

The Pastor as Theologian-Philosopher under Christ in His Church

EPS, Midwest, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, March 11-12, 2016

Richard A. Ostella, Westminster Reformed Church, Livonia, MI

westminsterreformedchurch.org

rostella@comcast.net

[With] brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Pet. 3.8), He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9 NIV)

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that the call to ministry requires that a pastor function as a theologian and a philosopher to do his work of the word and prayer properly. He must be both “apt at teaching” (1 Tim 3.2; 2 Tim 2.24) and teachable¹ refuting those who contradict the truth (Titus 1.9, NIV) in a context of dialogue (Heb 10.22-25; 1 Thess 5.11-21).² Thus, he must function as a philosopher, but his work is defined by the mission of the church. So, we need to establish a clear definition of the church’s mission to ground some comments on the role of the pastor-theologian-philosopher *under Christ in His church*.

I. The context of the pastor’s (theological-philosophical) work is the mission of the church

It may come as a surprise to state that the mission of the church is *not* evangelism. Instead, the church’s mission is to be disciples to the glory of God. Everything else about the church of pastors and flocks flows from this foundation. Some essential support for this claim derives from the mission of the apostles and pastors.

A. On the mission of the apostles

Without question, the Great Commission of Matthew 28.16-20 is the *locus classicus* regarding the mission of the church. However, the major hurdle for applying this classic text to the church today is the fact that this mandate was given to the apostles (28.16). Similarly, the promise of a mission to the ends of the earth in Acts 1.8 was given to the apostles, and the Book of Acts records the fulfillment of what Jesus promised them. Fundamentally, therefore, it is a historical-redemptive fact that the mission of the church is a derivative of the mission of the apostles.³ Briefly put, the mission of the church is the obverse of the mission of the apostles. Their mission was to go to the nations with gospel proclamation, that included, at the least and initially, teaching about baptism, the trinity, and commandment keeping; this is no small theology. *Therefore, the mission of the church is to be disciples, learning the gospel that is theologically rich and geared for holiness.*

B. On the mission of pastors

In the context of Ephesians 4.11-16, we learn that Jesus gave pastors to the churches for three purposes (4.12): that pastors bring the saints to maturity as holy ones, that pastors do the ministerial work of the word, and that pastors build up the body in the faith. Thus, the text does

¹ In the classroom, Ed Clowney used to emphasize being teachable as well; I think he got that side of the story from the context of 2.24, not quarrelsome but kind and from James 1.19, slow to speak quick to listen.

² The implication of dialogue derives from the nature of mutuality in the assembly for corrective upbuilding as taught in all the one-anothering passages, in the texts that call for testing all things, in the inseparable bond of preaching with teaching, and in the call for clarity supported by the prayers of the saints. To say the least, preaching that includes, on a selective basis driven by necessity, can only move forward by prayerful interaction of pastor and flock. Hence, the pastor theologian is also a philosopher. That is, he is like the general practitioner who has to have a deep and wide knowledge of medicine without being a specialist.

³ Their work is foundational for the church not only in the giving of the canon to the church but also in the very formation of the church itself. My claim is that truths about the nature of their mission are presuppositional, so they ought to control our interpretation of texts that speak of witnessing and good deeds. This is worth noting here because those who think of evangelism in a presuppositional way may think, consciously or unconsciously, that any view that even begins to question the ultimacy of evangelism cannot possibly be true, and those who walk on this path cannot be genuine Christians. Similarly, those who think of doing good works in a presuppositional way, may think, consciously or unconsciously, that any view that subordinates matters of social justice to gospel proclamation cannot possibly be true, people on this path have yet to become fully surrendered and truly spiritual Christians. Presuppositions are not bad, but holding them uncritically is not good, and they need to be tested, carefully put in place, and wisely applied to avoid these extremes.

not tell us that pastors teach the flock to do the work of ministry.⁴ To be sure, the church has a vital role in mutual upbuilding (4.16), but the focus of 4.12 is on the distinctive role of ministers in bringing believers to maturity in truth and love.⁵ This deepens our grasp of making disciples and being disciples.⁶ The mission of the church is defined in a structural way here: *to be disciples under pastoral ministry of the apostolic word (God's word now written) for maturity in holiness.*⁷

II. Now, let's consider the the pastor's work within this mission in three proper functions

A. First, the pastor's work has its proper function when Scripture is his *principium*

The *principium* of Scripture is a fundamental way of affirming the final authority of Scripture that goes with being a Christian, one who submits himself to God speaking through Christ by the Spirit in the written sixty-six books of the Bible.⁸ This yields the following implications.

