

Metaphoric theology and God images in a hermeneutics for pastoral care and counselling

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ABSTRACT

Because of the recent development in pastoral care, a hermeneutic model is proposed. Metaphors in pastoral care and counselling are embedded in the life stories of parishioners. As an interpreter of Stories/stories, it is the diagnostic task of the pastor to make a pastoral assessment of the meaning and significance of these stories in terms of God images. In order to do that, the pastoral issues regarding encounter (partnership, companionship, commitment and intimacy) have been linked to the following pastoral metaphors in Scripture: shepherd, servant, wisdom and paraclete. With regard to metaphoric theology, God as Friend is our choice for a pastoral encounter which takes the notion of salvation seriously.

In pastoral counselling pastoral diagnosis is of great value, because the pastor's function is hermeneutical, i.e. to interpret and to understand in order to facilitate change, foster growth and enhance faith development. The pastor's task is to help people to interpret God in terms of their lives and problems. This interpretation is determined decisively by two factors: people's understanding and image of God, as well as the quality of their maturity in faith. With this in view, the question of the unique character of a pastoral diagnosis is at stake.

I would like to advocate the hypothesis that interpretation in pastoral care deals with metaphors about God which not only reflect the dogmatic and theological frame of reference, but the meaning dimension regarding several life issues and existential problems. Therefore metaphors are embedded in the life stories of parishioners and could be viewed as an indication of the meaning dimension of these metaphors within social contexts. This challenges pastoral theology to develop diagnostic criteria which undergird the process of identification and interpretation of religious metaphors.

Furthermore, the underlying assumption of this article is that a pastoral hermeneutics is about the technique of listening and storytelling. It is through the process of listening that the pastor can be involved in the identification of the meaning of religious metaphors such as God images.

The pastoral act of listening to stories is a creative event because it gives narrative sense to otherwise meaningless events:

“When a pastor listens to a parishioner with patient intensity, the very act of listening give narrative sense to what would otherwise be only trivial gossip, or a fragment of complaint, or an isolated anecdote. The sustained attentive listening imparts meaning to what a person says: details can be perceived to have significance if a person listens to them significantly”¹.

In pastoral care it is therefore of the uttermost importance to take parishioners’ use of God metaphors seriously:

“The pastoral act of listening enables a person to recognize correspondence between what is denigrated and devaluated by others as mundane with the actual pattern of God’s redemption”².

1 THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF A PASTORAL DIAGNOSIS

It could be stated that a pastoral diagnosis is about a dynamic process of understanding and analysis of information, focusing on the integration of relevant data concerning the character of faith. Such a process of integration takes place in the presence of God against the background of scriptural information and existing images of God. Thus, pastoral diagnosis is a process within which the events concerning a person’s life are understood from a particular theological perspective: eschatology as the characteristic of the Christian faith. Furthermore, a pastoral diagnosis adopts the character of an existential hermeneutics within the framework of a parishioner’s belief system. However, a pastoral diagnosis does not aim for purely an existential analysis; it does not wish to understand human behaviour merely in terms of choices and relations. Neither does a pastoral diagnosis focus mainly on psychoanalysis; nor does it aim to understand human behaviour merely in terms of conscious or unconscious events. Primarily, a pastoral diagnosis focuses on an assessment of faith in terms of God images and the ultimate meaning of life.

The focus on faith does not imply that a pastoral diagnosis ignores emotions and experiences. Important to realise is that a pastoral analysis is about a process of theological evaluation. C W Taylor describes it as “a theological assessment”. “Theological assessment is the art of thinking theologically about beliefs that undergird parishioners’ feelings and actions”³.

In view of the effective development of pastoral resources for counselling, it is necessary that the whole question of diagnosis be

examined anew. P W Pruyser is convinced that diagnosis is a substantial part of pastoral counselling. Therefore he is of the opinion that Rogers's negative evaluation of diagnosis gave it an uncalled-for unilateral and negative connotation⁴. According to Pruyser, the reason why diagnosis fell into misuse was the result of a moralistic theology which aimed to classify the parishioner beforehand out of moral principles. The fact that the pastor often used only the field of the conscience and prescriptions to obtain knowledge about human behaviour, was the cause of justice not being done to the entire human being as a person. Often specific guidance was so authoritative that the person received no hearing. Consequently, the pastoral counselling was more prescriptive than truly hermeneutical (understanding and clarification).

Pruyser contends that it is the task of every professional person to obtain clarity first about all the person's problems before deciding about any form of treatment. Therefore he defines diagnosis as:

"Diagnosis in any helping profession is the exploratory process in which the troubled person is given an opportunity to assess and evaluate himself in a defined perspective, in which certain observations are made and specific data come to light, guided by conceptual or operational tools, in a personal relationship with a resource person"⁵.

The importance of a pastoral diagnosis is confirmed by the research of J T de Jongh van Arkel⁶. He points out that a diagnosis helps the pastor in the process of organizing and connecting relevant data. It helps the pastor to generate hypotheses in the light of which both pastor and parishioner can apply the truth of Scripture better to a certain area of the parishioner's life. Diagnosis therefore intensifies the quality of a pastoral assessment because it sheds light on all relevant data. It helps the pastor to summarize in order to attain integration. In fact, assessing, summarizing and eliciting could be regarded as skills which help the pastor to detect all the facts and beliefs that are part of the key feelings and actions which constitute parishioners' problems and joys.

The statement that diagnosis and pastoral counselling are linked inseparably, is not so far-fetched. But then allowance must definitely be made for the following assumption: a diagnosis does not focus on a procedure of classification through which human behaviour is categorized and typologized in advance. Diagnosis is simply the interpretation of a person's total existence, focusing on clarification, establishing connections, organizing data and the interpretation of behaviour in terms of the quest for meaning. A pastoral diagnosis thus focuses on the organizing, summarizing

and interpretation of data, establishing links between faith and life; between God image and self-understanding; between scriptural truth and existential context.

