

DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL

LEARNING THE CRAFT OF PASTORING:
SIX PRACTICES FOR CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION: WHY WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND PASTORING

Is pastoral ministry a troubled profession, perhaps even one in crisis? Or is the profession a deeply satisfying calling to which it is worth giving one's life? Jackson Carroll, who oversaw a national recent survey of pastors, concludes,

Most of America's pastoral leaders—represented by the sample that we surveyed—are deeply committed to their calling to ordained ministry. If they consider a change, it is more likely that they would pursue their call in another church-related occupation rather than dropping out. They are likewise generally satisfied with most aspect of their work. In short, they echo Eugene Peterson's comment with which we opened this chapter.¹

Peterson reflects,

I've loved being a pastor, almost every minute of it. It's a difficult life because it's a demanding life. But the rewards are enormous—the rewards of being on the front line of seeing the gospel worked out in people's lives. I remain convinced that if you are called to it, being a pastor is the best life there is. But any life can be the best life if you're called to it.²

Pastoring is difficult but for many pastors it is deeply rewarding.

But of course there is more to pastoring than finding job satisfaction. We also want God to be satisfied with what we are doing. Perhaps we are most aware of this while trying to communicate God's Word to the people of God. Karl Barth felt this keenly as a pastor and as a theologian. At age 28, on September 4, 1914, he wrote to his friend and fellow pastor 26-year-old Eduard Thurneysen,

Here are two sermons from me; they are simply the last two. You will look at them not as though they were finished products but only as experiments. We are really all of us experimenting now, each in his own way and every Sunday in a different way, in order to become to some degree masters of the limitless problem.³

¹ Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 185.

² Carroll, *God's Potters*, 159. David Wood, "Eugene Peterson on Pastoral Ministry" *ChrCent* 119, no. 6 (March 13-20, 2002): 18. Cf. 18-25.

³ Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925* (trans. James D. Smart; Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1964), 26.

If preaching is a limitless problem—trying to convey the God of the universe to a sinful and holy group of human beings in twenty minutes, then the pastoral task as a whole is even more overwhelming. If we just had to deliver one sermon a week, that would be difficult, but pastoral ministry has never been characterized as simply that.

The 24 or 30 course sequence in the Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) degree attempts to cover the necessary ground but students often have difficulty seeing how it all fits together to form a holistic pastoral ministry. “Why do I need to know this?” is not just asked in junior high math classes.

After entering the pastorate, many new pastors are overwhelmed by the tidal wave of demands and discouraged that their own expectations seem so frequently thwarted by bureaucracy, tradition—in short, other people. Their questions are often desperate, “How do I sort through the chaos to find what is most important? How do I know if I am doing a good job?”

Eventually pastors, if they hang in there, settle into a routine. This is of course a relief compared to the chaos of the first year in ministry. But Will Willimon worries that it is often then that settling into a routine turns into complacency and mediocrity.

In a small, rural church, alone, with total responsibility in your shoulders, in the weekly treadmill of sermons and pastoral care, if you are not careful there is too little time to read and reflect, too little time to prepare your first sermons, so you develop bad habits of flying by the seat of your pants, taking short cuts, and borrowing from others what ought to be developed in the workshop of your own soul. Ministry has a way of coming at you, of jerking you around from here to there, so you need to take charge of your time, prioritize your work, and be sure that you don’t neglect the absolute essentials while you are doing the merely important. If you don’t define your ministry on the basis of your theological commitments, the parish has a way of defining your ministry on the basis of their selfish preoccupations and that is why so many clergy are so harried and tired today. Mind your habits.⁴

⁴ William H. Willimon, “Between Two Worlds” in *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings* (ed. Allan Hugh Cole; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 284. Cf. 274-286.

Wanting to continue to grow in skill and wisdom, pastors are increasingly returning to school in Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) programs which shore up one aspect of pastoring. But without a broader framework, these programs may simply ossify pastors in their ways. I often hear pastors say, “I’m a preacher, not an administrator.” Their D.Min. degree in preaching reinforces their desire to focus on just one aspect of pastoring. Meanwhile that pastor’s congregation needs a leader willing to learn enough about administration and care for the poor so that they can at least delegate and oversee those areas adequately. Their congregation members complain that even in meetings, “the pastor is in preaching mode” or “using their preacher’s voice.” Meanwhile, the pastor’s preaching is becoming increasingly ineffective as they see it as their primary focus.

Similar negative consequences result when pastors conclude, “I’m a pioneer, not a maintainer” or “I’m an evangelist, not a theologian.” A string of broken congregations often lie in the wake of this “self-aware” pastor who trumpets, “I know what I’m good at and I know what I’m not.” Admitting that I am only one part of the body of Christ is indeed important but this realization should inspire me to appreciate and learn from the other parts of the body. Fascinatingly, Paul does not say, “Once a foot, always a foot.” Rather, he encourages mobility and growth. “Now eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor 12:31). Yes, “we have different gifts” (Rom 12:6) and we are to exercise them diligently (Rom 12:8), but there are no biblical grounds for specialization in one area and total neglect in the rest.

I argue in this paper that pastoring consists of six areas. The pastor seeking excellence ought to cultivate their abilities in all six areas. Pastors never arrive at excellence. The church is a sign, instrument, foretaste, and herald of the reign of God. We point, we never arrive. We become better signs, instruments, forestastes, and heralds. We grow closer to excellence but

pastoring is an art, a craft—consisting of a series of demanding practices. We can never cease learning.

But a comforting thought is that we can do it with others. We can learn with and from others.

And an even more comforting thought is that we do this work with God. The church is God's idea. The Spirit of God empowers the work. One can never get over the stunning designation—the church is the body of Christ.

Seminarian, take heart. New pastor, press on. Veteran pastor, continue to sharpen up. These are the six practices of our work.

THE SIX PRACTICES THAT FORM THE CRAFT OF PASTORING

The title of my primary concentration for the Th.D. program is “The practice of leading Christian communities and institutions.” This phrase was initially stated on the Th.D. website as a sample concentration—probably drafted by Greg Jones I am told. Alasdair MacIntyre bears principle responsibility for bringing to the forefront the language of “practice” in current theological and philosophical discourse.⁵ He defines “practice” as:

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.⁶

⁵ Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002). I will also employ below the use of practice or *habitus* in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau.

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (3d. ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187.

There are a number of parts to this definition that can be teased out. A practice is *complex*. It is not easy to learn. It is *social and cooperative*. We do it with others. It involves *excellence*. We can get better at it.

I argue in this paper that the practices that constitute pastoring are:

1. *Becoming a neighbor to the suffering*: learning about human suffering from artists, social-scientists and the sufferer
2. *Becoming a master pastor observer*: learning about different styles of pastoring from sociology, historical exemplars, fictional and real life exemplars
3. *Becoming a student of the body of Christ*: learning about the function of the church leader in the New Testament
4. *Becoming an equipper for holy living*: learning about the marks of the church from historical theology
5. *Becoming a believer in the missionary nature of the church*: learning about the church's purpose through biblical theology
6. *Becoming a lover of the missionary God*: learning about the triune God from prayer, Scripture, and systematic theology

None are easy. None can be done without others. We can grow in each area.

Most importantly, however, is that for MacIntyre the term “practices” is just part of a larger schema of how communities develop and are sustained.⁷ “Practices” are not just tasks on a to-do list. Sam Wells notes,

It is fashionable among moral theologians to allude to practices—and students, once they have grasped this, sometimes speak of practices as if one could grab a few off the shelf and be fully equipped for adversity, as if they were like camping gear. Swinton, without talking as if we were all living in monastic communities, makes it clear that practices are demanding, time-consuming to learn, and fragile even when well understood.⁸

We might think of pastoring as a craft (Greek, *techne*) or an art (Latin, *ars*). In learning a craft,

MacIntyre notes there is a need for exemplars—people who have expertise in the practices.

⁷ See especially, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 61-69. Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

⁸ Sam Wells, review of John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*, *ChrCent* 124, no. 21 (Oct 16, 2007): 55.

Masters and apprentices draw from a shared set of values—a “tradition.” Throughout our look at the six practices that constitute the art of pastoring, we will assume the need for learning from others and drawing from the Christian tradition.⁹

MacIntyre describes the two-fold goals of the process this way. First, the apprentice in any craft has to learn,

the distinction between what in particular situations it really is good to do and what only seems good to do to this particular apprentice but is not in fact so. That is the apprentice has to learn, at first from his or her teachers and then in his or her continuing self-education, how to identify mistakes made by him or herself in applying the acknowledged standards, the standards recognized to be the best available so far in the history of that particular craft. A second key distinction is that between what it is good and best for me with my particular level of training and learning in my particular circumstances to do and what is good and best unqualifiedly.¹⁰

In our case, the pastor needs to learn how to apply theology in practical ways, *and* to distinguish good pastoral ministry from the ultimate realities of God’s kingdom. In other words, excellent pastoral ministry requires a broad range of understanding from earthy concrete practical skills to sharp profound piercing knowledge of God’s ways. In this paper, I attempt to sketch out that range—starting from the most practical and concrete compassion related to anthropology and moving to the most sublime descriptions of the triune God. I argue that neither end of the spectrum is adequate in itself.

This essay is in essential continuity with five books that have been published by Duke Divinity School faculty from 2001-2006.¹¹ Each of them either explicitly or implicitly argue that

⁹ This approach differs from an idealist approach

¹⁰ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 61-62.

¹¹ Richard Lischer, *Open Secrets: A Memoir of Faith and Discovery* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001). William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). William H. Willimon, ed., *Pastor: A Reader for Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). Carroll, *God’s Potters* (2006). L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006).

skillful pastoral ministry be paired with rigorous theological reflection. For example, Greg Jones and Kevin Armstrong write regarding this about the *concrete* aspects of pastoring.

Excellence in Christian ministry is perceptible and palpable¹²

And about the abstract, transcendent standard they write,

There is no one standard or criterion for measuring excellence, other than fidelity to the crucified and risen Christ. We suggest, then, that the focus should be fixed on how congregations and pastors are bearing witness to the presence and power of God.¹³

My paper differs by describing the spectrum of concrete and abstract practices that constitute pastoral excellence. Articulating the six major practices central to pastoral ministry should help pastors to sharpen their areas of weakness and understand their areas of strength within a larger framework.

1. *BECOMING A NEIGHBOR TO THE SUFFERING: LEARNING ABOUT HUMAN SUFFERING FROM ARTISTS, SOCIAL-SCIENTISTS AND THE SUFFERER*

On one occasion a pastor stood up and asked Jesus a question. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to be a great pastor?”

“What did you learn in seminary?” he replied.

He answered, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will be a good pastor.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “How far do I have go?”

¹² Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 5.

¹³ Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 7.

