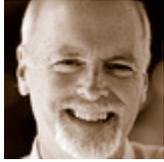


## Feature Article

# Seeking Pastoral Identity



by John Johnson

Many pastors face an identity crisis. They ask themselves, “Who am I? Why should the people in my congregation listen to me? What is my identity as a minister of Christ?” As Neuhaus notes, “It is not an academic exercise but a day-to-day struggle to make sense of who we are and what we are doing.”<sup>1</sup> Of its importance, Oates writes, “If you are to do your work well, refreshing strength must be afforded you from a coherent vision of your identity.”<sup>2</sup>

Pastors and others have wrestled with this problem over the centuries.<sup>3</sup> Yet the issue may be more intensely felt today. “Clearly the pastor-teacher is enveloped in a critical identity crisis in our time.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, pastoral identity may be *the* contemporary crisis in pastoral ministry.<sup>5</sup>

Pastors struggle with this question for three reasons. First, this concern has emerged out of a deficiency in pastoral theology. As one noted pastor states, “In my opinion, much of the ferment in ministry, the identity crisis most of us live with, is largely a theological failure.”<sup>6</sup> Much of pastoral training has been devoted to the practice rather than the theology of ministry. The focus is on administration, preaching, leadership skills, small-group dynamics, and other related duties. Too little time has been given to developing a theology of ministry, in which students address what God defines as ministry and calls a minister to be.

The second reason for the confusion has to do with the present culture. People have changed in how they expect pastors to spend their time, preach their sermons, and shepherd their people. Whereas in the past a pastor was principally viewed as resident theologian and preacher, today there is the expectation that a pastor should be, among other things, a chief executive officer, a therapist, and/or a church growth specialist.

Pastors are now forced to extend their energies to a new line of responsibilities, which sometimes eclipse the older and more foundational responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> If a pastor seeks to pursue a genuinely God-centered ministry, it will, as Oakes puts it, “collide head-on with the self-absorption and anthropocentric focus that has become commonplace in many evangelical churches.”<sup>8</sup>

Other voices are underscoring the concern:

The ministry, like other occupations today, is much preoccupied with the discussion of “role models,” “role expectations,” “role conflicts,” and such. The minister is expected to be preacher, leader of worship, counselor, teacher, scholar, helper of the needy, social critic, administrator, revivalist, fund-raiser, and a host of other sometimes impossible things.<sup>9</sup>

Neuhaus continues:

Pastors harassed by these conflicting expectations and claims upon time and ability are tempted to embark upon an open-ended game of tradeoffs. Today I’ll be a little of this and a little of that,

tomorrow I'll be a little of the other things and something else. For the conscientious, who are determined to keep the game going, it is a certain formula for confusion and collapse.<sup>10</sup> Many pastors entered the ministry with a clear vision and high ideals and have left battered, confused, and disoriented. The loss of bearings, the blurring of identity, has become a major cause of physical and emotional "burnout" in the ministry.<sup>11</sup>

The third reason for this pastoral identity crisis is the present drift toward relativism and a pluralistic mindset. Together, they have raised the question of pastoral relevancy. "The pastoral ministry," writes Wells, "has been culturally adrift for a long time. It has been dislodged from the network of what is meaningful and valuable in society."<sup>12</sup> As Peterson said, "In general, people treat us with respect, but we are not considered important in any social, cultural, or economic way."<sup>13</sup> The result is an uneasiness settling over the work of ministers like a thick fog, a perplexity that causes them to wonder who they are.

### MOVING TOWARD A SOLUTION

The point of this article is that the roots of pastoral identity are found in the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, sage, and king. These offices were held by the spiritual leaders or "pastors" of the Old Testament era, each one bringing a unique identity, calling, giftedness, and role.

From these offices the fundamental marks of a minister emerge, guiding him in both his self-concept as well as his day-to-day responsibilities before God. They must be taken together, for they bring out the comprehensive nature of a pastor's calling.<sup>14</sup> To disregard any one of these roles will distort both the identity and the function of the pastor.<sup>15</sup>

"If we are to form a clear conception of Christian ministry, we do not first turn inward and begin in a highly individualistic way to ask how we feel about it this moment . . . nor do we turn to public opinion polls to obtain a proper definition of ministry."<sup>16</sup> Instead, Christian leaders must look to models in the Bible.

Oden makes a compelling case for Christ as the model for pastoral identity.<sup>17</sup> "If ministry cannot be clearly established as the continuation of Jesus' own intention and practice, we lose its central theological premise."<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Fisher says Paul is the "primary model"<sup>19</sup> for pastoral ministry. While Paul seems a high ideal to emulate, he was still a human being with frailties and limitations. Christ may be the foundation, but Paul serves as the framework.

