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## Theological Foundations of Pastoral Care in Catholic Universities

Thomas V. Gourlay

University of Notre Dame Australia, [tom.gourlay@nd.edu.au](mailto:tom.gourlay@nd.edu.au)

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## Introduction

The phrase 'pastoral care' is increasingly part of discussions in tertiary educational institutions interested in holistic education for their students. Everyone who is involved in any kind of student welfare is keen to provide for the 'pastoral' needs of their students, and student guides, and university vision and mission statements are littered with phrases which say as much. Indeed, with an increasingly competitive student 'marketplace,' for want of a better term, the requirements of universities of all kinds to provide for more than just the intellectual needs of students is felt all the more.

Building on insights from Sacred Scripture, as well as the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), this paper will articulate what an authentic and theologically informed notion of pastoral care is. From this position it will look to demonstrate how such a theologically inflected notion pastoral care should form an integral part of the mission of the Catholic university as such. It will be argued that, while certain persons or offices within the university institution itself might be charged with a specific mandate to provide such pastoral care for students, staff, and faculty, all members of the university community bear some responsibility to show the kind of care that can appropriately be called 'pastoral' to all members of the university community.

## Understanding Our Context

The following paper will take as its basis a specifically Catholic worldview, one shaped by faith in the doctrines of creation, Incarnation, and redemption, taking the form of creaturely being to be undergirded by a metaphysics of relationality and love rooted in the Divine life of the Trinity (Clarke, 1997; Schindler, 1996; Schmitz, 1997). Such a confessional perspective asserts that all hold a particular worldview which encompasses a lived understanding of the meaning of life, suffering, friendship and the like. Such worldviews are foundational to people's actions, both as individuals

and within the communities in which they live and the institutions within which they work. While a faith-based worldview is easily defined and identifiable as such, there are a variety of worldviews which animate institutions, and exist in ignorance if not otherwise known and stated. No position is free from cultural or ideological bias and no worldview is neutral, even those claiming to be such (Cf. MacIntyre, 1988, 2007).

This paper looks to unpack the theological foundations underlying the practice of pastoral care afforded students at Catholic universities. While there will likely be overlaps with how and why pastoral care is practised in institutions that do not operate from within a Catholic context, this paper aims to describe the uniquely Catholic contribution to the theory and practice of pastoral care in an educational context.

### **Pastoral Care: A Catholic Definition**

The term ‘pastoral care’ is used in a variety of contexts. Despite the increased use of the term, the vagueness with which it is employed in many contexts renders the phrase meaningless or at least difficult to define. Pastoral care is traditionally understood as the care given by the ‘pastor’ – that person given charge over the herd or sheep or other livestock. In the context of Catholic and broader Christian and Judaic faiths, the image of the shepherd or pastor is traditionally one which is used in Sacred Scripture to describe God (cf. Ps 80:1 See also Gn 49:24; Ecc 12:11). One particularly memorable image—used frequently as a reading for funerals for believers and non-believers alike is Psalm 23.

This iconic Psalm provides something of a summary of the way this shepherd motif is woven through the Scriptures as a whole. In the Scriptures, the image of ‘God as shepherd’ points to his continual direction, guidance and care for his people, the ‘sheep.’ There are numerous instances where ‘Shepherd’ is read as a title for God (Ps 80:1 See also Gn 49:24; Ecc 12:11), and God’s people as his ‘flock’ (Israel as God’s flock Ps 95:7 See also Ps 79:13; Ps 100:3; Jer 50:7; Eze 34:31), and the Church as God’s flock (1Pet 5:2 See also Lk 12:32; Acts 20:28-29). Using this well-known metaphor,

the Scriptures develop an image of God by elaborating on the tasks undertaken by God as shepherd. The shepherd leads and guides, (Ps 23:2-3 See also Isa 40:11); the shepherd provides, (Ps 23:1 See also Gn 48:15; Ps 23:5-6; Hos 4:16; Mic 7:14); the shepherd protects, (Ps 28:9 See also Gn 49:23-24 ); the shepherd saves those who are lost or scattered, (Jer 31:10 See also Ps 119:176; Isa 53:6; Eze 34:11-16; Mt 18:12-14; and Lk 15:3-7); and, the shepherd judges, (Eze 34:17-22 See also Jer 23:1; Zec 10:2-3; Zec 11:16; Mt 25:32-46).

In the Scriptures, God delegates his task as shepherd or ‘pastor,’ to faithful leaders, who in turn act as shepherds over his people (Cf. Jer 3:15 See also Jer 23:4; 1Pet 5:2-4). God also gives, for example, those of David’s line who will shepherd and guard the people (Eze 34:23. See also 2 Sam 5:2 pp 1Ch 11:2; Ps 78:70-72; Eze 34:23-24; Eze 37:24; Mic 5:4; Mt 2:6). In the New Testament, the shepherd motif reaches its climax in the person of Jesus himself ‘the Good Shepherd’ and it is this role of shepherd over the people of God that is then delegated to the Apostles and their successors.

