
VOCATIONAL HOLINESS AND THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF
GOVERNANCE
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Eugene Peterson made a painful discovery after his first few years in ministry. “An abyss opened before me,” he recalled, a chasm “between personal faith and pastoral vocation.” It forced him to examine his sense of call, and along the way, revealed a few things about the American church. He observed that we typically misunderstand what pastors are called to do. “Pastoral vocation is interpreted from the congregational side as the work of meeting people’s religious needs on demand...and from the clerical side as satisfying those same needs quickly and efficiently.” Each misunderstanding reduces vocation to a transaction, an exchange between a congregation that demands a service and a minister who is paid to meet needs. Peterson is clear that this vocational distortion is a form of idolatry—“the idolatry of a religious career that we can take charge of and manage.” Peterson’s painful discovery began a pilgrimage toward what he called “vocational holiness.”¹

Peterson’s quest for vocational holiness came down to a competition between the “cure of souls” and “running the church,” where the cure of souls refers to “the Scripture-defined, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups, in settings sacred and profane,” and “running the church” means “the institutional duties” that allow “the work of the pastor [to be] almost completely secularized.”²

Peterson believed that he had to choose between the cure of souls and running the church. The way that he resolved his own conflict was to ask his congregation to “throw me into the sea.” He saw his institutional duties as the equivalent of Jonah sailing

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¹ Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration of Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 1-3.

² Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 57-59.

for Tarshish rather than doing what God called him to do, which in Peterson's case was to concentrate on prayer, preaching, and visitation.³

To whatever degree pastors might sympathize with Peterson's struggle, his resolution is deeply problematic: he divorced leadership from vocation. Part of the problem is definitional. Peterson tends to conflate leading the congregation with running the church. However, these are two different tasks. Much of the power of Peterson's work comes from transforming the mental models that Christians use to encounter their worlds. This is at the heart of what it means to lead. Peterson, on the other hand, tends to equate the term *leadership* with a pastor's misguided need to control the congregation and the laypeople who populate it. The problem with Peterson's solution is that it does not solve the problem of how to balance the competing commitments of ministry. Instead, it passes this delicate theological balancing act off onto the lay people.

Peterson does not want to talk about pastors as leaders. He believes that leaders who run churches commit three theological errors: (1) They seize the initiative from God, (2) they replace the "personal language of love and prayer" ("a language that is unhurried, unforced, unexcited") with a striving language of accomplishment, and (3) they allow "problem-solving [to] become full-time work." These errors cast pastors "in the role of spiritual technologists" who apply the latest technique to accomplish God's work for God rather than allowing God to accomplish God's work through them.⁴ The problem with his let-the-laypeople-lead solution is that lay folk are tempted by the same theological errors, yet they lack the theological training that would make the temptation apparent. Passing off the theological dilemma onto the laity does not address the theological temptation for "running the church" to overwhelm the more important responsibility to provide the "cure of souls." It simply makes the pastor feel better because the pastor no longer has to feel the tension.

It is important at this point not to cast Peterson as some

³ Peterson, *Unpredictable*, 34–35, 38–40.

⁴ Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 59–64.

caricatured foil because Peterson is right to claim that dealing with God is far more important than erecting an institution or building a career. I agree when he says, “If we do not develop a contemplative life adequate to our vocation, the very work we do and our very best intentions, insidiously pride-fueled as they inevitably become, destroy us and all with whom and for whom we work.”⁵ Pastors need, and congregants crave, an intimacy with God. It is what the church has to say that no one else can say.⁶

So what are pastors to do? We can acknowledge the competing commitments. Pastors have to lead God’s people (who are responding to God’s call and not ours) without becoming shopkeepers. And we can admit that we cannot hide from the dilemma by passing it off onto lay folks. My hope is for something more profound than a simple truce in the conflict between sacred and profane. Leading God’s people is intimately entwined with the parts of a pastor’s vocation that focus on worship and pastoral care. We tend to think that a minister can be either a good caregiver or a good administrator, but it is hard to be both, we tend to say, because the skill sets and the giftedness for each are so different. I disagree. The very gifts that make someone a good preacher, teacher, and counselor are exactly the gifts that one needs to be a good Christian leader and to practice Christian governance. In short, leading God’s people is most faithfully a means of curing souls.

