

RESPONSE TO ERICKSON'S INTEGRATING THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

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Maybe I have a belated apology to you, Dr. Erickson. A belated apology of twenty years that I did not take my Th.M. under you because I thought we were so different. I did not realize that we have so many similarities at that time.

Here I would like to thank Dr. Erickson for his presentation tonight. His presentation reminds me of his teaching twenty years ago, and that also shed lights on his new insight today. I received an autobiography of up to 1985 from Dr. Erickson not long before. With that I wrote a brief article on his intellectual biography. Then I began to realize how he tries to integrate theology and ministry in his life. There are a couple things I really enjoy tonight. Dr. Erickson mentioned how we can treat secular thinking on a somewhat equal footing with theological understanding. Even though secular thinking is not actually on equal footing with theology, still it is very important to our understanding about this world. And I think that warrant our

serious consideration. As seminary professors and seminarians, we are prone to not take them serious enough, prone to not knowing what is happening around us, in terms of physics, in terms of biology, in terms of technology.... I am the one who needs to confess my shortcoming.

As far as integrating theology and pastoral ministry is concerned, I want to take the clues from Dr. Erickson that is in line with what he has been talking about tonight. As a professor of theology, I have been trying to teach a practical subject every now and then: I have been teaching evangelism, I have been teaching preaching. When I taught these subjects, I had to put things together. When teaching evangelism, I have to put marketing, branding, etc. together with my theology. When I teach preaching, I have to integrate oral communication with my theology, or my branch of theology. This is a way to make sure that my theology and some sort of theories are integrated.

On the other hand, I try to serve in a church in a real pastor capacity instead of just an advisory role. It is beneficial in the sense that it can keep my theology down to earth because I have to deal with the day-to-day life of my congregation. When one of my members has cancer, I do need to make calls. When a gay person pops up in the congregation, I do need to deal with the person as well as the congregation, i.e. how they should interact with each other.

From my experiences, I do have bias. In terms of pros and cons of favoring theology or practice, I would bias towards theology. It would be nice to contrast against this pragmatic society that pushes us to be successful, to be successful operationally. It is a temptation to learn the practical and not the theory behind! I would think it is better to have an approach of theology and practice which is from above. Let us learn what the theology is first. Then we try to fit the theology into our practices to see if they really fit together. That will help us to eliminate some of the unbiblical thinking of our secular practices.

A side comment: if some of you come back for continued education, maybe you would consider to learn more about theology and theories than just coming back to pick up a practical subject. That will help you to integrate what you are working on right now. If you indeed want to major in a practical subject, I do recommend you to learn as much theories behind the practices as possible. Dr. Tom Chang here has a good grasp of the theory of practical theories.

There is one test to see whether we are integrating our theology with our ministry, that is, to examine our own sermon. Our sermon would really bring out our theology! The other day when I was sitting in a preaching practicum class, a student was giving a sermon about choices. One of the examples he gave about choices is that: we can choose to have children or not. Now what is in his mind is that having children really is an option. This is some theology! I am not trying to dispute this or that here. The fact is that he has this theology in mind. So try to examine our sermon carefully. Write it down in full manuscript. Read it a few times and you will find what theology you are holding. Thank you!