The authors of Sacred Scripture frequently used this familiar image of shepherd and sheep to analogically describe the relationship of God, or his delegate, to his people. While the shepherd may not be the first image that comes to mind as being a particularly vivid one for people in the twenty-first century, one can be sure of the fact that it would have been for the readers of the Scriptures from around the time of their composition until the onset of the industrial age in the 1800s. The image of the shepherd is one of care and concern, one who, while set apart from those he leads, is inextricably united to them, sharing in their experiences and sufferings. The image of the shepherd is not one of a detached moraliser, he is the one who will “leave the ninety nine”, (Cf. Mt 18:12; Lk 15:4), and go after the lost or stray. It is in this sense that the shepherd or pastor motif is particularly useful in the context of care for students in Catholic educational institutions.

The image of the shepherd as employed by the Scriptures then should be archetypal in discussions about ‘pastoral’ care in Catholic institutions. In seeking to provide pastoral care, staff in the setting of the Catholic university should strive to emulate that care which this good shepherd

provides for his sheep. In this sense then, pastoral care means caring for the person in an holistic way, one which acknowledges the unique physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs of each individual. It will entail acknowledging the individuality and the freedom of the students, and more importantly, it is an approach which always holds in mind their final end, that being union with God and the communion of saints in heaven. “Wherefore God alone can satisfy the will of man, according to the words of Ps 102... Therefore God alone constitutes man’s happiness.” (*Summa Theologiae*, 1911-1925: 1-2, q. 2, a. 8. See also, 1, q. 103, a. 5; 1-2, q. 1, a. 7; q. 9, a. 1; q. 13, a.2; q. 91, a.2). This notion of union with God as the final end of the human person finds more ancient roots in Catholic tradition also, as in the *cor inquietum* of St Augustine of Hippo, “for you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” (Augustine, 2003a Book 1.1). This touches on more fundamental notions of the meaning of the human person as conceived of within the Catholic tradition as such, which will be treated briefly below.

### **Sketching a Catholic Theological Anthropology**

Any attempt to distil 2000 plus years of theological reflection on the nature of God, creation (including human beings), and the relationship between the two into a short paper such as this is doomed to be incomplete at best. However, for the purposes of the present discussion there are four key elements worth unpacking in this context that shed light on the aspirations of Catholic universities in their efforts to provide pastoral care for both their staff and their students.

The first and perhaps most important element of Catholic theological anthropology for those working in Catholic institutions, is that the ‘end’ or *telos* of the human person is not to make money, or to become productive, law abiding citizens, or even to make positive contributions to society as a whole. While all these results are desirable and most likely probable for graduates of Catholic educational institutions, these outcomes are not in fact what is understood as the primary goal of a Catholic education, or of human life conceived of more broadly. The Catholic faith teaches and holds that the human person is not made for this world only. A life beyond this life awaits each and every

person, and that ultimately the human person's goal or aim is to be in heaven, sharing eternal life in a never-ending exchange of love with the Holy Trinity and the communion of saints (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1994, para. 1024). Catholic tradition teaches that this natural desire for the supernatural is not mere velleity, but is a strong drive, what St. Augustine refers to as the "restless heart". With this end point in mind, the words of Pope Benedict XVI, from his address to pupils at the celebration of Catholic education from his visit to the United Kingdom of 2010 resound, "A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints", (Benedict XVI, 2010a).

Secondly, the Catholic faith teaches that the human person is created, and created as *Imago Dei* – in the image of God, (cf. Gn 1:27). Commenting on this St. Augustine wrote, "God then made man in his own image. For he created him a soul endowed with reason and intelligence ...." (Augustine, 2003b, p. 407.) In Genesis it is recounted that God made the human person in his image and according to his likeness. This notion of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God is extended to everyone, regardless of race, gender, religious belief, political persuasion or whatever. Related to this is the Catholic-Christian belief that all people are called to grow into the likeness of Christ through reception of the sacraments, a life of prayer, and acts of charity (Weinandy, 2002).

Thirdly, it is a doctrine of the Catholic faith that each person is gifted by God with a unique and unrepeatable soul (CCC, para. 366). Each human person is created by a loving God, out of love, to be loved and called to love in return. As a result of this call to love, the human person is gifted with freedom to participate in the love of the intra-Trinitarian relations.