1. Scripture is self-attesting

For Oliphint, "Self-attestation... means that Scripture needs no other authority as confirmation in order to be justified and absolutely authoritative in what it says nor is there anything else that is able to supersede this ground, in order for Scripture to be deemed authoritative. To put the matter philosophically, Scripture's warrant rests solely and completely in itself, because of what it is, the very Word of God. It is a first principle."⁹ As Muller puts it "Since... it is... a first principle that it is most certain, indemonstrable or immediately evident, and never a postulate or hypothesis" then it "cannot be rationally or empirically verified and, indeed, need not be—and that its authority is known in and through its self-authenticating character."¹⁰ Thus, "the [Westminster] divines knew that reference to anything other than

⁴ This alternative rests on the following proposals: a) there is no grammatical or linguistic ground for linking the first two phrases into a single thought, b) yes, verses 7 and 16 indicate a role for all believers in the church, but this does not require the conclusion that the two phrases in 4.12 are a single unit and not coordinate, and c) completion of the body is not adding more stones (evangelism), but building up the body (v. 16); nor is it building up for social justice ministry. Instead, it is building up in faith, knowledge, doctrine, and love. All believers have a role in the building up of the body, but the focus of 4.12 is on the distinctive role of ministers in bringing all believers to maturity in truth and mutual love (4.11; 3.5; 2.20; 4.20) in keeping with why pastor-teachers are given to the church per verse 11.

⁵ Cf. *Novum Testamentum* XLVII, 1, 26-46, "Whose Ministry? A Re-Appraisal of Ephesians 4.12" by S. Page. The obverse of this work of pastors is the work of the church receiving pastoral care rooted in the word that was given by the apostles in their testimony and witness to Christ that He promised, commissioned, and empowered by the gift of the Spirit.

⁶ This accords with DeYoung and Gilbert, but with qualification: "The mission of the church [is] ...proclamation, witness, and disciple making (which includes teaching everything that Jesus commanded)," What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 233. The qualification, which harmonizes with the overall thrust of these authors, is simply that we need to accent being disciples as the mission of the church per the Great Commission. From the introduction to Christ and throughout the Christian life, Christ is "learned" (Eph 4.20); saved sinners come, learn and submit to His authority (Mat 11.28-30). That is how one becomes a Christian and how one continues as a Christian.

⁷ Be holy as God is holy. Perfection is the goal. The number one tennis player in the world goes on an interview and says, "My goal is to improve my game." He seems to be flawless and that does not reduce the goal. Striving for perfection (even though we fail and cannot attain it) continues. How much more should this be the case of being disciples for holiness. A huge part of doing involves choosing the better place, like Mary at the feet of Christ listening to His teaching (Lk 10.38-42). Moreover, Pastor-theologian is surely a misconceived title if he does not pursue holiness in himself in order to teach the the whole counsel of God (theology, the patter of sound words) to the church for holiness unto the glory of God. Thus, as Warfield puts it, aptness to teach does not make a minister; nor is it his primary qualification. It is only one of a long list of requirements which Paul lays down as necessary to meet in him who aspires to this high office. And all the rest concern, not his intellectual, but his spiritual fitness... above being learned, a minister must be godly (*Shorter Writings*, I, 411-412).

⁸ A Christian submits to the sixty-six books on the authority of Christ who testified to the OT, cf. "The Authority of the OT" by E. J. Young, *The Infallible Word: a Symposium* [P & R, 1946], 55-91) and who promised the NT (cf. *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* by H. Ridderbos [Baker, 1963]). So 1Thess 1.5; 2.13.

⁹ "Because it is the Word of God" by Scott Oliphint in *Did God Really Say?* Ed. David Garner, 14.

¹⁰ Cited by Oliphint, *Did God*, 14-15.

Scripture (to ground it) would be to deny the Word of God as the theological *principium*. They knew this because...the Roman Catholic church—was right before their eyes...The authority of Scripture depends on God, who is truth itself, and therefore is to be received because it is his Word.”¹¹ This is where a Christian, a pastor, must root his knowing and doing, if he is to be consistently Christian in his commitment to live under the authority of Christ as his prophet, priest, and king (Mat 11.28-30).

