



# PASTOR PAUL

NURTURING A CULTURE

OF CHRISTIFORMITY IN THE CHURCH

SCOT McKNIGHT



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**BrazosPress**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Brazos Press  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.brazospress.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McKnight, Scot, author.

Title: Pastor Paul : nurturing a culture of Christofornity in the Church / Scot McKnight.

Description: Grand Rapids : Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019. | Series: Theological explorations for the Church Catholic | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018053563 | ISBN 9781587434266 (cloth : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Pastoral theology. | Bible. Epistles of Paul—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BV4011.3 .M425 2019 | DDC 253—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018053563>

Italics in Bible quotations have been added by the author.

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19 20 21 22 23 24 25      7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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## Series Preface

Long before Brian McLaren began speaking about a “generous orthodoxy,” John Wesley attempted to carry out his ministry and engage in theological conversations with what he called a “catholic spirit.” Although he tried to remain “united by the tenderest and closest ties to one particular congregation”<sup>1</sup> (i.e., Anglicanism) all his life, he also made it clear that he was committed to the orthodox Christianity of the ancient creeds, and his library included books from a variety of theological traditions within the church catholic. We at Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS) remain committed to the theological tradition associated with Wesley but, like Wesley himself, are very conscious of the generous gifts we have received from a variety of theological traditions. One specific place this happens in the ongoing life of our community is in the public lectures funded by the generosity of various donors. It is from those lectures that the contributions to this series arise.

The books in this series are expanded forms of public lectures presented at NTS as installments in two ongoing, endowed lectureships: the Earle Lectures on Biblical Literature and the Grider-Winget Lectures in Theology. The Earle Lecture series is named in honor of the first professor of New Testament at NTS, Ralph Earle. Initiated in 1949 with W. F. Albright for the purpose of “stimulating further research in biblical literature,” this series has brought outstanding biblical scholars to NTS, including F. F. Bruce, I. Howard Marshall, Walter Brueggemann, and Richard Hays. The Grider-Winget Lecture series is named in honor of J. Kenneth Grider, longtime professor of theology at NTS, and in memory of Dr. Wilfred L. Winget, a student of Dr. Grider and

the son of Mabel Fransen Winget, who founded the series. The lectureship was initiated in 1991 with Thomas Langford for the purpose of “bringing outstanding guest theologians to NTS.” Presenters for this lectureship have included Theodore Runyon, Donald Bloesch, and Jürgen Moltmann.

The title of this monograph series indicates how we understand its character and purpose. First, even though the lectureships are geared toward biblical literature *and* systematic theology, we believe that the language of “theological explorations” is as appropriate to an engagement with Scripture as it is to an engagement with contemporary systematic theology. Though it is legitimate to approach at least some biblical texts with nontheological questions, we do not believe that doing so is to approach them *as Scripture*. Old and New Testament texts are not inert containers from which to draw theological insights; they are already witnesses to a serious theological engagement with particular historical, social, and political situations. Hence, biblical texts should be approached *on their own terms* through asking theological questions. Our intent, then, is that this series will be characterized by theological explorations from the fields of biblical studies and systematic theology.

Second, the word *explorations* is appropriate since we ask the lecturers to explore the cutting edge of their current interests and thinking. With the obvious time limitations of three public lectures, even their expanded versions will generally result not in long, detailed monographs but rather in shorter, suggestive treatments of a given topic—that is, explorations.

Finally, with the language of “the church catholic,” we intend to convey our hope that these volumes should be *pro ecclesia* in the broadest sense—given by lecturers representing a variety of theological traditions for the benefit of the whole church of Jesus Christ. We at NTS have been generously gifted by those who fund these two lectureships. Our hope and prayer is that this series will become a generous gift to the church catholic, one means of equipping the people of God for participation in the *missio Dei*.

Andy Johnson  
Lectures Coordinator  
Nazarene Theological Seminary  
Kansas City, Missouri

