



## A Study of John 21:15-17: Implications for Christian Ministry

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### ABSTRACT

Leadership is one of the key challenges facing the contemporary society despite many seminars, conferences and workshops organized on this subject. The political crises in many organizations and societies are the result of poor leadership. The subject of leadership is so important that no amount of scholarship dedicated to it can be considered too much. In a predominantly Christian society like Africa (and some other parts of the world) many people look up to Christianity to offer a leadership model that can promote quality leadership. The purpose of this paper is to provide biblical principles for leadership through a textual analysis of John 21:15-17. A literature-research methodology was used to gather data from books, journal articles and dissertations. A key finding is that shepherd leaders must show deep concern, compassion, acceptance and empathy for their followers in order to heal, sustain, nurture, and empower them. The paper ends with implications of the shepherding model of leadership for contemporary Christian ministry.

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### INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the key challenges facing the contemporary society despite many seminars, conferences and workshops organized on this subject. This article argues that the shepherding model of leadership is the best antidote to leadership crises in many contemporary societies. This introductory section reviews selected literature on the concept of leadership to place the research in the right literary context.

The Greek word “*poimante*,” which means “to tend” gives the origin of the word “shepherding.” The shepherd’s tasks and obligations include caring for, directing, leading, and guarding the sheep, in addition to feeding them.<sup>1</sup> In order to take care of the flock, one must nurture the maturing believers and equip them to procreate within their sphere of influence. Protection from threats, particularly those that want to damage the flock, is another aspect of oversight.<sup>2</sup> Knowing that there are individuals who wish to injure or steal from the flock, the prudent shepherd searches for initiatives that might assist and safeguard them. It is crucial to effectively minister to the sheep and

<sup>1</sup> Roger M. Raymer, “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 855.

<sup>2</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), 1132.

maintain their health since that is the ministry into which the shepherd has been called. Given this understanding, the pastor must also be aware that occasional correction is necessary. To place individuals in a healthy relationship with God, pastoral care ministries (such as counseling, charitable work, or other forms of pastoral care) must be developed and promoted. Pastoral care activities include healing, leading, supporting, and reconciling require interpretation via the basic nurturing and emancipating activities of a community of faith.

Hugh Alan Cole defines shepherding as the provision of counseling and supporting care for individuals.<sup>3</sup> The ministry of shepherding, which serves as the cornerstone for the ministry of human care, recognizes the importance of being constantly prepared to address challenges confronting the flock. In this sense, the shepherd serves as “father” to the flock and provides them with their leadership needs. This is a crucial task in the modern society where one finds it difficult getting a mentor and an effective leader to counsel them.

Having examined the meaning of “shepherding” or “shepherd”, the paper continues to explore how the Bible employs the shepherd metaphor to explain the divine-human and leader-subject relationships in the biblical world.

### **Shepherding in Biblical Context**

The idea of shepherding runs through the Bible. The Old Testament makes numerous references to shepherds. The first shepherd identified in the Bible was Abel (Gen 4:2). He is said to have offered an offering to God from his flock. Israel was founded on a shepherding heritage. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds (Gen 13:7; 26:30; 30:36). Rachael, the wife of Jacob, is also described as a shepherdess (Gen 29:3). Moses was a shepherd before becoming the famous lawgiver and exodus coordinator (Exo 3:1). King David also worked as a shepherd (1 Sam. 17:34-35; Psa 78:70-71). Prophet Amos was also a shepherd (Amos 7:14).

The act of shepherding was and still is a common occupation for people in the Middle East. The terrain and geography of the Middle East lend itself to sheep and goat rearing. Yet, the area lacked abundant grass and sources of water. Shepherds led their flock to pasture and brought them home safely, counting them to know if all had returned. Should one sheep get missing, the shepherd would leave the rest and search thoroughly for it. In the process of shepherding, the shepherd experienced many risky situations such as confrontation with thieves and wild animals. The shepherd, therefore, needed to be courageous, compassionate and hardworking.

Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as a Shepherd whose sheep are Israel (or the church). Jacob was among the first people who identified God as a shepherd. In Genesis 48:15, Jacob (who was lying on his deathbed) asserted that God had been his shepherd all of his life to that moment. The biblical Patriarchs (Abraham, Jacob and Isaac) as mentioned earlier were all shepherds. Jacob was fully aware of the role of the shepherd in the life of the sheep. His reference to God as the Shepherd of his life was, therefore, meant to declare that God had treated him as a shepherd would treat a sheep. But since God is perfect and most gracious, his shepherding relationship with Jacob far exceeded that between any human shepherd and a flock. There are other passages which symbolically refer to God as the Shepherd of Israel (Eze 34:30–31, Psa 80:11).