The theme faith and life in a pastoral diagnosis means that pastoral care is interested in the effect of faith on a person's emotional processes and feelings (affective dimension). Naturally, the connection between faith and personal motivation is also important (conative dimension). Because faith is formulated by means of existing concepts, ideas and perceptions, the connection between faith and reason is very important for a hermeneutical process of understanding. Faith, indeed, is a form of knowledge of God which thus includes a rational component (cognitive dimension). The human conscience and norms play an integral role in behaviour. Hence the important link between faith and ethics (ethical dimension). The human existence is also embedded into a network of relations and structures. Therefore a pastoral diagnosis cannot ignore the connection between faith and the socio-political dimension of a parishioner's life (contextual dimension). A pastoral diagnosis focuses on the interplay between faith and its fields of application within the anthropological data: the affective, conative, cognitive, ethical and cultural dimensions of human behaviour. All this anthropological data is interwoven into the language of faith implemented by a parishioner. Therefore, it is the task of a pastoral diagnosis to analyse and understand faith metaphors to determine exactly what the parishioner means by faith in God and how he/she applies it in concrete situations.

Thus far two concepts have been used which could be fairly confusing, i.e. diagnosis and analysis, which are associated immediately with the psychological context in which these concepts are normally used. What is meant by a pastoral diagnosis and a pastoral analysis? Essentially, both a pastoral diagnosis and a pastoral analysis are about a pastoral hermeneutics. The objective of such a hermeneutics is to apply the salvation in Christ so that man discovers meaning which fosters growth in faith. A C Heuer⁷ speaks of "hermeneutics of application to life" and states that the application of faith truths at the level of human behaviour does not imply a new type of psychology that is enforced on theology. He refers to Jung's declaration, taken up by Paul Tillich, i.e. "there is no revealed psychology". A pastoral hermeneutics does not envisage an analysis of God's nature and its application to the human personality by means of psychoanalysis. Pastoral hermeneutics seeks to clarify the significance and existential implications of the encounter between God and man, focusing on the discovery of meaning and growth of faith. In a somewhat different

vein, but along the same lines, Heuer⁸ makes the following comment about pastoral hermeneutics: "It is a badly needed application of the Christian Scriptures to the problems of being human and behaving in a growthful manner".

When the concepts "pastoral analysis" and "pastoral diagnosis" are used, they refer to the same issue: the understanding, interpretation and clarification of faith within the context of existential questions regarding the quest for meaning. In both an analysis and diagnosis, the significance of salvation, as expressed in God images and faith behaviour, are at stake.

The concept "analysis" refers to the critical function of observation and rational reflection. Therefore the work of the analyst is involved with observing the activity of God in the individual's experience and relating this encounter to the goal of wholeness as the person's ultimate need. That is why this particular function is referred to in pastoral analysis as diagnostic theology⁹.

For the sake of greater clarity we distinguish as follows between a pastoral diagnosis and analysis. Pastoral diagnosis concerns the process of evaluating and assessing faith processes in the light of all role-playing factors regarding our disposition, conduct and social context. The "what" of a pastoral diagnosis is the quality of mature faith. Pastoral analysis concerns a more specific factor which plays a role in the development of a mature faith. In a pastoral analysis (as a subdivision of a pastoral diagnosis) three factors may be identified, viz faith, religion and God images. In our search for diagnostic criteria, and for the development of our argument, we limit ourselves mainly to the issue of God images.

In summary, a pastoral diagnosis regards the process, mode and significance of faith while a pastoral analysis is just a more specific component of the process of assessment regarding the what and content of faith. The fact that we link pastoral diagnosis to faith, religion and the concept of God, means that we prefer a more substantial approach to a mere functional approach.

G Fitchett¹⁰ distinguishes between a functional and a more substantial approach. He describes his model as a functional approach: "This approach focuses more on how a person makes meaning in his or her life than on what that specific meaning is". His model is known as the "7 x 7 model for spiritual assessment" and consists of two main dimensions: a holistic and a spiritual dimension¹¹. He divides the holistic dimension into the following sub dimensions: medical, psychological, psycho-social, family system, ethnic and cultural, social and welfare, and spiritual. He divides the spiritual dimension into the following seven sub

dimensions: faith convictions and meaning; vocation and ethical consequences; experience and emotion; courage and growth; ritual and religious practices; community systems; and authority and guidance.

The value of Fitchett's model lies in the various components of an assessing process being integrated. By "assessing" he implies: "both a statement of a perception and a process of information gathering and interpreting"¹². His model focuses on improving the quality of the processes in pastoral counselling. To Fitchett¹³ the value of such a "spiritual assessment" is the following: it serves as a basis for effective and purposeful pastoral action; it is part of a more profound process of communication; it provides clarity about contracting and program designs/plans of action; it founds personal responsibility and accountability; it deepens the quality of our capacity and sensitivity for discernment; it is more cost effective; it offers a scientific basis for better control of research data in pastoral care; it influences the pastoral view of health and the pastor's feeling of professional identity and competence.

Fitchett's functional model is discussed here because it should be viewed as a supplement to a more substantial model. Some may agree with Fitchett that the greatest value of a pastoral diagnosis lies in it helping the pastor to move from a subjective level of reflection to a more objective level. In this manner a greater measure of planning and structure in counselling is achieved. Making an accurate diagnosis helps the pastor to listen and understand with greater sensitivity. This also helps the pastor to combine effective listening with purposeful action planning. The greatest value of a pastoral diagnosis is that it contributes towards directing faith specifically to the problem and growth areas of people's lives. Scripture can be handled organically, and made relevant to parishioners' dealing with crucial problems by means of a pastoral diagnosis.

Should a pastoral diagnosis wish to focus mainly on content (a substantial approach) in order to clarify the phenomenon of faith, the issue of metaphors cannot be ignored. The further implication of our focus on metaphors and God images is that a diagnosis is orientated to the more cognitive dimension of a pastoral assessment.

2 METAPHORIC THEOLOGY

Our choice for a metaphoric model implies that the paradigm in which we argue and think is a hermeneutic one. In contrast to an explanatory model which seeks to determine the essence, substance and character of things as well as being in terms of a cause and effect approach, a metaphoric model

tries to bring clarification in terms of the significance of concepts within relations. Instead of the traditional subject-object division, a metaphoric model claims to be heuristic; it claims to be a paradigm switch away from understanding the being of God in terms of ontology to an understanding of the meaning and significance of the name "God" within different contexts. In this regard C E Braaten¹⁴ identifies three different contexts which influence our speaking of God today: the ecclesial, the academic and the secular. The first refers to the language of prayer and praise; the second to philosophical questions and the last to the secular realm of social, political and economic spheres of activity.