To practice leadership that embodies the cure of souls, pastors will have to change how we understand the language that we use to describe leadership⁷ and the categories we use to frame our administrative responsibilities. We will need to change the ways that we see the basic building blocks of institutional life: things like money, meetings, and volunteers. Instead of seeing money as an expediency for church programs and preaching about money as a necessary nuisance, we will need to see discussions of money as a

⁵ Peterson, *Unpredictable*, 114.

⁶ I take the phrase from the subtitle of John Leith’s book, *The Reformed Imperative: What the Church Has to Say That No One Else Can Say* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988).

⁷ On the importance of language for shaping pastoral vocation, see Peterson, “First Language,” in *The Contemplative Pastor*, 87–94.

theological matter and preaching about it as a spiritual examination of how we treat the things we hold most dear. We need to change how we view the meetings that fill our congregations on alternate Tuesdays and the third Monday of the month. In this new perspective, the essence of a church meeting will become about striving for faithfulness and not about solving problems or doing business. Our primary aim should be to mobilize congregations to participate in the Mission of God in our world. The calling to leadership enables God's people to exercise their individual and communal callings; it is not simply to locate volunteers who will do the church's work.

The Practice of Christian Governance

"The moment we drift away from dealing primarily with God," Peterson reminded us, "we are no longer living vocationally."⁸ Yet we feel a constant temptation to drift. To mend our understanding of vocation, we will have to change how we see the calling of ministers to lead God's people. "It is the *imagination* that must shift, the huge interior of our lives that determines the angle and scope of our vocation."⁹ We need to see our roles and responsibilities—our mission and our mandate—in a new light, one that allows pastors to maintain vocational holiness whether they are meeting with a grieving widow who wants to talk about funerals or with a facilities committee that wants to know about furnaces. A pastoral calling invites—no, requires—us to expand our imagination,¹⁰ to see that the pastoral vocation must provide leadership that embodies the cure of souls (and conversely, to understand that the cure of souls requires pastoral leadership for God's people).

If we are to unite the cure of souls with running the church, it will be helpful to understand those tasks as practices. Practices are communally defined and historically rooted activities that embody some ultimate good, or as I like to call it, a theological

⁸ Peterson, *Unpredictable*, 55.

⁹ Peterson, *Unpredictable*, 177.

¹⁰ Another important discussion of imagination is found in Craig Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," in *For Life Abundant*, eds. Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 41–61.

essence.¹¹ I use the word *essences* to describe what MacIntyre calls the “goods internal to a practice.” These internal goods serve as a bridge connecting the practice with the virtue(s) that serves as the teleological core of the practice. My usage of “essences” allows me to talk at the same time about the internal goods and the virtue(s) that are what I call “the beating heart that animate the practice.” Thus, for the sake of clarity, I conflate some points that philosophers and theologians have worked hard to nuance.¹²

Inside every practice is some ultimate good that expresses the essence of that practice.¹³ Think, for example, of giving alms to the poor, a practice that has been part of our tradition since God first called us. Giving to the poor has at its core a number of values that are cherished by all Christians. We give to the poor as an expression of compassion and thanksgiving and specifically not to gain some higher reward. The word that comes closest to capturing this combination of values is generosity. No Christian has to explain why generosity is good. It is not the means to some greater good;

¹¹ The seminal philosophical discussion of practices are Alistair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984 [1981]), 187; and Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988). The seminal theological discussion begins with Craig Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice,” in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to Theological Education*, eds. Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 35–66. It is a pleasure as well to acknowledge helpful conversations with Robert Muthiah, a doctoral student who came to me to learn about practices. I am not sure, however, that I did not learn more from him than he learned from me. I found the conversations so helpful that I cannot tell you where my formulations end and his constructions begin. So let me simply acknowledge how much I enjoyed those conversations and commend to you his paper that eventuated from them: Robert Muthiah, “Christian Practices, Congregational Leadership, and the Priesthood of All Believers,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2:1 (Spring 2003).