2. Reason has a humble role

The Christian lives under authority and thus loving God with all his mind involves the submission of himself, his reasoning self, and his use of philosophy and logic to God speaking in Scripture.¹² For Turretin, reason serves theology as its handmaiden and must function “in subjection to Scripture” and not preside over Scripture; “reason...neither can nor ought to be constituted the rule of belief.”¹³ Hence, he speaks of the ministerial versus the magisterial use of reason in which the reasoning self consciously submits to the authority of God’s word.¹⁴

3. Theology is a normed norm

A theological tradition codified in historic creeds of the Christian faith (for example, the Canons of Dort and the WCF) has an authority in the churches that may serve as a standard for office holding. However, its authority is derivative, fallible, and always subordinate to the norming norm of Scripture which is infallible. We might boldly affirm that the historic formulations give us the theology of the church as radically important teaching guides to which Christians in local churches subscribe to confess their faith. They do so to varying degrees as they grow in their understanding of theology that has been historically formulated by the working of the Spirit in the church over the ages.¹⁵ To properly confess a good confession (as Jesus did before Pilate) the local church, pastor and flock, must be able to make some precise distinctions, grasp clear definitions, and continually test its confession by the infallible standard of Scripture. For pastor’s to do their part in this confessional process, they must have a well-

¹¹ Ibid. 15.

¹² In his discussion on the authority of Scripture, Calvin says this: “It is utterly vain then to pretend that the power of judging Scripture so lies with the church that its certainty depends upon churchly assent...How can we be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church?—it is as if someone asked: Whence will we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.” Oliphint then goes on to say that per Calvin, “it is not right to subject [Scripture] to proof or reasoning.” “He affirms that there is no higher authority to which one can appeal for proof, no better or more transcendent reasoning, than looking to Scripture itself, since it carries with it its own infallible authority. Any other reasoning, any other proof, will simply be subject to error and confusion. The basic principle of self-attestation is that we understand what Scripture is by subjecting it to itself, and to itself alone. It is its own witness, by virtue of what it is,” Oliphint, *Did God*, 16.

¹³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-97), 1:24-28.

¹⁴ Reason functions in a ministerial place as the handmaiden of theology. We must use good reasoning skills in learning Scripture. But reason does not rule over Scripture. This is consciously set forth in the quest of truth from the start. The title of Oliphint’s book speaks volumes in this connection: *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (P&R Publishing, 2006).

¹⁵ Therefore, pastoral work is served by exegesis of the text in its historical redemption context, as it operates with enriched awareness of the system of sound words arrived at in systematics that is ever in touch with the history of theology. Muller gives good guidance here that helps us remember that the pastor must do his work with theological and philosophical awareness, thus as pastor-theologian-philosopher he must wrestle with such notions as hermeneutical circularity, linearity of redemptive history, the development of theology, and presuppositional awareness: “the curricular priority of Scripture over church history, and of history over contemporary dogmatics and practice, actually serves to underscore how the hermeneutical circle functions in a context where the authority of Scripture is prior to that of the church, and the authority of both Scripture and ecumenical creeds is prior to the whims of the individual exegete. The linear movement...from Scripture through history to doctrine and practice both affirms and mirrors the doctrine of the authority of Scripture. A hermeneutical circle that overturns the linearity of salvation-history and of the development of Christian doctrine by imposing its presuppositions on texts will never be able to find an authoritative point of departure” (“The Study of Theology Revisited,” *WTJ*, Vol. 56, No. 2, p. 411).

grounded theology and skill in critical thinking to thereby teach the church how to live under the authority of Christ and fulfill their mission of learning for holiness to God's glory.