The word “shepherd” may be used in different ways. First, it may be used to underline the bond between God and his chosen people, the Israelites. It was employed to demonstrate God's role as the genuine shepherd, one whose people can depend on them to take care of one another rather than just the larger flocks. God led his people safely out of Egypt and into their own country after leading them through the desert for forty years.<sup>4</sup> “You led your people like a sheep by the hands of Moses and Aaron,” declares the Psalmist (Psa 77: 20). This truly clarifies God's role as their shepherd throughout

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Hugh Cole Jr., “What Makes Care Pastoral?” *Pastoral Psychology* 59 (2010): 711.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 20 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 734.

the exodus and how he cared for the Israelites. God cared for the Israelites like a shepherd, providing for them (Psa 78:19), protecting them (Exo 33:15–16), and healing them (Exo 15:26).

David speaks metaphorically as a shepherd in Psalm 23 to illustrate what is expected from Israel's leaders.<sup>5</sup> David's description of the provisions God makes for him is based on his experience as a shepherd. According to David, a good shepherd provides nourishment and refreshment for his sheep. Also, a good shepherd makes the sheep lie down in green pastures (v. 2). "Lying down in green pastures" has to do with a place to rest and a supply of food. There is also the provision for water. Providing water for the sheep in the dry Middle East society was a critical task which the shepherd was expected to undertake. There is also the provision of guidance using the shepherd's staff (v. 4). David also conveys the idea of abundant provision when he speaks of a table being set, his cup overflowing, and his head being anointed with oil (v. 5). Clearly, God is the perfect and chief Shepherd of his people. All the attributes of a good shepherd outlined above are really God's and are to serve as a model for all leaders.

Apart from its reference to God, the word "shepherd" was used to describe the work of the religious and political leaders in Israel, whom God appointed to look after his people and inspire them to uphold his law, as they live in anticipation of the advent of the one True Shepherd (Eze 34:23), the righteous branch who would carry out justice and righteousness in the land. The leaders of Israel were considered as shepherds who possessed the delegated authority to cater for God's people, the Israelites. As mentioned earlier, the good shepherd provided food and security for his flock, in addition to leading and guiding them. The failure of Israel's leaders in this regard is well documented in the Bible. Therefore, on many occasions, God expressed his anger against the leaders of Israel because they failed to care for their subjects. Ezekiel 34:1-6 is key to God's dealing with bad leaders/shepherds. Here, God accuses the leaders of slaughtering their sheep for their own gain rather than feeding them. This links well with Jesus' assertion that the hired shepherd comes only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Instead of caring for the flock, Israel's leaders in the time of Ezekiel treated their subjects "harshly and brutally" (Ezek. 34:4 NIV). Ezekiel's greatest rebuke in this and other passages was the leaders' failure to provide guidance for the people. He mentions thrice that the sheep are scattered. They were lost, became prey for every beast and had no one to search for them (v. 6).

In Jeremiah 6:3 and 23:4, certain rulers are referred to as shepherds. The people are referred to as sheep in Jeremiah 4 and 9:19. Jeremiah, in his judgment of Israel's leaders took Ezekiel's notion one step further, linking a lack of spirituality on the leaders' part with the scattering of the sheep. In Jeremiah 10:21, the Prophet, making reference to the captivity of Judah, states that "The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered" (NIV). The state of the shepherds' mind and their failure to consult God for direction was a pathetic situation. Leaders of Israel were expected to make God central in their decision-making process.

God, as the Shepherd and Father of Israel, expressed love for his people. According to Emmanuel Asante, this love was not "of the sentimental and indulgent variety which permits anything."<sup>6</sup> God revealed himself to Israel as the Holy God, who in his love does not close his eyes to the sins of his people. Part of God's ministry to Israel was to discipline, and judge them, as he had warned them he would do if they broke his covenant (Deut. 28:1-68). This means that Israel's relationship with God was meant to purge them of sin, purify them and showcase them as God's own treasure.

The New Testament also features the shepherding concept. The first people to learn of Jesus' birth and went to him were shepherds (Luke 2:8–20). Given that Jesus is the chief Shepherd, one can say that the shepherds who visited infant Jesus actually visited the master Shepherd. In John 10, Jesus identifies himself as the "Good Shepherd" (v. 11). As a result, he serves as a model for the ministry of

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<sup>5</sup> Toni Craven and Walter Harrelson, "Psalms" *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 772.

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Asante, *A Call to Serve: A Theological on Ministry* (Accra: Son Life Ghana Limited, 2019), 24.

shepherding.<sup>7</sup> Jesus identifies himself as the Great Shepherd for his sheep who had come into the world to provide life to the fullest to everyone who comes to him (v. 10). In Luke 7:13–16, Jesus, the Good and Great Shepherd of the flock, names twelve of his disciples as apostles. These apostles were to learn from their Master and then shepherd others as the Master would. In John 21:15–17, Jesus gave Peter a mission that was extended to all those who had been selected to serve as the shepherds of God’s flock. This task extends also to contemporary Christians. Therefore, all Christians are required obey the commandment to “feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, and feed my sheep.”