# Preface

Curiosity about the topic of this book arrived while I was pondering a lecture on the Corinthian correspondence for students, many of them pastors with gripping realities to sift what I and Paul had to say, at Northern Seminary. As I was reading 1 Corinthians 1–4, I was taken aback by Paul’s sarcasm, his lack of pastoral sensitivity, and his profound theological subversion of the ways of the Corinthians. Our session made for an adventurous conversation and confusion about how to implement Paul’s pastoral ways. That first lecture led to others with ever-new branchings out. In pondering those chapters in 1 Corinthians, then, I branched out to two other sections of Paul’s letters that silently requested time in the classroom too: 2 Corinthians 2:12–7:16 and Colossians 1:24–2:5, two passages I consider more pastoral than even the Pastoral Letters. I was baffled and excited about how to explain Paul’s pastoral strategies to pastors or those training to be pastors. My first formal opportunity to do so was in a gathering of church planters and pastors connected to the Anglican Church of North America (Christ Church, Plano, Texas, where I met David Roseberry). My second opportunity was in nearby Dallas, at a Churches of Christ pastors network headed up by Pat Bills (Highland Oaks Church of Christ). The third opportunity was with Pat Bills’s network again, where I began to explore what is now in chapter 2 (“A Culture of Friendship”).

When Andy Johnson at Nazarene Theological Seminary invited me to give the Ralph Earle Lectures on Biblical Literature for Pastors Day, I knew my topic and was delighted Andy agreed. Since that day, now

nearly two years ago, I have been constantly pondering Pastor Paul, studying the texts in context, and finding great joy reading pastors writing about pastoring. I am grateful to Andy for the invitation, and as one now old enough to remember using the word studies done by Ralph Earle, I am doubly honored. Invitations such as these come with administrative care, so I express thanks to Dana Preusch, director of the Center for Pastoral Leadership, for her efficiency in handling the details of the event.

Since the invitation from Andy I have lectured and preached and discussed Paul as pastor in a number of settings, each of which deserves to be mentioned and thanked. I give thanks to my classes at Northern Seminary; to Trinity College Bristol (Justin Stratis), where I gave a lecture in J. I. Packer's old office (!); to Westminster Theological Centre (Nick and Lucy Peppiatt Crawley) and to Woodlands Church Bristol (Dave Mitchell); to Greg Mamula and Robin Stoop for the invitation to speak to the American Baptist Pastors of Nebraska; and especially also to Regent College Vancouver for giving me a full week to teach on the topic in the summer of 2017 as a warm-up to the whole set of lectures now published here. In February 2018 I spoke about these themes to Nelson Searcy's Renegade Conference in Orlando, Florida, a nice place to be in the midst of a Chicago winter. "Memory," Mary Karr once shrewdly observed, "is a pinball in a machine."<sup>1</sup> I appeal to her image of a memory bouncing around from bumper to bumper if I have forgotten anyone or any of the bumpers where the lights went off for something in this book.

I have mentioned my students at Northern, but now I must express my thanks to the president, Bill Shiell, for his enthusiasm for this study of Pastor Paul and to the board of trustees for their generosity and protection of professors' time and schedules. Because Paul has been on my mind and in my writing since I've been at Northern Seminary, my conversations with colleagues have often wandered into Paul, or my colleagues' comments have made me wander into Paul, so I thank—in the order of our offices—Jason Gile, Robert Price, Cherith Fee Nordling, David Fitch, Sam Hamstra, and Geoff Holsclaw.

I am grateful, too, to those who have read portions of this manuscript and offered feedback: Josh Casey, Sven Soderlund, Tara Beth Leach, and Becky Castle Miller, the last of whom read several versions

of several chapters and made many suggestions. The book is better for her comments and I want to thank her for her sharp mind and no-nonsense approach to writing. An early conversation with Amanda Holm Rosengren spun out into the first chapter in several versions and her suggestions refined where I ended up. More than anyone else, Jay Greener's pastoring at Church of the Redeemer has inspired this book. He probably knows, but has not said so, that my occasional scribblings during his sermons are as often as not "notes to self" for this book. Jay—and this comes from the first chapter—pastors people. So does Stephanie, who has a rambunctious bundle of children and moms and dads to pastor.

Editors at Baker: Bob Hosack and the others. An editor, someone has said, is someone who knows more about writing than writers but somehow has managed to escape the compulsion to write. I haven't, they have, and I am grateful they have.

All my books end up as discussions in our home, and my wife, Kris, found this book's topic a welcome change from a recent, more controversial book. The chapter on Paul and friendship became a series of short talks I gave to a tour group through Pauline sites in Turkey and Greece. Those talks gave Kris a special interest in the subject and motivated her to keep me motivated to get this book sent off to Baker.

