

A Christological Reading of the Shepherd Motif for Pastoral  
Theology with Special Reference to Ezekiel 34.

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## **The Shepherd Motif and Pastoral Care**

The metaphor of shepherd is often used to provide a biblical understanding of the functions and role of the pastor. The image of the shepherd is a powerful metaphor for God's care for His people, and can be quite useful in pastoral care as an example of the character and nature of the compassionate and just God who intimately cares for His people. Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34 contribute significantly to this motif. However, caution must be taken as to not simply correlate the work of God described in these passages to the role and function of the pastor in the twenty-first century. The primary concern of the shepherd metaphor is not a prescription of pastoral functions, but description of God Himself as revealed in the incarnation of Christ as the 'Good Shepherd' (Jn. 10:11); the 'one Shepherd' (Jn. 10:16; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24); the 'great Shepherd' (Heb. 13:20). The metaphor of shepherd in the Old Testament is generally an anthropomorphic representation of Yahweh.

Seward Hiltner, who was influential in constructing a theology of pastoral care, explains his own method in terms of observing the actions of pastoral practitioners. Hiltner placed significance on the empirical description of a 'pastoral event' (Patton 1986, 129) or the 'data of ministry' (Lapsley 1969, 44). He saw the process of pastoral theology being utilised when the 'practice or functions or events are examined reflectively and thus lead to theory' (Hiltner 1958, 22). With a functional hermeneutic method such as this, the passages employing the shepherd motif can be used for the purpose of validating the current functions of ministry rather than providing the theological foundation for such ministry. YHWH's description of His own care for His people through the anthropomorphic use of the term shepherd in passages such as Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34 has often been used to shape an understanding of pastoral care. When we consider these passages as formative for the role of a pastor, one will soon find that the 'word 'shepherd' is problematic' (Tidball 1997, 22) and

that ‘the image of Shepherd can be pushed so far as to be downright misleading’ (Liftin 1982, 58-59). Jay Adams (1986, 5-7), for example, draws nine characteristics from the twenty-third Psalm which he claims for ‘the Christian minister defines his work as pastor’, concluding that the pastor as a shepherd, ‘must meet their [*the flock’s*] every need’.

## **PART 1 – The Shepherd in Ezekiel 34**

Approaching the motif of the shepherd from an interpretive perspective of biblical theology will give a more accurate presentation of meaning of the text within its context in scripture, and thus a more sound biblical foundation for pastoral theology. With biblical theology being a broad understanding incorporating diverse approaches, it is acknowledged that this discussion of the shepherd in Ezekiel 34 will not use a specific ‘biblical theology’ but will incorporate some aspects of a canonical, covenantal, gospel centered, and salvation history perspectives common to biblical theology in providing exegetical notes on Ezekiel 34.

### **From Old to New**

Chapter 34 of Ezekiel sees in the beginning of a new phase of Ezekiel’s prophecy represented by the release of Ezekiel’s tongue in the previous chapter (Zimmerli 2003, 91). Ezekiel is no longer restricted to speak of the judgment facing Jerusalem (C. Wright 2001, 223) and the news of the fall of Jerusalem has vindicated the prophet with the fulfillment of his predictions (C. Wright 2001, 223).

Von Rad (1968:101) observes that ‘three factors bring the prophet’s kerygma into being. These are: the new eschatological word with which Yahweh addresses Israel, the old election tradition, and the personal situation’. In this chapter the tradition of Yahweh’s election of, and covenant(s) with, Israel are clearly present in the text, but the prominent

theme is the new word of restoration. Chapter 34, then, begins the section of the book that Block (1998:268) entitles in his commentary 'The Gospel according to Ezekiel'. With the restoration of Israel and Judah foretold and Yahweh's purpose of deliverance to bring about a covenant of peace (Ezek. 33:25) is revealed.