B. Second, pastoral work functions properly when Scripture is understood paradoxically

For Van Til, a paradox is an apparent contradiction *or* intellectual tension.¹⁶ In a rough and ready way, a paradox has the following ingredients: 1) There are (at least) two claims or beliefs. 2) Both are in Scripture; they are *clear* threads of biblical teaching. 3) They seem to contradict each other; we have difficulty seeing how they fit together in the fabric of Scripture.¹⁷ Intellectual tension exists in a tenacious and profound way.¹⁸ But we know that there is no inconsistency between them because God has revealed them both. 4) We have the tendency to damage one teaching or the other by our reasoning. As Van Til puts it, when "contradiction" is wrongly attributed to two truths, one is "thrown overboard" to solve the problem logically.¹⁹ Thus, the danger is that we take a biblical truth and use it to deny another biblical truth!²⁰

Paradoxicality should be no surprise. After all, we have limited knowledge of the One who reveals Himself; we cannot penetrate all the interconnections that exist within the truth that God knows and what He reveals. Pointedly, then, paradox is the "*result of our ignorance about interconnections.*"²¹ Therefore, our reasoning reaches its limits in paradoxes of divine revelation and there, right there, we exercise a humble use of logic when we bow in acceptance of what God has said, *acknowledging that what God has said is true precisely at those places where we cannot discern how revealed threads of truth cohere.* This in turn promotes humility in biblical

¹⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: P&RP, 1954) 9-10. In *Defense of the Faith* (P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, 2008, 4th edition, edited by Scott Oliphint), 67-68 he says: "Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical." Oliphint on Van Til notes that what seems to be contradiction is not ultimately one because "God is exhaustively coherent" (fn. 38). Oliphant also explains the Van Til uses paradox to refer to "any intellectual point of tension" (fn.38).

¹⁷ There may be other factors that make acceptance of x difficult, but the juxtaposition to the corresponding thread is central as a cloud that hinders seeing x clearly and accepting it wholeheartedly.

¹⁸ Not every difficult set of teachings constitutes a paradox. Difficulties such as Jephthah's vow in relation to Jesus teaching on vows are not paradoxical because they do not push against each other. Church history and the history of theology reveal a limited number of paradoxes easy to identify. Paradoxicality is not difficulty in arriving at comparable truths, but difficulty in harmonizing truths that are clear (by themselves Christ's deity and His humanity are quite clear, but reflection on their interconnection takes theologians all over the map. Some are the trinity, the deity and humanity of Christ, the Bible is the word of God and the word of men, sovereignty and responsibility, God's decree and His desire, and moral inability along side of full responsibility.

¹⁹ *Defense* 69. This is not merely a debate between reformed and non-reformed thinkers because, for one example, Van Til wrestled on the basis of paradox in opposition to some reformed thinkers in his book, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: P&RP, 1954). In more ways than one, J. I. Packer compliments and gives detail to Van Til's approach to common grace and the free offer of the gospel in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961). Packer's definition of antinomy (appearance of contradiction, apparent incompatibility) equals Van Til's use of paradox, though Packer restricts paradox to a figure of speech, 18-19. Van Til uses antinomy and paradox interchangeably, *Defense*, 67, fn.36.

²⁰ Consider the illustration of a rope over a pulley hanging in front of someone stuck half way down a deep well. The person sees two ropes and cannot see that they connect or how they connect to form a single rope. To use the "ropes" to save his life, he must grab both at the same time. If he grabs one to the exclusion of the other, he will plummet to the bottom of the well. To receive the bread of life from Scriptural paradoxes for our benefit, we must believe and live by both ropes of truth, even if our logic tells us that using one to the exclusion of the other seems necessary or is easier.

²¹ John Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox" in *Foundations of Christian scholarship: essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1979), 321. Frame goes on to explain that "we do not know precisely how they 'dovetail,' *how* they take account of one another. We know that they *do* dovetail, for we know that God's plan is wise and exhaustive, and usually we know how they fit together to some degree, but the gaps in our knowledge often demand that we rest content with a paradoxical formulation" (underlining mine).

study. Therefore, we may appropriately refer to accepting theological paradox as the most humble use of logic.²²

Acquaintance with paradoxicality is helpful in handling difficult teachings. It is an organizing principle by which to identify threads of truth for clarity in the midst of complexity. When pastors and church members encounter threads of truth that seem to exist in intractable tension (such as: the full humanity and full deity of Christ, Scripture is the word of man and the word of God, and so forth) having a handle for these theological boiling pots on the stove gives perspective and keeps us from getting burned by confusion. The reality of paradoxicality goes hand in hand with the perspicuity of Scripture.²³ Thus, even the most profound teachings of Scripture are bread of life for the church because each thread is applicable as gospel: i.e., as a man Jesus could die for us; as God, His death could endure our eternal punishment.