Scot McKnight  
Lent 2018

## Pastors as Culture Makers

I am a professor who loves the church, but I am not a pastor and I know it. When I start to think I comprehend pastoring or when I consider a special angle on pastoring, a conversation with a pastor reminds me that I'm a professor. I believe the pastoral calling is noble, and at times I envy the pastoral calling, but I am a professor, and so I am fascinated by how the New Testament talks (or does not talk) about the pastoral calling. Our theme will be how Paul pastored, and I will explore seven illustrations of a single theme, but first I want to speak to the general themes of pastoral theology. (If I occasionally use the first-person plural—"we," for those who have forgotten or would like to forget their days of beginning Greek—forgive me the transgression of identifying with you and the apostle Paul.)

### The Complication of the Pastoral Life

Pastoring is a complicated calling, but at least we know where it begins: with spiritual formation.<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, the dean of pastoral theology for many, once opined on the inadequacy of the typical form of education by professors—in other words, people like me—in seminaries and how ineffective the normal preparation is for ministry, landing at this spot when he was done opining: "The more I worked with

people at or near the centers of their lives where God and the human, faith and the absurd, love and indifference were tangled in daily traffic jams, the less it seemed that the way I had been going about teaching made much difference, and the more that teaching them to pray did.”<sup>2</sup> Or, as he said in another context, the three pastoral acts are “praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction.”<sup>3</sup>

Formation, then, is the core, but then the complications begin, leading even the most accomplished pastor to wonder if it is beyond anyone’s ability. No wonder Paul called himself a “clay pot” (2 Cor. 4:7 CEB). Ordinary pastors often wonder if what they are doing matters, and they doubt sometimes (or more often than not) if they are called, and they end some days with a sigh and wake up with shards of hope, though even that hope weakens in some seasons. On some days the pockets of parsons are filled with ambiguity and rebellions against pragmatic certainties.<sup>4</sup> I believe this is all part of the calling and not a sign of weakness or even a lack of the calling. People wear pastors down because they expect so much and need what the pastor often can’t provide, and any pastor worth her salt cares and emotes and does what she can, and it’s never enough. But it’s complicated.

Pastors are, to use a medical analogy, general practitioners rather than specialists. They are, to switch images, teachers in a one-room schoolhouse on the prairie. The complexity of the human person—heart, soul, mind, and body—is why the pastoral calling is so engagingly and endlessly complicated. One never knows what pastoral care a person might need or what discernment the pastor might discover. A day accompanying Jesus or Paul or Peter or John would have revealed the same unpredictable, wild complication at the heart of the pastoral calling. That’s what pastoring is. Over a decade a pastor accumulates more stories of goodness and nonsense than anyone in society, and that fund of experience penetrates behind the walls of wisdom in ways that amaze me as a professor. This means the pastor’s calling is multiple, or, to use the words of Paul, it is the calling to “become all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22). That’s the complication I’m talking about, and it’s the pastor I admire for entering into its mysteries.

Some people who want to pastor think pastoring is about preaching sermons and studying all week, but what I mean by *pastor* is *the parson who pastors people*. The average size of a church in the US is about

seventy-five, and I want to speak directly to the pastor of churches of that size as well as to pastors of larger churches. Why? Because the pastor of an average-size church *pastors*. We live in an age of specialization, and that has meant that some pastors get to be preachers, and others counselors, and yet others administrators, and even others focus on Bible studies and teaching. But most pastors do it all, and that means (to this professor) that they pastor. Pastor A once started talking about Pastor B, who was “on campus” only on Sunday mornings when he preached to big audiences on TV. Pastor A told me Pastor B, when asked, didn’t even know if the church had a Sunday school program or a discipleship program. We both got a good laugh, but it was also a sad story for me: the Sunday morning big-show personality preacher is not a pastor if he or she is not pastoring people during the week. Pastor B was not, and I’m not telling you who Pastor A is because I don’t know if he pastors either.

The genius of pastoring is only discovered over time and only by those who enter into the fullness of the complexity of pastoring. Karl Barth, reflecting later in his life on his contemporaries who had been pastors for four decades, said this of the pastoral calling: “I can visualize what it means to spend forty years in giving instruction to first communicants, in seeking the right spiritual word at a graveside or for young married couples, in being pastor to every conceivable kind of folk, and above all in expounding the Gospel Sunday by Sunday and proclaiming the Word of salvation for the community and world of to-day, in face of all kinds of afflictions, irritations and hostilities, of the suspicion of the times and (not least, but above all) of all one’s own unbelief.”<sup>5</sup>

Barth lived in a time when the pastor’s calling was far less complicated. Add four more sentences to Barth and you approximate the life of the pastor today. Except of course in Kansas or Iowa. I think one of the pastors in Marilynne Robinson’s novels about Gilead, Iowa—perhaps John Ames—said he liked to go to church when the people weren’t there. People, however, are what make it a church, and pastors and people belong together. And when pastors and people get together, the complications show up. I calculate that pastoring is between ten and twelve times more complicated than professoring, which is why some pastors would like to be professors. Professors who want to be

pastors often don't know what they're getting themselves into. (Just in case you are wondering, I have no statistical basis for that "ten or twelve," but it sounds about right.)