In reply Jesus said: “A neighborhood between two churches was filled with suffering people. No one from the nearby Methodist church considered it their neighborhood. No one from the nearby Baptist church considered it their neighborhood either. But a church from another city built relationships with people in that neighborhood, provided emergency food, hosted families in their homes, and advocated for long-term changes. Which church went?”

The pastor replied, “The one that had mercy.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”¹⁴

Jesus asks pastors and churches to go—to make themselves available to minister—to act as neighbor—to the suffering people of the world.

Jesus’ point in Luke 10:25-37 in the story of the Good Samaritan is that one can never be complacent in compassion. We have never done enough. We have never “loved our neighbor” sufficiently.

Matthew 28:18-20 tells us we have never gone far enough. We go to “all nations.”

An ongoing practice of the pastor is to continually learn what it means to be a neighbor to the suffering. It is not easy but we can learn this with others and from others. We can get better at it.

Another way of saying this is that the pastor should be a servant. The United Methodist Church considers service to be a major task of the pastor together with order, word and sacrament.

Jesus is the exemplar according to Philippians 2:5-8 (TNIV)¹⁵

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

¹⁴ Adapted of course from Luke 10:25-37.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society®.

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a human being,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Jesus became human and there is a sense in which pastors need to become more human than they already are. They need to become more aware of the skin, blood and bones of bodily existence. Eugene Peterson renders John 1:14 this way, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”¹⁶

In Jesus’ time of suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked his disciples to stay awake with him and bear with him in his suffering. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that it is easy for the people to think of being a Christian in “religious” terms—having an inner tingly religious feeling often brought when sitting in a pew and singing touching hymns. It is easy to think that God wants to give us sentimental fuzzy feelings. Bonhoeffer counters that it is actually more Christian to think of God asking us to crouch in the dirt next to him as he sweats blood.

Bonhoeffer writes,

Jesus asked in Gethsemane, ‘Could you not watch with me one hour?’ That is the reversal of what the religious man expects from God. Man is summoned to share in God’s sufferings at the hands of a godless world. He must therefore really live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over or explain its ungodliness in some religious way or other. He must live a ‘secular’ life, and thereby share in God’s sufferings.¹⁷

¹⁶ *The Message*. Copyright 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 361.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's character Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov* beautifully tells the story of how he came to understand the words, "in truth we are each responsible to all for all, it's only that men don't know this."¹⁸ Later others asked Father Zossima how he could possibly believe this. Zossima says,

"But how can I possibly be responsible for all?" everyone would laugh in my face. "Can I, for instance, be responsible for you?"

"You may well not know it," I would answer, "since the whole world has long been going on a different line, since we consider the veriest lies as truth and demand the same lies from others. Here I have for once in my life acted sincerely and, well, you all look upon me as a madman."¹⁹

Sadly, people have often been persuaded to abandon the Christian tradition when confronted with perceptive observations about the human condition that are superior to what they have seen in the Christian community. The person sees the hypocrisy and destructiveness of so-called Christians and decides there surely must be something more humane and discards Christianity.

Thomas Aquinas faced this reality at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century.²⁰ The writings of Aristotle had just been rediscovered and the Augustine and his Christianity appeared dated and old-fashioned. But Aquinas found Aristotle to be a great conversation partner for drawing out the insights of Augustine.

In our day, it is not Aristotle but the social sciences and the arts that earn the respect of humanity for their insight into the human condition. At the macro-level, there are economists

¹⁸ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (trans. Constance Garnett; Plain Label Books, 1933), 768. Zossima's account begins on 735.

¹⁹ Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 778.

²⁰ See Chapter 5. "Aristotle and/or/against Augustine: Rival Traditions of Enquiry" in MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 105-126.

and political scientist who have identified “the biggest problems in the world today.”²¹ For example, the Copenhagen Consensus lists ten global problems:

1. Hunger and malnutrition
2. Climate change
3. Conflicts
4. Financial instability
5. Water and sanitation
6. Subsidies and trade barriers
7. Population/migration
8. Communicable diseases
9. Education
10. Governance and corruption

Brian McLaren notes other similar formulations arrived at independently by the United Nations for its Millennium Development Goals, the World Bank’s J. F. Rischard, and the United Nations University.

Many good human beings who are not Christians say, “Yes, these are the issues we must be focusing on! That is something worth living for!”

Christians and the church often seem far removed from these “big issues.” But why should that be? Did not Jesus become human? Should not his followers do the same? Mourning with those who mourn and sweat blood? Getting off our donkey and bandaging the wounds of those lying on the side of the road?

Artists and social scientists like economists and anthropologists observe humanity closely. Michel de Certeau explains why this attentiveness is necessary even to things as seemingly insignificant as “gestures.” He wonders why some gestures survive and thrive and others fall into disuse.

In the gesture are superimposed invention, tradition, and education to give it a form of efficacy that suits the physical makeup and practical intelligence of the person who uses

²¹ Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 46-51.

it. If the gesture comes loses its usefulness, either because the term in the operating chain no longer seems worthy of interest or because a process less costly in time, energy, skill, or material appears, it loses both meaning and necessity. Soon, it will no longer exist except in a truncated form, illegible, in a way, before becoming the inarticulated, insignificant witness of a defunct material culture and of a former symbolism, a fragmented, incomplete, deformed gesture that slowly sinks into the obscure ocean of forgotten practices . . . A gesture is only reworked if it is considered efficient, operating, based on a good return or a just necessity in light of the work it involves. Its life is linked to the belief that is invested in it: it must be judged necessary, convenient, operating, beneficial; one must believe in its possible success in order to continue repeating it.²²

Mary McClintock Fulkerson says, “Certeau gave extraordinary attention to ordinary practices and their use by the powerless to subvert dominant structures.”²³

Similarly, through considerable study, Martin Luther King, Jr. learned what peaceful practices had the potential to be effective and he trained the suffering to put them into action.²⁴

Will Campbell, Tex Sample, John Paul Lederach similarly observe the gestures and approaches of those without power in order to clarify and affirm their insights.²⁵

Often pastors are reluctant to read business management and organizational leadership literature because of its underlying assumption that efficiency = profitability = happiness.

Christine Pohl rightly notes,

Within faithful Christian communities . . . understandings of excellence and practices of excellent ministry will often be complex and somewhat ambiguous given . . . our hope is a crucified Savior.²⁶

²² Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press 1984; rev. ed. University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 203.

²³ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Practice,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 194. Cf. 189-198.

²⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” in Willimon, *Pastor: A Reader*, 247-263.

²⁵ Tex Sample, *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus: Doing Ministry With Working Class Whites* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006). Will D. Campbell, *Brother to a Dragonfly* (New York: Continuum, 1977, 2000). John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale: Herald 1999).

²⁶ Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 4.

Pastors are rightly suspicious of approaches which glorify what is efficient. But Certeau reminds us that close observation—I submit that business practices should also be included—may give insight into human behavior. As a pastor, I was enormously helped by insights from business literature.

- “Meetings are boring because they lack drama . . . Meetings are ineffective because they lack contextual structure.”²⁷
- “Know thy time.”²⁸
- “Define the right outcomes and then let each person find his own route toward those outcomes.”²⁹
- “First, get the right people on the bus and then figure out where to drive it.”³⁰

A disregard for insights about the way people relate to one another can sometimes be the equivalent to walking on the other side of the road as people lie bleeding in the middle of the road. Often though it is the volunteers and other staff of the church who are bleeding because of mismanagement. The mismanagement is understandable as are deficiencies in each of the practices that constitute the art of pastoring but defiant ignorance is not spiritual but negligent.

Gregory the Great in the fifth century warns people of being overly preoccupied by the busyness (which we will take up in the last practice) but then he also warns against dismissal of administrative responsibilities.

One the other side of things, there are some who undertake the care of a flock but appear to be so free of these concerns for the benefit of their own spirituality that they do not concern themselves at all with external matters. When these persons completely neglect the care of physical necessity, they neglect the needs of the laity under their direction. As a result, their preaching is disregarded because as they critique the actions of sinners, they

²⁷ Patrick Lencioni, *Death by Meeting: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 224.

²⁸ Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967; 2d. ed.; Burlington, MA: Elsevier, 2007), 24.

²⁹ Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 110.

³⁰ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 41.

fail to acknowledge the needs of the present life, and so no one listened to them willingly.³¹

The excellent pastor attends to administrative responsibilities so that the organization under their responsibility does not unintentionally participate in oppression because of its emphasis on “spiritual” things.

Pastors get off their high horse and bandage wounds. Artists help us to see hurting we might otherwise miss from the side of the road. Eugene Peterson writes about poets,

Poets slow us down, poets make us stop . . . This attending, this waiting, this reverential posture, is at the core of the life of faith, the life of prayer, the life of worship, the life of witness.³²

and about novelists,

Anyone, I think, serious about these elemental conditions of story, person, and place in which our salvation is worked out will welcome novelists as friends, and seek to spend time in their company.³³

In his book *Take and Read: Spiritual Reading: An Annotated List*, Peterson suggests books that help the pastor pay attention to the world.

Artists and social scientists also can help us understand the breadth of factors that contribute to human suffering. Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes this aspect. “While Bourdieu’s habitus has affinities with MacIntyrean concerns, it provides richer accounts of the range of bodily, tacit, and regularized understanding that is constitutive of agency.”³⁴

Bourdieu writes,

³¹ Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule* (trans. George E. Demacopoulos; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), 72

³² Eugene H. Peterson, *Take and Read: Spiritual Reading: An Annotated List* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 56.

³³ Peterson, *Take and Read*, 49.

³⁴ Fulkerson, “Practice,” 191.

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.³⁵

A number of Christian theologians including Walter Wink have identified these structures as the “powers” that apostle Paul refers to (Rom 8:38; Eph 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15).³⁶

The sociologist, anthropologist, psychologist, artist, novelist, and poet may help us better to become like Jesus in becoming flesh and making our dwelling among others (to paraphrase John 1:14).

But there are others who may also help us become more human: the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan (Ex 22:21-22); the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner (Mt 25:35-36). Jesus did not just come to observe as a social scientist or artist, he came to serve. In the process of making ourselves a neighbor to those around us, we begin to identify with them and love them.

In summary, all pastors are “human” and are thus aware of the human condition. But it is important to note that the art of pastoring involves deepening our understanding of humanity.

But this is only the first of six practices that the pastor seeks to learn. The human condition does not ultimately determine what the pastor does. Our human perception of what needs to be done needs to be guided by something. It is right to say we are to “do good” (Mt 12:12; Lk 6:27; Gal 6:10; Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 13:16; 1 Pe 3:11) but “doing good” is an

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (rev. ed.; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

³⁶ E.g. Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Trade, 1999).

inadequate summary of the pastoral craft. The pastor who is ruled by human demands will inevitably succumb to the twin struggles of pride and burnout. Furthermore, striving to “do good” without other criteria makes us susceptible to the temptation to use all means necessary to alleviate human suffering—including tyranny and violence. Social work and social justice must be located within a greater theological framework. Still, for many pastors, this first practice is the one we most need to grow in. We need to get our knees dirty and our face stained with tears in the Garden of Gethsemane with the suffering Jesus. Will we grow in becoming a neighbor to the suffering?