Braaten¹⁵ identifies three modes of God-language. The academic world inquiring into ways of speaking about God - a descriptive monological approach; the dialogical model of prophecy or proclamation, speaking for God, which is a prescriptive task; the liturgical mode of speaking to God in prayer and praise which is an ascriptive act. In a pastoral assessment, whether we speak about, for, or to God, our task is to determine the significance of God-talk with regard to the quest for meaning. Our stance is hermeneutical regarding the metaphoric meaning of God-language. Therefore it does not matter whether the speaking of God refers to a more theocentric trend which, in terms of dogmatics, is deeply suspicious of anthropomorphic or homocentric models of God-language. The other trend is Christocentric which holds that Jesus, as subject, gives to God, as predicate, its definitive content and meaning¹⁶. The hermeneutic trend in pastoral care only wants to assess the influence of God-language on faith development. In a pastoral approach we are interested in people's "experience of God", in what Braaten¹⁷ calls "the existential locus of God-language". Our stance can be summarized by the following quotation:

"The question of God arises out of the human quest for meaning, it is, thus, a structural dimension of human existence. Statements and symbols about God function to answer questions concerning the nature and destiny of human existence"¹⁸.

This is what P Berger calls "signals of transcendence"¹⁹.

To a certain extent metaphoric theology is to start theology "from below", from the side of the human subject inquiring into the possibilities of meaning in existence and history. It does not begin "from above", from revelation regarding the essence of God's being. A pastoral hermeneutics endeavours to trace significant signs of meaningful experiences of transcendence and mystery in human events and language. This is where the issue of metaphoric language comes into play.

By making use of a metaphorical approach in pastoral theology, we should be aware of the underlying assumption. In metaphorical theology

the assumption is that all talk of God is indirect: "No words or phrases refer directly to God, for God-language can refer only through the detour of a description that properly belongs elsewhere"²⁰. This does not imply that God is not "real". The implication is that the reality of God could only be described in words or phrases used inappropriately. However, in terms of faith, the reality of God is a meaningful and indeed a realistic and substantial issue.

The difference between a model and a metaphor is as follows. A metaphor invites us to speak of God symbolically in terms of concepts well-known to us, in order to consider some qualities associated with that specific concept as one partial, but perhaps illuminating way of speaking of certain aspects of God's relationship to us. A model now is a metaphor with "saying power". "A model is a metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation"²¹. Hence the implication that models can be revised because metaphors change over a period of time. Therefore metaphorical theology is more than hermeneutics or construction. It could best be described as "heuristics", a way of finding out, discovering, in order to comprehend and interpret. "This heuristic theology will be one that experiments and tests, that thinks in as-if fashion, that imagines possibilities that are novel, that dares to think differently"²².

It becomes clear that a metaphorical stance in pastoral care has the implication that the pastor functions as a facilitator and interpreter of meanings through the common perspective of faith. A metaphorical approach in pastoral care can only be successful if such a common ground exists. J Hick²³ makes a distinction between metaphorical and literal speech. The latter refers to meaning in a lexicographical sense. Metaphorical speech is indicated by the derivation of the word from the Greek *metaphorein*, to transfer: "There is a transfer of meaning. One term is illuminated by attaching to it some of the associations of another, so that metaphor is 'that trope, or figure of speech, in which we speak of one thing in terms suggestive of another'"²⁴. Hick argues further that the function of metaphor is that it serves to promote communication and community. For this to happen, the effectiveness of metaphor as a form of communication depends upon a common reservoir of shared associations - a system of associated commonplaces²⁵.

The previous exposition poses a few questions: is it necessary for pastoral theology to make use of a paradigm switch? Could a metaphorical model help us to find a God concept which could enhance communication and community? Another question emerges: How, then, must we comprehend God?

Inter alia then, especially S McFague²⁶ strives towards such a new metaphorical theological concept. Because of the fact that God is often conceptualized in the tradition of the church as King, Lord, Ruler and Patriarch, she proposes another metaphor:

"I will suggest God as mother (father), lover, and friend. If the world is imagined as self-expressive of God, if it is a 'sacrament' - the outward and visible presence or body of God... Would not the metaphors of parents, lovers, and friends be suggestive, with their implications of creation, nurture, passionate concern, attraction, respect, support, cooperation, mutuality?²⁷"

Choosing a certain metaphor is extremely difficult. So, for example, in the pastoral encounter the Father metaphor could evoke various negative associations from people's childhoods. Anna-Maria Rizzuto²⁸ contends that concepts of God are established during childhood as a result of the child's quest for objects which symbolize security and intimacy. Naturally parents then act as role models which, to the child, represent God and have a vital function in establishing their understanding of God.

The connection between God's Fatherhood and a patriarchal culture could also arouse negative associations. Women could, for example, experience the term "Fatherhood of God" as a symbol of oppression. Here S Terrien's opinion is noteworthy, viz. that the term should be viewed less against a patriarchal background and more within the whole question of the Bible's control of influences emanating from the idolatry in the Near Eastern culture. According to Terrien²⁹ critics do not keep the following factor in mind: "They did not pay attention to the stress of prophets and psalmists on fatherhood as metaphor of grace and motherly compassion".

The fact that God was not specifically addressed as "mother", should be conceived of as follows:

"The answer is that they (Hebraic theologians) reacted against the allurements of the Mother Goddess cult, because they somehow sensed the difference between true divinity and deified nature"³⁰.

Terrien refers to Jesus' use of the name "Father".

The name Father, which he favoured as a designation of God, paradoxically reflected his radical overthrow of patriarchy. Jesus intended a metaphorical name that meant neither mastery over slaves, nor tyranny over women and children, but, on the contrary, tenderness and care and responsibility for the growth of a new family. Moreover, for Jesus the notion of divine fatherhood definitely did not mean the physiological bond of paternity with its repressed archetype of oedipal rebellion, which depth psychology and anthropology have emphasized in our time. For Him the

name Father evoked a transcendence voluntarily curbed by self-immolation³¹.

For the purpose of a paradigm switch in the pastoral encounter and the important role of a metaphorical approach in the pastoral theology, it could be said that images of God must keep in mind dynamic contexts and fields of meaning. In the interpretation of people's concepts of God in the pastoral encounter, the pastor must be aware of various nuances of meaning; also of his/her own concept of God. It is of great importance that a pastor should realise that a metaphoric approach in pastoral care cannot be separated from his/her dogmatic convictions, as well as from the immediate ecclesial context of ministry. Hence the complexity of a pastoral assessment.