## Pastor as Culture Maker

Now to the theme of this book: *The pastor is called to nurture a culture of Christoformity*. One of this generation's best scholars on the apostle Paul, Michael Gorman, has made the word *cruciformity* popular, and I've learned much from him. So, my use of *Christoformity* stands on his shoulders, and by it I mean that we are called to be conformed to Christ. Pastors are nurturers of Christoformity in this sense: we are formed by his life, by his death, and by his resurrection and ascension. We are not only to believe the gospel but also to embody it. To use the Greek and Latin terms no one uses, *bio-formity*, *cruci-formity*, and *anastasi-formity*. Add those together and you get Christoformity, but the way we become Christoform is through participation in Christ: through baptism, through faith, through indwelling and being indwelt by Christ, through the Spirit, through being clothed with Christ, through fellowship, through transformation, and through sharing all the events in Christ's life.<sup>6</sup>

Christoformity is rooted in Jesus's own words and life. Hence Jesus said,

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! (Matt. 10:24–25).

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

If we take the second text first, we see that the mission of Jesus was to serve and give himself for others. The first text says it's enough for us to be like Jesus. That's Christoformity. If the Christian life is about Christoformity, then pastoring is about nurturing Christoformity in ourselves and in others.<sup>7</sup> In his summary of Paul as a pastor, Paul Bar-

nett concludes, “In topic after topic, issue after issue Paul . . . relentlessly taught the Corinthians to reproduce the character of Christ in their community.”<sup>8</sup>

To take a step back, this is the *mission of God*. Graham Buxton, a pastor and professor of pastors, calls us to see what ministry actually is—participation in what God is doing in Christ through the Spirit. “Only Christ,” he presses on his readers, “is able to make God known to us. . . . Our response is a willing participation in God’s self-revelation. That is our privilege and our calling as coworkers with Christ in God’s ongoing ministry in the world.”<sup>9</sup> Pastors are not so much on mission *for* God as they are participating in the *mission of God*, which means that it is the mission God is carrying out and that pastors enter into God’s own work.<sup>10</sup> Pastoring, then, is participation in what God is doing, and what God is doing is rescuing all creation from its enslavement and liberating it. Which means it is participating in the ongoing work of Christ through the Spirit in the world. Take, for instance, how Paul understands his own ministry in Romans 15:18–19: “For I will not venture to speak of anything *except what Christ has accomplished through me* to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ.”

It is not Paul’s ministry or mission so much as it is Christ’s ministry and mission through the Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5–6; 2:13; 4:3–9, 19–21).<sup>11</sup> To the Colossians Paul speaks of his ministry by appealing to the work of Christ in himself: “the energy that he powerfully inspires within me” (Col. 1:29).<sup>12</sup> Thus Paul is only participating in what God—Father, Son, Spirit—is doing: “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you . . .” (Gal. 4:19). James Thompson, who has labored over the Pauline texts in order to comprehend Paul’s pastoral theology, says it well: “*Ministry is participation in God’s work of transforming the community of faith until it is ‘blameless’ at the coming of Christ.*”<sup>13</sup>

The ultimate end of Christofornity, then, is participation in the rule of Christ over all creation to the glory of God.<sup>14</sup> Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:18–30 by connecting glory in verse 18 with conformity to Christ in verse 29 in a grand sweep that completes cosmic redemption.

That is, the divine intention in creating human beings in Genesis 1–2 will be realized in the new heavens and new earth. Christoformity, then, is more than cruciformity, but the cross is central to all Christoformity. Christoformity is as complex as the pastoral calling is complicated. Pastors don't create Christoformity—that's done by God in Christ through the Spirit. But they are called to nurture it, to plant and to water and to weed and to protect and to provide. Christoformity is complex and is, as Duke New Testament professor C. Kavin Rowe speaks of it, "a narrative way of life."<sup>15</sup> His colleague at Duke, Will Willimon, professor of the practice of Christian ministry, describes this narrative way of life as a "culture."<sup>16</sup> To Rowe's and Willimon's thoughts, I add some from C. S. Lewis:

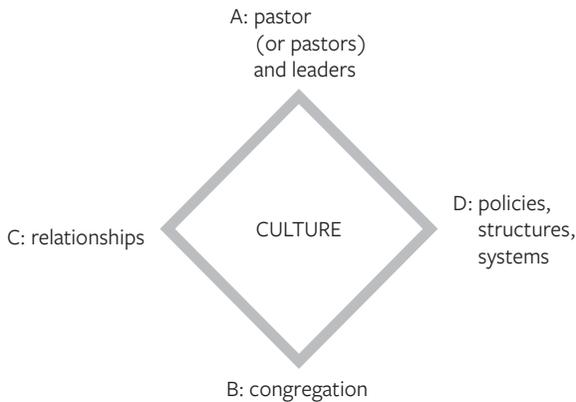
May I come back to what I said before? This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else. . . . In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him.<sup>17</sup>

I add together these thoughts from Christian leaders to say a pastor nurtures a Christoform culture. As culture makers, pastors nurture Christoformity.

Peggy Noonan, in the Oval Office to interview President George W. Bush while researching for her beautiful biography of Ronald Reagan, coaxed Bush into ruminating on Reagan. What Bush said about presidents can, I suggest, be said about pastors as well: "But if you really think about it a president's job is to define the spirit of the nation. And to help define the soul."<sup>18</sup> I believe this: one of the pastor's jobs is to nurture the spirit and soul of a local church. Emmanuel Lartey, a Ghanaian who studied in England and has taught and pastored in Africa, the UK, and the US, claims that "pastoral theologians . . . are on a journey of creatively imagining a different kind of world community."<sup>19</sup> That community is marked by Christoformity. To imagine such is to nurture it.

## Forming a Christiform Culture in a Church: Four Elements

We must ask, *How do we nurture a culture?* A church culture emerges from four separate but integrated elements.<sup>20</sup> Think of this as a diamond where the four points are (A) the pastor (or pastors) and leaders; (B) the congregation; (C) the relationship among the pastor (or pastors), leaders, and the congregation; and (D) the policies, structures, and systems that govern A, B, and C.



It would take a specialist to explain all this and it surely requires both a full book and someone else to do it, but I'd like us to think of pastors as culture makers in terms of this diamond. Pastors and congregations together form the culture as A, B, C, and D mutually indwell one another. It is not just A and not just B. The more charismatic or domineering the pastor is, the more influence he or she has on culture formation. Pastors are called to be influential in the formation of a church culture. A good pastor and a bad congregation form into a mixture of cultures while a bad pastor and a good congregation will lead often to the same mixture. Good pastors and good congregations help each other just as bad pastors and bad congregations fight each other. The relationships that form between A and B cannot be emphasized enough. But I want to stress that the less contact A actually has with B leads to a persona formation for the pastor and persona culture for the pastor's relationship with the congregation. This means that a persona, the public presentation of a person, can become false and fraudulent and be powerfully influential in the formation of a corrupted culture. Yet, and I have seen this over

and over in my own life, genuinely good relationships between A and B can form C: flourishing and good relationships. The culture that forms in a church is determined by the kind of relationships between A and B. The structures, policies, and systems that churches establish and then indwell are not removed from these relationships; they are expressions of A, B, and C. In the middle of the diamond a culture emerges out of A and B, as well as out of relationships and structures involved. Culture emerges out of what happens between these elements; cultures are not intentionally created as much as they emerge from existent realities.

For a church culture to flourish as God wants, *goodness* is required on the part of the pastor, pastors, and leaders, as well as on the part of the congregation. No church culture is completely *good* because it emerges from human beings who are not completely good. Yet the gospel's power transforms what could be a bad culture into good at some level, so churches have at least some small chance of emerging as a culture of (some) goodness. Finally, in this book, goodness culture will be called Christofornity. For a Christoforn culture to emerge in a church requires Christofornity in A and in B, with C formed in Christoforn relationships and D becoming structural expressions of Christofornity. My last observation repeats what has been said: the pastor, with pastors and other leaders, are called to nurture Christofornity so that a culture of Christofornity emerges in their local church. (I must repeat: no church will be completely Christoforn, but having a goal of Christofornity sets us all in the right direction.)

## The Complicated Culture Called “Church”

I now turn to sketch briefly ten elements of a Christoforn culture that the pastor can nurture.