### **The Old (34:1-10)**

Though this chapter reveals the character and purposes of God in deliverance and restoration, it begins with 'the final climax of the protest against the political leaders' (Eichrodt 1970, 471). This is a negative assessment of the leaders of Judah in which a metaphor of shepherds is used. It is a metaphor that is commonly used in Ancient Near Eastern literature as a representation of leadership, royalty, or deity<sup>1</sup>. In the Old Testament the term shepherd is generally an anthropomorphic representation of Yahweh<sup>2</sup>, as we see later in this chapter. However, in the opening ten verses of this chapter, Allen (1990:161-164) sees Ezekiel's metaphor as borrowed from Jeremiah 23:1-2 which 'in referring to shepherds, appears to relate to the last major kings of Judah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah'. In the assessment of the previous situation in Ezekiel 34, the 'blame is laid firmly on the policies of the last kings of Judah.'

### ***Broken Covenant***

The covenantal relationship depicted by the phrase 'I will be their God and they will be my people'<sup>3</sup>, is clearly broken. Ezekiel is describing a prior event which has already occurred

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<sup>1</sup> Laniak (2006:65-69) presents examples of Mesopotamian gods and rulers as well as Egyptian pharaohs who were referred to with the metaphor of shepherd.

<sup>2</sup> Eg. Ps. 23:1-6; 80:1-2; 95:6-7; Is. 40:10-11; Jer. 23:3; 31:9-11; Ezek. 34:11-31; 37:24; Mich. 5:4-5. The term 'shepherd' is also used in a negative context to describe the inadequacy of political and spiritual leaders in the Old Testament (Taylor H. 1990, 7), however the passages cited contrast the human efforts with God's perfect care for his sheep (cf. Jer. 23:1-4; Ezek. 34:1-31).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gen. 17:8; Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 37:23-27.

(Craig 1983, 242), and is a breakdown in relationship that is testified to by the departure of God's presence from their midst (Ezek. 10:1-22), when Yahweh also pronounced judgment on leaders of Jerusalem (Ezek. 11:1-15). The "scattering" of the flock (Ezek. 34:5-6) can be related to the preceding exile and injustice of the political and religious leaders in Jerusalem (Blenkinsopp 1990, 157), who neglected their responsibility and abused their authority in seeking their own gain (Ezek. 34:1-4) and will be held accountable (Ezek. 34:10). Through this concept of scattered sheep also finds a further dimension to its understanding in the person of Jesus who has compassion on a people who are 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Mt. 9:36; Mk 6:34) still awaiting the eschatological reality of the covenant of peace (Ezek. 34:25) under the shepherd promised in Ezekiel 34 (Lane 1974, 226). Likewise God would have compassion on the people of Israel as expressed in the remainder of Ezekiel's oracle concerning restoration.

The scattering of the sheep in the exile is an expression of the result of the broken covenant as 'possession of the land and disobedience towards God's commandment are mutually exclusive' (Zimmerli 2003, 54). The covenant has clearly been broken, as Israel was told 'you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices' (Lev 18:4). This decree is understood to be incorporated as part the covenant relationship (Lev 26:46 cf. (Sprinkle 2007, 280)), which was clearly broken by the leaders who have turned from Yahweh's decrees and 'conformed to the standards neighbouring nations (Ezek. 11:12) profaning the holiness of Yahweh who's name they represented to the nations.

Due to the holiness of Yahweh and the casuistic nature of certain elements of the covenant, a break in the covenant relationship required a judgment that would have 'either a punitive or a purging impact' (House 1998, 339). Through this judgment Yahweh's 'lordship over all creation' is attested to, in his use of the surrounding nations, the scattering of the

flock, the punishment of the leaders, and his sovereign ability to gather his flock from ‘other the whole earth’ (Ezek. 34:6), ‘nations’ and ‘countries (Ezek. 34:13), in order to bring them into a new relationship that he will establish. Thus, in addition to judgement, ‘the holiness of God is also a constructive force making new life possible’ (Brueggemann 1986, 72) in Ezekiel’s theology.

## **The New**

### ***New Leadership (34:11-16)***

In this new phase of Ezekiel’s ministry, the themes that Ezekiel has previously used are still present (House 1998, 340), yet ‘all the emphasis falls on the promise of salvation’ (Eichrodt 1970, 471) rather than judgment. Here is a new beginning that is separate from, but related to the old (Brueggemann 1986, 2). The judgment against Judah’s leaders find’s its ultimate purpose, as restoration ‘begins with an exchange of leadership’ and establishment of a remnant (House 1998, 341) from the scattered sheep (Ezek. 34:11-15). This not the description of the function of the Christian leader or pastor, as suggested by some defining works in the field of pastoral theology<sup>4</sup>, though it does present an invaluable example of pastoral care. Rather this is a description of a theocracy, where God is not only transcendent in leadership, but also as leader is active in restoration<sup>5</sup>, that all will know that this was truly a miraculous work of Yahweh (Von Rad 1968, 205) cf. Ch. 36), who is now again present is a real and positive way.

