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## Review of Jaco Hamman’s *Becoming a Pastor: Forming Self and Soul for Ministry*, Revised and Updated Edition

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Jaco Hamman’s (2014) revised and updated edition of *Becoming a Pastor: Forming Self and Soul for Ministry* comes at a time we are witnessing seismic shifts in both theological education and the church. It is only over the last two years that enrollment in Association of Theological Schools (ATS) member schools has leveled off after nearly a decade of material decline—and the leveling off is only after counting the admission of five new schools to ATS (Brown and Meinzer 2017). A pro-forma adjustment that accounts for the new schools still evidences modest pressure on enrollment. The underlying data reveals even more significant changes in student demographics: a double-digit percentage decline in the enrollment of white students over the past decade has been offset by a similar percentage increase in ethnic minority and international students, as well as a steady increase in students age 50 and older. Similarly, on the church side, studies conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) identify a steady decline in the number of Americans that identify as Christian (or have some Christian affiliation), and a steady increase in those who identify as atheist, agnostic, religious “nones,” or who associate with non-Christian faiths. The same study also identifies a growing trend in interreligious marriage. Such changes across the North American religious landscape then begs several critical questions: Given such undeniable trends, how should seminaries rethink pedagogy in a way that takes seriously the human situation of an immensely more diverse student population (relative to what we have seen over the past 75+ years)? Moreover, how should we imagine ministry preparation and formation in a way that best prepares students to engage a radically different religious, social, and cultural landscape than what students encountered just a decade ago? For sure, these changes have the potential to be anxiety provoking for even the best pastors and leaders.

Hamman’s project on *Becoming a Pastor* reflects a solid movement towards addressing these questions and more. The operative word in his title—*becoming*—posits a radical departure from the more traditional Hellenistic pedagogical framework that has captivated theological education over the last century. Whether understood through an enlightenment lens that confined knowing

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and learning to the limits of cognition, or modernity's project to essentialize all of human experience and create universal norms, western theological education has long espoused a praxis that suggested pastoral preparation and formation is solely achieved through the requisite acquisition and engagement of historical facts, tenants, doctrines, and systematized theologies, and that the appropriate regurgitation of such information was evidence of formation and mastery. Hamman's project turns such thinking on its head. Pastoral formation is an evolution—not a destination or an achievement. It is more organic than it is acquisitive. *The identity of a pastor is less about doing and saying, and more about being.* The role and responsibilities of the pastor are done out of the essence of her being ... not the recollection of doctrines, theologies, or theories. *Becoming a Pastor* does not seek to subvert this traditional approach to pedagogy, but it indirectly decenters its prominence. Even through the case studies presented in his introduction, Hamman demonstrates that the *personhood of the pastor is inseparable from the work and identity of the pastor.* This is not to suggest that there are no other books or writings that deal with pastoral formation. However, many texts are delimited to a particular context. In more conservative circles (generally speaking), formation tends to be understood in terms of piety, sanctity, and religious discipline. In more progressive settings (again, generally speaking), formation tends to be understood in terms of experiential praxis—or personality, skills, and strength assessments. *Becoming a Pastor* avoids the particularity of any one religious or social context and invites readers and students of all backgrounds to reflect on their interior space. Informed by an impressive array of theological thinkers (such as Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Dykstra, and Brueggemann, to name a few); a human development lens through the work of Donald Winnicott; and scripture; Hamman's project has the potential to appeal to a wide cross-section of students, seminaries, and religious contexts. Indeed, Hamman's work offers a compelling argument that *intentional attention to the entirety of the pastor's life and interior world (past and present)*—including her needs, deficits, relational patterns, desires, strengths, and potentials—are all additive to formation and pastoral identity. That is to say, the best gift the pastor will give to the congregation is not a sermon, strategy, or idea ... but herself. Hamman speaks of such life-long becoming not as an achievement but in terms of *capacities*, thereby sending the strong message that spiritual, emotional, and psychological development is a journey, not a destination, the pastor is never done with or can take for granted.

