

history were too definitely drawn for further prophecy to be much needed.

But when the time of fulfilment came, all these modes of revelation came alive once more, only to subside again when the need for them was past. So in the second century Church prophecy seems to have become as suspect as it had been in the time referred to by Zacharias. And quite rightly : after the time of revelation in the apostolic Church, whose now universal mission is as it were authenticated by the *anakephalaiōsis* of all the Old Testament modes of revelation, with their affinity to things pagan, the Church no longer had any need of the charisms for the most part, because its possession of revelation was henceforth sufficiently ensured by its divinely instituted but non-charismatic hierarchy.

No similar historical development is to be observed in the divination techniques of pagan cultures ; instead, they all co-exist happily together as long as pagan society feels the need for communicating with the gods, because there is no question of their oracles controlling a significant development of history. They *are*, of course, nearly always concerned with concrete issues, often political, as Hebrew prophecy was ; but not with any rhyme or reason such as is demanded of a grasp of history. The purposes of the pagan gods in their dealings with men are inscrutable—for the very good reason, ultimately, that they are not there.

The purposes of Israel's God, on the other hand, are very definitely there. And though His ways are unsearchable, the intention of revelation is to render them to some extent scrutable in the nation's history. It is in that history that God's purposes take shape. It is thus a dramatic history, it has a plot, and it leads up to a climax—a climax of final revelation.

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FEED MY LAMBS

A metaphor is illuminative only for a certain audience. To tell a civilised audience that a certain mountain is as tall as the Empire State building would convey new knowledge. The same metaphor would be ineffective in speaking to natives in the heart of the Dark Continent. Therefore in reading any historical document, removed from us by centuries, we must carefully reconstruct the 'backdrop' of any metaphor used in the document, if we are to reach the depth of meaning intended by the author.

It is a commonplace to observe that the words of Our Lord were the words of a Jew, addressed to a Jewish audience. Hence, it is difficult to overstress the role of the Old Testament background in Our Lord's speech. The cultural environment in which he moved had saturated both him and his hearers with the Old Testament truths and the Old Testament manner of expression. If he used a certain manner of expression, moulded by the Old Testament, it was with the consciousness that the flavour and depth of that expression on its many Old Testament levels would be understood thoroughly by his Jewish hearers. From our viewpoint in time, then, the more nearly we will grasp the full richness of the message the more nearly we understand the imagery which he used and which the evangelist saw fit to record.

Metaphors have levels of meaning. Judiciously used, a metaphor brings to a listener or reader not a single idea, easily conveyed by non-metaphorical language, but rather a cluster of ideas. The Old Testament cluster surrounding the image of shepherd involves varied dimensions or levels of meaning with regard to authority. Not every one of these meanings is present in every Old Testament use of the image. But when Our Lord speaks against an Old Testament background, the cluster of these varied ideas is conveyed in his image.

Jn. 21:15-19 provides a good example of semitic imagery. By a careful study of the pastoral image in the Old Testament, we can expect to come to a deeper insight into the meaning which this particular image had for the apostles who first heard the words and for the Jewish Christians who first heard this teaching from the apostles. Previous studies of this passage have started from the same viewpoint. But it is the author's judgment that they did not go far enough with the conclusions which they drew.

First, it is clear that Our Lord in commanding Peter : ' Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep ' is using a metaphor. We will examine the metaphorical use of ' feed ' and ' shepherd ' in the Old Testament for the light it may cast upon the verse in St John.¹ In 2 Samuel, there is a striking use of the shepherd metaphor. A major crisis has been precipitated by the death of Saul and in an effort to end this crisis the elders of the people approach David :

Previously, when Saul was our king, still you it was who led Israel in and out ; and the Lord told you : You shall shepherd my people Israel and you shall be prince over them : ²

There are several points here. One is the historical situation. A crisis

¹ The Hebrew word רעה in varied grammatical forms means both ' shepherd ' and ' to lead to pasture ', or ' to cause to graze '. This verb was used by the author to control his survey of the OT image as it is used in the Hebrew bible.

² 2 Sam. 5:2. This and the following citations are the author's translations from the original.

has come about which demands leadership. Here we may go a little further than the position taken by Joachim Jeremias, who observes, almost in passing, that the title shepherd is occasionally used of military leaders.¹ Yet, even with the examples his article cites, the emphasis is not on military leadership but on the act of leading. In a primitive state such as Israel, the primary demonstrations of leadership would inevitably be in a military situation. However, the point stressed by the metaphor is the *act of leadership*. The militancy of the leader while leading is quite peripheral to the figure.