Paul compares the church and its leaders to a sheep with shepherds in his final letter to the Ephesians elders (Acts 20: 28). In 1 Timothy 3:1–7, the characteristics of a shepherd and the code of conduct are clearly laid out. Consequently, a man of character whose life is above reproach, who is devoted to his wife, self-controlled, wise, respectable, hospitable, and able to educate, who is not a heavy drinker, who is at peace, who does not love money, who is a good provider for his family, and who is a mature Christian, is the appropriate candidate to occupy a shepherding position. According to 1 Timothy 5:8, shepherds should prioritize supporting the physically frail, such as babies, family members in the hospital, and the elderly.

As noted earlier, love is key for shepherding God’s people. People look to shepherds for love, protection, and a feeling of community. John Bisagno describes the Christian church as a family that shows the love of Christ through deeds.<sup>8</sup> In Ephesians 3:15, Paul refers to the church as a family that guides its members to become essentially Christian. Bisagno is correct in seeing the church in this light. Thus, love and care are key features of the church (1 John 3:11). The shepherding ministry must not only be characterized by love but also by human empowerment activities that will equip the sheep to become shepherds of other sheep. Given this fact, pastors must equip or educate the saints to perform the work of the ministry rather than undertake all ministerial activities themselves.<sup>9</sup> This is the rippling effect of the shepherding ministry. The membership must use their spiritual abilities to minister to and take care of other members.

### **Exposition on John 21:15-17**

The fourth Gospel is attributed to John, the Apostle, with a lot of arguments about the date of writing this document. This Gospel has a very high Christology in that it makes clear statements about the divinity of Christ, his pre-existence, incarnation and the atonement. Right from the beginning, it declares Jesus are God who existed from eternal past and later came to earth in human form to live with and minister to human beings, and ultimately provide an atonement for their sins (John 1:1-18). As a highly Christological document, the gospel according to John places much emphasis on love, a Christian virtue rooted in Christ. The disciple is given the command to love the neighbour just as Jesus loves the disciple (John 13:34). Before his ascension, Jesus wanted to draw Peter’s attention to the need to love him (Jesus) and the flock of God. Jesus, therefore, used his act of reinstating Peter after the latter’s betrayal of the former to give a deeper meaning to what it means to love Jesus. This love relates to the shepherding role of Christian leaders. The love for Jesus is demonstrated by one’s fulfilment of the love-for-neighbour commandment. This section considers John 21:15-17 to ascertain what Jesus wanted Peter (and by extension all disciples) to know about shepherding.

Examining a cathartic incident in Peter's life that is described in John's gospel in chapter 21, it becomes clear that this event "is supposed to show Peter as entirely restored to his position of leadership."<sup>10</sup> He is to learn a new way to love and to love genuinely without betrayals even at the point of death. It is possible that Peter had repented even before Jesus’ interaction with him. If he had

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene L. Stove, *The Ministry of Shepherding: A Study of Pastoral Practice* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1976), 13.

<sup>8</sup> John R. Bisagno, *Letters to Timothy: A Handbook for Pastors* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 120.

<sup>9</sup> Bisagno, *Letters to Timothy*, 120.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in your Church* (New Jersey, Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2010), 35.

repented and asked for forgiveness, then he had been forgiven and restored to a personal relationship with Christ. Granted that Peter had been reconciled with Christ, the public restoration will be seen as Jesus' attempt to make the public aware that Peter's sin has been dealt with and therefore, he (Peter) should no more be considered as a betrayer but as one who has the right to lead the church.

The interaction between Jesus and Peter took place after breakfast. The series of questions was both dramatic and engaging. In the passage, Jesus questioned Peter three times. Did Jesus ask Peter whether he loved him three times instead of just once, to match his three denials? The threefold charge Jesus issued in response to Peter's declaration of love and loyalty is of great interest in the understanding of the significance of shepherding, even though commentators disagree on the significance of the difference between the Greek words for "love" in the exchange (*agapao* and *phileo*).<sup>11</sup>

Jesus answered to each declaration of Peter's allegiance with a directive for him to follow. Have you ever given it any thought? Jesus might have emphasized any number of areas of leadership duties, but he always chose language that focused Peter's attention on the need to take care of the flock.<sup>12</sup> The word "feed" was used by Jesus in the first and third phrases (Greek: *boskein*). He used the word "shepherd" in the second case (Greek: *poimainein*). The word "*boskein*", according to Trench, "is only 'to feed; but *poimainein* entails much more; the entire business of the shepherd, the directing, guarding and folding of the flocks, as well as procuring nutrition for it"<sup>13</sup> Morris asserts that "Most people regard the variety as little more than aesthetic".<sup>14</sup>