2. *BECOMING A MASTER PASTOR OBSERVER: LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENT STYLES OF PASTORING FROM SOCIOLOGY, HISTORICAL EXEMPLARS, FICTIONAL AND REAL LIFE EXEMPLARS*

Under the sub-heading, “How Clergy Spend Their Time in a Typical Week,” Jackson Carroll writes,

Congregational members are often unaware of what their pastors do all week and how much time they spend doing it—hence the standing joke that clergy work only one hour a week. Many lay members do, in fact, see their pastor for only one hour each week, and this makes what clergy do something of a mystery, sometimes leading to misperceptions with negative consequences. Some pastors, for example, tell of members who complain whenever they do not see the pastor’s car at the church. . . . Clergy time use is even something of a mystery to some pastors, who don’t have a clear picture of how their colleagues use their time. When we asked about pastors’ time use in our survey, a frequent request they made was, ‘Let me know how others spend their time!’³⁷

Cooperating with some of the best academic sociologists of religion in the country, Carroll orchestrated a comprehensive survey of Christian clergy in the United States in 2001.

Throughout *God’s Potters*, we learn about how women clergy differ from male clergy; how Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant, and Historic Black clergy differ; how

³⁷ Carroll, *God’s Potters*, 99.

urban and rural clergy differ; younger and older clergy differ; with regard to: salary, hours worked, job satisfaction, perceived effectiveness, physical health, readings habits, seminary training, leadership style and conflict management. Reading Carroll's book is one way to find out the breadth of what pastors are doing in the United States today. In a blurb on the back of the book, Will Willimon calls Carroll a "master church observer."

I content all pastors should seek to be *master pastor observers*. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Cor 12:21).

MacIntyre informs us that there should be some who are masters of the craft—in our case pastoring. They are not perfect—even they have not arrived at excellence—but they exemplify the best standards so far. They attempt to pass on what they know.

The authority of a master within a craft is both more and other than a matter of exemplifying the best standards so far. It is also and more importantly a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others towards going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past to move towards the *telos* of fully perfected work.³⁸

In the courses where I have been a teaching assistant this year at Duke Divinity School for Ken Carder, we have required the students to read a number of other books by masters of the craft of pastoring. They span a range of denominational and geographic settings: Barbara Brown Taylor (Episcopal), Richard Lischer (Lutheran / rural), Will Willimon (United Methodist), Henri Nouwen (Catholic), Peter Storey (Methodist / South Africa), Tex Sample (United Methodist / rural) and the wide variety of authors in the volume *Pastor: A Reader for Ordained Ministry*.³⁹ Though none are sociologists, each of them became a master pastor by being a *master pastor*

³⁸ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 66.

³⁹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, Md.: Cowley, 1993). Lischer, *Open Secrets*. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). Peter Storey, *With God in the Crucible: Preaching Costly Discipleship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). Sample, *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus*. Willimon, ed., *Pastor: A Reader for Ordained Ministry*.

observer—learning about the variety of ways the pastoral craft has been practiced and trying to discern best practices.

The students are happy to be exposed to different descriptions of pastoral work. The pastors told Carroll, “Let me know how others spend their time!” The first-year MDiv students in “Introduction to Christian Ministry” say, “I’m in seminary. But do I really want to be a pastor?” and the third year MDiv students in “Local Church in Mission” say, “I will be a pastor in a month. Yikes, what do I do?”

We ask students to read Reinhold Niebuhr’s journal of his first years as a Detroit pastor in the 1920’s and Richard Lischer’s tales from his first pastorate in rural Missouri.⁴⁰ Students learn that they are not the first ones to struggle with uncertainty and confusion in pastoral work but they also start to begin to see the truth, beauty and goodness of God in the midst of it. At a minimum, they learn the scope of things that pastors have had to deal with in the past. For example, after reading Lischer’s hilarious account of his Lutheran congregation trying to make sense of his sun-bathing, bike-riding, literature-reading wife, the students are not surprised when for example they find the congregation whispering among themselves about their spouse.

Anyway, Mrs. Lischer *hides behind the garage and reads books*. The community first asks the historical question, ‘Have we ever seen anything like this? Have any of our other ministers’ wives hid behind the garage to read? Have we ever heard of this type of behavior?’ Morally, the community wonders, ‘What are we to make of her actions? Does such behavior indicate anything about her fitness as a mother or pastors’ wife? *Must* one leave the premises if one hires a baby-sitter?’⁴¹

Through humorous and serious examples, stories and principles, students begin to develop an evolving set of best practices that these master pastors have in common.

⁴⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1929, 1980). Lischer, *Open Secrets*.

⁴¹ Lischer, *Open Secrets*, 98.

To gain an even greater breadth of understanding of how pastoral work has been undertaken, they could read the accounts of pastoring by Ambrose, Gregory the Great, George Herbert, Richard Baxter, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Oden, Richard John Neuhaus, Eugene Peterson, and David Hansen.⁴² This could be supplemented by fictional descriptions of pastors including Father Zossima in *Brother's Karamazov*, Father Mapple in *Moby Dick*, John Ames in *Gilead*, and Father Tim in the *Mitford* series.⁴³

One can learn much of the nuance of pastoring from reading a variety of books by master pastors. In the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes we are intended to learn from looking over the shoulder of a mentor passing on wisdom. If at a minimum, students learn the variety of ways the pastoral task has been undertaken, at best, the master pastors serve as pseudo-mentors—offering templates that help the student pastor with wisdom beyond their years.

Of course *real life relationships* (!) with other pastors can help one learn the craft of pastoral ministry! Seminary M.Div. curriculum always include some form of “Field Education,” “Supervised Ministry,” internship or practicum with an experienced pastor. The student learns from observing the veteran pastor in ministry, trying pastoral tasks themselves, and regular

⁴² Ambrose, *On the Office*. Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*. George Herbert, *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (ed. John Tobin; New York: Penguin, 1991). Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger, 2007). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (vol. 5 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983). Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, 1992). Eugene Peterson, *Eugene Peterson's Pastoral Library: Four Books in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

⁴³ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (ed. Tony Tanner; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead: A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004). Jan Karon, *At Home in Mitford (The Mitford Years, Book 1)* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

Peterson recommends 16 novels in Peterson, *Take & Read*, 48-54. See also the many recommendations in the comments at Ben Myers, “What to read? Literature and ecclesiology” *Faith and Theology* blog. June 11, 2009. n.p. [cited 13 June 2009]. Online: <http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/2009/06/what-to-read-literature-and.html>

debriefing conversations.⁴⁴ Of all the aspects of learning the craft of pastoral ministry, perhaps this 1-on-1 experience is the most important.

As MacIntyre reminds us, the idea of exposing students to exemplars for effective learning has a rich and long history. A community's traditions are passed down from exemplars according to Aristotle. Young people learn the crafts of life by participating in practices with other learners under the guidance of the mentor. Joshua learned from Moses, Solomon from David, and Elisha from Elijah. Timothy is urged to pass on what he has learned to others. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2).

But it is also important to put the formal internship experience in perspective. Some students are quite capable and passionate about Christian ministry but never seriously consider pastoring themselves after a disappointing field education experience. It is easy for something to go awry in the experience. It is difficult to give students significant responsibilities when they are new to a congregation and when everyone in the congregation knows they are only participating in the congregation for a summer or a year. Furthermore, there are a host of reasons why the veteran pastor may not invest time in the student. But if framed this way—becoming a master pastor observer, the student can remember that their supervisor represents only one style of pastoral ministry. Seeing one's Field Education as learning one of the many styles of pastoral ministry frees the student from freighting their experience with too much emotional baggage. The idea is not to adopt the veteran pastor's style for one's ministry permanently but rather to try it on and try to perceive its strengths and weaknesses.

⁴⁴ See especially Brian A. Williams, *The Potter's Rib: Mentoring for Pastoral Formation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005).

There is an additional application for pastors already in ministry. The sensitive pastor often notices that there is an undercurrent of comparison, jealousy and pride at ministerial gatherings and conferences. Instead, the pastor seeking excellence can approach such situations with intellectual curiosity. “What can I learn about pastoring?”

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:21-31 that the different parts of the body need one another. Paul obviously appreciates the variety of approaches to ministry. The excellent pastor is able to say something similar. “We rural and urban and suburban pastors, we solo and multi-staff pastors, we Roman Catholic and Pentecostal pastors, we evangelistic and prophetic pastors, we traditional and contemporary pastors, we are all parts of the body of Christ. Let us encourage one another and learn from one another.”

In summary, this section emphasizes that excellence in pastoring is pursued by paying attention to the variety of styles of pastoring in the Christian tradition—through learning from master church observers, pastoral ministry writers, fictional accounts of pastors, and pastoral mentors and colleagues. We want to be *master pastor observers*. Through this we begin to develop a set of evolving best practices.

But inevitably, in learning about the variety of ways pastoring is practiced, students will ask, “These are certainly different takes on pastoring. Are all these ways of pastoring legitimate? Which are better?”

And what of those who conceive pastoring quite differently—for example, the pastors of the 1250 megachurch (2000+ attendance) in the United States?⁴⁵ And what about the well-known authors Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Andy Stanley, and Adam Hamilton who pastor

⁴⁵ Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 146, 149, 150.

churches with over 10,000 weekly attendance?⁴⁶ They have some things to teach us, though one might call what they do something different from “pastoring / shepherding a flock.” It is more like “overseeing (*episcopos*?) a large shepherding organization!” How do we evaluate these approaches that admittedly flirt with the ruling like the pagans do (Matt 20:25-26)? And what about intentionally innovative churches?⁴⁷ Surely becoming a master pastor observer begins to seem impossible! Sociologist Mark Chaves notes that “There are more than 300,000 congregations in the United States.”⁴⁸ Fortunately Chaves, Jackson Carroll, and other sociologists can give us broad trends.⁴⁹

In the first section, I urged pastors to practice becoming a neighbor—learning about the suffering of the world. We listed the most severe global crises. In this section, I have urged pastors to become master pastor observers even though there are 300,000 American congregations and we could surely learn from churches around the world! Both are impossible tasks. But they are not tasks. In the Aristotelian framework, deepening our understanding of suffering and pastoring are *practices* that we are learning. We undertake these practices with fellow learners, under the direction of teachers who know more than we do in certain areas.