¹² Books have been written to describe some of these practices. Two of the best are Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999) and L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

¹³ For a particularly helpful explanation of the ways that practices, internal goods, and virtues relate, see Brad J. Kallenberg, “The Master Argument of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*,” especially the chart on p. 29. The subtlety of MacIntyre’s distinctions can be seen, for example, in chapter 14, “The Nature of the Virtues,” in *After Virtue*.

it is an end unto itself (i.e., giving alms expresses *generosity*). Thus, the essence of giving to the poor is generosity that flows from compassion. Every practice has at its core some theological essence.

Theological essences are not religious garbs we use to clothe what would otherwise be an essentially secular activity. They must be the core of the act, the beating heart that animates the living practice. This view will transform meetings into exercises in discerning the will of God for a community and will allow the task of recruiting volunteers to become an invitation for believers to participate in the communal ministry of God's people.

Peterson used the word *integrity* to describe what happens when the tasks we perform in a practice match the essences of that practice.¹⁴ With professions, he said, "integrity has to do with the invisibles: for physicians it is health (not just making people feel good); with lawyers, justice (not just helping people get their own way); with professors, learning (not cramming cranial cavities with information on tap for examinations). And with pastors it is [faithfulness to] God (not relieving anxiety, or giving comfort, or running a religious establishment)."¹⁵ Another reflective practitioner, Thom Jeavons, put the point more succinctly. The difference between ministry and other professions, he said, is that for pastors, "the bottom line is faithfulness."¹⁶

Faithfulness requires that we never lose sight of the end to which we strive. We've already discussed how that changes the way that pastors see volunteers, meetings, and money. But other things must change, as well. We will need to change the way that we see administrative responsibilities like planning, conflict management, and board governance.

Think, for example, of the most mundane task in running the church—the task that drove Eugene Peterson into the sea. That

¹⁴ MacIntyre uses the same word. See, for example, *After Virtue*, 195, where he talks about how to maintain the "integrity of a practice."

¹⁵ Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 7.

¹⁶ Thomas H. Jeavons, *When the Bottom Line Is Faithfulness: Management of Christian Service Organizations* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

would be what goes on in a meeting. This, too, is part of the leader's vocation because it is part of the practice of Christian governance. How, then, can we reconstrue the meetings that fill our calendars?

Meetings are like having the family of God sitting at a dinner table. Christianity became real to me at the dinner table. Each evening as my family ate together, we would process the day's events. Questions were asked: "How was school today?" "Who's going to take me to basketball practice?" But as we processed the events, we also had to decide what to do about difficult issues. As I watched my parents work through the difficult issues of life, I saw that their faith made a difference in how they acted. They often prayed before they made big decisions; they often looked to Scripture for guidance. "What does the Bible say?" they would ask; they sometimes even chose the more difficult option simply because they believed that was the Christian thing to do. That is when I learned that faith mattered. I learned that I needed to see my own life in light of God's love; I needed to ask how spiritual resources like prayer and Scripture could help me make sense of life; and I needed to choose to act faithfully, even if that meant taking a more difficult path. I became a Christian by following the decision-making models I saw at the dinner table.

Congregational committee meetings are like that dinner table. In these informal moments, church leaders can have the greatest impact. They show how even the most mundane issues must be seen in light of God's presence with us. Finding someone to salt the icy winter sidewalks, for example, is not just a liability issue or a matter of public relations; it's a matter of hospitality. Stewardship is not about bringing in enough money to pay the bills. Stewardship is a practice that points to the fact that nothing we have as a congregation belongs to us. We hold it in trust for God, who will hold us responsible for its wise use.

It is in committee meetings that church leaders offer not just perspective but spiritual resources. It is also in committee meetings that church folks see the church choosing to live up to its belief, even if it is inconvenient. Just as I learned Christianity by watching my parents at the dinner table, so congregations learn to see faith in action by watching their leaders in committee meetings.