### *A Culture of People*

My go-to definition of pastoring is this: a pastor pastors people. People will occasionally ask if I think they are called to pastor, and my go-to answer is a twofold question: Are you presently pastoring anyone? And who sees you as their pastor? Pastoring is not a job one gets when one graduates from seminary, the way one gets a job as an

engineer, but is a calling on one's life that grabs hold and turns a person into a parson. The parson's way of life is pastoring.

To *pastor* means to nurture Christofornity in both individuals and congregations. Pastors are designed for what used to be called the "cure of souls" and what Eugene Peterson once called the "ministry of small talk"<sup>21</sup> about ordinary life. In another context, he wrote about Paul and said, "Pastoral theology, as Paul lives and writes it, is relational—persons are involved as persons-in-relationship."<sup>22</sup> Many today, such as Margaret Whipp, define pastoral theology as a theology of care.<sup>23</sup> To do so opens the aperture to see that pastoring is about pastoring people in each person's specific realities. The irony of pastoring today emerged in the recent Barna Group study called *The State of Pastors*. When pastors were asked what they like to do most, 66 percent said preaching and teaching. "There is a big drop-off from there," Barna concludes. "One in 10 says 'developing other leaders' is their most enjoyable task (10%), and one in 12 prefers 'discipling believers' (8%). 'Evangelizing' (6%) and 'pastoral care' (5%) bring the most joy to smaller proportions of pastors, and a mere 2 percent say they enjoy 'organizing church events, meetings or ministries.'"<sup>24</sup>

How unlike Paul.<sup>25</sup> He calls pastoring a "daily pressure" and speaks of his "anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28).<sup>26</sup> When he leaves the church at Ephesus, which I consider his favorite church, he says he has been warning everyone "with tears" (Acts 20:31). So concerned is he over the response of the Christians of Corinth, which I consider his least favorite church, that he tells them his "mind could not rest" and he has to avoid a golden opportunity for ministry (2 Cor. 2:12–13). He pleads with them to "make room" in their "hearts" for him (7:2). When he gets the good news from Titus of their positive response to his message, he says it is God who "consoled" and that Paul "rejoiced" (7:7). One senses here the heart of Pastor Paul: his emotions are shaped by how his churches are responding and growing in Christlikeness.

To the Thessalonians Paul writes that he treated them as a mother (1 Thess. 2:7) and a father (2:11): "As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (vv. 11–12). He even says the Thessalonians had received his teaching as if it was God's very word (v. 13). Perhaps

the most revealing pastoral moment in this splendid little unity in the middle of the letter is that for him and his companions to be separated from them was like being “made orphans” and that he and Silvanus and Timothy “longed with great eagerness to see [them] face to face” (v. 17). When the separation was too much, he sent his good friend Timothy (3:1–2; see 3:5). And the loving pastor knows exactly what Paul means when he says, after hearing good news upon Timothy’s return, “For we now live”—under what conditions?—“if you continue to stand firm in the Lord” (3:8). Paul pastored God’s people.<sup>27</sup> Henri Nouwen, in his classic book on pastoring called *The Wounded Healer*, describes pastoring in those very terms: pastors are wounded healers. They are themselves wounded; they are themselves finding healing; and as ministers they are wounded by the sufferings of the world and their people; and they are called to minister the graces of healing.<sup>28</sup> So the first element is that pastors nurture a culture of people, and people—not programs and pews and plans—are the focus.

The complications of individuals become the complications of congregations, and I must emphasize here that by *people* I don’t just mean individuals but congregations. Paul’s theology of ministry was for churches, *and therefore individuals*, to be nurtured into Christofornity. Not just individuals, which is the downside of too many books today on spiritual formation. That is, spiritual formation is understood as “me and God” and “intimacy with God” and “how to pray” or “practicing solitude.” I’m not against any of these, and I’m all for each of them, but formation in the Bible is first about being formed as a community, as a church, as a fellowship. Through that, formation becomes personal and individual. The fundamental and primary formation virtue in the New Testament is *love*, love for God (individual) and love for others (communal). Love, in fact, is never alone: love is for the other. James Thompson gets this exactly right when he observes that for the Pauline Christians “the test of their progress will be their capacity to exist as a family within the community of faith.”<sup>29</sup>

And so does Michael B. Thompson, who comes from a context similar to that of James Thompson:

I have often thought it curious how many churches in the country of my birth (the US) have in their names the word “Independent.” By that

they are emphasizing that they are not part of any larger denomination, membership in which they see as a disadvantage. Indeed, the notion of “independence” is a cultural fundamental in America because of our history. But the danger of Christian “independence” is an unhelpful isolation and a profound susceptibility to error (as well as a poor witness to the wider love of Christ). . . . If anything, Paul would have wanted the Corinthians to be known as a “Dependent” church—dependent upon Christ and the rest of his people to whom they belonged.<sup>30</sup>

Pastoring, then, is nurturing Christoforimity in persons. Formation deserves a deeper look.