⁴⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Bill Hybels, *Axiom: Powerful Leadership Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). Andy Stanley, Lane Jones and Reggie Joiner, *The Seven Practices of Effective Ministry* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2004). Adam Hamilton, *Leading Beyond the Walls: Developing Congregations With a Heart for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches From the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, Ill: CrossWay Books, 2008).

⁴⁸ Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

⁴⁹ Cf. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman, *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Rodney Stark, *What Americans Really Believe: New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008).

And not all is up for grabs and debate, we enter this training within the constraints and boundaries of the Christian tradition. Kevin Vanhoozer writes,

Lesslie Newbigin (and Augustine) are right: knowing always takes place within the context of prior belief. To grow in knowledge, one must make at least a provisional commitment to a framework of thought, to accept something as a ‘given’ on trust and then go on to test it. Theology’s ‘given,’ as Barth never tired of insisting, is the self-giving of the triune God: God in christocentric (and we might add, *canonical*) self-presentation.⁵⁰

We now turn explicitly to that canonical framework for sorting through the depth and breadth of human need and the breadth of attempts to respond to that need.

3. *BECOMING A STUDENT OF THE BODY OF CHRIST: LEARNING ABOUT THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH LEADER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*

Up to this point, I have argued that the pastor in search of excellence seeks to know human suffering and to learn the nuances and variety of pastoring. Like Vanhoozer, Newbigin, Barth and MacIntyre, John Howard Yoder insists that there is a tradition—a baseline that is the standard by which all later development is measured. In other words, the statements by Carroll, Willimon, Lischer, Peterson, Dostoevsky, and Hybels about what pastors should do must be compared with what the New Testament says pastors should do. Their ideas must be tested to see if they resonate—to see if have “the organic quality of growth from seed, faithful translation, or fecundation”⁵¹ because alternatively, “there is such a thing as unfaithfulness.”⁵² Not all “unfolding, clarification or reformulation” by later Christians has biblical resonance. There is a

⁵⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 295. Cf. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*.

⁵¹ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

⁵² Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

“difference between compatible extrapolation and incompatible deviation” from the early church.⁵³

We are faced with error, into which believers are seduced by evil powers seeking to corrupt the church and to disqualify her witness. To denounce those errors we must appeal to the common traditions from which those who fall into error are falling away, which they previously had confessed together with us . . . The clash is not tradition versus Scripture but faithful tradition versus irresponsible tradition. Only if we can with Jesus and Paul (and Francis, Savonarola, Milton, and the others) denounce *wrong* traditioning, can we validly affirm the rest. Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities’ origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord’s past presence.⁵⁴

Yoder encourages us to gather around the Scriptures comparing the craft of pastoral ministry we see there with the craft of pastoral ministry we see around us.

One might think that comparing what the Bible says to what Gregory, Sample, Storey, Taylor, and Neuhaus have said would be easy. One need only look up all the references to pastors in the New Testament and see what they did.

Our first clue that it may not be that simple is when we realize that there is no reference to “clergy” or “reverend” in the New Testament. “Preacher” is only used twice. Paul refers to himself as one (1 Cor 9:18) and Noah is called one (2 Pet 2:5).

The word “minister” (*diaconos*) occurs 29 times but never as the person who preaches a Sunday morning sermon. The Greek word can mean minister, deacon, or really anyone who serves. This is not to say we cannot learn from these texts. It is surely telling that the most common word for involvement in the church is the word “servant.” This corresponds nicely to the first practice—learning to be a neighbor to the suffering. But we have hardly been helped regarding what pastors should do today.

⁵³ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 67.

⁵⁴ Yoder, “The Authority of Tradition,” *The Priestly Kingdom*, 69. Italics original.

Surely the term “pastor” will clarify things, we think. But “pastor” (ποιμένας, literally, “shepherd”) and its related words only occur three times in the New Testament in relationship to the church. One reference is in Ephesians 4:11 “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (NRSV, Cf. KJV, NIV, TNIV). The phrase might also be translated “pastor-teachers” because the article is missing from “teachers.” The word “shepherd” occurs 18 other times—referring to the people who watch sheep or Jesus himself. The verb ποιμάινω (to act as a shepherd) occurs twice in relationship to the church with almost the same wording,

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them” (Acts 20:28).

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (1 Pe 5:2).

Again, it is not that “shepherding” is an insignificant biblical concept; consider Moses, David, and Jesus (“I am the Good Shepherd” John 10:14)—pretty important leaders! But it is important to note that pastor is a relatively peripheral term in the New Testament. Being part of the list in Ephesians 4:11 and the encouragement in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2 to “be a shepherd” do not tell us adequately how the church leader today is supposed to be spending their time.

We will be similarly disappointed when we finish looking at the terms “elders/presbyters” and “overseers/bishops.” Alexander Strauch tries to design a full ecclesiological structure from references in the New Testament to elders in his book *Biblical Eldership*.⁵⁵ But he is not alone. Presbyterian and Anabaptist church polities also place great emphasis on these 16 occurrences of the word elders (πρεσβύτερος) in the New Testament (Acts

⁵⁵ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in Church* (Littleton: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1988, 1997).

11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17, 20; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pe 5:1, 5).

Strauch concludes that biblical eldership is five-fold: pastoral leadership, shared leadership, male leadership, qualified leadership, and servant leadership. He first argues that elders are pastors—but this only tells us that elders are supposed to be like good shepherds (as opposed to wolves). Nor are the second and fifth designations, “qualified leadership” and “servant leadership,” unique to elders. Unqualified and power-hungry leadership is never condoned in Scripture.

Strauch’s third designation is “male leadership.” In his most recent report, Mark Chaves, the best sociologist of congregations in the United States, gives us the latest estimates on women in ministry. “Fifty-one percent [of congregations], with 59% of participants, do not allow women to be full-fledged senior clergy.”⁵⁶ With congregations almost exactly split on women’s roles in the church, Strauch has come to a controversial conclusion. It is important to note that the main text used for excluding women from leadership, 1 Timothy 2:12, is not related to “elders” or any of particular title.

The argument against women elders is that the qualified elder is said to be “the husband of one wife” (Titus 1:6 KJV). But, the text immediately goes on to say “a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6). Similar qualifications are given for overseers / bishops (ἐπισκοπή) in 1 Tim 3:2-5.

There are some like Strauch who say *no woman* is eligible to be an elder because she is not a “husband of one wife.” But there are others who further conclude from Titus 1:6 quite a

⁵⁶ Mark Chaves, “American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21st Century” *National Congregations Study report*, (June 2009), 16. [Cited 13 June 2009]. Online: http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSII_report_final.pdf

few more qualifications that Strauch would not accept. Some conclude that *no single men* are eligible to be elders because the verse assumes a wife. Some go on to say that *no married man without children* is eligible. Some go further and say *no married man who does not have children old enough to believe for themselves* is eligible.

In my view, the emphasis in Titus 1:6 is on the person's character and not their gender, marital status, number and age of their children. These verses should more properly fit under Strauch's category "qualified leadership." Elders should be people of high Christian character.

There are some who agree with Strauch about "male leadership" who would disagree with his take on the extent to which he argues for "shared leadership." He deduces from the few references to appointing elders *plural* (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) that no church should have one single leader with authority greater than the other elders. There should be no higher title than "elder."

Strauch is with the majority of Christian churches who claim to embrace some form of "shared leadership." Even the Roman Catholic church would embrace this idea to some extent with their "College of Cardinals."

It is unremarkable to conclude that good structures do not put all power in one person's hands. It is difficult to think of a large organization today that functions officially with only one person in charge. A privately-owned business would be one example of single-power-rule but even this organization is regulated by labor laws. Almost always there is a board of some kind that attempts to provide some checks and balances. In other words, the concept "plurality of leadership" or "shared leadership" is an indefinite and commonplace notion. Just because Paul appointed "elders" plural in every church does not tell us that much. There are hints of egalitarian processes in the early church: Matthew 18, Acts 15, 1 Corinthians 14 but there are

just as many or more examples of the apostles and others exercising rather undemocratic leadership.

Similarly, despite the professed “plurality of leadership” espoused in presbyterian and congregational polities, most congregations in practice give significant responsibility to one person. They may formally be an equal to the other elders but in practice, they function with significantly more power.

This brings us to the word *episkopos* (translated “overseer” in contemporary translations, but “bishop” in the KJV) and a form of church government, Episcopal, that is explicit about its hierarchical nature. There are very few New Testament occurrences of this word and we have looked almost all of them already in the context of elders (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:2) and elders shepherding (Acts 20:28). Philippians 1:1 is the only remaining reference.

Given this overlapping usage of the words pastor(s), elder(s) and overseer(s), most New Testament scholars conclude that church leadership functions and offices were functioning in different ways in different local churches. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee puts it this way,

One thing that should perhaps strike the serious reader of Scripture is the general lack of concern in the New Testament about the way the church ordered its corporate life, whether in its structures (‘offices,’ etc.) or its gatherings for worship. So much is this so that every present form of church government appeals to the New Testament texts in support of its particular organizational flow chart. This is true from the ultimate hierarchical understanding of church in Roman Catholicism to the much more subtle hierarchy of the Plymouth Brethren, not to mention Baptists and Presbyterians in between. The New Testament documents simply show no interest in defining these matters; their ecclesiological interest rather is on the who and how of the composition of the people of God under the new covenant effected through Christ and evidenced by the Spirit.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Gordon D. Fee, “The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (2d. ed.; eds. R. W. Pierce, R. M. Groothuis, G. D. Fee; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 242. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson, eds. *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J.P.M. Sweet* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997). Ernst Käsemann, “Ministry and Community in the New Testament,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 63-94. Gordon D. Fee, “Laos and Leadership under the New Covenant,” in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 121-146. Gordon D. Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles,” in

New Testament scholars almost universally agree that the New Testament is fluid and flexible in its descriptions of church leadership. They notice plurality of leadership but also hints of authority. Roles and responsibilities seem to have become formalized early in the post-apostolic period.

So where did this structure of a single bishop wielding great power in the Episcopal system come from? Roman Catholics are the most vocal defenders of this system. They argue that it developed very early in the post-apostolic period citing the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch who probably wrote during the reign of Trajan (98-117 CE).

‘Be subject to the bishop as to the commandment’ (*Ign. Trall.* 13.1); ‘we are clearly obliged to look upon the bishop as the Lord himself’ (*Ign. Eph.* 6.1); ‘you should do nothing apart from the bishop’ (*Ign. Magn.* 7.1).⁵⁸

Presbyterians and others who defend plurality of leadership posit that this constitutes an unfaithful derivation from what they see in the New Testament. Catholics agree that all non-canonical Christian tradition should be judged to see if it constitutes faithful or unfaithful development of the tradition as we find it in the New Testament. But they would suggest the New Testament evidence is ambiguous. Roman Catholic New Testament scholar Raymond Brown writes,

I approached a number of NT books looking for an answer, explicit or implicit, to a specific problem, namely: What were Christians in the Sub-Apostolic Period (the last one-third of the first century) being told that would enable their respective churches to survive the passing of the authoritative apostolic generation? There was no evidence in

Listening to the Spirit in the Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 147-162. Walter L. Liefeld, “The Nature of Authority in the New Testament,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (2d. ed.; eds. R. W. Pierce, R. M. Groothuis, G. D. Fee; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 255-271. Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Community Formation: in the Early Church and in the Church Today* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002).