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<sup>4</sup> Eg. Hiltner (*Preface to Pastoral Theology* 1958), Clebsch and Jaekle (*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* 1964), and Jay Adams (*Shepherding God’s Flock* 1986). Cf. Rodgers 2007 *An Analysis of the Divergent Theological and Practical Frameworks of Pastoral Care* (unpublished paper).

<sup>5</sup> One can see God seeking the lost (34:11); God as the one who rescues and restores (34:12); as the one who leads to a place of rest (34:13-15); the one who strengthens the weak (34:16); and as judge (34:17-22). God is the one who commits to peace (34:25); who provides (34:26-27); who gives protection (34:25).

### ***New Relationship and Community (34:17-22)***

The return of God's presence after he had departed from the temple is of great significance to Ezekiel. 'In Exodus 32-34 it is the threat of the loss of this presence that drives Moses to restore the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Moses knows that if God is not "with them" for good they have no hope. Virtually every biblical lament... makes the same case' (House 1998, 339). The presence of Yahweh though again brings a judgment between 'fat sheep and the lean sheep' within the flock (Ezek. 34:17). The explicit goal of this judgment is declared by Yahweh; 'I will save my flock and they will no longer be plundered' (Ezek. 34:22). This distinction between sheep is echoed in Matthew 25:41-46 which depicts the eschatological fate of those do and do not show concern for their fellow men (Morris 1992, 635), specifically to the 'least of these' (Mt. 25:45), in which Jesus is referring to those in need; 'hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison'. This clearly stands in opposition to 'butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away' (Ezek. 34:21). With salvation of his flock at the fore, Ezekiel speaks of 'the saving event which Yahweh is to bring about is the heart of man [*sic*]' (Von Rad 1968, 203) (cf. Ezek. 36:24-28), and of the promise of Yahweh to bring a new shepherd and ultimately a new covenant of peace.

### ***Hope of a New Covenant (34:23-31)***

Though the judgment that is spoken of here in this portion of Ezekiel is not as a call for repentance, but as a historical description, the hope of restoration was never out of the question. 'Even before the destruction of Jerusalem he [Ezekiel] spoke of the possibilities of deliverance' (Von Rad 1968, 202). In the darkest moment during the oracle of the glory of Yahweh departing the Jerusalem, Ezekiel reveals the heart of Yahweh was already set on



restoration, and does so in language that reflects the covenantal relationship that would be made new.

‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.’

“They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.’

(Ezekiel 11:17-20)

The promise of covenant is directly preceded by the promise of a new shepherd. God’s shepherding nature, revealed here in Ezekiel is given a broader perspective in the incarnation of God’s Son, the good shepherd (Jn. 10), and ‘the fulfiller of this prophecy’ (Eichrodt 1970, 472). Previously in the chapter, it is declared that Yahweh himself would tend to his sheep (Ezek. 34:15), yet here Yahweh promise his servant David ‘will tend to them and be their shepherd.’ There are two implications that can be interpreted here from an approach of biblical theology. Firstly looking back to previous covenants, and the second finding a greater understanding in light of the gospels where the ‘discernment and presentation of the new depend profoundly on knowledge about the old’. (Brueggemann 1986, 2).

The ‘servant’ in the passage is the agent Yahweh will use to lead, guide, and govern his people as he did with his ‘servants’ Moses & Joshua (Num. 27:17-18) following the Sinai covenant.<sup>6</sup> The identification of the servant with David brings to mind the eternal Covenant made with King David (Block 1998, 298), promising to David’s offspring the throne forever (2 Sam. 7). Ezekiel doesn’t use the term king in this chapter to describe the rule of this new

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<sup>6</sup> Where Joshua is elected in to replace Moses as the ‘one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’S people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.’

servant David, highlighting the role of Yahweh as king (Gowan 1998, 136). In this new covenant there will be ‘no human agent or mediator’ (Brueggemann 1986, 74).