### *A Culture of Formation*

The pastor is a Christian more than a person performing a role, a task, a sermon.<sup>31</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, distinguishing between our office and our vocation, said it this way: “My office, then, is in the church. . . . But my vocation is to God’s person in the world, and that makes me the same as those among whom I serve.”<sup>32</sup> The pastor’s first responsibility is to nurture and to be nurtured into spiritual formation. One of the great Hebrew words in the Bible is *dabaq*, which is often rendered “cleave to” or “hold fast to” or “cling to.” The Bible uses this term for Adam cleaving to Eve (Gen. 2:24), but it is a common word for one’s relationship to God as well:

You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him *you shall hold fast*, and by his name you shall swear (Deut. 10:20).

If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and *holding fast to him* . . . (11:22).

The LORD your God you shall follow, him alone you shall fear, his commandments you shall keep, his voice you shall obey, him you shall serve, and to him *you shall hold fast* (13:4).

. . . loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and *holding fast to him*; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (30:20).<sup>33</sup>

The term takes on the sense of following closely or pursuing (1 Sam. 14:22) and describes close attachment, as in Job 41:17: “They [sections of Leviathan’s armor] are joined one to another; / they clasp each other and cannot be separated.” Perhaps the most evocative of all uses is found in Jeremiah 13:11: “For as the loincloth *clings* to one’s loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah *cling* to me, says the LORD, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.” This is the idea I want to call to your attention: the pastor’s responsibility is to cling to the Lord in love, adoration, worship, obedience, and faithfulness. As a man loves his wife, as soldiers pursue, and as—yes, this—underwear clings to one’s body, so the pastor is to cling to God.

Unfortunately, clinging to God is not seen by enough as the first step in the pastoral life. Nouwen said it well: “Most . . . are used to thinking in terms of large-scale organization, getting people together in churches, schools and hospitals, and running the show as a circus director.”<sup>34</sup> Too often pastoring is fashioned today by theories of business leaders instead of dipping into the spiritual masters such as Saint Macrina, Saint Bonaventure, Teresa of Ávila, Rebecca Protten, Evelyn Underhill, Alexander Schmemmann, or Robert Mulholland. These and many others, like A. W. Tozer, pastored out of a heart ablaze with the presence of God in the inward journey.

What are the marks of spiritual formation, and, thus, what are the marks of the pastor’s spiritual formation? Whatever the answer is finds its way into expectations for the pastor and in most cases in the pastor’s own desires for himself or herself. We could list the Beatitudes as virtues or look to the fruit of the Spirit or make some composite macro-list from one passage after another. Rather than piling on and piling up, I suggest we look at the following list of cardinal virtues in the New Testament. Without defining each of these at length, we can say,

A pastor is loving,  
 a pastor is holy,  
 a pastor is just and embodies justice,  
 a pastor is a peacemaker,  
 and a pastor is wise.

How? By being a Spirit-filled person, by being a person who prays and reads the Bible and kneels before God for grace and power to fulfill the impossible calling. In the Jewish world of Jesus and the apostles this would mean being a *hasid* (a devout pastor) and a *hakam* (a sage).<sup>35</sup> This is what churches want from their pastor or pastors, and these are the sorts of virtues pastors ought to strive for. In the history of the church these are the virtues held up as marks of distinction among pastors, and in the history of spiritual formation this character is the focus.

Pope Gregory the Great, in one of the most important books ever written on the pastoral life (*The Book of Pastoral Rule*), puts into words the expectations of most people in a church, and, perhaps more importantly, what he says is both tradition in the church and no longer popular. So, let me begin with his opening claim: “The conduct of a prelate [= bishop] should so far surpass the conduct of the people, as the life of a pastor sets him apart from the flock.” Many don’t like this, and I know that, but I want to continue anyway. “For one who is so regarded that the people are called his flock, must carefully consider how necessary it is for him to maintain a life of rectitude.” And of what does such a life of rectitude consist? He answers: “It is necessary, therefore, that he should be pure in thought, exemplary in conduct, discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech, in sympathy a near neighbour to everyone, in contemplation exalted above all others, a humble companion to those who lead good lives, erect in his zeal for righteousness against the vices of sinners.”<sup>36</sup>

If that is not enough, Gregory adds the tension of pastoring people: “One must not be remiss in the care for the inner life by preoccupation with the external; nor must one, in solicitude for what is internal, fail to give attention to the external.”<sup>37</sup> This can, of course, sound like perfectionism, but it need not be.

