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**Current Issues in Pastoral Theology:  
An Editorial Introduction**

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## ***Current Issues in Pastoral Theology: An Editorial Introduction***

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This special issue of the *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* features articles exploring current issues in pastoral theology. The articles within this issue address academic and ecclesial concerns across the evangelical spectrum. In keeping with the mission of JBTS—to relay content that is original and yet accessible—this issue contains articles uniquely formulated to speak to seminary students, busy ministers, and scholars academically engaged in the broad field of pastoral theology. This issue includes an even selection of articles from scholars working within various academic institutions, in addition to articles from pastors engaged in the trenches of everyday pastoral ministry. In sum, this issue offers a distinct set of voices from varied backgrounds, ministry methodologies, and denominational alliances.

### **What is Pastoral Theology?**

What is pastoral theology, and where is its place in the broader fields of the theological disciplines? Answers to this question are elusive due to the conflation of terminology in current academic and ecclesial discourse. Part of the confusion centers on the relationship between practical theology and pastoral theology and how these disciplines are related yet distinct. These two fields are sometimes discussed interchangeably without providing any distinction between the two, further complicating discourse within contemporary discussion. For example, Richard Osmer defines practical theology as “the branch of Christian theology that teaches the members of the Christian community how to perform certain practices and to embody the mission of the church in a particular social context.”<sup>1</sup> The strength of Osmer’s definition rests in the *performing* of theology within the broad Christian community. Thus, practical theology could include homiletics for some, counseling for others, and broadly speaking, for others it could include various components of generalized pastoral theology. Thus, the discipline of *practical theology* serves as the larger umbrella to each of its sub-disciplines, but it is important to note that while pastoral theology is a sub-set of the larger field of practical theology, it too is subject

1. Richard R. Osmer, “Practical Theology,” in *Mapping Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, eds. Kelly M. Kopic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 319.

to being a catch all term for disciplines which do not easily fall within the greater discipline of practical theology.

In other words, the discipline of practical theology includes subjects as broad as homiletics, counseling, and pastoral theology, and according to Elaine Graham, practical theology goes so far as to include “interactions with a range of non-theological disciplines, such as the modern psychologies, social and cultural theory, anthropology, and philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> Within this expansive view of practical theology, one could make the discipline of practical theology apply to nearly any other field, particularly those centered upon human interactions. On the other hand, pastoral theology, as a sub-discipline of practical theology, includes practices such as general pastoral ministry, prayer, discipleship and numerous other practices most often associated with the specific duties of ecclesial ministry. In current discourse, preaching is viewed both as a sub discipline of practical theology (homiletics), and a specific duty of pastoral theology.<sup>3</sup>

Complicating matters further, some theologians use the term pastoral theology as the larger umbrella term rather than the common usage of practical theology. For example, Alister McGrath follows this line of thinking in his helpful but oversimplified distinctions of the theological branches.<sup>4</sup> McGrath considers the “architecture” of theology to include biblical studies, systematic theology, philosophical theology, pastoral theology, and church history. Christian theology has a “strongly pastoral dimension” to it, says McGrath, and this important dimension is “generally inadequately reflected in the academic discussion of theology.”<sup>5</sup> Citing the Puritans as the best examples of those unwilling to distinguish rich theological depth with pastoral applicability, McGrath notes the historic ministries of Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards as examples of a rich theological expression committed to the life of preaching, worship, prayer, and pastoral care.

Other theologians speak of practical theology and pastoral theology by their close relationship to systematic theology. Ray Anderson suggests, “the discipline of practical theology extends systematic theology into the life and praxis of the Christian community.”<sup>6</sup> John Frame goes further, suggesting that practical theology is “a department of systematic theology,” and practical theology “asks a particular

2. Elaine Graham, “Practical Theology,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Accessed January 5, 2018, ProQuest ebrary.

3. For further reading on these distinctions, see Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 23–34; Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1–7.

4. Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 4–9.