Finally, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), pointed out that Jesus is *the* model of human perfection. In its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, it states; "Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear", (Paul VI, 1965b, para. 22). This

passage, the most frequently cited of all the Council's documents by, (now Saint) Pope John Paul II who, holding the Chair of St Peter for some 27 years from 1978-2005, was charged with the significant task of interpreting and implementing the decrees, statements, and constitutions of Council. Paragraph 22 of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), quoted above, is treated by St. Pope John Paul II as the hermeneutical key of the Council in its entirety. Essentially, it means that to learn what it means to be a human, one must look to the person of Jesus Christ, who fully reveals what it means to be human. In a very real way, this means that to be truly human, one must emulate Jesus in his *kenotic* outpouring of himself in love for others—to be a sincere gift of self (para. 24). When the Pastoral Constitution speaks of Christ “making [clear] our supreme calling,” (para. 22), it points directly to God's universal salvific will, that all would be eternally united with the Triune God for eternity in heaven.

These truth claims add up to a conception of the human person that is inherently dignified, loveable, and called to eternal greatness (or sanctity), and these beliefs should ideally inform all interactions between staff and students. The pastoral reality though, is that the interaction between staff and students, or even more broadly in the community will at times fail to live up to such high ideals. Human sinfulness (including both sins of commission and of omission), as well as the drama of the work of sanctification continuously affects the functioning of all human institutions, including Catholic universities. Such an ideal, however, is according to St. Pope John Paul II, not something that should be discarded out of hand (John Paul II, 1993, para. 103). The ideal is not mere whimsy or fantasy, but through the operation of grace becomes a reality in the lives of believers, and should be functional within the Church and its institutions, including universities. This is the call of Jesus in Mt 5:48, to “[b]e perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” and reinforced by the “universal call to holiness” as taught by the Second Vatican Council, (Paul VI, 1965a, chap. 5).

St. Pope John Paul II taught clearly that, “It would be a very serious error to conclude... that the Church's teaching is essentially only an ‘ideal’ which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated

to the so-called concrete possibilities of man, according to a ‘balancing of the goods in question.’”

He goes on to ask, “what are the ‘concrete possibilities of man’? And of which man are we speaking?

Of man dominated by lust [sin] or of man redeemed by Christ?” (John Paul II, 1993, para. 103).

For St. John Paul II, any attempt to dismiss the universal call to holiness as mere idealism amounts to what is in essence a crisis of faith.

This is what is at stake: the reality of Christ's redemption. Christ has redeemed us!

This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing the entire truth of our

being; he has set our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence. And if

redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ's redemptive

act, but to man's will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act.

God's command is of course proportioned to man's capabilities; but to the

capabilities of the man to whom the Holy Spirit has been given; of the man who,

though he has fallen into sin, can always obtain pardon and enjoy the presence of

the Holy Spirit. (John Paul II, 1993, para. 103)

The Catholic university is marked by the spiritual reality of grace freely given by God and received by individuals, staff and students alike. The dynamic of sin, redemption, and the drama of sanctification animate the educational community as its members journey along life's path. The ideals which are proposed by Christ do not remain abstract concepts but are realised in the lives of staff and students as they receive the sacraments, pray together and in private, grow in the virtues, and practise acts of charity. This is something that should animate all Catholics within a Catholic educational institution, and the ethos of the institution as such. In addition to this, it is something that should be ceaselessly offered, or proposed, to those members of the university community who do not share the Catholic faith (Benedict XVI, 2010c).



### ***Ex Corde Ecclesiae: Pastoral Care as an Integral Element of Catholic Education***

In his Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), St. Pope John Paul II highlighted the important role of Catholic universities as “incomparable centre[s] of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity” (John Paul II, 1990, para. 1). The lofty ideals set for the Catholic university in this document include the imperative to provide pastorally for all those associated with the university structure as such, from the students to the faculty, and including the administrative staff and cleaners (1990, Article 6, para. 1). Within the document, John Paul II writes that the “university community concerned with promoting the institution's Catholic character will be conscious of this pastoral dimension and sensitive to the ways in which it can have an influence on all university activities”, (1990, para. 38).

One instruction for those formally involved with pastoral care is to encourage the growth of an atmosphere of pastoral care and concern amongst all members of the community.

Those involved in pastoral ministry will encourage teachers and students to become more aware of their responsibility towards those who are suffering physically or spiritually. Following the example of Christ, they will be particularly attentive to the poorest and to those who suffer economic, social, cultural or religious injustice. This responsibility begins within the academic community, but it also finds application beyond it. (1990, para. 40)

The Gospel imperative to show concern for each individual, and particularly the poor, suffering, or vulnerable is not only the concern of those in specifically ‘pastoral’ positions within the educational community, but for everyone (see Mt 25). Those involved more particularly in areas such as student services, counselling, chaplaincy, campus ministry, or any other facet of non-academic student engagement are charged with a specific mandate to lead others to developing this concern, but it should be remembered that this is not the responsibility of one person, department or division, (John Paul II 1990, para. 40).