The importance of personal spiritual formation for the pastor’s pastoring of people into Christofornity cannot be overestimated. In her wonderful book about the pastor as moral theologian, Sondra Wheeler contends that pastors are not just moral theologians; beyond that, “because ministers will continually be preaching by behavior and teaching by example, they must also become certain kinds of people.” What might that kind of people be? “Not only people who possess certain knowledge and techniques but also people whose character is shaped

in particular ways.”<sup>38</sup> Victor Copan’s *Saint Paul as Spiritual Director* explains why. Spiritual direction, which I’m using for the moment to refer to pastoring people, often gets wrapped into programs and techniques, but Copan digs deeper with two points: “It is my contention . . . that the total shape of the life of the director is a key factor—if not the key factor—in the success of spiritual direction; [and] effectiveness in spiritual direction is not to be found primarily in technique, but in the character and lifestyle of the one providing the direction.”<sup>39</sup>

His point is that behind the program of discipleship and behind the techniques and disciplines is the person, and the personal formation of the pastor matters. One should not be a pastor if one doesn’t shoulder the responsibility of being an example, because being an example is what the pastor is whether she knows it or not. That is, people will imitate the pastor, and what Paul would have experienced (in being an example) was common to the world of Paul: Jewish, Greek, and Roman.<sup>40</sup> Imitation, in fact, is the first principle of all forms of education: children imitate parents, and students imitate that parental relationship with their teachers. Hence, the congregant and the pastor are in a similar relationship: people need an embodied example to follow, and they will follow the embodied example—good or bad. To be sure, what some in a church will know of a pastor will be a projected image, the persona of the pastor as presented in sermons and various leadership roles. Hence, some will be “imitating” a false persona, but this illustrates the influence of even a persona. I could go on, but my point is that the pastor’s personal formation is important to pastoring people.

One must also consider that congregants follow the pastor not because they know in advance that the pastor is like Christ. Rather, the order is the reverse: they come to love the pastor or admire the pastor as an exemplar, and that becomes their image of Christ. The pastor inevitably is understood to display what true godliness in the way of Christ is like, so people, not least new converts, follow the pastor because they think he is patterning before them the way of Christ. Douglas Campbell, professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, in his splendid new book on Paul, proposes that churches are to be learning communities shaped not by programs but by imitation of exemplary Christians: “The \$64,000 question is not, should we have elites? But

what sort of elites should we have? The answer for Christian communities is that we should have Christian leaders who are characterized by the relational qualities that we want everyone else to copy. Appropriate churches will be arranged as learning communities with leaders and followers or disciples (sound familiar?).”<sup>41</sup>

Each of the Pauline texts on imitation (1 Cor. 10:32–11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6) has specific resonance for a specific church, but one can’t dispute the sweeping kind of exhortations Paul gives, not least in Philippians 4:9: “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” And he ties this all to Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Wisdom, education, formation—choose your term—each occurred then, as they do most effectively now, in the context of embodied examples investing life in those who need to be formed.

The pastor nurtures a culture of spiritual formation in the direction of Christofornity. Not long ago I read Georges Bernanos’s *The Diary of a Country Priest*.<sup>42</sup> My biggest impression of the book was this: unknown to all around him, the priest of a rural French church was dying of cancer, but his own suffering did not stop the petty demands of his parishioners, nor did it stop him from making the daily rounds of visitation and pastoring people. I grew annoyed with the people as the priest’s condition was clarified, and my admiration of the priest grew as his own humility and suffering grew. “Monks,” he said, “suffer for souls, our *pain* is on behalf of souls.”<sup>43</sup> Very few novels capture Christofornity better than what we see in this priest. His story reminded me of pastors I know who faithfully serve their congregations in the midst of intense personal anguish—their own struggles in marriage, the anxious nights of concern over their children, divorces in the family and in the parish, physical suffering and disease, and, on top of it all and running right through it all, doubts about one’s success and a consciousness of failure. The priest in Bernanos’s novel asks a question that pastors commonly ask: “Am I where Our Lord would have me be? Twenty times a day I ask this question. For the Master whom we serve not only judges our life but also shares it, takes it upon Himself. It would be far easier to satisfy a geometrical and moralistic God.”<sup>44</sup> Precisely.