The resurrected Christ summons Peter to the task of tending to the sheep in all three imperatives. Peter's declaration of love and affection drew possible three accusations from Jesus in his reply. He might have stated, for instance, "preach the gospel," "create disciples," or "love one another," among other imperatives. Instead, Jesus used imagery associated with shepherding the flock in each instance while restoring Peter, saying "Tend My Lambs," "Shepherd My Sheep," and "Tend My Sheep" (John 21: 15- 17). The three charges are not only meant to affirm Peter's apostolic authority but also pronounce the central part of the Christian gospel and Christian ministry.<sup>15</sup> Sheep need to be tendered and shepherded/looked after.

In light of John's narrative in John 21:15–17, it should also be remembered that there was a dialogue that took place at Tiberius (Lake Galilee), following the ascension of Jesus. Peter was fishing with the other disciples. When Jesus showed up, his presence filled their nets, and he encouraged them to bring some fish to the meal he was preparing. Then, three times, he questioned Peter, "Do you love me?"

When Jesus asked Peter for the first time whether Peter loved him more than the other people, he replied, "Yes, Lord you know that I love you" (John 21:15 NIV). The first question definitely served to remind Peter of his foolish boast that implied that he was the one most devoted to Jesus, among the disciples (Matt. 26:33). Jesus did not question Peter's affection. He was aware of Peter's brotherly love for him. To give Peter more assurance that he was a sincere disciple of Christ, Jesus asked Peter to declare his love once again. Peter was not questioned by Jesus on whether he and his wife would work for the gospel. Will you put up with suffering and ultimately give your life for me? He had that in mind for Peter, but all he said was, "Do you love me?" Isn't that what matters most? If you genuinely care about someone, you will go above and beyond to meet their requirements. According to what Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will obey my commandments" (NIV). Faith and love are both essential. It is clear what Jesus said: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not go hungry, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35 NIV). But faith is not sufficient on its own.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (Minneapolis: James Family Publishers, 1977), 162.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 875.

<sup>13</sup> Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench & Co. Company, 1894), 85.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 874.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon J. Keddie, *An EP Study Commentary: John Vol. 2* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2001), 418.

Additionally, Jesus expects his followers to love him completely and without conditions. Along with reaffirming their love for Jesus, good shepherds need to be supported and encouraged.

Clearly, Peter was distraught. He was disturbed because Jesus asked him the third time “do you love me?” (John 21:17). The second and third questions were repetitious and served to make Peter have a deeper assessment of himself and to face more fully the implications of the three denials so that he can eventually love Jesus and his disciples deeper than before. Sometimes one needs to experience emotional pain in order to have their consciences cleansed and have their love validated. Jesus and Peter spoke again just a few days before when Jesus was about to die. “You cannot follow where I am going right now, but you will follow later, Jesus said to Peter” (John 13:36, ESV). “Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:37–38 NIV).

As a result, the rising Jesus requested Peter to declare his love for him three times, just as Peter had refused him three times. While Peter was saddened by this, being free of his guilt and remorse allowed him to go on. It prepared him for the work that lay ahead. Shepherds in God's vineyard must also have a complete love for Jesus. Shepherds can make amends with Jesus, gain his forgiveness, rediscover his love, and proceed in his steps.

### **Dimensions of Shepherd Leadership**

Jesus used the expression “Feed my sheep” to sum up Peter's responsibility (John 21:17). Before considering the dimensions of shepherd leadership, it is important to summarize the practical aspects of Jesus’ charge to Peter.<sup>16</sup> First, the task of ministry is a practical function, not status or office. Jesus used active verbs in his charge to Peter; Peter is therefore required to take practical actions. Second, the provision of spiritual needs of followers is central to Christian ministry. Ministry is about spiritual nourishment. Malnourished churches do not survive just as malnourished children often do not. Feeding and tending God’s flock involves food and pasture: preaching, teaching and doctrine (content) and contextual application of God’s word to the flock. Shepherds, or “Pastors,” are prevalent in today's society and involved in a variety of ministries. But what nourishment are these shepherds providing for the sheep of the Lord? Should shepherds provide their flocks with tales, personal testimony, social and political debate, irrelevant theological topics, philosophy and popular psychology, miracle encounters, and feel-good entertainment?