In other words, the role of a minister in a meeting is to keep their congregants focused on the Christian practices that are just below the surface of our seemingly mundane tasks. This is one of the main reasons that a pastor is trained in theology: to be able to see the Christian practices that form the foundation of our congregations' activities. Ministers attend meetings so that they can point to the theological essences at the heart of these practices.

In fact, the more controversial the topic is, the more necessary is the practice-pointing pastor. Why? Because controversies usually involve a tension between one or more practices (and thus competing commitments between the values that these practices embody). For example, hospitality and stewardship are often in tension. At the Almond Springs Presbyterian Church, for instance, a controversy arose over the parking lot. The parking lot had not been paved in many years. One group wanted paving to be a priority in the next budget because they were worried that the cracks in the asphalt were a safety hazard to the elderly congregants who used canes. But another group opposed putting paving in the budget. "We simply don't have the money," they said. Each side could not understand why the other would not see reason. The pastor of the church, Rev. Charlotte Robinson, jumped into this debate. But her initial goal was not to solve it. She simply tried to clarify what was at stake. She explained that hospitality—and especially looking out for widows and other vulnerable people—is a deeply held Christian practice. Then she explained that the stewardship of our limited resources is also a Christian practice. At first, this made things worse. Each side said, "See the pastor says we're right." Then Rev. Robinson took the next step. She explained that each side was acting as if the other side was wrong. What she had done, she explained, was show that each side had a legitimate point. And this, she was careful to conclude, should change the goal of the debate. Instead of choosing Side A or Side B, the board should recognize that tension existed between two goods. She

thus urged them to find a way to give each side what they wanted. Eventually, the board came to frame the debate this way. “One side says, ‘We have to pave the parking lot.’ And the other says, ‘We don’t have enough money.’ Is there any way to change either of those conditions? Can we find a solution other than paving? No. Can we find more money? Yes.” And they came up with a compromise. They waited a year to pave the parking lot, putting half the cost in an escrow account to distribute the cost over two years. In the interim, they did two things to increase hospitality: they cleared out the weeds and dirt that had accumulated around the cracks, and they urged able-bodied people to park in the areas where the cracks were most severe.

Notice that the pastor’s role here is particularly subtle. The board might have come up with this compromise on its own, but the most pronounced effect of Rev. Robinson’s work was to change the demeanor of the discussion. She legitimated each point of view and set the board to the task of finding a next step that would embody hospitality and stewardship. At the heart of every meeting, a good pastor can find a foundation of Christian practices.

Our congregations need these practices because they are our life. But the practices need our churches as well. All practices require institutions or organizations to support them. For example, the practice of health care is sustained by a network of institutions such as doctors’ offices and hospitals. Likewise, universities sustain the practice of education. In MacIntyre’s words, “An institution—a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital—is the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices.”¹⁷ The converse is also true. One way to see churches, for example, is as a bundle of practices. “Constitutive practices” are so central to the faith that “Christianity cannot be explained or understood without reference to” them.¹⁸ These

¹⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

¹⁸ Kallenberg, “Master Argument,” 22.

practices constitute what it means to be the church.¹⁹ Indeed, the task of discipleship is focused on cultivating those very practices.

Practices can be embedded in organizations in another way, too. Some practices are inherently communal and require coordinated action. They are the responsibility of the whole people of God, and they must be sustained in perpetuity so they require an institutional expression in order to be maintained properly. Think, for example, of Acts 6. The apostles learn that some widows are being neglected. This is unacceptable because all God's people are called to care for "the widow, the orphan, and the alien in your midst." It is a communal duty. The whole people of God is held responsible if widows are neglected. That means that Christians cannot practice widow care alone. I may take in a widow or care for an orphan. I may practice the kind of charity and hospitality that is a model for all people. Yet, if neglected widows are in the midst of my congregation, God indicts the whole people—not just the ones that seem from my high and mighty perch to be slackers. Such communal indictment is necessary in order to prevent the Pharisaical response to poverty, which is to say that I have given my fair share so now I can ignore those in need around me. Widow care is like many Christian practices; it belongs to the whole people of God.