For identifying and assessing God images, extreme care is necessary. God images are a complex issue within which cultural concepts, ecclesial confessions and dogmas, questions about philosophical and anthropological concepts play an important role. This means that no pure, correct (orthodoxy) or final image of God exists which could communicate God credibly and meaningfully to people. Therefore, in utilising and applying a metaphoric model in counselling, the following guidelines should be considered:

- * Each pastor has a unique image of God which reflects his/her own experience of God and what God means to him/her personally. Both the pastor's and parishioner's understanding of God is influenced by subjective and existential factors.
- * The pastor's ecclesiastical tradition and dogma influences his/her evaluation. For example, the following are possible: a Reformed concept of God with the emphasis on a revealing and proclaiming God; a Roman Catholic and Anglo-Saxon concept of God with the emphasis on an incarnated God; a Lutheran concept of God with the emphasis on a suffering God; a Third World concept of God with the emphasis on a liberating Exodus God.
- * The pastor should communicate great sensitivity for each parishioner's concept of God. Here particular reserve and reticence is required. Because of the large variety of discourses and metaphors about God, the pastor must realise that each parishioner's image of God is unique. To alter a person's concept of God can be extremely painful and very traumatic. Great sensitivity and care should be communicated.

* A pastoral diagnosis should not be assessed in terms of ethics. Thus it is not about the question whether it is a good or bad, correct or erroneous concept of God. A *theological* concept should never be analysed and assessed in a moralistic way. Rather, it is about the question how a certain image of God is associated with various scriptural metaphors and life experiences. Thus a problematic understanding of God is possible, which could give rise to dysfunctional or pathological faith behaviour. The question then is what the norm is for criticizing and challenging. I see it thus: an image of God is problematic if it makes one rigid, not free, inhuman or anxious and if it creates delusions³².

The discussion of metaphors has been directed towards alerting the pastor to the fact that in his/her interpreting and facilitating function, the secret of care and comfort resides more in the pastor's being function than in his/her knowing and doing functions.

"For the pastoral counselor... metaphors are parallel to theological presuppositions that being is more essential to enabling growth than doing, that presence is more evocative of change than strategy, that calling persons to change (repentance), choice (responsibility), and clarity (integrity) are central to the counseling task"³³.

3 GOD IMAGES AND METAPHORS IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

Pastoral theology seeks a biblical metaphor which can be used as a figure of speech within the theological vocabulary to present the unknown (revelation) in terms of the known (creation) comprehensibly and meaningfully. Choosing a certain metaphor thus immediately implies limitation and unilateralism; yet this is necessary on behalf of the issue in question in pastoral theology.

Metaphoric theology is an attempt to take the meaning dimension of God-languages and contexts seriously. Its objective is to understand the process of naming God in terms of real life issues. Metaphoric theology enhances the dynamic interplay between God and existential events. It creates a fresh and open approach which frees the pastor from a rigid and biased dogmatic attitude. In counselling it prevents a traditionalistic indoctrination which hampers the art of sensitive listening and assessing.

The discussion of metaphoric theology brings us to the burning issue of God images in pastoral ministry. The question emerges whether it is possible to identify metaphors in Scripture which shed light on those images which depict God in terms of an identification with human needs

and suffering. The metaphors should therefore convey the meaning of compassion, help and consolation in terms of God's involvement with existential issues.

From Scripture several possible metaphors could be derived. In the light of our search for metaphors conveying the pastoral dimension of God's involvement in history, the following four have been identified by pastoral theology: shepherd, servant, wisdom and paraclete. The various metaphors therefore indeed are intended for developing sensitivity (the shepherd metaphor), conciliation and woundedness (the servant metaphor), discernment and insight (the wisdom metaphor), support and empowerment (the paracletic metaphor). Hence the following further discussion of the four metaphors.

3.1 The shepherd metaphor: care as a mode of pastoral ministry (sensitivity)

When God told man to "rule" over the earth (Gn 1:26), He did not want him to exploit the earth, but rather care for the entire creation. The Hebrew word translated into "rule", was derived from the Semitic pastoral milieu and is a shepherd metaphor implying sensitive and compassionate caring. Man was told to care for God's earth, not to destroy it. This instruction by God corresponds with his own style. God cares for the entire creation in a very special way, and like a shepherd He cares for man. Psalm 23 is a classic example: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want".

The fact that God is depicted as a shepherd, is in sharp contrast to the use of this concept in the Ancient East where the title of shepherd was an honorary title for an Eastern ruler³⁴. The Sumerian and Babylonian kings were shepherds in the sense of status and authority. However, God was a Shepherd in the sense of grace, love and faithfulness. Old Testament people knew that they were safe and secure within God's shepherding care. This care is manifested through God's covenantal grace and expressed by Israel being the people belonging to Jahwe's flock, about whom he shed many a tear (Jr 13:17). Thus, in a very special sense, the covenantal congregation becomes God's flock (cf Is 40:11: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young"; see also Ezk 34:31; Mi 7:14; Zch 10:3; Ps 100:3). In the history of Israel God constantly proved, through his pastoral care, that indeed He was their God and remains faithful to his covenantal promise: "You my sheep, the sheep of my

pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezk 34:31). During the course of Israel's history the shepherd metaphor was also conferred to the Messiah who would act as God's Shepherd. Thus the messianic hope was kept alive and fostered by the shepherd metaphor: "[I] will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd" (Ezk 34:23).

During New Testament times the shepherd was a despicable figure, yet this was the metaphor which Christ chose to express God's love for sinners on the road to perdition. In contrast to the hardhearted haughtiness of the Pharisees (Lk 15:4-6), Jesus is the messianic Shepherd who gathers the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 10:6). His compassionate love and sincere mercy are communicated (Mt 9:36). To prove his mercy and love, Jesus had to lay down his life for the sheep (Mt 26:31; Jh 10:11), while focusing on the redemption and appearance of his flock on Judgement Day. Then Jesus will judge the nations: "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Mt 25:32). Interesting about this eschatological dimension in the work of the Shepherd, is that to qualify as a sheep, a social criterion is being issued. The criterion is not worshipping, but social ministry for the needy fellow-man:

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Mt 25:35-36).

These verbs express concrete charity within the daily social practice. In this way the mode of the shepherd reflects, and the shepherdly function attains a social and welfare dimension.