This article, however, explores the models Jesus brought to fullest expression and that Paul seemingly emulated. As noted, they must be taken collectively, for together they incorporate the whole of ministry. Finding pastoral identity in an Old Testament setting seems logical. As part of the company of the redeemed, the church is a community of faith, a people of God, with the same needs to be mediated from on high. There is the need of a priest to mediate God's forgiveness, the need of a prophet to mediate God's Word, the need of a sage to mediate God's wisdom, and the need of a king to mediate God's rule.

### THE NATURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT OFFICES

By the time of Luther and Calvin, the three offices of prophet, priest, and king became the central organizing principle of Protestant Christological teaching, the manner in which to describe the ministry of Christ.<sup>20</sup> These also serve as the central organizing structure of the pastoral office.

It seems reasonable, however, to add a fourth office, a fourth distinct class of individuals who minister to the community of faith, namely, the sage. There are several reasons for viewing the wise man as a fourth office. First, the Old Testament viewed the sage on a level parallel with the priest and prophet (Je. 18:18). Like priest and prophet, "wise" was used as a noun to describe a vocational post.<sup>21</sup> "The wise man constituted a third office, using wisdom in harmony with the function of the other two offices."<sup>22</sup> This is also affirmed by Waltke, who argues that both sage and prophet were "true spiritual yokefellows," speaking with the same authority and making similar demands on their hearers.<sup>23</sup>

Second, just as Christ is the ultimate prophet, priest, and king, so He likewise was recognized as the sage of all sages (Ma. 12:42).

Third, wisdom is a fundamental thread in the tapestry of Old Testament revelation. To leave out the sage would be to ignore a major part of God's ministry to Israel through His servants. Wisdom was the ethical outworking of the Law. Cook asks, "Have we been so captivated by the traditional approach to the three offices of Christ that we have missed the obvious?"<sup>24</sup> To overlook the work of the sage robs the pastor of an essential part of his identity. Failing to recognize his role as a sage to his people, he trivializes the importance attached to his role as a wise counselor.

Assuming the validity of all four offices, the following summaries serve as a foundation to describe the pastor's identity.

## THE PROPHET

The prophet was an individual called from among his peers.<sup>25</sup> God's calling affirmed that he was a man who belonged first and foremost to God. This is underscored by the title "man of God." Being called means that he was divinely enabled. Prophecy was not some native faculty, some special genius or innate talent. Moses was an inarticulate stammerer by nature, and Jeremiah complained that he was a novice.

At the heart of his identity, the prophet was a mouthpiece for God, called to speak in the name of God. He was one who could see spiritual realities others could not see. He was authorized to speak authoritatively for God (Ex. 7:1-2; Da. 9:6).

God's prophets were individuals under divine constraint, officers of the heavenly court. They were men God had summoned and impelled. Ezekiel, giving a rationale for his task, explained, "So I prophesied as I was commanded" (Ez. 37:7; cf. Is. 8:11; Je. 20:7; Ez. 11:5; Jo. 1:1; Am. 3:8). The prophet dared not omit a word (Je. 26:2), nor utter falsely (1 Ki. 18:20-40).

The prophets were called to speak the Word of God (Dt. 18:18; Je. 1:9). They were not creating a new doctrine but they realized they were spokesmen for God.<sup>26</sup> The prophet was overwhelmed with a sense of God's message. He had no freedom to go beyond its boundaries (Dt. 18:20). Neither could he shrink from declaring all of it.

Often the message from God was a burden. The prophet was under such compulsion that he was a different person (1 Sa. 10:6-9). He was in discomfort until the message was released. The act of keeping the revelation inside Jeremiah was likened to a "burning fire shut up in [his] bones" (Je. 20:9). Brought on by his refusal to proclaim it to a derisive audience, he mourned, "I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it."

In speaking God's word, the prophet was called to awaken the mind, care for the soul, and instruct the heart. In particular, he was called to warn people to return to their covenant obligations.

## THE PRIEST

The priest, referred to some seven hundred times in the Old Testament and eighty in the New, was identified with sacrifice, intercession, and blessing.

At the heart of the priest's character was holiness (Ex. 39:30; Ez. 44:11). He was called to wholeness, symbolized by his exclusion from the altar if he had any physical impairments (Le. 21:17). All this was necessary, for the priest was invited into the presence of God, where he would inquire of God, wearing the Urim and Thummim. More than anyone else, he came into the closest possible contact with Israel's God.<sup>27</sup>

The one who was invited into the tabernacle was also called to be its guardian, to look after the sanctuary. Among his duties, the priest was called to serve at the altar and officiate in God's "chapel" (Dt. 18:5). Within this context, he was called essentially to care for the soul.<sup>28</sup> Hence, his was a work of

interceding for God's people (Jo. 2:17), intervening on their behalf with God, and bringing sacrifice (He. 5:1). Essential to his mission was preparing the people to meet God. The priest was also called to pronounce blessings (Le. 9:22; Nu. 6:22-27; Dt. 21:5).