Third, ministry for Christ is authoritative, meaning the flock are to follow a certain mode of life rather than doing what the like. To be part of the flock required one’s readiness to be discipled and discipleship must yield good results. An authentic Christian ministry must have both personal and social ramifications. Fourth, the sheep, disciples of Christ, are the subject of Christian ministry. The people in the church are not the pastor’s but Christ’s and they must be treated as such. Peter would comprehend that Jesus was referring to humans as the “sheep.” To the verdant field that offers everlasting life, Peter was to guide people who are Christ’s and not his (Peter’s).

With this summary, the paper now proceeds to consider key dimensions of shepherd leadership/ministry, expounding the above points.

### **Feeding and Caring**

Every living thing needs to eat in order to survive. The restoration of health, growth, and vigour is referred to as feeding.<sup>17</sup> Without nourishment, sheep quickly become undernourished, feeble, and eventually die. Numerous verses emphasize the shepherd's responsibility to feed the sheep. The following exchange between Jesus and Peter is found in the New Testament on shepherd leadership in terms of the duty of feeding: Simon Peter was asked by Jesus, “Simon son of John, do you really love

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<sup>16</sup> What follows has been gleaned from Keddie, *An EP Study Commentary: John*, 419-420.

<sup>17</sup> K.T. Resane, “Leadership for the church: The Shepherd Model”, *Theological Studies* 70.1 (2014): 6 <http://www.dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70il.2045>. Accessed on 2nd January, 2022 @ 1:42am.

me more than them," after they had finished eating. You know that I adore you, Lord, he said. Feed my lambs, commanded Jesus. Once more, Jesus questioned, "Simon, son of John, do you really love me?" Yes, Lord, you are aware of my love for you, he said. Look for my sheep, Jesus commanded. "Simon, son of John, do you genuinely love me?" He questioned him a third time. Jesus' third "Do you love me?" question to Peter caused him pain. Lord, you are all-knowing, and you are aware of my love for you, he added. Feed my sheep, commanded Jesus (John 21:15-17).

Jesus offered Peter three directions based on the scripture. "Shepherd My Sheep," "Feed My Sheep," and "Feed My Lambs." The responsibility of the spiritual shepherd is to feed and guide both the lambs and the older sheep. Sandy Simpson responds to this by stating that lambs should be fed milk. That is, teaching the lamb the principles of God's Word so they can mature. Shepherds are also commanded to "look after my sheep." "Feed my sheep," is the shepherd's mandate. These are the Lord's sheep, not the sheep of the church hierarchy. The *oikonomos* (caretakers), who are charged with overseeing and managing the wellbeing of the Master's sheep, act as shepherd leaders. The idea is for shepherd leaders to go from feeding sheep *brome* to feeding lamb *gala* (milk) (solid food). Solid nourishment is training in righteousness, which equips the sheep with all they need to survive a day of trial.<sup>18</sup> This whole idea is from Hebrews 5: 12 -14 and 6:1-3 where the writer points to his readers that they needed milk and not solid food and later said to them that solid foods are for the mature.

The following roles play a part in shepherd leadership's compassionate side: It concerns restoration. In order to do this, the shepherd must look for and return the missing sheep to the flock. As the Good Shepherd in John 10, Jesus cares about finding the missing sheep (John 10:11). He instantly departs from the ninety-nine (99) to seek the missing person. Until the sheep is located, the shepherd does not give up. Second, grooming is a practice (John 21:16). In the past, someone who worked in a stable to care for the horses was referred to as a groom.

### **Leading and Serving**

It is the responsibility of the shepherd to guide the sheep while he or she is the flock's shepherd. Here, the concept of direction is relevant. According to R.C. Sproul, "without the care and constant supervision of a shepherd, he is aware that sheep tend to move willy-nilly in all directions without any order to their movement, the sheep without the shepherd will be exposed to danger, becoming the enemy's prey, and getting lost with so many vulnerabilities."<sup>19</sup> It is therefore important for a shepherd to lead the sheep. The Psalmist says in Psalm 23 that "He leads me beside the still waters." Leadership dictates the direction and the shepherd-leader is the one who directs the flock in the world, and guides them not to conform to the world (Rom. 12:2). The sheep must be led by the shepherd to grazing areas and water sources. They receive instruction and healing. In the correct direction, they are led. Using the rod and staff, they are shielded from the world's wolves and animals (pseudo-leaders). The flock is to be controlled and safeguarded by the staff and rod.