So what do the apostles do when they discover these neglected widows? They appoint servants to take responsibility for the situation. These become the forebears to what the Pastoral Epistles call deacons. The church not only recognized the need very early to appoint some people to care for widows, the church also realized that these widows represented a whole class of persons who would always need the church's care. To care for the "least" among them, the church created an office called deacon; that is, they created a

¹⁹ These "are practices that constitute being the church, practices to which God calls us as Christians. They are, likewise, practices that place people in touch with God's redemptive activity, that put us where life in Christ may be known, recognized, experienced, and participated in. They are means of grace, the human places in which and through which God's people come to faith and grow in maturity in the life of faith." Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 43.

means to ensure that a group of servants would always be available who would take responsibility for the needy ones in our midst. In the contemporary church, this duty rotates over time among many people within a congregation, which is appropriate because the responsibility belongs to the whole Body of Christ. This is just one example of a practice that must be expressed by the whole community of faith and that requires someone in the community to coordinate its expression.

An unfortunate by-product comes from the fact that practices require institutions to sustain them. Institutions have other concerns beyond the practices that they bear. Hospitals and universities, for example, must meet their budgets to stay afloat. They have to follow the laws of the land, and they are populated by people who are interested in power and prestige in addition to the essences that form the heart of the institution. These other concerns are collectively called external goods in order to contrast them from the internal goods that are the essence of the practice that the institution sustains.²⁰ Congregations, of course, are subject to these external goods as well. Some people might think that the only holy thing for a church to do is to separate itself from the external goods that a practice accrues so that it can concentrate on the internal goods. But no church can separate itself from the world that we in the church are called to serve. Nor can we eliminate external goods because sometimes good things like prestige are going to come to a community of faith. Witness the work of Mother Teresa. She and her Sisters of Mercy took the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to shield themselves from the most tempting external goods. By all accounts, she and her people lived alongside the poorest of the poor, practicing a witness that I can never approach. But even in such a situation, her work gained for her a treasure trove of prestige and even celebrity. She was renowned the world over. Even in an organization that eschews external goods like power and prestige, those things accumulated, and Mother Teresa found a way to redeem them. She used her prestige to raise a platform from which to speak for those who

²⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194, 222.

could not raise their own voices. The external good allowed her to focus people's attention back on the internal good. So we cannot set up a model of Christian life that despises organizations because they sustain our constitutive practices, nor can we ignore external goods because they are inextricably tied to those organizations.

We have alluded to an inherent problem with practices, one that needs to be named so that we can address it—one that goes to the heart of Peterson's concern about losing our vocation by separating the work of ministry from the God who calls us. There is a tendency for practices to become decoupled (or disconnected) from the essences that animate them. Perhaps the best analogy for understanding this tendency is the idea of entropy, which is a term from physics that says that neat and ordered things tend to come apart unless some force is applied to keep them together. Anyone who has seen a teenager's bedroom or tried to keep an orderly desk understands that the term applies to more than thermodynamics. We will thus use the term *entropy* to refer to the tendency for practices to become separated from their essences.²¹

Because ministry is a bundle of practices, it is particularly susceptible to entropy. This is so much the case that the theologian Edward Farley gave a particular name for what happens when pastors lose sight of the essences that animate their vocations. He called it the *clerical paradigm* (alternatively, some refer to it as the *clergy paradigm*).²² The clerical paradigm represents a misunderstanding of the nature of ministry. It asserts that the way to exercise a minister's vocation is to become proficient at doing the things ministers do. Behind the paradigm is the tacit belief that a pastor who fulfills the preaching, teaching, counseling, and administrative duties in

²¹ Craig Dykstra uses the term *institutionalization* to describe the decoupling of practices from their internal goods. I have come up with a different name (i.e., *entropy*) because a central part of my argument is acknowledging the point that MacIntyre and Stout make about the need for institutions to sustain practices, a point that Dykstra acknowledges as well. I simply want to stay away from any confusion. Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," 54.