Paradoxicality also emphasizes faithfulness in biblical study. The great lesson for exegesis and theological formulation is that *faithfulness to the text has precedence over logical coherence*.²⁴ This does not stifle debate as if anyone may shout “paradox” and dogmatically end discussion. No, debate must continue by faithful study with the caution that though we must engage critically, we must not make logical consistency the dominant principle or ultimate goal. For example, if Scripture clearly teaches that the natural man has moral inability, and if it clearly teaches that he has full responsibility then, however difficult this may be to harmonize logically, we must accept both and work hard to apply both in preaching, teaching, and living. In this light, the fact that lost sinners have the command to repent and believe does not allow us to infer to their ability to believe and repent such that we set aside all the clear texts on moral inability with respect to faith. Of course, how we interpret the many passages on inability (blindness, deafness, deadness, etc.)²⁵ must reflect faithful exegesis.²⁶ Debate is also legitimate with regard to Kant’s

²² Noting the fact of biblical paradox aids presuppositional awareness that is essential in humble self-criticism by which we look at and evaluate the theological bifocals by which we see. Like bifocals presuppositional glasses determine how we see things, but we can tilt our heads and at times see that with which we see. Awareness of our presuppositions is a way for us to bow our heads and, though difficult to do, go through the door to self-critical thinking. Of course, it is important that we engage biblical context with this awareness in order to do our best to examine our beliefs by Scripture knowing that some of our beliefs color how we read every text. Furthermore, self-criticism is something that we must undertake by prayer and meditation because we tend to wear masks when we look into the mirror of Scripture. As Augustine put it, we tend to put ourselves behind our backs; in our context, this means that we tend to put our cherished, even if false, presuppositions behind our backs so we cannot see them for what they are in the light of Scripture. False presuppositions are like demons: they only come out by prayer and fasting! Switching analogies, we can say that we must be concerned with every relevant thread that intersects the piece of fabric at any given time; otherwise, our work of interpretation will come apart at the seams. Paradoxical truths are threads of truth that are clearly and tightly woven together in the fabric of Scripture even though how they can co-exist in the same fabric may be difficult or even impossible to grasp.

²³ It is quite easy to identify passages show Jesus to be God, and at the same time, passages that show Him to be human, as well as a single person. These teachings are perspicuous. By implication from the truth of Scripture, we extrapolate to the historic two-natures doctrine as true over against formulations the set aside one or more of the basics that He is fully God, fully human, and one person.

²⁴ In one sense, admitting paradox is simply another way of saying that God’s thoughts are above ours as the heavens are above the earth and it should not surprise us when we face difficulty. What we must do in faithful quest of the truth is pull together biblical data and accept paradox “where it is warranted.” (John Frame, *Ibid*, 323-24). Logic is properly used when it is governed by the recognition of our creaturehood and hence by the recognition of the limits of creaturely reasoning. We must acknowledge the distinction between Creator and creature, and thinking this way must control the use of logic because the laws of logic are founded in the character of God (He is truth and thus there can be no contradiction in His knowledge or revelation). Properly used, the laws of logic will reveal no contradiction in the biblical system of truth because as God’s revelation it has no real contradiction.

²⁵ Cf. Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, II, 586-588 and *The Canons of Dort*, “Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine: The Corruption of man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof.”

²⁶ Our interpretations must be subject to examination by the church at large. Nonetheless, it should be easy for us to see (by the aid of the paradoxicality model) that there are scores of inability texts and “cannot” texts. It is reasonable to affirm that we must keep them front and center in our discussions with acute awareness of the philosophically problematic nature of the “duty implies ability” challenge to the “clear” message of the “cannot” texts.

“duty implies ability” reasoning to see if it is philosophically problematic and counter-intuitive.²⁷ Debate with Kant, we might say, is a categorical imperative.

Therefore, theological paradox is not only a legitimate model, but it is also helpful in calling pastors to be skillful in philosophical and critical thinking, but who practice it humbly in subordination to Scripture. They do so by giving conscious priority to faithful handling of Scripture above logical consistency. And they practice a most humble use of logic by the acceptance of paradoxes where warranted. Then they follow Calvin’s pastoral encouragement to stop inquiry where the Holy Spirit closes His holy lips.²⁸ At that point, the reasoning self rests, we rest, on Christ the solid Rock; and there we bow in worship and praise.