⁵⁸ *The Apostolic Fathers*, (ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 207. Cf. p. 205 regarding Trajan and 209-213 regarding further questions about dating the letters.

these works that a consistent or uniform ecclesiology had emerged. Rather, writings addressed to different NT communities had quite diverse emphases.⁵⁹

Gordon Fee concurs,

But my concern here is simply to point out the high degree of uncertainty all of us face when asking questions about this dimension of ‘church’ on the basis of the New Testament evidence.⁶⁰

The Roman Catholic scholar then asserts that given the ambiguity, the tradition of the church has been faithful in sustaining the basic tenets of the Christian faith and thus should be trusted on smaller matters as well. Presbyterians argue that a contaminating Greco-Roman emphasis on hierarchy was introduced quite early and that there have been conscientious dissenters through the church’s history—calling for more egalitarian structures.

Rowan Williams tries to mediate the dispute—saying defenders of the Catholic tradition overstate the case when they imply that “The Fathers say the same thing, and say the same thing as we now say; there is no hidden alternative history.”⁶¹ There have always been Christians who protested abuses associated with the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. But Williams also says Protestant historians who emphasize that “the shape of the drama is one of primitive catastrophe, a devastating loss at or near the very beginning”⁶² forget the dangers faced by the post-apostolic church and the need for clarity and organization.

Roman Catholic New Testament scholar Raymond Brown argued that the New Testament reflects some of these same tensions. He says the Pastoral Epistles reflect a hierarchical emphasis, while the Johannine communities emphasize love and the Spirit. He

⁵⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 146.

⁶⁰ Fee, “The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry,” 245.

⁶¹ Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 20. E.g. Petavius, Bishop Bull 21-22.

⁶² Williams, *Why Study the Past*, 20. E.g. Mosheim, Adolf von Harnack, Bultmann, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 22-23.

thinks Matthew has the nuanced view. Matthew acknowledges the need for organization and authority but argues it must be a different kind of organization and authority. About Matthew 18, Brown says,

This may well be the most profound practical treatment of church in the NT and exemplifies Matthew's nuance in anticipating the dangers that the church faces from the very fact that it is structured and has authority.⁶³

One cannot ignore power as insignificant (Matt 18:15-20) nor use it to lord over others (Matt 20:25-26).

It seems we have come to standoff. There are some church structures that place more emphasis on the plurality of leadership but then actually function with quite a bit of authority in the hands of one person. Furthermore, without hierarchy to keep them together, these churches tend to fragment and split off with great frequency leading to 33,000 denominations worldwide.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the Episcopal church structure embraces hierarchy with little New Testament support but important Patristic evidence. Most pastors today choose one of the two ways—living with that tradition's strengths and weaknesses. The episcopal pastor enjoys the stability of the hierarchy and tolerates the bureaucracy. The presbyterian or congregational pastor enjoys the freedom of being at the top of the structure and tolerates the occasional split.

What is intolerable is that these scarce references to pastors, elders and overseers do not tell us what the church leader is supposed to do. They are supposed to oversee, be a shepherd, serve, teach, and live with integrity. Does that resolve any of the questions we had in the last section about what a pastor should do? Hardly. It seems rather to leave almost all of them open. We also face the disconcerting notion that the New Testament does not record overseers, elders,

⁶³ Brown, *Churches Apostles Left Behind*, 138.

⁶⁴ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A comparative survey of churches and religions in the modern world* (2d ed; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

and pastors doing almost anything. The title of the book of Acts is not the Acts of the overseers, it is the Acts of the Apostles. Paul and Peter are apostles. A crucial insight into power in the New Testament that does not often get articulated is this: The apostles had more authority than the overseers, elders, deacons, teachers, and prophets.

Apostle (ἀπόστολος) in the New Testament has the sense of

*delegate, envoy, messenger . . . esp. of God's messengers . . . a group of highly honored believers, who had a special function . . . Then esp. of the 12 apostles.*⁶⁵

They were sent by the triune God to build up the Church. When ecclesiology is structured around the scarce references to pastors, elders and overseers in the New Testament, one has hardly scratched the surface of what the church was doing during the first century. Peter and Paul were doing far more than watching over the flock, being able to teach (elders), and overseeing (bishops). They were spreading the good news, traveling, adapting, correcting, and church-planting. If that apostolic authority and passion are lost because church leaders consider those activities beyond the scope of what the New Testament says presbyters and overseers are supposed to do, it is no wonder that ecclesiology has a reputation for being stale. This is why the questions of how apostolic authority should be carried forward after the death of the original apostles is so important. This is the issue of apostolic succession, a disputed issue between Catholics and Protestants.

Catholics argue that the authority of the apostles was succeeded by that of the office of the bishop while Protestants argue that the apostles' authority today is found in the books they left behind—the New Testament. They are agreed however that apostolic authority still matters.

⁶⁵William Arndt et al., “ἀπόστολος, ου, ό,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, c1979), 99.

In this, they are dramatically different from the secular world. They are also agreed that apostolic authority in the New Testament is ultimately from the triune God and for the building up of the church. Even if one does not embrace apostolic succession, the Church only faithfully exists as it is faithful to the apostle's legacy.

This is why Karl Barth, who calls "the list of the predecessors of the bishop" the "equivocal notion of the 'apostolic succession,'"⁶⁶ also says,

There is, therefore, a legitimate apostolic succession, the existence of a Church in the following of the apostles, only when it takes place in this history that the apostolic witness finds in a community discipleship, hearing, obedience, respect and observance. But it is in the fact that they serve that the apostles follow the Lord Himself and precede the community.⁶⁷

If we are going to look at New Testament ecclesiology then, we must take into account, not just elders and overseers, but also the apostles. If we decide that plurality of leadership (elders) is the biblical ideal, there still needs to be dynamic apostolic dimension operating by allowing the apostles' words in the New Testament to powerfully challenge and inspire courageous risky action. If we decide that hierarchy (overseers) is necessary, those overseers only fulfill their responsibilities rightly when they lead their communities to be missionary witnessing communities.

There are three texts that address the breadth of New Testament ecclesiology, which can serve to reiterate this point.

⁶⁶ Barth, CD Volume IV,1 § 62, 715.

⁶⁷ Barth, CD Volume IV,1 § 62, 719.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (Italics mine).

¹¹ So Christ himself gave *the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers*, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Romans 12:4-8

⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is *prophesying*, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is *serving*, then serve; if it is *teaching*, then teach; ⁸ if it is to *encourage*, then give encouragement; if it is *giving*, then give generously; if it is to *lead*, do it diligently; if it is to *show mercy*, do it cheerfully.

1 Corinthians 12: 27-30.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church *first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues*. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

First, *diverse expressions of ministry are crucial to the functioning of the church*. To focus on just elders or bishops is problematic. The apostles like Peter and Paul exhibit a wide range of tasks and even apostle is too narrow a category to focus on.

The lists in the three texts vary. None of the lists claim to be comprehensive. They serve as “sample” lists of ministries. A formal hierarchy of offices and roles had not yet become standard and uniform. But even if egalitarian or hierarchical structure became standard, the principle remains: a variety of ministries are needed in the church. The pastor pursuing excellence attempts to become a master pastor observer and a master New Testament ministry observer.

Second, *diverse ministries find unity in Christ*. In each case, the operating metaphor is “the body of Christ.” Serving Christ is their unified purpose. Christ is the common inspiration. Christ determines the attitude toward others. We will discuss ministry as rooted in relationship to the triune God in the last section of this essay.

Third, *the church as the body of Christ dignifies ministry*. The notion that the church is the body of Christ motivates people to contribute more. “Eagerly desire the greater gifts.” One need not feel they are stuck with one role or gift. Mobility and flexibility are here endorsed by Paul. Christ also inspires people to do what they do well. If you have a gift, “do it diligently.” This affirms the overall purpose of this paper to explore excellent pastoral ministry. Why pursue excellence? For the sake of the body of Christ.

Fourth, *there is little distinction between the ordinary Christian and the church leader*. There is a difference in degree, not in kind between ordinary Christians and church leaders. Ordinary Christians are supposed to build up the body; leaders to oversee the body. Christians are supposed to live Christ-like lives; leaders are supposed to live exemplary lives. Christians are supposed to meditate on Scripture; the leader teaches it. These are not categorical differences but rather differences in degree. We see little evidence of a major gap between the ordinary and the ordained. In fact, the ordinary are encouraged to seek the greater gifts. “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1). It is good for the ordinary Christian to aspire to more responsibility. There is no caste system, there is no glass ceiling which prevents upward mobility.

Fifth, *one part’s ministry should always be aligned to the rest of the body of Christ*. Each part of the body is to function in tandem with the other parts. This leads us into the next section. The effective leader must have the direction of the entire church in mind. If one does not

understand the purpose of the church, how can one direct it? The church is the most important category—the pastor’s role is derivative.

4. *BECOMING AN EQUIPPER FOR HOLY LIVING: LEARNING ABOUT THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH FROM HISTORICAL THEOLOGY*

We have now encouraged pastors to develop excellence by knowing human beings, knowing pastors, and knowing about how the New Testament describes church leadership. But we concluded our look at the New Testament evidence by determining that the church leader’s function demands an understanding of the Church’s purpose. How can the overseer oversee the church without understanding what it is supposed to do?

This requires a two-fold inquiry. (We will take up the second—biblical theology of the purpose of the people of God—in the next section). First, it is important that the pastor understands historically how the practices of the church have been understood. What are the “marks of the church?” This is a task of “historical theology” or “systematic theology” (“dogmatics”).

The marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*) can be traced back to the Lutheran Church’s Augsburg Confession (1530) written by Philipp Melancthon and Martin Luther.

The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.⁶⁸

A revised version of the Augsburg Confession called *the Variata*, was later signed by John Calvin in 1540. Calvin’s words in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536, 1559) are quite similar to the Lutheran document.

