

the specific (160–65).

There are a couple of positives worth noting. First, Baxter's emphasis on *context* is much appreciated. Determining proper text boundaries ensures identifying that singular complete thought and helps establish authorial intent (21–22). While there is latitude for creativity in sermon preparation and delivery, "The message must always travel along the same path as the sacred text. Having mapped the text in this way, you are well on the way to the homiletical outline" (84). Even application must be faithful to the context, "Preachers often apply biblical texts sideways" (159), applying what is generally true yet still unfaithful to the text context.

Second, his emphasis on the clear *communication* of the text. The hearer must be able to hear from God so that they can respond appropriately. While the finer points do matter, he issues two warnings:

First, the point of this attention to the finer points of the original language is not to "wow" the audience.... The purpose of thoughtfully engaging with the minutiae is to teach the flock, to deepen their faith, to help them love God with their mind. Second, this part of the sermon process can be fraught with grammatical jargon. The jargon needs to be left on the cutting room floor of the study (130).

The goal in effective biblical communication (i.e., preaching) is not simply dispensing information, "The sermon ought to move the listener to a deeper knowledge and understanding (both head and heart) of God through Jesus Christ" (157).

This book *is not* for everyone. Baxter assumes the reader: (1) will recognize the immense value of and be deeply committed to expository preaching, (2) will have sufficient training in the biblical languages and hermeneutics to craft a sermon, (3) will be someone who preaches from a pastoral perspective rather than a merely academic one, and (4) will readily acknowledge the massive imperative for the exegete to locate any given text within its social-historical background (15–17). If you are comfortable with those prerequisites this book *is* for you. It is a short, easy read, taking one from post-exegesis to pre-homiletic. This work is for those who want to go *farther in* and *deeper down* in their preaching.

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Pastoral Identity: True Shepherds in the Household of Faith, by Douglas D. Webster. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2023. 186 pp. \$19.99.

Douglas Webster (PhD, University of St. Michael's College; BA and MA, Wheaton College) is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Preaching at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University. He previously served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of San Diego and has taught at

Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Canada, and served churches in Toronto, Bloomington, Denver, and New York City. He has written extensively on the areas of “Christ and culture,” pastoral roles/ministry, and preaching.

Pastoral Identity provides an evaluation and critique of the practical and philosophical approach to pastoral ministry within much of the 21st-century western culture. Webster’s critique is inter-denominational and can be broadly applied—he is even-handed and fair in his analysis and critique.

Though critical of the current (and historical) view of pastoral ministry as a profession that creates a “super-spiritual” class set apart and above the rest of the church, Webster carefully and diligently avoids any personal or *ad-hominem* attacks. Webster’s own journey and growth toward his current understanding of the biblical descriptions and prescriptions for ministry is described throughout the book. As a result, he is generous and sympathetic to the thousands who currently labor in professional church ministry as staff, elders, pastors, clergy, etc.

Webster’s goal is to assist the current professional pastor in alleviating what he believes is an unbiblical burden of spirituality and professionalism that is one piece of the larger problem of pastoral and ministry burnout. Webster never questions the sincerity, spirituality, or motivation of those involved in the very system he critiques.

Pastoral Ministry begins with a defining of terms coupled with a brief history lesson. In the preface Webster identifies the current practice and philosophy of church ministry under the title “Christendom,” which he compares to the biblical “household of faith.” These working definitions are important for following Webster’s discussion, analysis, and critique.

Christendom says Webster, is rooted in medieval practices of Christianity where the parish priest is the vicar of Christ and the singular representative of the church. The pastor/priest/vicar/clergy exercises authority over all areas of church ministry. Worse, argues Webster, this representative model creates an unbiblical separation of clergy from laity, burns out pastors, and reduces congregants to an audience of passive recipients and volunteers rather than an active priesthood. As various traditions and denominations have developed, nevertheless argues Webster, they have continued to share these common characteristics regarding pastoral ministry whether low church (e.g., Baptist, non-denominational, etc.) or high church (e.g., Anglican, Lutheran, etc.).

The working premise of *Pastoral Identity* as stated by Webster is that: “a Christendom approach to pastoral leadership and congregational identity no longer fits our cultural situation and is a poor reflection of a biblical understanding of the church and its leadership” (13). By comparison Webster argues for a “household of faith that transcends denominational traditions and is committed to mutual submission in Christ, every-member ministry, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the priesthood of all believers, costly discipleship, and God’s global gospel mission” (13).

Pastoral Ministry is divided into 10 chapters of slightly varying

length. These chapters provide a cohesive and logical flow to the thought process of Webster's argumentation. While it is easy to critique others, it is much more difficult to work on a solution. Happily, Webster does not shy away from this more difficult task in an attempt at providing the reader with recommendations for how a church, both leadership and laity, move to minimize, if not altogether remove this clergy/laity distinction as they work toward a shared ministry.

Webster presents a biblical argument and case for pastoral ministry being focused on developing the full-time ministry of all believers in whatever situation and environment God has placed them (e.g., businessman/businesswoman, homemaker, lawyer, teacher, nurse, student, etc.). One key critique of modern ministry is that members are often robbed of the opportunity to minister and serve, rather than be equipped for the work of the service. *Pastoral Ministry* argues that instead of the priesthood of all believers, we have a culture of priests and members, of ministry professionals and ministry volunteers.

Though he presents an alternative solution, Webster readily acknowledges the hurdles to implementing a "household of faith" approach to ministry. Among those challenges Webster identifies are: (1) the historical practice of the church since the third century which has focused on this lay/clergy distinction; (2) the narcissistic pastor/leader; (3) cultural systems and administration; (4) the innate human desire to lead or be lead; (5) laziness and many others.

While much of the critique is aimed at the established professionalism of the "clergy," Webster identifies that there is a mutual challenge as church members are prone to outsourcing ministry and outsourcing spirituality and many prefer to have a paid professional who is responsible for their spirituality. This mentality must be equally addressed and overcome to implement the changes Webster suggests are not only needed, but the biblical description for a healthy, vibrant, and God-honoring local church body.

Pastoral Identity is a challenging read—not because the subject matter is particularly difficult, but because so many cultural and religious norms are challenged. Nevertheless, Webster argues cogently and biblically for a rethinking and reworking of the modern church establishment, or "Christendom," with a view toward the biblical model of the priesthood of all believers that eliminates the volunteer mindset besetting so many members within our churches.

Where so many books provide something of an "echo-chamber" to our modern ministry approach, Webster's book strikes an entirely different chord. *Pastoral Identity* challenges the reader to biblically evaluate their assumptions about pastoral and church ministry and to ask hard questions about what it means to be part of the household of faith.

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