The tension created by Yahweh himself tending the flock, then the promise of this Davidic servant tending the flock suggests a great level of intimacy between Yahweh and his servant David. Eichrodt (1970 498) even goes as far as to say that ‘what Ezekiel chiefly means by this servant David is that he is to be regarded as the fully reconstituted image of God.’ Who we understand in light of the New Testament to be Jesus who is the ‘exact representation’ of God and who himself said ‘I and the Father are one’ (Jn. 10:30) when speaking of the sheep entrusted to his care. Thus, ‘Jesus is the new Moses promulgating a new Torah’ (Dempster 2006, 311) who mediates on our behalf in order to establish a new covenant and restored relationship in an even fuller understanding than Moses who mediated for Israel after the first breach of the Sinai covenant. The one in the line of David who would establish a new eternal covenant. Reading the gospels with this background one can observe with N. T. Wright (2005:43) that Jesus ‘does, climactically and decisively, what scripture has in a sense been trying to do: bring God’s fresh Kingdom-order to God’s people and thence to the world.’ So through Jesus, the Davidic servant prince, ‘the new covenant of peace becomes the fulfilment of the older covenants of promise’ (House 1998, 341).

This new covenant offers blessings associated with previous covenants such as blessing (Ezek. 34:26), security (Ezek. 34:27), land (Ezek. 34:27), protection (Ezek. 34:28) and prosperity (Ezek. 34:29). However this new covenant is further reaching than the old. According to Goldsworthy (2006:80), ‘Ezekiel... sees renewal of the human spirit as the restoration of the covenant relationship that in turn provides the key to understanding reality (Ezek. 36:22-28)’. The new covenant, then, is not merely a historical or political restoration, but a restoration of the heart and a promise of peace in order that ‘they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them’ (Ezek. 34:30).

Interpreting this passage from the approach of biblical theology brings to this passage, which is already theological rich in description of God's loving character and redemptive purpose, a further dimension in the affirmation this representation of the character and purpose of God consentient with the whole book of Ezekiel, God's relationship through history with Israel, and the promise of further fulfilment in the messiah and eschatologically. This has greater implications for pastoral care than merely supporting the functions of healing, nurturing, and sustaining that are observed in the practice of pastoral ministry.

## **PART 2: Implications for Pastoral Care**

When the metaphor of shepherd is used in Ezekiel 34 (and Ps. 23), it is not referring to functions to be enacted by the pastor or pastoral carer, but it is used to represent God Himself, or His anointed one, indicating His nature and what He will do for His people. These passages indicated what the people needed, what God intended to provide, and in the first 16 verses of Ezekiel 34, God's critique of the political leaders of Judah. However, these passages do not directly contribute to an understanding of the role or functions of the pastor<sup>7</sup>. In the metaphor of shepherd, a picture is painted of God Himself (Taylor J. 1976, 220; Ezek. 34:11; Ps. 23:1) as the one who cares for His people; who declares 'I myself will search for my sheep and look after them' (Ezek. 34:11<sup>8</sup>). The shepherd is used in some of the Old Testament and other writings from the Ancient Near East<sup>9</sup> to represent a monarchy or deity

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<sup>7</sup> That the care is to 'be provided by the human leaders of the community is not made explicit in the psalm' (Gerkin 1997, 27) cf. Ps. 23. The same is true in Ezekiel 34.

<sup>8</sup> This citation precedes 'a long chain of verbs with Yahweh as their subject, highlighting the event as an act of Yahweh himself' (Block 1998, 289).

<sup>9</sup> Laniak (2006, 65-69) presents examples of Mesopotamian gods and rulers as well as Egyptian pharaohs who were referred to with the metaphor of shepherd.

which affirms this understanding (Taylor J. 1976, 219) cf. (Allen 1990, 161)<sup>10</sup>. The view of God as the shepherd in scripture is an ontological pillar of pastoral theology, in that pastoral care in its very nature is ultimately God's work, not the work or function of the Pastor.

God's character and His promises reveal that He is about the task of pastoral care<sup>11</sup>. We must understand that 'Pastoral ministry is God's ministry.' Beasley-Murray (1989, 54) continues, 'pastors are called to be ministers of Christ, and not ministers of his Church'<sup>12</sup>.