His role, then, was a beautiful complement to that of the prophet. As the prophet stood to represent God, the priest entered God's presence to represent man. Both functions were and are critical to the spiritual formation of God's people.

## THE SAGE

The sage was also called of God, summoned to be a channel for the wisdom of God. He was the scholar of his day, called to teach students how to integrate truth with life. In particular, he was set apart to exhort people to fear the Lord, the first principle of wisdom (Pr. 1:7). His words were like ox goads (Ecc. 12:11), effective in moving people to action. Like tent pegs, his sayings were driven into the hearts, so that lives would not be blown away by the winds of life's storms.

Solomon was the sage of sages in the Old Testament (1 Ki. 4:29-32; 10:1-9). Others are named, but little is known about them (1 Ki. 4:31; Pr. 30:1; 31:1). Working in a context previously established and defined by the priest and prophet, the sages pointed their hearers to the ethical demands of the Law. They composed Israel's wisdom literature, counseled her kings, and consoled and guided her people.<sup>29</sup> The priest had the Law, the prophet his vision, and the sage his counsel. "The priest guided the repentant to the way of forgiveness in the law; the prophet aroused the sinner to the point of repentance; the wise counseled him not to do the wrong in the first place."<sup>30</sup>

Through his pastoral ministry, as a student of the word and a professional observer of life, the sage guided people to live out the Law. In training people in the skills of living God's word, the sage provided down-to-earth good sense. "They functioned very much as Christian pastors today in their work between Sundays," training the people to use what they know of God's way in everyday routines.<sup>31</sup>

## THE KING

Though this office did not emerge until the eleventh century, the king also brought a necessary dimension to the shepherding of the people. In fact, shepherding and ruling were concepts associated with kingship by the elders in David's day (2 Sa. 5:2). Called to exercise authority wisely, the king was responsible to maintain and defend the state and to insure justice. Above all, he was to fear the Lord (Dt. 17:14-20).

Like the prophet and priest, the king was anointed, consecrated for his task, sharing in God's holiness (1 Sa. 10:10; 16:13; 24:6). In fact, "anointed" most commonly referred to the king of Israel. Therefore, great respect was due the king (1 Sa. 24:6-11; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Sa. 1:14, 16).

In a certain sense he was looked on as a savior, ensuring the welfare of his people (Ps. 72; 2 Ki. 13:5). Yet, as de Vaux points out, Israel's faith in God "made any deification of the king impossible."<sup>32</sup> At times he performed priestly acts, leading Israel in worship (2 Sa. 24:25; 1 Ki. 5-8), offering sacrifices (2 Sa. 6:13; 24:25), and blessing the people (2 Sa. 6:18). Yet, he was not a priest (2 Ch. 26:18).

The king's principal task was to lead the nation, the people of God. The king's ability to lead and administer the affairs of state rested on his obedience. The accounts of Kings and Chronicles underscore repeatedly the direct relationship between a leader's competence to command and his personal godliness.

The prophets declared God's word, the priests mediated God's forgiveness, the sages instructed the people to walk in godly wisdom, and the king led the people, administering justice, establishing boundaries, utilizing resources, and leading into battle.

## THE FOUR OFFICES AND CHRIST

In Christ, the four offices came into perfect bloom. "In one figure alone were all offices adequately united, sufficiently displayed, and fully consummated—Jesus Christ."<sup>33</sup> Looking back, clearly the offices served to foreshadow and anticipate the Minister *par excellence*.

In successive states these offices were revealed in Christ, moving to a dramatic climax. In His earthly ministry, He first appeared as a prophet, then as a wise sage. In His suffering and death, He revealed His identity as priest. In His glorification, He rules over His kingdom as Head of the church, and will return to earth to establish His rule over the world as king of kings. More than guidelines for His ministry, then, the offices are, as Walvoord puts it, the "key" to the purpose of the incarnation.<sup>34</sup> Christ not only brought the offices of the Old Testament to perfect expression; He also radically altered them. He taught not merely with words, but was God's own living Word. He interceded, not as a Levitical priest with animal sacrifice, but as the great High Priest, bringing the sacrifice of His own body. He counseled, not as a mere sage acquainted with the ways of life, but as the very personification of wisdom. And Christ governs, not like the rulers of this earth, but as the Heir of all things.

#### AS PROPHET

As the prophet of all prophets, Jesus declared the word of God from the moment He began His public ministry (Lu. 2:47). Moses was the great prophet of the Old Testament, but Christ was even greater (Dt. 18:15; Ma. 11:9; 16:13-14; Ma. 6:15; Lu. 4:18-21; 7:16; 13:33; Jn. 4:19; 6:14; Ac. 3:22; 7:37; He. 1:1-2).