In my experience, Hamman's insights and reflections on Boomers, Generation-Xers, and Millennials in chapter one elicits strong reactions from students. While many of them have heard of these terms before, many have never encountered a critical—even if cursory—examination of the human experiences behind the terms. Moreover, while some students may suggest their life experiences are not identified in Hamman's generational analysis, the first chapter highlights a very important phenomenon that many students overlook: while a pastor may serve in a racially or ethnically homogenous faith community, there may still be radically different cultures existing within the same community. Hamman's first chapter compels students to examine the human situation beyond race and ethnicity. Moreover, it alerts students and readers to a common leadership mistake that is made in racially homogeneous congregations: just because ministry strategies and goals may *feel right* to the pastor or leadership team (based on their needs, passions, desires, or deficits), this does not mean that it *feels right* to others in the church. Presumptuousness is a common mistake pastors tend to make when serving in racially homogenous faith communities. Hamman compels the reader to interrogate how one's theological anthropology is challenged by intergenerational patterns over the past 60+ years.

Chapters two through seven represent the heart of the text, as Hamman reflects on various *capacities* that embody pastoral being. These capacities are not acquired through noetic faculties

alone in academia, but through self-work, self-care, and the life-long attention to one's inner world and the quality of one's being. The *capacity to believe* (as opposed to belief in) is a strength of presence that stems from a strong awareness of one's true self, offset by awareness of one's false self. A *capacity to imagine* allows one to epistemologically navigate—intentionally—between the objective and subjective worlds of both self and others. The *capacity for concern* is the rare (and often painful) ability for the pastor to engage his own ruthlessness and brutality (as opposed to the common defense of denial) in the hopes of lessening (but not eliminating) the likelihood of being injurious to others. The *capacity to be alone* reflects the pastor's ability to erect appropriate boundaries such that she can hold her own personal brokenness, while interacting with the wounded nature of others. The *capacity to use and be used by others* reflects the intentionality of interdependency in relationships—as opposed to dependency or independence. The *capacity to play* involves the pastor's ability to suspend reality testing for the sake of creativity and alterity.

Hamman writes in a way that is accessible to both graduate students and to lay leaders, but without compromising the integrity or complexity of the project. For example, in each of the chapters that describe a *capacity*, Hamman outlines 10–15 practical real-life examples that reflect the antithesis (or unbecoming pastor) of the virtue being described. For Hamman, each of these capacities are critical for *becoming a pastor*.

A key question I offer for this project—more in the way of an observation than a criticism—is how its understanding of pastoral formation might be augmented based on contemporary critiques of psychodynamic theory offered by women and ethnic minority scholars. For example, many scholars have observed how traditional (and even contemporary) psychoanalytic literature fails to adequately account for how culture, race, class, ethnicity, social location, and embodiment inform our understanding of subjectivity, human development, pathology, and healing. Given the radical demographic shifts we are seeing in both theological education and the church, it begs the question of how human experiences at the margin inform and cultivate our understanding of pastoral formation and pastoral being.

I strongly encourage students to retain this text (as opposed to selling it at the end of the semester). While seminaries may teach students to give attention to self-care throughout their pastoral careers, few are actually taught how to do it. Denominations and churches would greatly benefit—over the long run—by including pastoral self-care resources in fiscal policy and annual budgets. However, downward pressure on annual financial contributions—coupled with a growing cultural ethos that equates pastoral success with productivity, busyness, and rabid doing—all collude (in a detrimental way) to diminish the importance of pastoral self-care. While *Becoming a Pastor* is not meant to replace the assistance one can secure from various care-professionals (or groups and retreats designed to care for pastors and church leaders), Hamman's project represents a solid resource that any pastor can use to begin or help sustain the life-long task of *self-work and becoming*.

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