Leading requires service and sacrifice. The leader of the flock is expected to use the authority vested in him/her to serve the followers. The goal of the service and sacrifice made by the leader is to improve the wellbeing of the followers. The shepherd exercises power without coercion. Greenleaf asserts that the shepherd-leader is first of all a servant: "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead."<sup>20</sup> The leader's role in seeking the wellbeing of the followers is noted by Kofi A. Busia when says "the ultimate goal of politics [or power] is the creation of conditions, which will give every individual the opportunity to be the best he can as a human being and as a member of a community" and so a society's political progress must be judged by "the quality of the individual, by his knowledge, his skills, his behaviour as a member of the

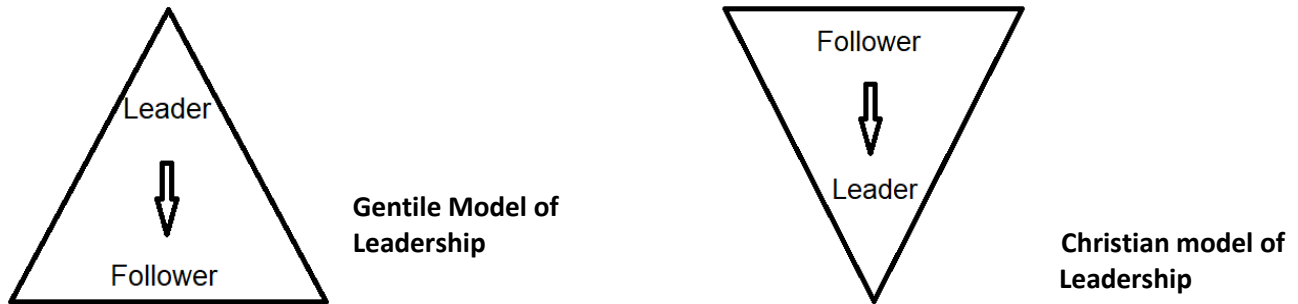
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<sup>18</sup> Sandy Simpson, "The Responsibilities of a Good Shepherd," in Apologetics Coordination Team (ACT). Accessed on 31st December, 2021 from <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/agoodshepherd.html?>

<sup>19</sup> R.C. Sproul, "Shepherding the Flock" accessed on 31st December, 2021 <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/shepherding-flock>

<sup>20</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant-leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002), 27. The diagram was taken from the same source.

society, the standards of living he is able to enjoy and by the degree of cooperation, harmony and brotherhood in our community life as a nation.”<sup>21</sup> Leaders must therefore work to satisfy their selfish interests; they must have the community at heart. The quality of one’s leadership depends on the effect of the leadership on the life of the community. Such leadership is “supportive, with authority at the bottom of the pyramid and followers being served by the leader and subject to the nurturing oversight of the leader,” as opposed to worldly leadership that is “suppressive with authority [concentrated] at the top of the hierarchy and followers being lorded over and dictated to by those in authority.”<sup>22</sup> The diagram below depicts the leadership style described above.



### Protecting and Guiding

Protection has to do with preventing something that is to be attached from threat, harm, or destruction. Simpson confirms this as he asserts that, in order to physically guard the sheep against wolves into the sheepfold, the shepherd-leader would lie down in the gate.<sup>23</sup> He actually risked his life to protect the sheep. David, as the perfect example of a shepherd, protected his sheep and snatched some from the mouth of wild animals. According to Metzger, shepherds protect the sheep from wild animals and thieves that come with diabolic intentions to steal, kill, and destroy.<sup>24</sup> The ability to protect the sheep from Satanic plans against them and false heresies obligates the focal point of the Shepherds. Shepherds must be the right people to protect their sheep from any bad company and false doctrines.

Guidance is another duty of the shepherd. It entails providing guidance or constructive criticism with reference to a choice or a path of action in the future, as well as setting and maintaining a course of action. In leading the sheep, one leads and directs them to keep them from straying into peril. A shepherd's staff, which he uses to lead and steer the sheep, is just as crucial as his rod for defending and guarding the flock. The shepherd's staff serves as a constant reminder of his or her leadership. The shepherd in the book of Psalms says, “He leads me in the path of righteousness” (Psalm 23:3). In ancient Israel and even today, the sheep are forbidden not to eat in the fields where crops are growing. The shepherd has to guide the sheep not to get into areas where there are crops to destroy them.

### Implications for Contemporary Christianity

#### Theological Training

For the shepherd to be prepared and be informed about the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, theological training is necessary. Theology is a collaborative task of the Church if the believing and baptized community has been called, commissioned, and sent to create disciples and instruct. It is wrong to think that theological education does not enhance Christian ministry. God created humans in his image and an aspect of the divine image in humans is the ability to think and reason. Theological

<sup>21</sup> Busia cited in Anane-Agyei, Okodie. *Axioms of K. A Busia: A Compilation of Philosophies, Ideas and Policies of a Statesman* (Accra: Abibrem Communications, 2014), 37, 104.

<sup>22</sup> James Estep Jr. “A Theology of Administration.” In *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries*, edited by M. J. Anthony and J. Estep Jr., 35–52 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2005), 46.