The shepherding mode is also transferred to the officials in the congregation. "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Ac 20:28). The connection between Jesus' crucifixion and his caring task as Shepherd is confirmed by 1 Peter 2:24-25. Now Jesus becomes the Shepherd of the human soul (psyche in the sense of total revelation of the human life before God) as He is the Great Shepherd because of his unique mediatory work and the blood of the everlasting covenant. This is the specific emphasis of the epistle to the Hebrews (cf Heb 13:20). Jesus is the Shepherd focusing on reconciliatory peace brought about by his pastoral care for all mankind.

It is clear that the meaning of *poimainein* in the New Testament is linked to God's covenantal care for Israel, concretely expressed in the

charity and love revealed in Jesus' service and fulfilled in his sacrificial death. When this term is conferred onto the pastoral carer and his office (Ezk 34; 1 Pt 5:2-4; Ac 20:28; Jh 21:15-17) the pastoral mode becomes an instrument through which God's care is displayed: salvation. For pastoral care the meaning of the shepherd metaphor is that it connects the unique meaning of pastoral care, as compassionate and loving charity, to Jesus Christ's sacrificial and redeeming love. In the shepherding function pastoral care concretely represents God's caring support for people in need. Social and political needs are also accommodated in this shepherding function. Thus the mode of pastoral care is about more than human sympathy: the compassion of the covenantal God Himself. Because of the defenselessness of the sheep in God's flock, guidance, cherishing and protection simultaneously infer the entire congregation to be the Lord's flock.

3.2 The servant metaphor (wounded healer): service as therapy and pastoral identification (*pathos*)

The servant metaphor in the Scriptures communicates the identification of God with human suffering in a very special sense. The servant metaphor uniquely links God's compassion to human suffering as a result of sin, illness, persecution, disruption and death. It indicates God's *pathos* and compassion for our human needs.

The metaphor *ēbēd Jahwe* (Greek: *pais Theou*) figures strongly in Isaiah's prophesy. Without further discussing the question whether the suffering servant of the Lord was Isaiah himself, another historical or messianic figure, the important meaning of this metaphor is the following: (a) in the image of a servant, the Servant announces the will of God (Is 42:3) and God Himself confirms his faithful covenantal care (Is 42:6); (b) the Servant confirms God's sovereignty and the maintenance of justice (Is 49:1-6); (c) the Servant confirms the motif of comfort, sustenance and support (Is 50:4-9); (d) in the Servant's suffering He acts vicariously and is punished and abused on behalf of others (Is 52:13-53:12).

God's identification with human suffering clearly comes to the fore in the work of Jesus Christ. He is God's *doulos* par excellence (Mt 12:18; Ac 4:27). In Luke 22:37 Jesus applies the suffering servant dictum of Isaiah 53 to Himself. In Mark 10:45 Jesus' service is linked to the fact that He gave his life vicariously for many. That the servant image of Jesus cannot be separated from his vicarious suffering, is clear. In God's Servant's redeeming work He suffers on behalf of people (Mk 14:24).

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). The most concrete expression of the suffering of the Servant of God, fully identifying with human need, can be found in Philippians 2:6-11. In the humiliation of the Son of God He assumes the role of a slave and becomes equal to human beings (v.7).

Applied to pastoral care this means that the servant metaphor conveys the idea of sacrifice and identification with suffering human beings in need. Pastoral care itself is not a replacement of the sacrifice of Christ, but communicates Christ's vicarious suffering with the view to healing. Therefore the LXX often does not translate slave into *doulos*, but into *therapon*. In the New Testament the verb *therapeuo* mainly indicates healing³⁵. It is used in a very special sense to describe the healing miracles of Jesus and his disciples (cf Mk 3:2; Mt 4:23, 9:35).

That Jesus' therapeutic works are connected to God's promises regarding the suffering of humankind is important. According to Matthew 8:16-17: "When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases'".

Jesus' "therapy" comes to the fore in his healing of people possessed by demons (Mt 8:16; Mk 1:34, 3:10; Lk 4:40). From this information it is therefore important to point out the connection between therapy and Jesus' messianic fulfillment of God's promises. Jesus' therapy refers directly to God's sovereignty over all evil (powers). Therefore we can conclude that the servant metaphor, as linked to Jesus' healing of the sick and exorcising demons, links suffering and therapy so that suffering humankind can come under the sovereignty of the Kingdom of God. Thus therapy, in the process of healing, is a symbol of God's victorious sovereignty over all destructive powers. "The real miracle is victory in the conflict with forces which struggle for mastery over this cosmos"³⁶.

Therefore, the therapy of pastoral care is about the dimension of healing and recovery, linked to the sovereignty of the Kingdom of God. Healing has a symbolic character and points the suffering person to God's victory over all destructive powers.

Not only is this conclusion confirmed by the term *therapeuo*, but also by the term *iaomai* used alternatively for healing and recovery. Recovery is linked to Jesus' authoritative words (Mt 8:8: "The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed'") as well as to faith (Mt 8:13: "Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go! It will be done just as you

believed it would'. And his servant was healed at that very hour"). Faith is not considered to be an essential precondition for recovery, but an important instrument in the process of recovery; "Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted'. And her daughter was healed from that very hour" (Mt 15:28).

Therefore it can be said that pastoral therapy is linked to an identification process between God and suffering on the grounds of Jesus Christ's messianic work. The issue of recovery in pastoral counselling thus expresses the fact that the service and diaconic character of pastoral care possesses a therapeutic dimension which allows people to recover at all levels. Hence, not only a spiritual or psychic recovery, but also physical. As a therapeutic event, recovery is symbolic of the reality of salvation as embodied in the serving Christ. Recovery points to the victorious dimension of God's faithful covenantal care and is accompanied by priestly actions, authoritative words and receptive faith. The focal point of the process of recovery is the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God has the meaning of the healing of human life, liberation. When human life is drawn into the power of the Kingdom of God, renewal and healing takes place and becomes whole. Salvation comes over man. Life is saved. Man becomes human anew³⁷.

The servant metaphor is thus linked in a special way to the healing, recovery or reconciling function of pastoral care, which demands a very special disposition from the pastor, that of woundedness.

H J M Nouwen draws attention to pastors' weakness and brokenness. Especially in our modern world they experience this alienation and loneliness intensely. This loneliness is often the worst element of their woundedness. They have to care for lonely people while intensely aware of their own weakness: "He is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others"³⁸. "Woundedness" not signifying an exhibitionist display of your own painful experiences to others, but rather, in your brokenness and pain sharing the pain and suffering of others, resulting in your own growth to what Nouwen³⁹ describes as hospitality and caring love. The latter is the ability to make peace with your own pain in order to make room for the pain of others. Thus the pastor brings healing: "It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and the pain of another, but invites him to recognize his loneliness on a level where it can be shared"⁴⁰.