5. *Ibid.*, 7.

6. Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 23.

question of Scripture, among the other questions of systematics. That question is: how should we communicate the Word of God? Thus, it deals with preaching, teaching, evangelism, church-planting, missions, media communications, and so on.”<sup>7</sup> Frame’s definition of practical theology encompasses the usual slate of practices within its field, but his insistence on the discipline’s close relationship to systematic theology mirrors a growing trend to view pastoral theology with the nomenclature of applied systematic theology.<sup>8</sup>

In this issue, we have chosen to use the term pastoral theology because of its acute focus on the qualities and duties of the church’s primary theological communicator, the pastor. The eleven articles in this issue seek to address critical issues of pastoral significance both broadly and specifically, while relating these concerns to students, local church pastors, and the scholars who work specifically within the flourishing discipline of pastoral theology.

### **The Revitalization of Pastor Theologians**

Alister McGrath cited a joke theologians have of clergy: “You have a look at their bookshelves, and you notice that there is a cut-off point. After a certain date, they seem to stop buying theological works. And that’s when their brains died.”<sup>9</sup> Whatever one may say about the formulation of this humorous, light-hearted jab, McGrath’s overall point presses into several ongoing conversations between scholars and clergy.

First, there is a tendency for pastors to conclude that theological study is achieved in *full* during the formative years of seminary. In this sense, pastors could falsely believe that a few theology courses in their seminary program sufficiently provided the totality of depth and breadth needed for a lifetime of faithful and fruitful ministry. In line with McGrath’s humorous quip, in this sense, pastors with this mindset quit purchasing theological books when their seminary days concluded, thereby restricting their theological breadth to a modest span of time, eventually resulting in an intellectual death sentence to their theological development.

Under these circumstances, the humor fades and the stunning reality emerges regarding the importance of ongoing theological rigor well after the seminary degrees are placed neatly on one’s office wall. Pastoral ministry requires a lifetime

7. John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 9. Emphasis in original. Additionally, John Feinberg makes a similar connection in his editorial introduction to the volumes within the *Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series*, where he states, “systematic theology is not just for the understanding. It must apply to life, and it must be lived.” See John Feinberg, “Series Introduction,” in Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Incarnate Son: The Doctrine of Christ*, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 19.

8. See Pete Ward’s terminology of “Reembracing Applied Theology” in Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 3–7.

9. Alister E. McGrath, “Theology and the Futures of Evangelicalism,” in *The Futures of Evangelicalism*, edited by Craig Bartholomew, Robin Parry, and Andrew West (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 16–17.

commitment to ongoing learning and study, for often theological challenges must be confronted by pastors with open Bibles rather than theologians with updated CVs. Pastors are on the front lines of theological warfare each week as they occupy their pulpits and throughout the week as they use Scripture to address a myriad of practical concerns. In God's kind providence, he has provided an abundance of quality seminaries for those whom he calls to vocational ministry, and the best of these seminaries urge their graduates to keep their hunger alive for biblical and theological studies well after they graduate.

McGrath's lighthearted joke also speaks to a second conversation among scholars and pastors, often a result of the lingering residue of twentieth century pragmatism. Specifically, what is the relationship between pastor theologians and professional academic theologians? If pastors quit purchasing theological books upon their seminary graduation, can they in any real sense be considered theologians? But the blame lies within the academic community as well, where some scholars have worked to sharply distinguish their work from the work of the local church. John Webster lamented this tendency, stating: "The clear distinctions which some members of the academic theological guild draw between proclamation and critical reflection are part of the pathology of modern theology: our forebears would have been distressed by the way in which theology has succumbed to the standardization of discourse in the academy and the consequent exclusion of certain modes of Christian speech."<sup>10</sup> Just a casual glance into church history validates Webster's emphasis, for one can hardly bifurcate pastor and theologian when observing the ministries of the Reformers, the Puritans, and many of their theological heirs in subsequent decades, theological traditions, or continents.