<sup>23</sup> Simpson, “The Responsibilities of a Good Shepherd.”

<sup>24</sup> Paul L. Metzger, *Minister as a Good Shepherd: A theological reflection of Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry in John 10*. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2010),46.



education enhances one's thinking capacity and also exposes one to more truth about God and his purpose. Jesus' disciples learned from him through word and deed. The received adequate training from Jesus to undertake their ministerial tasks.

Everyone called into ministry must therefore have some form of training (whether formal or non-formal). Theological training can hardly be restricted to the specially-called only. Theological education must envisage the entire membership of the believing community.<sup>25</sup> This calls for a comprehensive theological education for shepherds to strengthen members or to give them a firm theological base for ministry. Pastors must have good theological training in order to feed the congregants with the right teachings and Biblical context. Theological training, in that sense, cannot be limited to academics but must be extended to the congregation and the indigenous people who are willing to avail themselves to study. Leadership courses must be developed and promoted as part of theological training for contemporary ministers.

As Theological Seminaries undertake the task of training people for ministry, it is important that they develop courses that will equip their products to meet contemporary demands in ministry. In Ghana, for example, there have been many attacks on Christianity, especially relating to the authenticity of the Bible and the Christian faith. The flock have access to what critics are saying and they sometimes become confused. Some of the issues are technical and far beyond what the flock can handle, even sometimes beyond what the "ordinary" shepherd can handle. Theological education is expected to introduce courses (such as Christian Apologetics) to equip the shepherd-in-training with the expertise to defend the Christian faith before their flock in order to firm their (the flock's) faith and keep them intact for Christ. Courses in Christian Leadership must also be developed and taught in Seminaries and Theological Institutions. The paper, therefore, demands a holistic review of the content of the curricula used for training ministers. This is important if Christian ministry is to make meaningful impact and be of great relevance to the contemporary society.

### **Apostolic Ministry of the Church**

The church must note that it has been sent into the world to create disciples of all peoples and to instruct them, exhorting them to follow the Lord's teachings. This is the essence of the shepherd's apostolic vocation. This consciousness of mission leads the believing and baptised community into worship and into a Christian way of life in the midst of the everyday world. The community of faith in Christ is to continue what the early church did, meeting constantly to hear the apostles preach, and to share the common life, breaking bread and praying (Acts 2:42). The church may meet both virtually, though physical meeting must be emphasized. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the restrictions it brought and the prospects it offered has taught the church to seriously consider online engagement with the flock. The use of the digital space is a quick and effective means of reaching people who could not have been reached if ministry is done only in the analogue space. It is important, therefore, for the church to put measures in place to be effective and relevant in the digital space. In this light the community is to engage in missions "which happens not only and not primarily through organized evangelism campaigns but through the quality of Christian life in the everyday world which evokes astonished or irritated questions" (1 Pet 3:15).<sup>26</sup> Church planting and pastoring must also be given the needed attention if the church is to expand.

The apostolic ministry is a mediating ministry. To mediate Christ's ministry, the church, understood as being sent, that is apostolic, must demonstrate that it is both near to God and to the world, exercising "a spirituality of holy worldliness."<sup>27</sup> The shepherd, therefore, need to understand both things pertaining to God and those pertaining to the world. This role is (in a sense) a priestly role which actually belongs to every believer. Though all believers are priests, some ministerial functions have been delegated to those prepared and ordained to undertake them. The shepherd's role in this

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<sup>25</sup> Asante, *A Call to Serve: A Theological on Ministry*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> Ray Anderson (ed.), *Theological Foundations for Ministry* 2nd Rev. Ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 442.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson (ed.), *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, 446.

regard is crucial. Given this understanding, the shepherd leads the flock with authority as Moses led the Israelites. The apostolic leadership of the shepherd is to the right destination, the divine goal for the flock. Thus, the shepherd is to direct members to make good decisions for their Christian lives and also give spiritual direction.

### **Charismatic Life of the Shepherd**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is what gives the Shepherd's ministry its genuine condition of life, its development into fullness and maturity, as well as its dynamism. According to Torrance, the church is accompanied by the grace of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> The church is referred to as a charismatic community, as is seen in Paul's writings. The Church "lives exclusively on grace and the power of the Spirit," according to this statement. The believer's existence is basically determined by the Spirit. The absence of the Spirit means the non-existence of the Christian community. By baptism, individual believers are initiated into a state of life informed by grace and not by merit and self-assurance. The concrete evidence of this charismatic state of the believing community is *charismata* which everyone in the church receives and whose steward (not owners) everyone is called to be (1 Cor 7:7; 1 Pet 4:10). The Church must be headed by a Shepherd who has been ordained by God; carrying God's Spirit to lead and take very good care of His flock. The charisma and character of the Shepherd must reflect Christ-like nature in the public. There must be evidence of Christ's leadership as the shepherd of God. The shepherd must be Spirit-filled and must be exemplary to life transformation (Rom 12:1-2).