This particular emphasis is to be stressed, because it is the act of leadership or the leader in the act of leading which recurs again and again in subsequent Old Testament uses of the metaphor. The second point to be stressed is the parallel which becomes familiar: 'You shall be shepherd . . . you shall be prince.' While it is true that unlike general oriental usage, the title of shepherd is not included in the honorific titles of the kings of Israel, parallels like the above become commonplace. Of course, according to the usage of semitic style, the position of shepherd and prince in such a citation makes the two words almost equal in meaning.

The third observation to be made on this passage is perhaps the most striking of all for the reader who is searching for light on Our Lord's meaning. The elders tell David: 'It was you who led Israel in and out.' This phrase brings to mind the passage in Numbers. Here Moses offers special prayer to the Lord:

Let the Lord Who is God of the spirits of all flesh appoint a man for the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them . . . that the congregation of the Lord may not be sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27:16-17).

The elders in their plea to David make special allusion to his previous role in 'going out before' the people of Israel. The obvious inference is that he has already partially fulfilled the role of shepherd which they want him to play now in fullness.

The Numbers passage sheds one more ray of light and reveals another dimension of the Old Testament metaphor. Moses' prayer is answered by the Lord with the appointment of Joshua. The Lord commands Moses to endow Joshua with some of his authority with this result: 'that the people of Israel will obey.'² This new dimension highlights the shepherd as one acting with authority not his own. He is virtually described here as an instrument.

Another use of this dimension: the notion of a shepherd as one

¹ Jeremias, Joachim. 'Poimēn' in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Kittel-Friedrich, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1959 vol. VI, p. 486.

² Num. 27:20

chosen by God and acting with divine authority, occurs in the Psalms.

He chose David his servant and plucked him from the sheepfold . . . he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob his people and Israel his treasure. He tended them and guided them with firm and skilful hand (Ps. 78:70-2).

The clear meaning of these verses is the allusion to David's acting with authority over the flock of Israel. Included in the verses is the notion that the God Who chose David to be the shepherd is the source of David's authority.

The meaning of delegated authority conveyed by the notion of shepherding Israel shows up again in Chronicles. Nathan receives a message from God explaining why the Judges of Israel had not undertaken to build the house of God which David was now to build. They had issued no such orders because they had received no command themselves :

In all the places where I made my presence felt did I say one word [about this] to any of the Judges of Israel whom I had commanded to shepherd my people? (1 Chr. 17:6)

The Judges who shepherded Israel before the days of the kings, like their successors acted with delegated authority.

Cyrus, an authentic Old Testament hero-figure, is described in shepherd imagery by Isaiah : 'My shepherd and the one to fulfill my every purpose.'¹ That Cyrus is acting as the Lord's delegate is clear. The Lord Himself will go before Cyrus and will level mountains, open doors and ungird the loins of Kings. These favours the Lord will not do for Cyrus personally but for Cyrus in his role as the holder of delegated authority. Hence the Lord can say with logic that these things are done 'for the sake of Israel.'²

Micah's famed prophecy on the Messiah who will come out of Bethlehem of Judah has this promise to make for him :

He shall stand and feed his flock in the Lord's own strength, in the majesty of the Lord's own name (Mic. 5:4).

Here we see the basic theme of the shepherd image. He shall feed the flock as a delegate, as an agent 'In the Lord's own strength.' The Hebrew idiom rendered by the preceding phrase certainly lends itself to strengthening this interpretation.³

The title shepherd in the Old Testament is not always predicated of worthy men. In fact, in some of its non-complimentary predications

¹ Is. 44:28

² Is. 45:4

³ cf. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley. Oxford 1910 2nd English Ed. p. 379 @ 119h.

another facet of the authority-content of the image is made strikingly manifest. The term shepherd is predicated of the leader as leader—whether or not he happens to be worthy of exercising leadership. Jeremiah condemns unworthy leaders :

Thus says the Lord : Woe to the shepherds who rout the sheep of my fold. Therefore, says Israel's God, concerning the shepherds who care for His people . . . I will gather the remnant of the flock . . . and I will set shepherds over them who will truly guard them (Jer. 23:1-4).

It is clear from the above passage that shepherd here is intended to convey only the notion of leadership, not necessarily worthy leadership. This is so since in the one passage the same title is applied both to worthy and unworthy leaders.

Earlier in Jeremiah, the role of the shepherd had been more clearly defined than in many other passages :

Shepherds I will give you after my own heart, who will feed you with wisdom and perception (Jer. 3:15).

The shepherd is to illumine the minds and hearts of the people of Israel with the knowledge and understanding given him by God. In this use of the metaphor there again appears the notion of the shepherd as the representative of God. Verse 12 of the same chapter lays down a condition which Israel is to fulfill. Faithless as she has been to her God, she must return to Him. It is only after this return that the shepherd, God's delegate, can communicate his delegated wisdom to her.

Zechariah uses the parallel of shepherd and leader.

