

Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian. Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), xi + 221 pp., US\$ 21.99 (ISBN 9780801097713).

The urgency for this book is felt throughout as the identity of the pastor is at stake. Who is the pastor, what is the pastor's role, not only in church but also in representing the Christian faith in wider society? And even more pressing: what does it entail that pastors are theologians? The authors, Kevin Vanhoozer, research professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Chicago, Ill.) and Owen Strachan, assistant professor of Christian theology and church history, work together with twelve pastors in a book that combines a rigorous passion for both the church and the academy to reassess the pastor-theologian. The larger context for the book comes from an earlier wake-up call by one of these pastors, Gerald Hiestand, senior associate pastor in Oak Park, Ill., in his *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (2015), and it is grounded in the authors' conviction that "theological minds belong in ecclesial bodies" (xi). The book argues against the supposed split between academic theology and pastoral ministry.

The book is divided into two main parts. Strachan writes about biblical theology (chapter 1) and historical theology (chapter 2) while Vanhoozer covers systematic (chapter 3) and practical theology (chapter 4). On the one hand, this division seems rather obvious, as it reflects the post-Schleiermacherian disciplinary divisions of theological schools, with biblical theology as its starting point and practical theology as its apex, or, to use Schleiermacher's metaphor, its crown. On the other hand, however, the division paradoxically reflects the modern specialization in theology, while the authors aim to close the gap between theology as a field of specialists and the pastorate as pragmatic leadership.

Two features of the book underline its urgency and its programmatic intention. First, each chapter is followed by a few shorter reflections by pastors (twelve in total) upon the theoretical positions outlined in the chapter from the perspective of the pastoral practice. Some of them tend to add new theoretical elements, while others are valuable applications or lively illustrations of how pastoral work and theological reflection are combined in the everyday life of the pastor. Second, the book closes with fifty-five summary theses. They include the tasks and roles of the pastor-theologians as well as the justification for the existence of seminaries, for instance that seminaries exist "to foster a particular kind of generalist: one who understand all things in the light of what is in Christ" (187). The urgency of the book makes it a valuable read for congregations and their leadership teams as well as for faculty, staff, and education

management of seminaries. The central idea in the book is that we do not have to invent the pastorate again, nor do we have to reduce pastoral work to energetic leadership or effective administration, but we can draw from centuries of wisdom and the central tenet of the Christian faith, the resurrected Christ.

In the introduction the authors stress their conviction that academic theology takes a second place (xi). This is understandable; yet, reminded by Karl Barth's idea that theology is a calling of the church, where does it leave theology as a primary function of the church? John Calvin is known for adding the academic theologian to the offices of the church. Even more ancient are the twelfth-century European cathedral schools out of which the first universities grew (Bologna, Paris, Oxford) with theology as one of their primary fields of interest. The authors frame this development as a movement away from pastoral work. It does leave the question of whether theology in its academic mode is a function of the church, especially in Christianity. The book would have benefited from a more subtle engagement with the classic theological tradition of *faith seeking understanding*. The study of God and divine things, following the classical definition of theology, is part of the ancient vision and belongs to the calling of the church. The authors have a valid point, however, when they issue a warning that in post-Christian societies academic theology runs the risk of losing its vital connection with the church or turns into a version of religious studies. Their plea for integrating theology into the pastoral work is timely. What is left of the public theological calling for pastors in post-Christian, particularly Western, societies? A follow-up that addresses this question more fully might include an exciting cross-cultural comparison with Christianity in the global south.

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