



# The Pastor as Scholar



# The Scholar as Pastor

Reflections on Life and Ministry

John Piper & D. A. Carson

edited by Owen Strachan & David Mathis

*The Pastor as Scholar and the Scholar as Pastor:  
Reflections on Life and Ministry*

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# Introduction

## The Return of the Pastor-Scholar

*Owen Strachan*

“What do you want to be—a pastor or a scholar?”

It’s a common question in some circles. Many young leaders-in-training have wrestled with its binary nature. *I must*, they think to themselves with some anguish, *be one or the other. Surely I cannot be both*. So the wrestling begins and uneasy conversations follow. For many, tidy resolutions prove evasive.

Perhaps it isn’t meant to be so. What if the question, though well intended, suffers from a potentially fatal flaw? What if—hold your breath—one could be *both*? What then?

This book stems from more than a sneaking suspicion that this rather mischievous counter-question might be onto something. This suspicion does not proceed from a vacuum but from the history of God’s church. Unlike our more recent history, when pastors were urged by some to busy themselves with the pragmatic matters of everyday ministry and some scholars focused less on the church and more on high-level academic questions, pastors and scholars throughout the larger span of church history have blended these roles. Pastors worked out of a burden to bless their people with rich biblical theology even as scholars labored to nourish, strengthen, and captivate the church through their

scholarship. Often the roles of pastor and scholar were filled by the same person. The pastor was a scholar; the scholar was a pastor.

This is particularly true of the Reformed tradition, the guild whose trans-denominational movement continues to grow in the current day. In Augustine, Luther, Calvin, many Puritans, Edwards, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, and many more, we find men who loved the church and excelled as theologians. Though our more modern binary categories of “pastor only” and “scholar only” might *seem* justified, when one turns to the actual history of the church, one finds countless examples of the scholarly pastor and the pastoral scholar. Neither role is a cop-out; both require that their adherents perform all the usual duties of the biblical local church pastor and teacher. We must not make the mistake of making evangelism the enemy of theology, discipleship the enemy of edifying scholarship. Whether in the form of a Calvin, an Edwards, or many others, this simply does not ring true. These examples reveal that robust theology, so far from hindering the practice of ministry, actually enriches it, even as the practice of ministry enhances and increases one’s appreciation for theology.

These models of pastor and scholar thrive in the current day, contrary to what some might think. John Piper and D. A. Carson are two of evangelicalism’s best-known figures. Each has provided leadership for the movement in distinct ways. From his iconic position at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Piper has modeled the theologically minded pastor. Throughout his long and distinguished career at

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Carson has exemplified the ecclesially concerned scholar. Each man has published dozens of books, marking them as a leading voice for evangelicals of varying backgrounds. Both have published on a variety of levels, whether for popular, churchly, or scholarly reading.

The giftings of each man have rendered them an example for fellow ministry leaders and believers. Because they have proved able to speak both clearly and profoundly, and always with a sovereign God and a salvific gospel in view, Piper and Carson represent a contemporary starting point for a much wider discussion of ministerial calling.

It was for this constellation of reasons that the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School asked Drs. Piper and Carson to speak at a special event geared toward future pastors and scholars on April 23, 2009. Coming on the heels of The Gospel Coalition national conference, the event was entitled “The Pastor as Scholar, the Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry with John Piper and D. A. Carson.” It attracted a capacity crowd to Park Community Church in downtown Chicago. The auditorium and two floors of overflow classrooms were filled with attendees who had come to hear the two leaders speak on their callings. For three hours, the audience listened to the scholarly pastor and the pastoral scholar. Thousands more streamed the media after the event, which created quite a buzz on numerous blogs and other forms of social media.<sup>1</sup>

This book, we hope, serves the growing conversation

on the identities of ministry callings. In addition to the aforementioned event, the Society for the Advancement of Ecclesial Theology, based in the Chicago area, convened in 2007 and is bursting with applications from interested pastors who have a concern to engage the life of the mind in their pastoral work. Theologian Kevin J. Vanhoozer gave the Page Lectures at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in late 2009 and commented at length on the necessity of the pastor-theologian, evangelicalism's "public intellectual" according to Vanhoozer.<sup>2</sup> On the publishing front, R. Albert Mohler Jr.'s *He Is Not Silent* includes a chapter on the pastor as theologian.<sup>3</sup> David Wells's *The Courage to Be Protestant* argues that historically, "scholar-saints" led the church, pastors who were "as comfortable with books and learning as with the aches of the soul."<sup>4</sup> Douglas Sweeney's *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* includes important content about Edwards's ministry as a pastor-theologian.<sup>5</sup> An insightful article on the topic by Gerald Hiestand ran in the *Westminster Journal of Theology* in 2008.<sup>6</sup> The recent systematic theology for the church by Daniel Akin, *A Theology for the Church*, features chapters by leading theologians and scholarly pastors that are aimed at the local church and its leaders.<sup>7</sup> In these and other texts, Christian thinkers are mulling over an enhanced pastorate and an engaged academia.

*The Pastor as Scholar and the Scholar as Pastor* serves as a short, readable introduction to these callings. It suggests by way of experience and meditation an answer to the question posed earlier: "What do you want to be—a pastor

or a scholar?” Perhaps we will be forgiven if, like Pastor Piper and Professor Carson, we want in some small way to be a realistic combination of both, in order that we might use our gifts in service to God for the health of our brothers and sisters. This, and no mere rearrangement of ministerial furniture, is the aim of this text: the strengthening of God’s church for the greater glory of its Lord.

# Head & Heart

What will our scholarship and pastoral ministry be if we have heads without hearts or hearts without heads? Recognizing the need for pastors and scholars to embody both theological depth and practical focus, John Piper and D. A. Carson have boldly advanced what it means to be a pastor-theologian and a theologian-pastor.

Weaving testimony and teaching, Piper and Carson challenge those in academia and in the pastorate to think carefully and holistically about their calling. Piper centers on the importance of careful thinking in his role as pastor, while Carson focuses on the importance of a pastoral heart in his career as scholar.

With insight and balance, Piper and Carson give critical guidance to help us span interdisciplinary gaps to the glory of God and the good of his church. These chapters are revised and expanded versions of the messages originally given following the 2009 Gospel Coalition conference.

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PASTORAL RESOURCES