God's shepherding nature, revealed here in Ezekiel is given a broader perspective in the incarnation of God's Son, the Good Shepherd<sup>13</sup>, and the Son of David. As foretold, 'He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD... And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth' (Mic. 5:4). When establishing a theology for pastoral care in light of the shepherd motif in scripture, including passages such as Ezekiel 34, it is not only the promises of God which emerge, but also the work that He is continuing to do in the person of Jesus. There is also an image presented of Christ being central to God's purposes of reconciliation and redemption (Col. 1:20 & Tit. 2:14); and to the kingdom of God breaking into this world and the lives of individuals and communities. For Jesus was sent to 'bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free' (Lk. 4:18-19). This 'in-breaking'

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<sup>10</sup> Allen (1990, 161-164) sees Ezekiel's metaphor as borrowed from Jeremiah 23:1-2 which 'in referring to shepherds, appears to relate to the last major kings of Judah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah'. In Ezekiel 34 the 'blame is laid firmly on the policies of the last kings of Judah'.

<sup>11</sup> One can observe God seeking the lost (Ezek. 34:11); God as the one who rescues and restores (Ezek. 34:12; Ps 23:3a); as the one who leads to a place of rest (Ezek. 34:13-15; Ps 23:2); the one who strengthens the weak (Ezek. 34:16); and as judge (Ezek. 34:17-22; Matt 25:32). God is the one who commits to peace (Ezek. 34:25); who provides (Ezek. 34:26-27 and Ps 23:1 & 5); who gives protection (Ezek. 34:28 & Ps 23:4). So that God's people will know that he is with them (Ezek. 34:30 & Ps 23:5a) and they will know him intimately (Isa. 40:11; Jn. 10:14); and they will be his people (Ezek. 34:31) whom he will guide toward righteousness (Ps. 23:3b). God himself will place one shepherd David, or in the eschatological perspective (Taylor J. 1976, 221)<sup>11</sup> of this text, Jesus as the son of David, over them (Ezek. 34:23-24). For the eschatological significance of the one true shepherd cf. 37:24; Mic. 5:4; Rev 7:17.

<sup>12</sup> Though pastoral care is God's ministry, relegating human efforts to the status of impotent is to 'deny with a false pessimism the incarnate nature of God's love' (Campbell 1986, 35). That love and care enacted by a pastoral carer should not be neglected, but should be utterly dependant on the God from whom and to whom the ministry of pastoral care is directed.

<sup>13</sup> John chapter 10 also has eschatological significance. Milne (1993, 148) argues that verses 11-15 are speaking in reference to 'the kingdom come, and for its new life'

of the kingdom is characterised by Jesus preaching the gospel, healing the sick and casting out demons as well as the ultimate act of reconciliation and restoration on the cross. All these things can be seen as a restoration from the effects of sin as represented in the definitions of pastoral care presented by Pattison (2000a, 13) amongst others.

God invites His people to partner with Him in accomplishing His work of pastoral care (Peterson 1993, 61)<sup>14</sup>. Through the motif of the shepherd, there are insights into the role and character of pastors as Shepherds under the 'Chief Shepherd' (1 Pet. 5:1-4). When the image of Shepherd is understood to reveal the nature and character of God, those who would choose to join with God in His ministry may gain insight into pastoral ministry by observing and imitating the work of their God. However, there must be an underlying understanding that this metaphor describes the work of God rather than defining the work of humankind. The pastoral carer must draw upon on the character and nature of God, the 'one Shepherd' (Ezek. 34:23; 37:24) of the Old testament, revealed in the person of Jesus, the 'one Shepherd' (Jn. 10:16) of the Gospels, yet being aware of the risk of superficiality in uncritical correlation between the description of the Good Shepherd and contemporary Christian pastors without acknowledging a dependence on God and His promises to lead His sheep. As the under-shepherd seeks to imitate God, he does not assume the same role as the chief shepherd, but acknowledges that God has gone before him in this ministry. Pastoral care then, is not based on the functions of the shepherd conveyed in the Old Testament, but rather on the understanding that God is ultimately the pastoral carer, who has promised to care for His people, is continuing to care for His people, and invites us, as under-shepherds, to join with Him in His ministry. A ministry which may or may not fall within the functions derived from the motif of shepherd.