²² Edward Farley, *Theologia*. A testament to the importance of the "clerical paradigm" as a foil for understanding theological education is *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education*, eds. Joseph C. Hough and Barbara G. Wheeler (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

the job description has captured the meaning of ministry. There is, however, a nasty flaw in the clerical paradigm. A helpful analogy in understanding the fallacy at the heart of the clerical paradigm is the life of a stay-at-home parent. A parent may spend the days cooking meals, picking up clothes, and shopping for groceries, but those duties are not the essence of parenthood. The task is much deeper. Behind all the duties is the more fundamental responsibility of forming character, of inculcating values, and of modeling behavior. These deeper responsibilities are what make the long hours and constant activity worthwhile. By the same token, the heart of a pastor's vocation is to inspire and commend, and to deepen the spiritual lives of a congregation; being able to preach well just is not enough. The main goal is not to do the things ministers do. It is to help people experience the fullness of God's love.

The clerical paradigm represents not just a misunderstanding of ministry. It also derives from a misunderstanding of theology. The common understanding of the word *theology* is "thinking about God." When most people talk about theology, they mean ideas about God. That is the agreed-upon definition of the word, so it is not inappropriate to use it that way. But a cadre of theologians (including Farley) has shown that this understanding of theology is remarkably hollow. *Theology* once carried a much deeper meaning, and these theologians argue that the best way to escape the clerical paradigm is to recapture this full-bodied understanding of theology. Let me explain what they have in mind, and along the way describe briefly how its deeper meaning was lost.

Before the twelfth century, theology did not exist as a purely intellectual pursuit. It did not exist for its own sake but for the sake of shaping a distinctly Christian worldview.²³ Theologians called this worldview *habitus*, by which they meant a distinctly Christian interpretative framework that would structure action.

²³ Randy Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 652.

The connection to action was crucial.²⁴ Any theologian's goal, then, was to change the way that people thought about the world so that they could enable faithful action in that world.²⁵ But following Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, scholars began to carve theology into pieces, allowing the speculative aspects of theology to overwhelm the pastoral commitments that had until then been intrinsic to theological contemplation. By the post-Reformation era, theology was "seen more as a set of intellectual affirmations than as a *habitus* that oriented Christian life in the world."²⁶

Dividing theology had the effect of creating a separation between theory and practice. We have come to think of theology as the theory that we use to create ways of thinking about issues abstracted from the distracting details of lived life. We then apply those theoretical conclusions to specific situations. This could be called the engineering model for doing theology because the division of labor in the sciences separates physics from engineering. Physicists rarely work out applications to put their discoveries to work, and engineers rarely create the theory that will change science's abstract explanation of the physical world. Physicists tend to think that engineers merely work out the details to implement ideas from physics. Likewise, engineers tend to mock the head-in-the-clouds approach that characterizes physics. A similar

²⁴ Edward Farley has written extensively about theology as *habitus*. All subsequent discussions must reference his seminal work. I am, however, here using Randy Maddox's formulation. Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Maddox, "Recovery of Theology," 651.

²⁵ Ellen Charry has made a particularly strong case for "reclaiming theology's *sapiential* vocation." She refers back to Augustine's use of the word *sapientia* (delight in the grace of God) and his distinguishing it from *scientia* (rational judgments on the acts of God). Charry points out that "Augustine's distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* was between knowing about God's grace and loving God as a result of that knowledge, the former being cognitive, the latter being affective knowledge." In other words, "*Sapientia* is not information about God imparted to the believer but the capacity to share in God" and thus *sapientia* is inherently "practical because it turns the believer outward." The above draws on Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Our Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Maddox, "Recovery of Theology," 655.

unfortunate separation exists between theologians and pastors. The conventional wisdom sees pastors as doing little more than applying the work of theologians.

Given that the separation between theology and application is the common theme that runs through many of the maladies we have described so far, whose responsibility is it to keep the congregation coordinated in its effort and to keep individual practices focused on their essences? It is the pastor's responsibility. Exercising that responsibility is itself a practice: the practice of governance.