The act of shepherding comes into concrete expression through diverse and spontaneous services in the believing community (Rom 12: 6-8). These services are not limited to those that are intended to build up the inner life of the church. They intend to do what Christians do in secular jobs, in their families and in citizenship. It means that *charismata* is given also for service in the world. Additionally, it implies that church ministry cannot be restricted to activities that take place just inside the walls of the church, as defined and inspired by the *charismata*. Ministry extends beyond the confines of the church. It involves what the Christian does in secular settings. It gives an indication that the Shepherds must train up the flock to fit into the secular world with their doctrinal knowledge of the Scripture. In this regard, Gary Ginter asserts that:

Being a Kingdom Professional is a matter of role and competence. This means that one is a professional in every sense of the word, but that one seeks to be a professional in such a way that they measure their impact by how well they advance God's kingdom agenda. In other words, instead of seeking to maximize their income, or their status of reputation, they live to maximize their impacts as measured by how it furthers God's kingdom agenda... [which] is about people and their coming to be more like Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

### **Sacrificing for others' sake**

Peter was to make sacrifices for others, learning from Jesus' example. The sacrifice made by the shepherd leader has implications for the church. The sacrificial life of the shepherd entails the worship life, *koinonia* and service to humanity. The shepherd fulfils his ministry only if it becomes the focus of the need of the church. This three-fold way of expressing its priestly function: worship, *koinonia* and service means that the Shepherd's ministry is directed to God, himself, and the world. This ministry constituting the Church's holistic ministry—marks it as an inseparable trifocal: The church's ministry is inseparable vertical (*theocentric*), internal (*ecclesiocentric*) and horizontal (*cosmocentric*).<sup>30</sup>

T.W. Manson argues that Christ's high priestly activities comprise his whole self-oblation in love and obedience to God.<sup>31</sup> He did so in love and service to others. That work which he finished on the cross makes all believers priests. Here, the priesthood of all believers implies that they are able to

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<sup>28</sup> Derrick J. Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds: An introduction to Pastoral Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 164

<sup>29</sup> Asante, *A Call to Serve: A Theological on Ministry*, 56.

<sup>30</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1979), 174.

<sup>31</sup> T. W. Manson, *Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), 70.

dedicate themselves to God in love and obedience while loving and serving mankind, so participating in the ongoing high priestly activity of Christ.<sup>32</sup> By giving spiritual offerings through Jesus Christ that are acceptable to God, the church serves as a "holy priesthood" (1 Pet 2:5). This spiritual offering comprises helping others and serving God (Heb 13:15-16).

Christian leaders must make sacrifices for their followers. Jesus epitomized sacrificial service on the cross when he died for humanity. He has gifted every shepherd in a way that he/she can also contribute to the development of the church through sacrificial services. Without sacrifices, the church and the society cannot be developed. The sacrificial service of the shepherd will ensure the continual existence of the church. This point has implications for political leaders. There is the need to sacrifice their individual interests for the sake of the development of the nation. Citizens must also be ready to go through hardships, if such hardships are for the good of the society in the days ahead. For example, a nation may decide to develop her infrastructure and during that period focus less in other areas of the economy with the purpose of using the infrastructural development to achieve a robust economy in future. In such a case, leaders must explain the rationale behind the required sacrifice so that the populace can also take informed decision about it. The application of the sacrificial dimension of shepherd leadership to national development needs to be promoted by all countries, especially the developing countries.

## CONCLUSION

To be a shepherd, there is only one thing necessary; love for Jesus. Without love for Jesus, no man can love the flock and cannot be a good shepherd. The shepherd must "feed", "care", "lead", and "protect" the sheep (congregants) with words of encouragement and life to enhance their Christian faith. Caring requires that the shepherd searches and brings the lost sheep back to the flock. It is the responsibility of the shepherd to guide the sheep while he or she is the flock's shepherd. It teaches and restores shepherds. They are shown the way of justice. The rod and staff serve as their defense against the world's wolves and animals (false leaders). The staff and rod are used to guard and discipline the flock. Shepherds must have good theological training, and create awareness of their apostolic, charismatic life and sacrificial life of the shepherd as Jesus demonstrated to Peter (John 21:15–17). Jesus taught his disciples to have good theological training in order to feed his followers with the right teachings and Biblical context. Pastors must avail themselves to receive a life full of spiritual growth and maturity by harnessing the gifts of the Holy Spirit to enhance church members to have a transformed life in Christ Jesus and to die for their Christian faith.

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<sup>32</sup> Manson, *Ministry and Priesthood*, 70.

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