C. Third, the pastor functions properly when he gives guidance to philosophers

Ross Inman’s article on the “Moral Perils of Intellectual Inquiry” (*Philosophia Christi* Vol 17, No. 2, 2015) draws lessons from Augustine and Aquinas for a virtuous pursuit of knowledge that consists in being governed by “ends that are objectively good for humans”(467). His summary exemplifies pastoral guidance to philosophers:

One’s natural desire for cognitive contact with reality ought to be restrained and moderated by the virtue of temperance, lest one devote oneself to epistemic pursuits that are directed at vicious ends (for example, pride or covetousness), trivial or insignificant truths, pursuits that detract from one’s wider moral and intellectual obligations, that rely on an illicit source, whose end or *telos* is in no way tied to love of God and neighbor, or that recklessly extend beyond the natural capacity of one’s present intellectual capacities (467).

Accordingly, Inman makes application to Christian philosophy (including the obedience versus discussion modes of philosophy, 468-469) with the caution that disciples of Christ who traffic in the world of philosophical ideas...need to consider how the warnings of Scripture regarding “vain discussion” (1 Tim 1.6), “empty deceit” (Col 2.8) “bear on their own lives and epistemic pursuits” (467-468) and may detract from carrying out their primary job description as disciples of Christ (471). How to do this may not be straightforward but the Christian philosopher does not take up this task alone (472). He is part of a philosophical community that serves Christ and His kingdom that must depend on the Holy Spirit for self-critical monitoring of the objects and ends of its intellectual inquiry (472). This is for the edification of the body of Christ and for our flourishing as human beings (472).

These emphases are welcome and well worth pondering more fully. In harmony with Inman’s sentiments, I would like to make some observations that are stimulated by the following statement: per the apostle’s warnings, Inman says, “For Paul, epistemic pursuits may either be in harmony with or at odds with the task of building up the body of Christ, a task that all teachers in the church have been commissioned by God to carry out” (467-468). Granted, this is a word of caution to pastor-theologian-philosophers, one that Inman, and Moser, help us absorb. But how does this actually apply to philosophers? Of course, if they are Christians, then they live under the Lordship of Christ (468) as disciples (471) and, as a community, they serve Christ and His kingdom (472).

But as philosophers, they are not teachers in the church (though perhaps more of them should be). How can they work to edify the body of Christ while occupied with instructing mostly unbelieving students, say, in the art of critical thinking, or truth-functional logic? In other

²⁷ It is perhaps the result of the failure to preserve the distinctiveness of the “duty implies ability” principle to Christians who have the indwelling Spirit and can discern spiritual things. It is the natural man that can do nothing good whatever.

²⁸ “When God stops speaking, we end our quest. Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know. Therefore we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed ...in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is in any way profitable to suppress. Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him, provided it be with such restraint that when the Lord closes his holy lips, he also shall at once close the way to inquiry” (*Institutes*, 3.21.3).

words, how are specific tasks like these mind-stretching and time-consuming endeavors legitimate terrain for a Christian who is a philosopher? It should be agreeable to all (and in harmony with Inman) that what he does is good if he meets the requirements of a good deed, namely, if he does his work with the right motive (love for God), by the right standard (the word of God), and for the right goal (the glory of God).

Nonetheless, the question remains unanswered, and we can compare it with any endeavor in any science. How can the philosopher (learning and applying the principles of symbolic logic for use in analytical philosophy) and in parallel, how can an engineer (learning and applying the principles of physics for use in brake design) *legitimately* do their work mostly among and mostly for people outside the church? In terms of the church, the Christian who is a philosopher or an engineer has the primary mission of being a disciple for holiness to the glory of God. Specifically, he has this proper function under Christ in His church. He is to submit to pastoral instruction and upbuilding by loving dialogue in the risen Lord's school of lifelong learning.