For the teraphim babble nothings and the seers see falsehood. Dreamers relate false dreams and offer vain consolation. This is why the people amble like sheep ; they need a shepherd. My anger burns toward the shepherds and I will punish the leaders (Zach. 10:2-3).

The parallel of shepherds and leaders is clear enough, but there is more than that here. It is necessary for the people of Israel that a proper source of authority be available to them. When it is not, as here, they wander like sheep without a shepherd. Elsewhere in Zechariah, the importance of the role of shepherd for the wellbeing of the people is made even clearer. It is a terrible fate to fall into the hands of an unworthy shepherd. This can happen only when God will ' no longer have pity.'¹

Jeremiah prophesies doom for Edom and quotes God's own words :

Edom shall become a horror.

. . . Like a lion coming up from the jungle of the Jordan against a strong sheepfold,

¹ Zach. 11:6

I will suddenly make him run away from her and I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is my equal? Who commands me? What shepherd [dares] oppose me? (Jer. 49:17-20)

In the light of other uses of the shepherd metaphor where the shepherd has been seen as acting 'in the strength of the Lord', and illuminating Israel with God's own knowledge, this passage underlines the notion of shepherd as delegate. Although the role of the shepherd as elsewhere described remains a lofty one, he can be replaced. Another can be set over the sheepfold at the Lord's pleasure. This is because, as previous quotations have shown, the authority which the shepherd has is not his own. They are special participations in the authority and wisdom of God. There are several other uses of the metaphor applied to kings in the act of ruling.¹ These all illustrate only the simple authority-motif of the image.

In our examination of the Old Testament metaphor of shepherd, we find that there is one other extensive use of the term beyond its application to the anointed, the king, the judge, the delegate acting with God's authority. God Himself is the shepherd *par excellence*. This is the prime term of the metaphor. Isaiah tells the reader :

Behold the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him . . . He will pasture his flock in the manner of a shepherd and with his arms gather the lambs and carry them. He will lead gently those that are with young (Is. 40:10).

The picture speaks for itself. Later Isaiah writes of God the shepherd who will call to prisoners and 'they will graze along the way; they will pasture in bare heights.'² Jeremiah describes God's special love for a repentant and punished Israel: 'The One Who routed Israel will gather her and keep her as a shepherd keeps a flock.'³ As early as Genesis this aspect of the shepherd has become an epithet of Israel's God. Jacob blesses Joseph and observes that he is under the special protection of 'The mighty one, the shepherd, Israel's rock.'⁴ Hosea acknowledges that the Lord indeed is shepherd, but points out an obstacle to the success of his shepherding. 'Israel is stubborn, even as a stubborn heifer. Can the Lord now feed them, like a lamb in broad pasture?'⁵ The prayer that God may shepherd His people occurs more than once in the Old Testament as in Micah :

O shepherd thy people with thy staff.
The flock and treasure that dwells alone . . .
Let them feed in Bashan and in Gilead as once they did (Mic. 7:12).

In the psalms, of course, the Lord is addressed with the epithet of

¹ Is. 56:11 and 63; Jer. 22:22 and 25:34-5 etc.

³ Jer. 31:10

⁴ Gen. 49:29

² Is. 49:9

⁵ Hos. 4:16

shepherd as with a beloved name which recurs again and again. 'Give ear, Israel's shepherd. You Who lead Joseph as You would a flock.'¹ 'Save the people and bless them. Be their shepherd and carry them for ever.'² Against this background, then, 'The Lord is my shepherd' takes on a new richness. This is no simple pastoral image, but the use of the word brings to mind an Old Testament world of connotations.

What may we conclude then from our study? Our Lord, in speaking to Peter in Jn. 21:16 chose a particular metaphor. The evangelist in recording the message of the Lord chose to record a metaphor with a particular semitic flavour. Jesus used a metaphor which would arouse particular connotations to the oriental mind. In order to determine them we have examined the Old Testament uses of this metaphorical expression and have found many dimensions or levels of meaning.

In the historical books, the figure is used of leaders, kings and judges, generally in the very act of leadership, dynamically acting under stress. The figure is used in situations which emphasise the fact that Israel's leaders share in divine authority and act as God's delegates in the use of that authority. This aspect of the image is particularly clear when applied to David and to Cyrus. The title shepherd is predicated of leaders in Israel who are good or bad; hence it is predicated of them as leaders, not as heroes. In the historical books of the Old Testament, to be a leader suffices to merit the title of shepherd for a man. The fact whether a man is a worthy leader or not is determined by reference to some description which goes beyond the mere use of the shepherd image. We have seen the metaphor applied to God Himself, Shepherd *par excellence* of the flock of Israel.

When Our Lord then chose the shepherd image of all possible images in entrusting his church to Peter, it was with the knowledge that the figure would be interpreted by his listeners in the light of the background we have described.

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¹ Ps. 80:1-2

² Ps. 28:9