The suffering servant metaphor and the wounded healer does not mean that suffering suddenly disappears; on the contrary, according to

Nouwen, our suffering grows to the point where it can be shared in an environment of love and understanding. In God's identification with our suffering through the wounded Christ, God does not summarily remove our suffering. No, it becomes even more painful. We are compelled to face our own suffering squarely. The difference being: with the Crucified one can share one's suffering, generating hope and a new vision. Suffering is cared for through sharing pain: "A minister is not a doctor whose primary task is to take away pain. Rather, he deepens the pain to a level where it can be shared"⁴¹. In this way the servant metaphor conveys healing or therapy.

3.3 The wise fool metaphor: paradox as an indication of true pastoral discernment and understanding

Wisdom is one of the most basic points of departure for a sensitive and caring perspective on life in the Scriptures. It originates in love for and awe of God. According to Proverbs 9:10, wisdom begins with "the fear of the Lord". The sensitive power of discernment concerning the essence of life begins with knowledge about God.

In Scriptures wisdom is associated with the human relationship to creation and daily life. R E Murphy⁴² poses the burning question whether wisdom can be viewed as a legitimate expression of Israel's faith. Although Old Testament exegetes like W Zimmerli and C Westermann have questions about this, G von Rad held the viewpoint that wisdom literature is part of Israel's faith in God. Murphy⁴³ concludes that wisdom plays a crucial role in Israel's experience of faith, especially because it is based on the principle of God's actions in the creation and everyday life. In short, the wisdom experience is to be described as a faith experience. The shaping of Israel's views of the world, and of the activity of God behind and in it, was done in an ambience of faith, and was characterized by trust and reliance upon God. Israel's knowledge of God in wisdom literature runs via experience and the creation.

Most important to grasp is that wisdom (*hokmah*) does not so much refer to God's saving acts in history, but to daily human experience within the world, which, as a result of God's creation, is well-ordered and good. This experiential knowledge is, for example, expressed in the sayings in Proverbs: "The saying is a sentence usually expressed in the indicative mood and based upon experience"⁴⁴. This is expressed in instructions and exhortations, the latter in the form of a positive or negative imperative. Wisdom could also appear in the form of a poem (Pr 2:1-32), without the

intention of educating or directing.

Scriptural wisdom should not be interpreted dogmatically. It is more than theory and rational knowledge. Wisdom embraces practical skills and is linked to human creativity (cf Ex 31:3-5, 36:1)⁴⁵. It is an attempt to comprehend human beings from the experience of world order, thus formulating guidelines for action. For this reason wisdom is about the art of life (how must I live?), morality (how should I act and deal with my neighbour?), as well as piety (how should I act in the presence of God?).

For pastoral care the importance of wisdom lies in the fact that it takes human experience within concrete relationships seriously. It is also directed to decision making and acting. They deal with the concrete, how and when and why certain actions are to be performed and certain insights to be appropriated (cf Pr 15:23, 25:11; Sir 4:23)⁴⁶. Human actions and experiences are assessed within two acceptable structures, i.e. that the creation is an ordered whole and offers security, also that society is based on a type of basic trust in the stability of reality and the faithfulness of God. In this manner wisdom offers the insight that pastoral care indeed is involved with the creation, the world and human experience:

“... the world is the showcase for divine activity. It is not contemplated in and for itself, but in relation to the creator and to living things that occupy it. It is not a cosmos that works mechanically, but a happening that occurs over and over for all its inhabitants (Ps 104).

Hence the human experience of the world is so important”⁴⁷.

It can thus be said that wisdom or the wise is a metaphor for God's active involvement in our human experience and creation. Hence the attitude of the wise is that of praise and wonder (Ps 19, Ps 104). Wisdom is also a metaphor for our quest for human dignity and justice (Pr 1:3, 2:9, 21:3, 22:8). “We should value wisdom because it will help us to understand how to deal with other people: rich and poor, king and subject, neighbors and strangers. Wisdom is the key to proper social relationships”⁴⁸.

In the New Testament wisdom is also related to morality and the development of virtues, of which James 3:13-18 and Galatians 5:19-23 are good examples. One of the most important characteristics of wisdom is that it consists of contrasts and paradoxes. The best example can be found in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, where Christ is portrayed as God's wisdom. This wisdom is revealed ambivalently, i.e. folly and weakness. The wisdom metaphor unmasks reality with the aid of an apparent contradiction: a crucified and suffering God (weakness) is the power of our salvation.

In a certain sense the wisdom metaphor is related to comedy: “In comedy those who see themselves as wise are made to look foolish, and

those who are foolish are found to have wisdom”⁴⁹. Comedy switches the roles and imparts meaning to a current view by means of a paradox. Thus the wisdom metaphor reframes reality: “After all the kingdom of God about which the Bible speaks is a kingdom that one enters, not like a king or at the right hand of a king, but on bended knee. The self-righteous are turned aside at the gate, and sinners admitted instead”⁵⁰.

This switch of the roles by means of a paradox could indeed be described as *God’s humour*. Umberto Eco⁵¹ asks the question whether God can laugh. Satan is too serious to laugh: “Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, to make truth laugh, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth”. The wisdom of the biblical message and scriptural truth indeed possesses such a comical and paradoxical character.

On the grounds of 2 Corinthians 3:18 A V Campbell⁵² uses the metaphor of a wise fool. The task of the wise fool is to unmask: “He appears as the essential counterpoise to human arrogance, pomposity and despotism”. By simple means the pastor wishes to liberate people from superficial talk and bring them back to the art of silence; it wishes to liberate people from their professionalism and quest for achievement and self-protection and return them to sacrificial and faithful love⁵³. The wise fool wishes to dispel the deadly seriousness with comedy.

That the metaphor of wisdom indeed has the task to liberate people by means of a paradox - free even to laugh again - can indeed be regarded as one of the important functions of pastoral care, because, in terms of biblical wisdom, “God’s insight” is that weakness (human dependence and sacrificing self-denial) creates strength (security). This generates the insight and power of discernment to assess reality by means of humour through contradictions and paradoxes. One of the best examples of the paradoxical character of humour, the humour of the wise fool, is to mock death like Paul: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:55).