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<sup>14</sup> Eugene Peterson (1993, 61) asserts that 'Cure-of-souls questions are: What has God been doing here? What traces of grace can I discern in this life? What history of love can I read in this group? What has God set in motion that I can get in on?'

So we can see that the foundations of pastoral care need to be ‘centred within a framework that is spiritual... biblical... transformational’ (Everett 2003, 5) and defined by the revolutionary reality of the cross, not the functions that the discipline entails. The functions outlined by Hiltner and others would be more authoritative if they were founded in a pastoral theology that saw those functions as the work of God, empowered by the reality of the cross, and directed by the kingdom of God. Our ministry of pastoral care is shaped not by functions, traditions or the sciences of this world but by the gospel and the God of the gospel. Pastoral care is not grounded in a functional hermeneutic, a biblicist hermeneutic, a descriptive hermeneutic, or a professional understanding (which are so dominant in the field), but in the person and work of Jesus in partnership with the Father and the Holy Spirit as well as those Christians called to serve Him.

### ***Christological Pastoral Care***

At the centre of pastoral theology ‘is God as revealed and self-declared , rather than we ourselves’ (Purves 2004, xxxiv). If one is to seek a biblical foundation for pastoral care, with an understanding of Jesus as the promised ‘Good Shepherd’ (Jn. 10:11; 14) with whom God would enact His care, as the ‘Chief Shepherd’ (1 Peter 5:4), we need look no further than Jesus Himself. Pastoral work originates in and is shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ’ (Peterson 2000, 5). If we do not find a theology of pastoral care in the person and work of Christ, then we do not find a truly pastoral or Christian care. All that is taught by the Apostle Paul, ‘like spokes of a wheel, radiates from Jesus Christ’ (Moo 2005, 169). Soteriology, eschatology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology, all of which are significant to pastoral care, cannot, for the evangelical, exist independent of Christ. Salvation, healing, and new life are found in Christ (Moltmann 1990, 41); He is the embodiment of the kingdom of

God (Hooker, 2005, 85), which finds its fulfilment in Him; He was empowered and led by the Spirit, and graces the church by sending to her the same Holy Spirit; and he is the head of the church. No area of Christian life or service, including pastoral care and its theological understanding can be anthropocentric. Although each individual is called to personal faith in response to God, the Christian life and mission 'is really christocentric' (Moltmann 1990, 276).

Any approach to the interpretation of the Bible in pastoral care, or for that matter, the interpretation of a pastoral situation, should occur through an epistemological framework that not only considers, but is shaped by the person and work of Christ.

The person and work of Christ thus play a key role in interpreting the Old Testament, and the New Testament which contains the account of His life, death, resurrection, and the early life of His church.

At a superficial level, a Christological approach might appear to place a focus on revelation, or the person of Jesus at expense of engaging with experience, or the context of the pastoral issue at hand. However, the relevancy of Christ is universal. There is to be no lack of contextual relevance or purpose within the cultural situations that the Apostle Paul addressed in his ministry (Purves 2004, 206)<sup>15</sup>, yet references to Christology are abundant in his writings (Witherington 2005, 25). The epistle to the Hebrews for example is addressing a specific situation, most likely a threat of persecution of the church under Nero (Guthrie 1998, 23). Though, the supremacy of Christ is a central contention and the situation being faced is

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<sup>15</sup> For example Paul's use of the monument to the 'unknown god' as a means of presenting the gospel (Acts 17:23f).

barely mentioned. Hebrews highlights the universal relevancy of Christ that is powerful to both the original recipients and readers today<sup>16</sup>.

Though experience in ministry is vital to the development of a pastoral carer, a prior theology of pastoral care centred in Christ is essential as a frame of reference with which to view pastoral situations. A dynamic<sup>17</sup> Christological hermeneutic assesses a pastoral situation in light of the person and work of Christ. A Christological understanding of the human condition and considering God's purposes for salvation and healing, will induce questions such as: How is Jesus already present and active in this situation? Once the key issues are established in the situation, scripture is used as the norm for both assessment of the situation, where possible, and for the prescription of the action. Suitable exegetical methods, including contextual insight, are essential in understanding both the pastoral situation and the text of scripture.