Over the last few years, a surplus of books, conferences, and ministries have emerged which seek to recover ground in this important conversation. These voices seek to ground pastoral ministry within a theological framework rather than a pragmatic one. For example, Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, in *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, urge pastors to view their ministerial role as the church's primary theologian.<sup>11</sup> Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand produced two recent books calling upon pastors to "resurrect and ancient vision" and embrace their roles as pastor

10. John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 211.

11. Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

theologians.<sup>12</sup> There is an invigorating relationship between the academy and the church, and these developments are strengthening these connections for all involved.<sup>13</sup>

These varied contributions provide a sweeping rebuttal to a common approach of pastoral ministry, which emerged from the popular mega-church culture and the overall modern church growth movement which often overlooked the importance of a robust theology. Thankfully, a passionate plea for pastors to recover a historical and biblical view that pastoral ministry is first and foremost a theological calling exists, and contemporary ministers must dispel a mentality seeking to bifurcate pastoral ministry and theological reflection. Pastors are theologians, and as G. C. Berkouwer said, “Dogma is a living reality within the house of God; here it sounds as the love song of the congregation. Concern for dogma is concern for faith. The task of theology is to help preserve the doxology of dogma.”<sup>14</sup> Pastors are on the front lines of these endeavors, and their roles grow in importance each day.

### **An Introduction to the Contents**

This issue contains eleven articles written by those from the academic guild as well as those involved in weekly pastoral ministry.

In the first article, Josh Branum’s analyzes the Pauline qualifications for eldership considering the shepherd metaphor. Branum shows how the shepherd metaphor is utilized throughout both the Old and New Testaments, by various authors, and in a variety of contexts leading to its culmination in the life and ministry of Jesus. He further explains the New Testament’s emphasis of Jesus as the great shepherd and how this role is later applied to elders and their roles within churches. With Branum’s analysis, readers are provided a fresh analysis of this crucial aspect of the pastoral office.

Gary Shultz discusses the renewed emphasis on pastors as public theologians and offers an important perspective on the role of theological preaching for the pastor theologian. He demonstrates how preaching is the theological act that grounds all other aspects of pastoral ministry even as it is grounded itself by that ministry. Shultz suggests preaching is the connecting center of the pastor-theologian’s ministry, resulting in effective pastoring and a robust ecclesial theology for gospel advance.

12. Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015). Also, Hiestand and Wilson followed with an edited volume that addresses the pastor theologian from the perspective of church leadership constructs. See Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016).

13. For example, see the developments of this emphasis in Daniel L. Akin and R. Scott Pace, *Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 1–16.

14. G. C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives*, ed. and trans. Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 216.

The following article by Jonathan Master focuses on the importance of preaching the Psalms. Master specifically focuses on Psalm 46 where he offers four recommendations for effective preaching in general, with emphasis in preaching the Psalms. Master understands preaching as a means of grace God specifically ordained for both the evangelization of the nations and for the building up of the church and this framework buttresses his emphases throughout his contribution. In the second part of his article, Master provides a sample sermon on Psalm 46 where he implements each of his four recommendations.

Matthew Ward provides the fourth article in this issue. Ward writes to address the role and importance of worship leaders to the theological leadership of the church's worship. Ward provides practical guidance on the critical role worship ministry has in articulating a contextualized theology within local churches. He provides helpful instruction for pastor theologians considering ways to be more thoughtful with the theological issues of a church's worship.

Joshua Chatraw's article shifts the conversation from the pastor's role as shepherd, his identity as a preaching theologian, and the importance of a healthy worship contextualized with theological reflection to articles specifically addressing the wider roles of the pastor theologian. Chatraw addresses the crucial subject of apologetics for pastor theologians. He helpfully summarizes the four common apologetic approaches and discusses their potential strengths and weaknesses. Chatraw then helps readers by offering a way forward for pastor-apologists through a person-specific approach.