That said, how does the pastor in the fulness of his calling give guidance to the philosopher, the engineer, and for that matter, the bricklayer, doctor, and painter who spend the bulk of their time in what some might consider unavoidable secular pursuits? In brief, let me summarize how I see my pastoral calling in this regard that builds on my first work of teaching theology by expository preaching (an emphasis in my paper this afternoon). At the core, without being an expert in any of these sciences, I begin with what Scripture tells us about all things that gives us an answer to the fundamental questions of metaphysics (what is it?), epistemology (what is knowledge?) and ethics (what ought I do with it?). Per Psalm 19 (Gen 1, Rom 1, Acts 19 and so forth), the world is theology (*theologia*) because it is God's speech; all the facts of the created order display His wisdom and glory. Therefore, human knowledge is knowing God's self-revealing speech in all things. In the three R's (readin, riten, & rith-matic), we are schooled in thinking God's thoughts after him. In turn, what we are to do with it is go where the facts take us in all areas and do so consistently with skillful inference making. We are obligated to do so because wherever God speaks He speaks with authority that requires obedience.²⁹

For the gathered church, the role is that of being disciples in the context of worship by diligent attention to prayer, reading of Scripture, singing, giving, preaching, and observing the sacraments.³⁰ The goal is holiness as the Lord is holy, which serves the ultimate goal of glorifying God through the restoration of sinners in the image of God. *For the church scattered*, when the members are dispersed to their homes and workplaces, their mission work is to live holy lives that reflect pastoral instruction in holiness (Eph 4.12). The good works pie of holiness is a big pie with many slices. Among the slices are works of mercy (doing social justice in a myriad of ways³¹) and works of witness (spreading the gospel word in a host of ways³²); along with works of finishing cement and teaching symbolic logic.

²⁹ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (1976) 32-33, 37; Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 202.

³⁰ As Inman, philosophers have the "primary job description as disciples" (471).

³¹ Sharing the gospel with unbelievers for the good of all indiscriminately (the gospel offer is for all everywhere among all nations, but with discrimination (with wisdom and restraint not to throw pearls before swine) extends love to people regarding their greatest need. If we miss this point, then the hole in our understanding of the gospel may be that we are thinking that life consists in food, drink, and clothing for the body.

³² Both as a local church and as individuals, by life and by lip, you are a light in the darkness. In this connection, your most important witness is the witness of a holy life displayed in good works guided by your learning of Scripture. Consider how spouses may be won by the silent testimony of a godly life (1 Pet 3.1), how wisdom toward outsiders manifests itself in gracious speech (Col 4.5-6), how your Christ honoring conduct and good deeds may lead Gentiles to receive the gospel offer in the day of God's visitation (1 Pet 2.12), and how your partnership in the gospel with your pastor has the important context of abounding love, spiritual discernment, and knowledge for a fruitful life of righteousness by Christ Jesus to the praise and glory of God (Phil 1.5-11).

Specifically, how philosophers, who are Christians, fulfill their mission must include hard work at work.³³ There, they are to have a good reputation with those outside and speech among outsiders that is godly, seasoned, gracious (Col 4.6).³⁴ They will love God by loving their neighbors according to the Ten Words in their true spirit and intent.³⁵

These works are good and all of them take time and energy. One may do this, and another may do that, in Christian liberty. There is no single mold into which all must conform.³⁶ People who aim at a one size fits all approach (either all must do the works of personal evangelism to be genuine, or all must do the works of social justice to be radioactively spiritual) not only fail to understand the Great Commission, but they also fail to appreciate liberty of conscience, and they tend toward legalism by bringing believers under commandments of men. These failures show that we have forgotten that the mission of the church is first Christ's mission of building His church in local expressions through the gift of various ministers in order that the church may be a body of disciples for holiness. Under the risen Lord, church members (doctors, philosophers, engineers) are to do a variety of good works as they are able and according to their circumstances, interests, opportunities, gifts, and callings. In this way, Christians who are epistles read by all, are lights in the darkness and their very conduct is part of the process by which God spreads the word, brings unbelievers to saving faith, and gathers in the plentiful and sure harvest of His elect at the end of the age.³⁷

So, there are no sacred versus secular compartments of life. It is all sacred as God's speech by which He reveals His glory. To be secular is to live in the sacred world of God's speech and to take up sacred tasks (like dissecting frogs or teaching critical thinking) in denial of the sacred. In the created world, God extends a warm invitation to fellowship with Him by sharing His thoughts with us. Therefore, we glorify Him in the details of all areas of life that we

³³ Just think of going off to work in the marketplace. Are you going there to make disciples or to make a living by the pursuit of excellence in your work? The answer should be obvious, but just because many miss it, *your work at work is to work*, to do your work unto the Lord, heartily, and in the pursuit of excellence.