The church and all that it does, including the ministry of pastoral care then ought to come under the authority and direction of head of the Church. The 'ontological connection between Christ and the church' then is the preface to ecclesiology or work of pastoral care undertaken by the church, as the church has no existence apart from Christ (Purves 2004, 97) for 'in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). It is by the Holy spirit that we are united with Christ (Purves 2004, 78). He 'is the bond by which Christ effectually binds us' (Calvin [N.D.], 279)<sup>18</sup>, without whom we would 'not belong to Christ' (Rom. 8:9). We are intimately and effectively united with Him, grafted to Him (Rom. 11:17<sup>19</sup>), as branches of His vine who can produce no fruit apart from Him (Jn. 15:5-6).

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<sup>16</sup> The writer had 'intimate knowledge' of their experience (Lane 1991, lv), and was able to speak 'directly into the experience of the audience' (Lane 1991, lvi).

<sup>17</sup> Different use of the term 'dynamic' to Hiltner. For the purpose of this paper the term represents an interactive process.

<sup>18</sup> *Institutes* 3.1.1.

<sup>19</sup> The Gentiles represented by the grafted branches (Murray 1968, 86), are totally dependent on Christ and must continue in Him (Murray 1968, 88)



It is therefore concerning to read statistics, such as those collated by Murphy (2002), assessing pastor's relationships with the Lord<sup>20</sup>. The conclusions drawn from Murphy's sample indicated that only 20 percent of pastors spend more than 15 minutes a day in prayer and only 30 percent read the Bible apart from sermon preparation. Stott (2002, 116) correctly asserts that 'Fundamental to all Christian leadership and ministry is a humble, personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ'. Our life of faith is determined by our relationship with Jesus, it logically follows that any of His ministry that we participate in, including that of pastoral care should also be directed by Christ through our intimate union with Him. Without union with Christ, 'all things are cast back upon us, and every issue depends on the pastor's ability to work his or her skills successfully' (Purves, 2004, 6)

### ***The Pastoral Work of Christ***

Christ Himself 'feeds and cares for' (NIV), or 'nourishes and cherishes' (trans. Bruce 1984, 383; 392) His church in a loving manner like that of a husband ought to care for his wife (Eph. 5:29-30). This care is ultimately manifest in His sacrificial death upon the cross. However, in addition to the anointment provided and righteousness imputed for believers in His death, there are expressions of His care manifest in our daily life. These include, but are not limited to, hope in things to come, comfort and exhortation in hardships, and a renewing of life, joy, and peace.

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<sup>20</sup> Information collated from 'Pastor to Pastor, Focus on the Family, Ministries Today, Charisma Magazine, TNT Ministries, Campus Crusade for Christ and the Global Pastors Network' (Murphy 2002). The accuracy of these statistics, however, does not diminish the concern that pastors and pastoral cares have at times neglected the one who ultimately provides pastoral care.

The care of Christ brings about an ‘epistemological redemption’ (Goldsworthy 2006, 60), as the believer’s mind is renewed (Rom. 12:2) and sanctified in union with Christ (Murray 1968, 109). Not only the mind of the believer is renewed, but the whole person, is redeemed as a ‘new creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17) in Christ for by the power of God, ‘life is at work in you’ (2 Cor. 4:12b). The Apostle Paul declares,

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

In reference to the aforementioned scripture Purves (2004, 196) comments, ‘Clearly this is the stuff of pastoral work.’ Hence we can see the pastoral ministry of Christ, whose care goes beyond that of any human concern (Stott 2001, 65).

Christ is actively present in the church as the ‘healer of their ailments’ (Baker 2002, 56), and the provider of comfort. The Apostle Paul exhorts that ‘through Christ our comfort overflows’ (2 Cor. 1:5). In addition to this, the hope found in Christ is another way in which the church is cared for by Christ. In Christ our high priest, ‘We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure’ (Heb. 6:18-20). The expected coming of the Lord, and the hope which it brings, ‘is one of the most central and powerful motifs of Paul’s preaching’ (Ridderbos 1975, 487). This hope goes beyond any human affirmation of things to come, as it is sealed by Christ Himself and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22).

All pastoral care ultimately finds its fulfilment in Christ, for ‘His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness’ (2 Pet. 1:3).

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