⁶⁸ The Augsburg Confession, article 7 (*The Book of Concord*). Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.html#article7>

The marks of the church and our application of them to judgment: Hence the form of the Church appears and stands forth conspicuous to our view. Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence.⁶⁹

Both name the proper preaching of the word and the proper administration of the sacraments as the minimal requirement for a church to be a church. But the tradition has developed such that the minimal requirements are now seen by a number of Protestant clergy as the main purposes of the church and thus the main things they should be doing. For example, pastors and associate pastors in PCUSA churches are still today called “ministers of Word and Sacrament.”⁷⁰ “Teaching elders” in the PCA are similarly responsible “to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments.”⁷¹ This focus can cause a pastor to lose some of the other aspects discussed in this paper i.e. that pastoring is a craft that must be learned by learning: (1) about the suffering of human beings, (2) about the variety of ways the pastoral craft has been practiced, and (3) about the broader way ministry is described in the New Testament.

Understandably, it appeals to harried and confused pastors to be assigned a couple of things to focus on—properly preaching and administering the sacraments. Given the infinite number of good things to do, pastors are relieved to have Luther and Calvin suggest somewhere to start! (I am trying to help in this regard. This paper tries to narrow the tasks down to six!)

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; LCC; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV, 1, 9. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.reformed.org/books/institutes/books/book4/bk4ch01.html#nine.htm>

⁷⁰ *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II*. (Louisville, Ky.: The Office of the General Assembly, 2007), G-6.0202. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/boo07-09.pdf>

⁷¹ *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (6d. ed.; Lawrenceville, Ga: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2007), 88. Cited 9 July 2008. Online: <http://www.pcaac.org/BCO%202007%20Combined%20for%20Web.pdf>

But again, this is not really what Luther and Calvin were saying. They were suggesting minimal requirements of what might constitute a non-heretical church. Surely the full scope of the Scriptures and Christian tradition would inspire us to aim beyond this.

There is though a way of supplementing the marks of the church which propels pastoral ministry on a better trajectory. A number of theologians have pointed out the inadequacy of the two marks and have suggested additions. In the following quotation, John Howard Yoder first criticizes the classical protestant marks as overly vague to the point of useless. Then he criticizes them for being overly clergy-centered.

The classical instrument for the interpretation of the mission and nature of the church is the concept of a shorter or longer list of ‘marks’ that are the minimum standards that enable one to recognize the existence of a particular church. ‘The church is wherever the Word of God is properly preached and the sacraments properly administered.’ From this definition of classical Protestantism we may appropriately begin our analysis. The shortcoming of this two-point statement is not merely its petitionary character. Obviously, the entire meaning of these two criteria is utterly dependent upon what ‘properly’ is taken to mean. Conceivably one could pour all of any theology into these two phrases . . . But a more fundamental flaw in this statement of criteria is that the point of relevance in their application is not the church but its superstructure. The place you would go to ascertain whether the word of God is properly preached in a given church is the preacher or conceivably the doctrinal statement by which the ecclesiastical body is governed. The place you go to see whether the sacraments are being properly administered is again the officiant. The concentration of your attention might be upon his or her way of proceeding or it might focus upon his or her understanding of the meaning of the sacrament. But in either case it does not focus upon the congregation.⁷²

Yoder complains that it is entirely subjective whether one is “properly” preaching and administering the sacraments. One can drive a truck through the tiny adverb “properly.” Must all of one’s theology be “correct” for one to be *properly* preaching and administering the sacraments? This amorphous wording is fertile ground for division. “You are not *properly* preaching, I think I will take my friends and start another church.”

⁷² Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 75-76.

Perhaps even worse is the unintended implication that what the pastor does properly or improperly determines whether a church is faithful or unfaithful. If the congregation is faithful and pious despite a renegade clergy member, are they not still a church? Of course they are—there is no shortage of flawed clergy members who fall—the entire church is not cast in doubt because of the errors of a pastor.

A focus on clergy properly preaching and administering the sacraments makes it seem as though what matters is what happens Sunday morning during the worship service. Is it not also vitally important how the congregation members live the other six days in their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces? The subsequent addition by the Reformers of the mark of “church discipline” attempts to compensate for this weakness but it still implies a procedure carried out by the clergy. If the clergy keep up their church discipline proceedings on schedule, the church is the church? But if they neglect this, and the congregation is still faithful, is the church not a church?

So how might we supplement the two practices? Yoder affirms the proposals of Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft and Stephen Neill to a great degree because they take into account the behavior of the congregation, not just the clergy.⁷³ Visser ‘t Hooft proposes three additional marks of the church: witness (*martyria*), service (*diakonia*), and communion or fellowship (*koinonia*). Neill also suggests three additional marks of the church: fire on earth (missionary vitality), suffering, and the mobility of the pilgrim. Yoder builds upon the four additional marks proposed by Menno Simons: (1) holy living, (2) brotherly and sisterly love, (3) unreserved testimony (witness), and (4) suffering (the cross).⁷⁴ It seems to me the addition of the mark

⁷³ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 76-77.

⁷⁴ Yoder, “A People in the World,” *The Royal Priesthood*, 77.

“holy living” encompasses much of what Visser ‘t Hooft, Neill, Simons and Yoder are attempting to communicate.

Rowan Williams argues for something similar. He finds the “Church’s distinctiveness and Church’s unity”⁷⁵ in the convictions of the martyrs. In around 156, Polycarp was burned at the stake for questioning the ultimate authority of the Roman Empire.

The story of the Christian tried and executed by the imperial power is the most dramatic but also the simplest possible demonstration of what ‘church’ means – and so of what holy power looks like and what is involved in claiming a different sort of citizenship.⁷⁶

The unity of the earliest centuries, then, lies partly in this mutual recognition of language grounded in a common sense of holiness, suffering and sovereignty. The implicit test for a church as to whether it belongs in the framework of catholic fellowship is whether it knows how to resist, whether it speaks and behaves as an assembly answerable to the emperor’s Lord rather than just the emperor.⁷⁷

Williams here argues that a martyr’s death served as a particularly strong picture of the distinctiveness of the Christian community. Using coincidentally similar wording, Paul writes in Galatians 6:17, that his marks are marks of suffering. “From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” If the church, that is the congregation members, have these marks of Jesus as a result of their holy living, there is a church.

If the mark “holy living” is acknowledged as central to the identity of the church, the pastor can no longer rest satisfied that they have done their job by merely preaching a proper sermon and properly administering the sacraments. They are responsible for helping *equip* the congregation for holy living in the world. Ephesians 4:11-12,

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to *equip* his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

⁷⁵ Williams, *Why*, 50.

⁷⁶ Williams, *Why*, 34.

⁷⁷ Williams, *Why*, 53.

This equipping will take place through preaching of the word and administering the sacraments but also through other means as well (going, prophesying, communicating the good news, shepherding, and teaching). Leaders will equip those gathered that they might be scattered throughout the world (Acts 8:1, 4, 14, 25).⁷⁸ If our task is to equip God’s people for works of service, we will need to be artists—drawing from many colors on the palette to do our work. We will need to know human beings, know the variety of ways pastoring has been done, and know the scope of the ways ministry was practiced in the New Testament.

5. *BECOMING A BELIEVER IN THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH: LEARNING ABOUT THE CHURCH’S PURPOSE THROUGH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY*

As a college student thinking about my vocational future, I was moved by the following anecdote imagined by someone. After ascending to heaven, Jesus is conversing with the angels. “So who is going to carry on the work now that you’re gone?” they ask. “I commissioned twelve disciples to do it,” he replies. “We know human beings,” they say, “that’s a terrible idea! What’s your backup plan?” And Jesus says, “I don’t have one.”⁷⁹

Of course Jesus did “leave his Spirit til the work on earth is done” as Melody Green’s chorus “There is a Redeemer” puts it.⁸⁰ And he will come again to make all things well. But the scandal remains; *the God of the universe’s modus operandi is to work with human beings*. This

⁷⁸ Christian Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life: A Vision for Pastoral Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 111.

⁷⁹ I have retold the story that I first read in Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism: 30th Anniversary Edition with Study Guide by Roy J. Fish* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1963, 1993), 178.

⁸⁰ John 14:16, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” Matt 28:20, “And surely I am with you always.”

is the story of the Bible. Without thorough soaking in this truth, a pastor cannot help but get discouraged and lost in the enormity of the task of pastoring people well.

In Genesis 1-2, God created human beings that they might steward creation. In Genesis 6-7, God saved creation through Noah. In Genesis 12, God invited Abraham to be blessed and to bless others. The subsequent history of the Bible is of God's decision to work with people who will be his representatives on the earth.

Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright says, "The whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation."⁸¹

After four hundred pages of exploring how the church saw itself as continuing Israel's story, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright concludes that the work of Christ cemented for Christians the missionary calling of the people of God.

Israel believed, sometimes, that when she was redeemed, the Gentiles would share in the blessing. The widespread early Christian impetus towards what was often a risky and costly mission can only be explained in terms of a belief that Israel *had* now been redeemed, and that the time for the Gentiles had therefore come . . . [this is] presumed everywhere in the early Christian mission.⁸²

In other words, the church saw its responsibility as continuing Israel's call to be a witness to the world.

Karl Barth summarizes it this way.

For the same reason the people of Israel in its whole history *ante et post Christum* [before and after Christ] and the Christian Church as it came into being on the day of Pentecost are two forms and aspects (CD II, 2, § 34, 1) of the one inseparable community in which Jesus Christ has His earthly-historical form of existence, by which He is attested to the whole world, by which the whole world is summoned to faith in Him.⁸³

⁸¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 51.

⁸² N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 445.

⁸³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4/1 § 62 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 669-670.

This tracing of a theme through the grand sweep of Scripture is often called “Biblical Theology.” Wright invites us to imagine the Bible as a play in five acts, “most of whose fifth act has been lost.”⁸⁴ To put on the play, actors need to immerse themselves in the first four acts and then reflect on what might be an appropriate fifth act might look like.

The church that does not recognize the missionary impulse in the people of God in the previous four acts, and therefore puts on a self-centered fifth act, poorly performs the play.

Kevin Vanhoozer envisions the pastor as the director.

Directing is not dictating. Directors should not manipulate or micromanage the actions of their players (‘repeat after me . . .’; ‘stand there; no, more to the right . . .’). On the contrary, the primary task of the director, after helping people to understand the play, is to help each player grown into his or her part . . . The pastor helps the congregation become better actors by helping them learn the script and understand how it should be performed in the present cultural scene.⁸⁵

The pastor attempts to coordinate all the gifts within the body of Christ that they might function together in such a way that their lives form a faithful performance of the Scriptures.

Darrell Guder writes,

The reason Christians are formed into communities is because of God’s work to make a people to serve him as Christ’s witnesses. The congregation is either a missional community--as Newbigin defines it, ‘the hermeneutic of the gospel’ (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 222ff.)--or it is ultimately a caricature of the people of God that it is called to be.⁸⁶

If the pastor is not clear what the ship is for, they will have difficulty steering it.

The church is more than a hospital for suffering people—as we might begin to feel after just studying people. It is more than a community that the pastor tries to love—as we might

⁸⁴ Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 140.

⁸⁵ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 449.