This common task of all associated with the Catholic universities stems from its shared vision, and its centre in the person of Christ (John Paul II 1990, para. 21). As he stated,

A Catholic university pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ. The source of its unity springs from a common dedication to the truth, a common vision of the dignity of the human person and, ultimately, the person and message of Christ which gives the Institution its distinctive character. (John Paul II 1990, para. 21)

For John Paul II, the results is the formation of a community which is animated by a spirit of freedom and charity, which “assists each of its members to achieve wholeness as human persons; in turn, everyone in the community helps in promoting unity” (John Paul II 1990, para. 21).

#### **An invitation to those outside of the Catholic faith tradition**

The above definition of pastoral care, as well as the foundational claims about the human person, relies heavily on faith-based affirmations that may be unfamiliar and consequently difficult and perhaps even nonsensical for individuals who do not subscribe to the Catholic or more broadly Christian faith to appropriate. This will be a particular challenge to the Catholic institution which will often employ staff, as well as service students who do not share the faith.

In such instances it is important to remember the Catholic institution is open to all who honestly seek truth. Pope Benedict XVI, in a 2011 address to the Directors, Professors and Students of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, stated that a Catholic university, “is a *welcoming and open home* for all those who, heeding the voice of the Teacher within, become seekers of truth and serve mankind by their daily commitment to a knowledge which goes beyond merely narrow and pragmatic goals” (Benedict XVI, 2011). The Catholic faith is not, and cannot ever be, a philosophy that is imposed upon others, be they staff or students in Catholic educational institutions, nor can it

be reduced to the optional or even compulsory 'side-dish' to the main meal of an otherwise secular education. As Pope Benedict XVI has clearly stated, the Catholic faith is always an encounter with an event, a person (Benedict XVI, 2006, para. 1). Despite this careful admonition to always respect the freedom of each individual, the Church and her members and institutions must be animated by a desire to share the Good News of which it is an heir and custodian. With Benedict XVI, leaders and staff in Catholic universities must wholeheartedly state, "we impose nothing... we propose ceaselessly," (Benedict XVI, 2010c) and it is here where Catholic universities share in the Church's broader mission to evangelise "to the ends of the earth" [Mt 28:19-20]. This is not a mission of proselytising, but of evangelising, of sharing a positive vision of life and love.

Regardless of the presence of persons of other faiths or of none, the Catholic ethos must inform every aspect of the life of the university, beyond what Pope Benedict XVI calls the 'self-evident requirement that the content of the teaching should always be in conformity with Church doctrine... [T]he life of faith,' he argues, 'needs to be the driving force behind every activity in the school, so that the Church's mission may be served effectively, and the young people may discover the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others"' (Benedict XVI, 2010b).

### **Conclusion: A Tradition worth learning from**

Catholic universities seeking to enact the mandate to provide pastoral care are confronted with a wide variety of challenges which will need to be addressed with a degree of specificity that precludes their treatment in a paper such as this. The guiding principles articulated in this paper which are found in Sacred Scripture and in the Church's tradition offer university administrators, faculty, and staff the basis from which it can make appropriate decisions in the appropriate provision of pastoral care for students and staff in need.

Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Papal magisterium, administrators, faculty, and staff of Catholic universities are obliged to follow a model of pastoral care that is Christocentric and Trinitarian. This stands opposed to models of pastoral care

that would attempt to plunder the Catholic faith of its personalistic focus by abstracting the person of Jesus from the otherwise palatable humanistic values of the Catholic faith. For the Catholic, it is only animated by the spirit of Jesus and empowered by an ongoing encounter with him that the lofty ideals set forth in this paper can even realistically be hoped for. As such, Catholic university administrators, faculty, and staff need to be conscious of the temptation which would seek to abstract the person of Christ from their induction programs and procedural structures.

Any attempt to incorporate an emphasis on 'pastoral care' within a Catholic university structure begins with the free decision of the individual, be they a member of the administrative staff, faculty, or student body, to adopt a truly pastoral approach to those with whom they come into contact. This pastoral approach might mean that at times they will be guiding, at other times directing; sometimes leading, sometimes protecting; sometimes supporting people when they fail or make poor decisions; and, at other times going after those who have 'lost' their way. To add to this, senior administrators wanting to incorporate a focus on pastoral care within their institution begin by modelling such an approach and inviting others to emulate them in that.

Good pastoral care is that offered by a good 'pastor', who like a good shepherd offers his sheep more than the simple necessities of life such as food, shelter, and clothing. A good shepherd wants his sheep not only to survive, but also to thrive. To be healthy, to grow, to produce something good, and, in the case of Jesus *the* Good Shepherd, eventually to become transformed.

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