³⁴ Of course, speaking to people about their need of the true Bread of life promotes the greatest possible health and well being of the neighbor. Having the poor always with us is a reminder that Christ and His mission of saving the whole man, body and soul, has priority and primacy.

³⁵ Christians in the workplace will do what they can to promote the authority structures of the fifth commandment, health and safety of the sixth, business ethics of the eighth, and so forth.

³⁶ Such is implied in appeals to have an impact on your world, move from success to significance, and leave a legacy by which you will be remembered, Cf. Stearns, Hole, 36, 236, 264.

³⁷ The Lord's harvest is sure and plentiful. He causes His word of salvation to spread and to grow like a seed growing of itself (Mk 4.26-27). That is the clear teaching of Acts and the letters to the Thessalonians (Acts 6.7; 12.24; 19.20: So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily). Precisely how this happens and the degree of fruitfulness among outsiders is determined by the Lord in His providence. Each local church has its God-ordained place in the process of planting, watering, and reaping. The same applies to individual Christians; your place in the process is God-given. Consequently, whatever fruit you may see from your life in the conversion of outsiders, as a church and as individuals, you have a testimony of the gospel that radiates in this world as light in darkness: you are light in the Lord (Eph 5.8) that exposes evil conduct (Eph 5.11-14) and as light, your good works do lead outsiders to glorify God (1 Pet 2.9-12). The degree to which your witness as a church spreads, increases, and prevails mightily depends on the sovereignty of God because the mission of the church is Christ's mission that He is accomplishing now from heaven as the risen Lord of a sure and plentiful harvest.

study, teach, experience, and apply when we acknowledge His speaking, and praise Him for the things we have the privilege of learning.³⁸

Conclusion

For the work of pastoral ministry as the ministry of a pastor who is a theologian and a philosopher, the question is not “will he function in these roles, even should he?” He does function in these roles because they define who he is under Christ in His church. So, the question is what kind of pastoral-theological-philosophical work does he do? Is it good or not so good? Ultimately, does his work promote the learning of the saints for holiness unto the glory of God?

³⁸Notably, a great deal of discipling work is required to break down false notions of a sacred-secular mindset. For example, whether acknowledged or not, the one who takes up the game of tennis takes up a sacred task. Playing tennis is not secular in contrast to something sacred like reading Scripture. All the facts that a tennis player learns are indirect words of a message from God to His image bearer. These words share God’s thoughts with man so that man can think God’s thoughts after Him. This sharing is an invitation to fellowship with God (Ps 19). The world in which man plays is the kingdom of God (the field is the world where sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one live, Mat 13.38) whether we are thinking of a country, city, or stadium. The principles of gravity, inertia, friction, and geometry that govern the activity of all participants are nuances of God’s wisdom. We grapple with God’s wisdom when we study the relationship of string tension to weather, court surface, and ball speed. How then can someone have wise-wisdom or true knowledge of tennis if they do not acknowledge God’s kingdom and speech? How can they know the game if they do not know (acknowledge what they know but suppress) that tennis is an expression of divine speech that calls to fellowship with God and obedience to Him? All the principles, details, and nuances of factuality that make up the game of tennis are words in a message from the Creator to His creatures. They are components of communication that are there for our understanding. If we do not receive the communication for what it is and use it in obedience to the Speaker, then we do not understand it; we lack true knowledge. In that case, we do not understand the game of tennis even if we have mastered it. The number one tennis player does remarkable things in the dark. This happens because though fallen he is still the image of God. Therefore, if there is true knowledge of tennis, then there will be enjoyment, and every bit of enjoyment will lead to thanksgiving to the triune God. Every marvel and every challenge will lead to a sense of awe at the wisdom of God and it will encourage praise to the God of such wisdom. Experiencing tennis (or biology, mechanical engineering, diaper changing, mashed potato mixing, cement finishing, and so forth) will mean experiencing an invitation from the Lord to fellowship with Him. The tennis player will acknowledge God’s voice and submit to His will while playing the game. He will seek to please the Lord in the attitude with which he plays and in the use to which he puts all his earnings. Controversially perhaps, he will not do his tennis work on Sunday unless he is assured by His risen Sabbath King that such work is fitting on His Sunday-Sabbath. Cf. “Epistemic Circularity, Christian Virtue, and Truth,” ETS, San Antonio, 2004, Richard A. Ostella, p. 4.