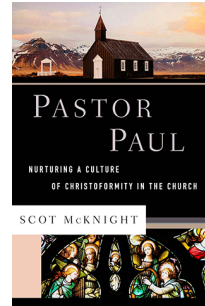


Book Review

Scot McKnight.
Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoforimity in the Church
Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019.
pp. xvii, 253, \$21.99. ISBN: 978-1-58743-426-6.

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Scot McKnight, Julius R. Mantey Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary, has spent his professional life training people for a job he has not had. Though he is not a pastor and is clear that he does not pretend to tell pastors how to do their jobs, McKnight has written an exegetically grounded and critically formed set of theological reflections on seven themes related to pastoral practice from the life and writings of the apostle Paul. Bookending these seven chapters is an introduction to McKnight's pastoral theology and a summary reflection—a benediction, really—followed by almost 50 pages of endnotes and significant bibliography for the research-oriented reader. The result is a well-ordered, readable work of pastoral theology.

For McKnight, spiritual formation is the starting point of pastoral work (p. 1), yet this work ranges over and through many other duties, including administration, preaching, counseling, teaching, and biblical study. All summed up, “The pastor is called to nurture a culture of Christoforimity,” which includes conforming to the life, death, resurrection-ascension of Jesus (p. 4). The pastor is not simply the one nurturing this transformation in the local body, but one in whom this transformation is nurtured. God's mission is as big as the cosmos and as personal as one person in community. Spiritual formation, if it is to be

through the pastor, must be *in* the pastor. With this foundation in place, McKnight offers seven theological themes for the pastor's nurturing work if the church is to be Christoforim: the church should be marked by friendship, family relationships, generosity, storytelling, witness, world subversion, and wisdom—a practical and critical knowledge that discerns and directs right action and posture in the world.

Because of the nature of this journal, I want to focus the bulk of this review on political aspects and implications, offering an affirmation, a request, and a critique. First, the affirmation: McKnight rightly affirms the local church as a place to learn ethics through *imitation*: members of the church community may learn behavior to be repeated outside the church. For example, McKnight grounds Paul's value for helping the poor in the story of Israel (p. 100) and subsequently affirms that the local church can provide the communal structure where people learn to value and aid the poor outside the local church. In this way, McKnight is critical of the homogenous unit principle: there should be diversity within the church in order to learn relationships and care for those outside by caring for those inside. The local church is thereby a web of friendships and new family relationships for those in need of support, stability, and protection (p. 76).

Second, a request: I would like to hear more reflection on the political imagination. Under his chapter on the church being a community

of storytellers, McKnight critiques the story of statism, “the theory that the state ought to rule and the state can solve our problems” which he claims is “America’s dominant narrative today” (p. 105). McKnight quickly softens the statement by saying that other narratives, including racism, capitalism, or elitism could be the dominant one. It is unclear if by “dominant narrative” McKnight means a narrative that one must lay over the events of the United States in order to understand these events or if statism or the other options mentioned *may* be dominant narratives that form the imaginations of individuals or communities in the USA. In other words, is statism a necessary narrative hermeneutic or one of several narratives that form political imaginations? Further reflection would also be welcome to discuss whether it is possible for the contemporary church’s story to be formed with the state as *part* of its political imagination without succumbing to statism as a dominant narrative. No doubt Christians do not want to fall prey to idolatry, so is it possible to live and conceive of life in the West outside a form of life that involves the nation-state? McKnight’s warning to avoid statism is not entirely clear. He writes, “By elevating humans on the towers of honors and adoration, modern statism questions the lordship of Jesus every time one or another version of it becomes our ruling narrative” (p. 112). What exactly does this elevation look like? Does a form of life that uses interstate highways, pays taxes, votes in local and federal elections, advocates for policy and party fall prey to statism? At what point?

Finally, a critique. McKnight could expand his consideration of the pastor’s available *influence*. McKnight critiques the pastor who acts as a platform presenter, writing, “Mastering the proper gesture, knowing where the camera is for the projected image of the pastor on the

screen behind them, knowing the right color to wear, focusing on the most emotive story rather than the Word of God—these are all at work in the celebrity pastor who understands Sunday morning as a performance. That’s not pastoring, and it is decidedly non-Christofornity” (p. 28). With the exception of emotive story over the Word of God, the other elements may be tools for a pastor to use appropriately for influence. Just as McKnight uses writing structure and technique for rhetorical effect to convince the reader, so may gestures be part of preaching and preaching to congregations of various sizes a kind of performance. (In fact, McKnight mentions how Phoebe may have been responsible to perform Paul’s letter to the Romans upon delivering it [p. 51]). The work of the pastor may be faithfully discharged, deploying various tools for influence, provided they do not betray the faith.

Ultimately, *Pastor Paul* is exactly what it wants to be—a readable, theological reflection on pastoral themes from the Apostle Paul’s life and writings by a New Testament scholar who loves the church and teaches emerging and established pastors. Readers who are familiar with McKnight will find *Pastor Paul* a valuable intersection of previous thought developed throughout his career, including McKnight’s work on atonement, ecclesiology, and Paul’s letter to Philemon.

The book has several of potential uses. It may serve as an optional text in a course in pastoral theology or pastoral ministry, or as a book for discussion among pastors in an online or in-person forum. Finally, individual pastors, especially those in solo situations, may consider the book a personal reorientation for ministry as they explore their own pastoral call and theology. As these solo leaders attempt to identify with their people, pray for their people,

suffer with their people, and celebrate with their people (p. 15)—and do so while going through the same things in their own lives—McKnight’s text introduces them to a first century pastor who remains a pastoral companion in the 21st century.