When pastoral care starts implementing the comedy and humour of wisdom, then we probably are very near to the heart of theology, because theology is more than mere *scientia* (rational knowledge). According to Augustine theology is also, and especially, *sapientia*: to respond by loving God, to enjoy and have intercourse with Him. “The challenge is for the apostolic faith to capacitate believers to desire and delight in God so that their dignity, relationships to persons and things, and visions of human excellence and a just social order stem from delight”⁵⁴.

3.4 The paraklesis metaphor: comforting as pastoral mediation of salvation

From preceding information it is clear how different metaphors convey the recovery and preservation of human beings with the view to their ultimate humanity and human dignity before God. Everything focuses around God's Kingdom activities which concretely figure in Jesus Christ's serving and sacrificial death. However, it is difficult to portray the richly chequered extent of the scriptural caring concept. Therefore, in his study on the care of souls in the New Testament, Bolkestein points out that a variety of diverging words are used. This also proves the varied richness and differentiation of the New Testament approach. A biblical care of souls is familiar with not only one possible approach to man, but several⁵⁵. The quest for a descriptive metaphor, in which both the mode and content of pastoral care is justified, must therefore keep Scripture's open dynamic approach in mind.

In the discussion it has become clear that the responsibility regarding the congregation's spiritual welfare is an important factor in the shepherding metaphor. This concept of caring for and feeling responsible for the welfare of the Lord's flock comes to the fore in the concept *episkopein* = to supervise and care for. The elder's supervising function (Ac 20:28) is not intended as control and inspection, but as care. This stems from a feeling of responsibility for edifying the congregation. The concept *paramytheisthai* again emphasizes the concept of encouragement (Phlp 2:1; 1 Th 2:12). The preparedness of the congregation is emphasized in the word *sterizein*, which is used in combination with *parakalein* in Acts 15:32, Romans 1:11 and Thessalonians 3:2 and indicates parishioners' deepening in faith.

The various concepts clearly have the spiritual preparation and empowerment of the congregation in common. The verb *katartizein* is linked to the concept of spiritual preparedness (2 Tm 3:17) meaning to equip people for their work; literally to prepare people. In Galatians 6:1 this preparing activity implies a process of gentle correcting. In Ephesians 4:12 an important combination of equipping (*katartizein*) and edification or building up (*oikodomein*) takes place. This combination clearly focuses upon the congregation's growth in faith and love. Thus, it is comprehensible why the edification motif plays an important role in any pastoral involvement. Edification, however, is not merely about the individual believer, but is a corporative concept implying all believers together as the

body of Christ. Pastoral care therefore wishes to remove individuals out of isolation and to integrate them within the whole of the congregation. To understand various concepts used in pastoral care in the New Testament, it seems necessary to view all from an integral perspective. This integral component is the *oikodomein* motif in the body of Christ. "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16). The New Testament often calls the congregation a house or a building. Profoundly, pastoral care is about *oikodomein* so that all believers can be built up "like living stones,... into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pt 2:5).

The process of *oikodomein* (building up the body of Christ and establishing the fellowship of believers) does not take place outside the dimension of discipline, admonition and punishment. In the process of spiritual preparedness, the congregation must also combat sin in its midst. In Matthew 18:15 *elenchein* is used to bring this reprimanding and admonishing dimension to the fore (cf also 1 Tm 5:20 and 2 Tm 4:2). This may not be neglected because, after all, it is God Himself who reprimands people (Heb 12:5).

The verb *nouthetein* is often used as correction and direction. Within the Greek context of *noutheteo* it means admonition, warning, advice, reminding, and encouraging people to abandon wrongdoing and correct their behaviour. "In contrast to *didasko*, which is concerned with the development and guidance of the intellect, *noutheteo* has to do with the will and feelings of a man"⁵⁶. In Colossians 1:28 and 3:16 *noutheteo* is linked to *didasko*. Admonition and education are linked like knowledge and action. As in practically all other verbs already discussed, both focus on spiritual maturity. "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col 1:28). This reprimanding ministry must still be exercised with a disposition of love and patience (*makrothymein*). Hence the command in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction".

From the preceding discussion the central motif in all the concepts must be pointed out: to build up and edify the congregation so that all believers will grow together (corporatively) in faith so that sin can be combated and that the body of Christ can be prepared spiritually. Thus, the central motif is to become a mature Christian. But what is the fundamental issue in this process of becoming a mature Christian?

The basic hypothesis of this article is that the word *parakalein* describes and reflects the content and style of pastoral comforting and caring best.

In the *LXX parakaleo* is mainly used for the Hebrew *naham* which denotes sympathy and comfort. Then it was also the prophet's task to comfort the people. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" (Is 40:1). When *parakaleo* is used to translate *naham* specifically, it expresses compassion, sympathy and caring (Ps 135:14). When *parakaleo* is used for other Hebrew equivalents, it denotes encouragement, strengthening and guidance⁵⁷. While in the Hellenistic world the stronger emphasis is on an ostracizing admonition, it is interesting that in the Old Testament the accent is on comforting and supporting.

In the New Testament the following nuances in meaning are found: summon, invite, reprimand, admonition, comfort, encourage, support, ask, exhort. The link in Philippians 2:1 between solace in Christ (*paraklesis*); encouragement through love (*paramytheisthai*); and communion with the Holy Spirit (*koinonia*) is significant. These concepts again are linked to the concept of empathy and compassion. When *parakaleo* expresses admonition, it focuses on comfort and preservation and must therefore not be viewed primarily as a moral instruction, but as a loving involvement fulfilled on the basis of "God's mercy" (Rm 12:1). The admonition in Romans 15:30 then is "by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit". *Parakaleo* thus is directly linked to Christology and pneumatology. Therefore it could be said that *parakaleo* as appeal, admonition and comfort always implies God's mercy and work of salvation/redemption in Christ. The comfort and encouragement in 2 Corinthians 1:4 is very specifically linked to the pronouncement in 2 Corinthians 1:3: "...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God". Herewith the help through human sympathy and empathy is directly linked to God's helping action, as expressed in God's paraclese. According to Romans 15:4 the paracletic function of encouragement is connected to Scripture focusing on hope.