⁸⁶ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 136. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

begin to think after studying pastoring. The church is more than a community that builds itself up—as we might begin to think studying the functioning of church leaders in the New Testament. The church is more than a community where preaching takes place and the sacraments are administered—as we might think from studying the marks of the church. Rather, the church is to be demonstrating the reign of God in the particular place where it is located—holy living. Lesslie Newbigin wrote (in 1953).

The Church is a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's reign for that 'place,' that segment of the total fabric of humanity, for which it is responsible--a sign, instrument and foretaste for *that* place with its particular culture.⁸⁷

Karl Barth (also in 1953) wrote that the Church can never become complacent reaching only its own members—oblivious to the world outside—and still be the Church.

As an apostolic Church the Church can never in any respect be an end in itself, but, following the existence of the apostles, it exists only as it exercises the ministry of a herald. It builds up itself and its members in the common hearing of the Word of God which is always new, in common prayer, in baptism and the Lord's Supper, in the practice of its inner fellowship, in theology. But it cannot forget that it cannot do these things simply for its own sake, but only in the course of its commission—only in an implicit and explicit outward movement to the world with which Jesus Christ and in His person God accepted solidarity, for which He died, and in which He rose again in indication of the great revelation of the inversion accomplished in Him. For this reason the Church can never be satisfied with what it can be and do as such. As His community it points beyond itself. At bottom it can never consider its own security, let alone its appearance. As His community it is always free from itself. In its deepest and most proper tendency it is not churchly, but worldly—the Church with open doors and great windows, behind which it does better not to close itself in upon itself again by putting in pious stained-glass windows. It is holy in its openness to the street and even the alley, in its turning to the profanity of all human life—the holiness which, according to Rom. 12⁵, does not scorn to rejoice with them that do rejoice and to weep with them that weep. Its mission is not additional to its being. It is, as it is sent and active in its mission. It builds up itself for the sake of its mission and in relation to it. It does it seriously and actively as it is aware of its mission and in the freedom from itself which this gives. If it is the apostolic Church determined by Scripture and therefore by the direction of the apostles, it cannot fail to exist in this freedom and therefore in a strict realism more especially in

⁸⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (1953) in *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian: A Reader* (ed. Paul Weston; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 138.

relation to itself. And when it does this it cannot fail to be recognisable and recognised as apostolic and therefore as the true Church.⁸⁸

The broad sweep of the Biblical narrative affirms our previous focus on knowing human beings and the importance of carrying on the mission of the apostles and not just the limited functions of elders and bishops.

However, even if the church carries out its mission well—reaching out to its community with apostolic holy living—the church still is not synonymous with the kingdom of God. It is the sign, instrument, foretaste and herald of the reign of God. Even at its best, the Church still is dwarfed by what and who it points to.

6. *BECOMING A LOVER OF THE MISSIONARY GOD: LEARNING ABOUT THE TRIUNE GOD FROM PRAYER, SCRIPTURE, AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY*

The Church indeed has a marvelous mission. Bill Hybels is probably not overstating it when he encourages pastors regularly by saying, “The local church is the hope of the world.” But fortunately, there is something and someone beyond the Church.

I have argued throughout this paper that pastoral ministry that does not set its sights on emulating the apostles in the New Testament, aims too low. The apostles knew the needs of the world, skillfully ministered to people, and equipped people for holy living. But the apostles would be dismayed if we were to only focus on them. “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you.” (Acts 14: 15).

The book of Acts is traditionally called “The Acts of the Apostles” but many scholars rightfully suggest that a better description is “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” A vision comes to Peter inviting him to eat unclean food. “Surely not, Lord!” (Acts 10:14) is his reply. Later, as he

⁸⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/1 § 62 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 724-725.

is preaching, the Holy Spirit seems to indicate his sermon is running a bit long. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (Acts 10:44). James in Acts 15:19 barely hides his reluctance about the mission to the Gentiles—mildly declaring, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Through them, and despite them, “the word of God spread . . . [and] continued to increase and spread” (Acts 6:7; 12:24).

The pastor is not a pastor who is not first a lover of God. The church leader can only oversee and build up the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit by loving God.

As the Costa Rican missionary Guillermo Brown once told me, “the church has the right to expect that their pastor will be seeking out the face of God through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures regularly.”

Eugene Peterson writes strongly about the importance of relating with God through Scripture and prayer.

For the majority of the Christian centuries most pastors have been convinced that prayer is the central and essential act for maintaining the essential shape of the ministry to which they were ordained.

Anything creative, anything powerful, anything *biblical*, insofar as we are participants in it, originates in prayer. Pastors who imitate the preaching and moral action of the prophets without also imitating the prophets’ deep praying and worship so evident in the Psalms are an embarrassment to the faith and an encumbrance to the church.⁸⁹

The authorial character of the Holy Scriptures was established as personal in the person of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because it was personal it was also relational, which meant that all reading/listening of Holy Scripture required personal, relational, participatory reading/listening. This was accompanied by the realization that these Holy Scriptures in which God was revealing everything of who God is, also included

⁸⁹ Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 19, 28.

everything of who we are: there is comprehensiveness and personal participation on both sides, author, and reader.⁹⁰

In the process of soaking in the Scriptures and prayer, the pastor becomes attentive to God and can do what Peterson says is the role of the pastor. “The pastor’s responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God.”⁹¹ In the process of paying attention to God, the pastor will grow in their knowledge of God’s purpose for the church and for themselves, in large and small ways.

In recent years, some systematic theologians have attempted to formally draw out the implications of God’s character for the church. The most talked about book in recent years regarding the church has been Darrell Guder’s book *The Missional Church*. Drawing upon John 20:21-22,

Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’

Guder writes,

We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation . . . we have learned to speak of God as a ‘missionary God.’⁹²

David Bosch,

Mission [is] understood as derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.⁹³

Vatican II had earlier put it this way,

⁹⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 27-28.

⁹¹ Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 2.

⁹² Darrell Guder, ed. *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

⁹³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390. Cf. Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.⁹⁴

Richard Hays,

If we ask, ‘What is God doing in the world in the interval between resurrection and parousia?’ the answer must be given, for Paul, primarily in ecclesial terms: God is at work through the Spirit to create communities that prefigure and embody the reconciliation and healing of the world.⁹⁵

All of these authors remind us that God gives the church its worth.

Many people who begin to understand more fully the character of God are disappointed to discover that the church bears little resemblance to him. Books like *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* and *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* attempt to reform the church by making it more like Jesus.⁹⁶ These authors seek new wineskins because the old ones do not seem adequate to capture the triune God. Nathan Kerr puts it more technically,

For not only has ecclesiology itself come to have priority over Christology in the display of Jesus’ identity and of the truth of his story, but the church itself has also come to be the very ‘goal’ in the telling of Jesus’ story, the ‘end’ of the narrative. What this means is that a particular community in history—a particular set of cultural-linguistic practices—is made to bear the full ontological weight of the meaning of what God has done to establish the Kingdom in our midst.⁹⁷

The church should indeed be constantly tested by whether it is being faithful to God. It is a constant battle for the church to be a sign, instrument, foretaste and herald of the reign of God as it is called to be. The Reformers were right to say *reformata et semper reformanda*—reformed

⁹⁴ Catholic Church. Vatican II. *AD GENTES: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*. 1965. Online: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html

⁹⁵ Richard B. Hays, “Ecclesiology and Ethics in 1 Corinthians,” *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994): 32. Cf. 31-43.

⁹⁶ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009). Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

⁹⁷ Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 108.

and always reforming. The improved church can never grow complacent that it is sufficiently improved, it must always be improving.

Therefore, to a certain extent these authors are right to argue “Theology before ecclesiology” or “Christology before ecclesiology.” But I always say, “If I had to choose, I would agree. But I don’t have to choose!” God is the one who said the church is important! God is the one who said theology and Christology are to be fleshed out in the Church. “And you will be my witnesses.” “I am sending you.” It is the Gnostic who deems the church with its earthiness and frailty an impossibility.

In other words, the person who just focuses on just theology or Christology or mysticism or communion with God through prayer because they do not want to contaminate themselves with: suffering, the nuances of pastoring, the tasks of the church leader, the marks of the church, and the story of the people of God in the Bible; those people actually misunderstand theology and Christology because the God of the universe “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”⁹⁸

Miroslav Volf tried to write a book about the church that limited itself to theological explorations. He says he began the 1998 book *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity* attempting to flesh out the “brief sketch of trinitarian ecclesiology” in Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*.⁹⁹ He engaged the way that the doctrine of the Trinity worked out in the ecclesiology of Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) and Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas. But it soon became clear to him that Trinitarian theology cannot long be separated from what I have called the first five practices.

⁹⁸ John 1:14, *The Message*.

⁹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

After the first two chapters on Ratzinger and Zizioulas, Volf gave up the self-imposed limitation of deducing insights about the church from what is known about the triune God. Benedict and Zizioulas draw much of their ecclesiology from tradition. Volf as a Protestant, wanted to draw on the New Testament.

An ecclesial model acquires theological legitimacy through an appeal to the New Testament witness concerning the church, and through reflection on how faith in the triune God and in salvation in Jesus Christ is to intersect with the cultural location in which churches live.¹⁰⁰

In other words, it is impossible and unnecessary to fashion an ecclesiology wholly from the doctrine of the Trinity. The entire spectrum from “cultural location” to “New Testament witness concerning the church” to “faith in the triune God and in salvation in Jesus Christ” should be taken into account to produce a theologically legitimate ecclesiology.

Similarly the person longing to become a master in the craft of pastoring then does not just seek to be a great theologian. The theologian must get dirty—be a “theologian in residence” as Ken Carder puts it. Nor will the mystic or the person who spends all of their time in contemplation necessarily be an excellent pastor. Gregory the Great says the excellent pastor must care about both practical matters and spiritual contemplation. “The spiritual director should not reduce his attention to the internal life because of external occupations, nor should he relinquish his care for external matters because of anxiety for the internal life.”¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

Too many young people do not even consider investing their lives in church leadership because they are not moved by the examples they see. Too many pastors are discouraged and confused.

¹⁰⁰ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 22 (emphasis added).

¹⁰¹ Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, 68.

Too many pastors and theologians think their own narrow slice of expertise is what the church really needs.

I have argued that six practices that span the theological disciplines form the craft of pastoring.

1. *Becoming a neighbor to the suffering*: learning about human suffering from artists, social-scientists and the sufferer
2. *Becoming a master pastor observer*: learning about different styles of pastoring from sociology, historical exemplars, fictional and real life exemplars
3. *Becoming a student of the body of Christ*: learning about the function of the church leader in the New Testament
4. *Becoming an equipper for holy living*: learning about the marks of the church from historical theology
5. *Becoming a believer in the missionary nature of the church*: learning about the church's purpose through biblical theology
6. *Becoming a lover of the missionary God*: learning about the triune God from prayer, Scripture, and systematic theology

Each one is by itself just a slice of the pastoral craft. But together they form a full-faceted rich joyful understanding the pastoral task. Even though we will never be experts in all or even any of these practices, we will at least know what we are supposed to be working on.