First Cor. 12 lists gifts that the Holy Spirit provides in order to build up the Body of Christ. One of them is usually translated as *administration*. This is not the best way to understand the term, though. The Greek word is κυβερνησις (which is the root for our word, *governance*). The word literally refers to the person at the helm or steering a ship, the person who was called the pilot. But the word was used in the Roman Empire to refer to the person in government who directed the affairs and set the course for a region.²⁷ In this way, it combined the ideas of leadership and administration. Over time, the idea grew to incorporate the coordinating activities encapsulated in the church offices—the bishops, elders, and deacons. The Pastoral Epistles may well be seen as commentaries on what the term *governance* means in the ecclesial domain.

All pastors have a responsibility to practice governance; this is the leader's vocation. We practice governance because God governs. Our mandate is to practice governance among God's people in the same spirit that God governs creation. God is calling all creation to Godself, enticing each person and community to embody more fully the traits that are intrinsic to God's nature. This is the Mission of God.²⁸ Likewise, pastors govern when they call people to embody the essences that animate the practices of Christianity. Thus, the

²⁷ See Breyer, “κυβερνησις,” in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* Vol. III, pp. 1035–1037. Early Church practice and art often emphasized that Christ was the pilot of the Church (which was often represented either as a ship or as Noah's Ark). The purpose of this spiritual gift seems to be in directing the People of God, although Breyer notes “what was the scope of this directive activity in the time of Paul we do not know.”

²⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

essence of the practice of governance is integrity (i.e., keeping the activities of the church bound to the theological essences that animate them). Pastors practice governance when they work to ensure that the people engaged in practices and the institutions that sustain those practices do not succumb to entropy's temptations.

MacIntyre recognized the need for this coordinating emphasis on integrity, but he called it "politics in the Aristotelian sense." Dykstra connects MacIntyre's ideas about practicing politics to pastors as follows:

MacIntyre says that 'politics in the Aristotelian sense' is a practice," Dykstra notes. "And what politics in this sense turns out to be is the practice of 'sustaining the institutional forms which are the social bearers of the practice[s]' constitutive of a community's form of life. This is a difficult business, precisely because of the threat already noted that [entropy] can pose to every practice. Thus, the practice of politics requires specific understandings, skills, and virtues intrinsic to itself. And this practice, carried out in the context of a particular Christian community, may well be the particular practice that defines what it means to be clergy."²⁹

In other words, the vocation of a minister cannot stray far from practicing governance because it is the pastor's duty to ensure that the church's bottom line remains faithfulness.

One of the most important aspects of a minister's vocation is to provide theological reflection in order to keep people focused on what God is doing in their midst. This is what the Hebrew prophets did. They explained how the actions of the people and the movements of history connected to the God who called their ancestors out of Egypt. In like manner, a pastor can and must provide the theological categories that keep meetings and events focused on the deeper reasons for the congregation's work. By way

²⁹ Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," 57, 58; note that I replaced Dykstra's word *institutionalization* with my word *entropy* for the reasons stated above.

of illustration, consider the pastor of the church where my family and I worship. Steve practices governance in the midst of Sunday morning worship services. He narrates his work, pointing us to the spiritual possibilities available in any congregational situation. Worship services are always shorter when he is out of town, and it's not because his preaching goes too long. It's because he fills the interstitial moments in the service with commentary—commentary that is often as spiritually fulfilling as the sermons he preaches. As he calls an elder up to the lectern to make an announcement about a mission project, for example, he will explain how that mission project relates to the larger mission of the congregation and specifically to its mission statement. Or, he will pause as he is preparing for the Pastoral Prayer, and then he'll look up at the choir loft and launch into a short description about how the words of the anthem they just sang connect to the themes in the sermon and in the Scripture text. Or instead of talking about the anthem, he might linger over the theological meaning for the prayer requests he is about to bring before God (preparing us, for example, to pray for an expectant mother by reminding us of the many times that God provided special blessings to Hebrew women who were labeled “barren”). He does the same thing in meetings. He reminds people of the spiritual issues at stake in a discussion and subtly provides the theological categories that they will need to take faithful action. He is like a father reminding his children to thank the grocery clerk because every person deserves respect. He is so in touch with the essences that animate his vocation that he helps his congregation exercise our faith without separating what we do from what we believe. That is the holy practice of governance.