Parakaleo is also linked to the term *paraklêtos* which can be translated into helper, advocate, counselor, comforter, persuader/conviner. Important to note is that, in some texts, the term *paraklêtos* denotes the soteriological dimension of Jesus Christ's work of reconciliation (1 Jh 2:1: "... we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ") and in other texts it indicates the Holy Spirit's independent work, continuing and realising Christ's work on earth. The Holy Spirit is the

Intercessor who instructs the disciples and reminds them of His message (Jh 14:26). The *parakletos* also is the Spirit of truth (Jh 14:17) who guides mankind in truth (Jh 16:13) and proves the world to be guilty, convinces of justice and of coming judgement (Jh 16:8). The following conclusion by Braumann⁵⁸ is noteworthy:

“The term is a variable concept which cannot be reduced to a single interpretation. On the one hand, it is Jesus who sends the *parakletos* from the Father (Jn 15:26). On the other hand, the Father sends the *parakletos* at the request of Jesus (14:16,26). According to Jn 14:26 Jesus himself is a *parakletos* who is distinct from the other *parakletos* whom the Father will send in his name”.

In the light of the scriptural information at our disposal, it could be said that, should the *paraclese* metaphor function as central metaphor in pastoral care, it expresses both the indicative components of care and comfort (justification on the grounds of Christ's reconciliatory work and victorious resurrection) as the imperative component of care (admonition, reprimanding, encouraging) with the view to changing direction in life. This *paracletic* activity takes place out of God's mercy, in accordance with scriptural intent (Rm 15:4). Care and comfort take place focusing on hope and growth in faith, so that the congregation itself (corporative dimension) is spiritually prepared. In fact, *parakaleo* envisages support which conveys Christ's work of salvation, undergirded by the work of the Holy Spirit. In the light of the pneumatological component of *paracletic* care and comfort, pastoral care focuses on continuing the effect of Christ's reconciliation with the sanctification of human life and of the whole world as goal.

In the concept “*paraclese*” the shepherding mode of protective cherishing, the servant figure of sacrifice in suffering, the wisdom of true discernment and the admonishing component of actual support and change are combined so that pastoral mode (loving care) and pastoral content (salvation) can be mediated effectively in practising congregational ministry. This leads to the important conclusion that pastoral care mediates the Gospel's message of comfort aimed at the sanctification of the entire creation in the presence of God. Pastoral care as intermediary for the Gospel of salvation leads to being comforted which therefore becomes a real gift via the work of the Holy Spirit. In the pastoral mediating process the Gospel grants salvation and fosters hope for the future of the coming Kingdom of God.

The choice of the *paraclese* concept as metaphor expressing the content of biblical comfort, is not new. Already in 1947 J Schniewind used this term to indicate the actual tenor of pastoral care. According to him⁵⁹

paraclese implies: promotion of salvation and grace, including both concepts of comfort and admonition. The choice of the paraclese concept to indicate the heart of a biblical approach was also expanded upon by J Fiset⁶⁰. Fiset concludes that paraclese is the mode in which God meets human beings in their contingent situation of anxiety, grief, sin, doubt, delusion and inadequacy. God, as the Paraclete, comes to people to liberate them from their agony, and to restore the fellowship of believers⁶¹. The congregation becomes the base community which has to exercise this paracletic comfort. In other words, paraclese is an actual function of the congregation as the body of Christ and is effected with the view to mutual upliftment and comfort⁶².

M Seitz⁶³ also subscribes to the paraclese concept and declares that where the care of souls is exercised, the emphasis is not on human activities, but on the work of Christ, the actual subject of all care. C Möller⁶⁴ is convinced that if pastoral care wishes to prevent the church becoming a mere mini-clinic for psychotherapists, it may not neglect the paracletic dimension. The care of souls then addresses human beings, not in terms of their deficiencies and sin, but in terms of their charismatic virtues which are part of their new life in Christ; people are not mere sinners, but, within the framework of the paraclese, redeemed sinners and therefore transformed into new beings.

To latch onto the previous four metaphors already developed in this chapter, viz. the shepherd, the servant, the wisdom and the paraclese, it could be said that an effective metaphor concept of God should bring to the fore aspects of sensitivity and compassion (*pathos*); identification (woundedness); insight and understanding in terms of *paradoxes* (wise fool); as well as consolation, encouragement (*paraklesis*) and empowerment. In this connection the concepts "God as Friend" (God's friendship in terms of his covenantal and compassionate faithfulness) should play an important role in the pastoral communication of care and comfort. Therefore a theology of pastoral care is about the faithfulness of God whose caring presence is expressed and embodied in the pastoral encounter as a metaphor of covenantal presence and mutual partnership/companionship.

The reason for such a metaphor is that God as Friend and his friendship are linked to the tradition of the church. It depicts God in terms of his faithfulness and identification with the history of Israel. Through the death of Christ, God indeed is our Friend. This is how Christ views the future relationship between God and man. John 15:13-14: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command". The reason for God as Friend is that it brings

the dimension of partnership and companionship (which in fact are ingredients of the pastoral encounter) to the fore. It creates a familiarity and intimacy which serve to indicate the love and grace of God. Friendship becomes a signal that the Word of God takes the hearer "to belong to a subset distinguished by a bond of intimacy"⁶⁵. Friendship illuminates the God-world relationship in such a way that it gives meaning to postmodern man who indeed is in need of intimacy. It further depicts God in a non-sexist way which is acceptable to both men and women, being equal before God. It also reflects the meaning of bonding between Christians who are willing to make enduring commitments.

In summary we can say God, as Friend, is our choice for a pastoral encounter which takes the grace of God and the need of man for salvation and intimacy seriously. It links up with the covenantal history as described in Scripture and the meaning and function of the sacraments within the tradition of the church. It represents the components of partnership, companionship, commitment and intimacy: ingredients of an encounter which tries to convey the shepherding perspective, the woundedness of the Servant, as well as the paradoxical wisdom and identification of a suffering and incarnate God. It should therefore be the task of the pastor as an interpreter of Stories/stories to convey through the shepherding metaphor God's loving care and compassion; through the servant metaphor God's woundedness and suffering; through the wisdom metaphor God's true discernment, patience, understanding and even humour; through the paracletic metaphor God's guidance, empowerment and support. The underlying assumption is that these metaphors impart meaning and significance regarding the three basic existential issues: our anxiety for loneliness, rejection and death; our painful awareness of guilt and guilt feelings; our experience of despair and meaninglessness. By doing this, a pastoral hermeneutics addresses postmodernity's quest for a theology from "below", i.e. what C E Braaten⁶⁶ calls the existential locus of God-talk.

NOTES:

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