We never arrive at excellence. The church is sign, instrument, foretaste and herald of the kingdom of God. But excellence is worth our best efforts. The triune God has decided to use us for his purposes in the world.

APPENDIX A: BONHOEFFER AND BARTH BOTH MOVING TOWARD THE CENTER
FROM THE REALIST AND IDEALIST POLES

Complimentary to the use of MacIntyre’s framework a spectrum with realism at one end and idealism at the other with Dietrich Bonhoeffer representing the former and Karl Barth the latter. Bonhoeffer was very interested in the practical—writing about sociology in his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*, reflecting on the actions of Jesus in *Discipleship*, describing the training of seminarians in *Life Together*, justifying courageous behavior in *Ethics*, and reflecting on what the post-war church might look like in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Karl Barth on the other hand had a tendency toward “idealism”—writing 8,000 words of systematic theology in his 14 volume *Church Dogmatics* in order to encourage people to focus more on God. “The Gospel proclaims a God utterly distinct from me.”¹⁰² Some early interpreters of Bonhoeffer even thought he had jettisoned Christianity completely because of his emphasis on “the profound this-worldliness of Christianity.”¹⁰³ People often think of Barth as a scholastic who was disinterested in ethics. A more thorough analysis however shows that Bonhoeffer and Barth commended the work of one another and neither is guilty of a thorough-going realism or idealism. Still, it might be helpful to think of Bonhoeffer as more interested in the lenses cited at the beginning of this paper (sociology and the problems of the world) and Barth more interested in the lenses at the end of this paper (the doctrine of the triune God and the theology of the people of God).

¹⁰² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 28.

¹⁰³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition* (ed. Eberhard Bethge; New York: Touchstone, 1997), 369.

Karl Barth deals with the problem of idealism and realism in his 1929 lectures, “Fate and Idea in Theology.”¹⁰⁴

The aspirations of theological realism are too genuine and necessary for anyone to suppose that a simple and sweeping rejection would not mean tossing out the baby with the bath water. No theology can afford not to share completely the intentions evident here. Anyone who wanted to reject this position *in globo* would not be a particularly good theologian, not even a particularly good Protestant theologian.¹⁰⁵

No one who wanted to expunge all idealism from theology would be a very sharp Christian theologian, merely a naïve realist.¹⁰⁶

Barth is concerned about the realist. “Idealist thinking . . . worries about the realist’s naïve confidence.”¹⁰⁷ Idealism’s positive contribution is that it

leads away from reality into the realm of truth . . . The Word became flesh, but flesh is not for that reason the Word. The relationship is irreversible. Flesh is the Word only because and only to the extent that the Word became flesh in a particular instance . . . Hence it [Idealism] takes pains to criticize subjective as well as objective experience. Hence, to the annoyance of the realists, it speaks of the figurative or symbolic character of God’s objective givenness.¹⁰⁸

Barth and Kerr however are together on the “singularity” of Jesus Christ.

He [the idealist] will also have to join forces with the realist by granting that God’s truth finds access to us in one single particular event and that this event is definitive . . . He will need to realize that only where the Word of God—which is bound neither to our reason nor to worldly phenomena—gives it sense, does his critical analysis make sense. And as a Christian theologian he will need to be clear about just how concretely and in just what connection he must ask about this sense. In this light it may be said that Augustine and Calvin, who placed themselves under rather than over the Word, were idealist theologians.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Karl Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology: Lectures delivered at the Hochschulinstitut in Dortmund, February-March, 1929. Translation of ‘Schicksal and Idee’ in *Theologische Fragen und Antworten*,” in *The way of theology in Karl Barth: essays and comments* (ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt; Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1986): 25-61.

¹⁰⁵ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 37.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 47.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 43.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 46.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 47-48.

Barth declines to dismiss Erasmus, Luther, or Thomas, idealist or realist approaches.

Theology, too, must do its work in appropriate humility. And we say nothing different if we remember in conclusion that Luther put the decisive contradiction to all *speculation majestatis* like this: ‘ . . . being where Christ began—in the Virgin’s womb, in the manger, and at his mother’s breasts.’ Begin, in other words, where God’s Word has and does concretely come to us: In truth, because it is God’s Word. In reality, because it was made flesh.¹¹⁰

But admittedly the nature of Barth’s work as a theologian was such that he tended toward the abstract. He acknowledges that idealism is an occupational hazard for the theologian.

How could theology or thinking concerned with God not be encountered on this path? One might even ask whether philosophical idealism would ever exist without the general problem of theology. Strictly speaking, isn’t it the concept of God that provides the impetus for carrying through the project of critical idealist thinking? Be that as it may, the reverse is certainly true that no theology has ever avoided the general problem of idealism.¹¹¹

The point is that it is entirely appropriate for the Christian ethicist, pastor, Christian educator, and missiologist to appropriate Barth’s insights in more concrete ways—to see how the truth becomes real but they are never free as a Christian to get complacent and cease asking whether their practice is indeed true.

In 1932-33, Bonhoeffer commented, “The Barthian view of ethics as ‘demonstration’ rules out all concrete ethics and ethical principles.”¹¹² He detected an “idealist” streak in Barth¹¹³—hence his comment about “neo-Kantian egg-shells.”

¹¹⁰ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 60.

¹¹¹ Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology,” 43.

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *Ökumene, Universität, Pfarramt: 1931-1932* (DBW 11), 212-213 quoted in Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 184. English version not yet available: *Ecumenical, Academic and Pastoral Work: 1931-1932* (DBW 11).

¹¹³ Barth refuses to be categorized as either idealist or realist in Karl Barth, “Fate and Idea in Theology: Lectures delivered at the Hochschulinstitut in Dortmund, February-March, 1929. Translation of ‘Schicksal and Idee’ in *Theologische Fragen und Antworten*,” in *The way of theology in Karl Barth: essays and comments* (ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt; Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1986): 25-61.

Barth was the first to realize the mistake that all these attempts (which were all, in fact, still sailing, though unintentionally, in the channel of liberal theology) were making in leaving clear a space for religion in the world or against the world. He brought in against religion the God of Jesus Christ, ‘*pneuma* against *sarx*.’ That remains his greatest service (his *Epistle to the Romans*, second edition, in spite of all the neo-Kantian egg-shells). Through his later dogmatics, he enabled the church to effect this distinction, in principle, all along the line. It was not in ethics, as is often said, that he subsequently failed—his ethical observations, as far as they exist, are just as important as his dogmatic ones—; it was that in the non-religious interpretation of theological concepts he gave no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics. There lies his limitation, and because of it his theology of revelation has become positivist, a ‘positivism of revelation,’ as I put it.¹¹⁴

Bonhoeffer is not accusing Barth of being a deist but he is criticizing Barth for failing to offer enough “concrete guidance.” Barth’s writing *style* is too idealistic. Hauerwas nicely expresses this idea,

Barth’s *Dogmatics* is a performance, a witness, through which we learn the skills to go on in a way no doubt different from Barth. For there is no way to be faithful to Barth without being different from Barth. That is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer, exactly because he followed Barth in his own way, witnesses to the power of Barth’s performance.¹¹⁵

This also coincides nicely with Bonhoeffer’s comments about meeting Barth. “Barth was even better than his books . . . I have been impressed even more by discussions with him than by his writings and lectures.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 328.

¹¹⁵ Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (rev. ed.; ed. G.B. Kelly and F. B. Nelson; New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 383. See German DBW 11:19. English DBW 11 not yet available.

APPENDIX B: THE DISCIPLINE OF “PRACTICAL THEOLOGY” IS ALSO ATTEMPTING TO DO THIS INTEGRATIVE WORK

In the last thirty years, a group of “practical theology” proponents have tried to bridge the gap between the social sciences and theology. They recommend a practitioner engage in “praxis” in which the details of a context and the Christian tradition are put into conversation with one another.

Continuing with MacIntyre’s terminology, Don Browning, in his book *Fundamental Practical Theology*, has attempted to sketch a working model of a way for theologians to both study the *technical skills* that are required in every practice and yet also to reflect on the *internal goods* related to religious *practices*.¹¹⁷ Browning calls this first task “Descriptive Theology.” This task takes advantage of all the social sciences have to offer. He then incorporates Systematic Theology and Historical Theology to help evaluate what has been discovered.

Though not drawing on MacIntyre, Thomas Groome’s *Shared Christian Praxis* takes into account this dialectic as well.¹¹⁸ If Browning’s work is analytic, descriptive and evaluative, Groome’s is constructive. Browning takes three churches and tries to describe what is going on in them and evaluate those approaches. Groome suggests a model of religious education, even more generally, a model of Christian ministry.

Richard Osmer gives this definition of practical theology. “Practical theology is that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in

¹¹⁷ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987).

¹¹⁸ Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980).

particular social contexts.”¹¹⁹ In looking historically at the discipline of practical theology, Osmer believes that four tasks have emerged as central to the field. These four tasks are the *descriptive-empirical* task which explores “What is going on?”; the *interpretive* task which explores “Why is this going on?”; the *normative* task which explores “What forms ought Christian praxis take in this particular social context?”; and the *pragmatic* task which explores “How might this area of praxis be shaped to embody more fully the normative commitments of the Christian tradition in a particular context of experience?”¹²⁰ Osmer makes clear that these tasks are interdependent and need not flow in any particular order.

Similarly, the book *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* makes explicit its goal to help congregations function more effectively. For troubled congregations, then, the task of congregational study offers the hope of clarity, intelligibility, and improvements in the many vexing difficulties in congregational life. For strong congregations full of energy and hope, congregational study will help identify directions for even greater mission and service.¹²¹

I see Groome, Browning, Osmer, and congregational studies as fundamentally compatible. They have each helped me to pay attention to what is going on in congregations and then to grapple with what the Christian tradition might say regarding the issue. The questions that are raised in the congregation force upon the tradition new questions.

The problem with this approach is that unlike MacIntyre Aristotelian framework, proponents of this approach often do not locate themselves within a tradition. When this

¹¹⁹ Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xiv.

¹²⁰ Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, xv-xvi. Osmer recognizes that practical theologians bring a host of different methods and presuppositions to these tasks which bring about a plurality of outcomes. Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 303-317.

¹²¹ Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998), 19.

happens, the context ends up dictating the practice and the Christian tradition no longer operates authoritatively. MacIntyre's project is to warn against rashly dismissing tradition for what is new. Communities decay if they no longer remember the tradition. "Practical theology" has largely been ignored by scholars in other disciplines because of its naïvely openness—as if the process itself is the foundation upon which its conclusions are built.

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