Benjamin Espinoza's article calls for pastor theologians to rethink common approaches to racial reconciliation within broader evangelicalism. Espinoza believes pastors occupy a critical role in forging new paths of progress in this crucial area. In his article, Espinoza calls for pastor theologians to capture and project a vision and plan for developing a rich ministry of racial reconciliation. He calls upon pastors to situate racial reconciliation as a gospel issue rather than merely a political one. He then urges pastor theologians to seek an ecclesial response worthy of the gospel. Espinoza believes pastor theologians must be the agents of racial conciliation in both ecclesial and academic spaces.

Owen Strachan's article focuses upon the contributions of Harold Ockenga for modern twenty-first century evangelicalism. Strachan believes Ockenga's influential pastoral ministry offers twenty-first century pastor theologians an example of a richly theological pastorate, and a pulpit that majored in doctrine over storytelling and sentimentality. Strachan offers five considerations for the rising generation of shepherds of God's flock, considerations that together urge the church to invest in the doctrinal formation, personal courage, and theistic confidence of its pastors.

Douglas Estes follows with a helpful perspective on pastor theologians and scholarship. Estes believes there is a critical need for pastor-scholars to serve the Church by advancing theological knowledge. He advocates for a utilization of the

written word to dialogue with an important part of modern society—scholars and educated readers—through the form of scholarly discourse. For many Christians, pastors are the only theologians whose written word will capture the attention of a busy laity.

Michael Goheen provides an engaging article on the overall discipline of pastoral theology. He advocates for a renewal of pastoral theology from a missional mode. Goheen argues modern pastoral theology suffers from three primary assumptions which cripple its witness. Goheen then sketches the missional turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and notes its considerable impact beginning with ecclesiology, and then on theology and leadership. Goheen's understanding of mission provides a solid theological foundation for the renewal of pastoral theology.

Andrew Zantingh's article furthers Goheen's thesis and shows its practical development within pastoral care. Zantingh's pastoral and academic background provide the backdrop to this formulation of pastors as leaders of ecclesial discipleship. He constructs theological contours reframing pastoral care in the missional mode and offering a concrete example of this kind of pastoral care in action. Finally, Zantingh sketches a dynamic approach to theological education to further equip pastors for the missional pastoral care he advocates.

This issue concludes with Marcus Serven's thorough examination of John Calvin's pastoral ministry. Serven believes Calvin has been misinterpreted, misread, and misunderstood and a renewed interest in this giant of the faith is warranted for effective pastoral care. Serven wants readers to know more of Calvin than his views on the doctrines of election, predestination, and reprobation, or his pivotal role in the prosecution of the arch-heretic Michael Servetus.

Serven demonstrates that Calvin was the preeminent pastor of Geneva during the time of the Protestant Reformation. In his analysis, Serven presents Calvin as a careful and effective shepherd of souls, and one whose theological studies formed his pastoral work.

Each of these articles vary in scope, theological perspective, and audience. Several articles address beginning and intermediate students seeking helpful reflections on pastoral ministry. The opening articles on pastors as shepherds, the role of theological preaching, how to preach the Psalms effectively, and the critical relationship between pastors have with the worship ministries of the body are intended to help students and pastors reflect deeply on each of these critical pieces. Other articles seek to provide more helpful reflections upon the ongoing conversations in recent scholarship regarding pastors as the public theologians of ecclesial ministry. The contributors who offered perspectives specifically geared toward pastor theologians sought to move the needle and add critical perspectives on these expanding conversations. Other articles sought to reorient the discipline of pastoral theology in hopes of providing a more robust identity to this critical discipline in its missional obligations. Scholars within pastoral theology will find

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each of these articles helpful and meaningful contributions to this flourishing field. Finally, the article focusing John Calvin's pastoral care essentially integrates the highlights from each of the previous articles for Calvin's pastoral ministry embodied each of the emphases.

Contributors to this special issue provide students, pastors, and scholars fresh perspectives for further discussion into the critical discipline of pastoral theology.