Jesus' prophetic identity was demonstrated by His titles (Rabbi, Master, Teacher, Apostle). Some people thought He was Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets (Ma. 8:27).

By His earthly ministry, Christ was the perfect model for those called to the prophetic task. As the revealer of divine revelation, He modeled what He proclaimed (Jn. 14:6), and bathed truth in the waters of kindness as He reached out to the lost, the hurting, and children (Jn. 4; Ma. 7; 10). There was variety in His preaching. Stories, seemingly harmless on the surface, were powerfully penetrating. His message, though concise, had unparalleled authority (Ma. 7:28-29).

#### AS PRIEST

Christ's identity as priest, after the order of Melchizedek, was held in reserve during most of His earthly ministry, hidden for the most part (Ps. 110:4). However, near the end there was no mystery as to His calling as the perfect high priest (Jn. 17). His sacrifice was unique because it was a self-offering. He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, the sacrificial lamb to atone for sin (Jn. 1:29; Ro. 3:25; Eph. 5:2; 1 Ti. 2:5-6; 1 Jn. 2:2; Re. 5:6). Hebrews presents Him as the superior, all-sufficient sacrifice (He. 7:27; 9:12).

In His present ministry He serves as the believers' High Priest. He continually intercedes for them (John 17; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), touched by their infirmities and sympathizing with their weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). Through both the cross and His present work in heaven, He saves sinners from crippling guilt (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:1) and promises the blessing of eternal life for those who believe.

#### AS SAGE

While Solomon is presented in the Old Testament as the sage *par excellence* (1 Ki. 3:1-15), Christ is presented in the New Testament as the One greater than Solomon (Ma. 12:42), the One in whom wisdom is culminated (Co. 2:3). Possessing the characteristics of a sage (Lu. 2:47), He increased in wisdom and stature (v. 52), and overwhelmed His hearers with His wisdom (Ma. 13:54).

## AS KING

While David, more than any other king, reflected the godly role of the Old Testament king, Christ is the king of kings, who will fulfill all the covenant promises as David's greater Son (Re. 17:14). He was born the king of the Jews (Ma. 2:2), and in His ministry He provided and provides judicial governance as the king (Is. 9:6-7; Ps. 2:6; Lu. 1:32-33; Jn. 18:37; 1 Ti. 6:15; Re. 19:16).

He came as the promised messianic king, executing God's justice (Ma. 18) and carrying out the Sovereign's mandates (Ma. 28:19-20). As King (Ma. 27:11), His preaching promoted God's kingdom (Mar. 1:14-15), a kingdom that consists of righteousness, peace, and joy (Ro. 14:17). He came to release mankind from spiritual bondage. As ascended king, He orders, directs, and preserves the church as its head (Eph. 1:22), and provides its resources (Eph. 4:8-9). However, the full revelation of His work as king is reserved for His second coming (Re. 19:16), when He establishes His reign on earth.

## CONCLUSION

These four offices define the essence of Christ's ministry as well as His identity. In His role as shepherd of the sheep all four offices were brought together perfectly. It is important to note, as well, that He imparted His model of ministry to those He disciplined (Jn. 20:21). This would suggest that ministers today should find their identity in the offices.

As Christ was sent, so He sent His future ministers (Jn. 17:18). In particular, He called Peter to shepherd His flock, thereby imitating His ministry, with love being the principal requirement (Jn. 21:15-17). Peter then transferred this shepherding model of ministry to those called to be pastors (1 Pe. 5:1-4). In this way Jesus established the bridge between the offices of the Old Testament and contemporary pastors.

## THE FOUR OFFICES IN TODAY'S PASTORS

The Old Testament "pastors" provide a balanced definition of pastoral identity, harmonized perfectly in Christ. Hence, any confusion as to one's pastoral identity can be sorted out by examining Jesus' ministry, but beyond this, by examining the ministry of the four offices. Pastors, too, have been called to a prophetic, priestly, sagely, and governing role. If, as Oden puts it, the "bold intention" of Christian ministry is to combine the various Old Testament offices into a single public office,<sup>xxxv</sup> how is the pastoral role to be understood?

### TO BE A PROPHET

As a contemporary spokesman for God, a pastor is called to the following three roles.

*To be God's mouthpiece.* Should not pastors today, like Old Testament prophets, sense the conviction that God is speaking through them, that they too have been moved by the Holy Spirit? Should not the people have the same expectation—that they have come to hear a word from God? Should not pastors aspire to serve as a divine conscience, much as one finds in the lives of Isaiah and Jeremiah?

As a contemporary prophet, the pastor is called to declare God's word (1 Co. 15:3; Ga. 1:11; 1 Th. 2:13). As Chrysostom put it, "Sermons are not occasions for literary criticism, but rather a unique moment of expected divine address."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Of course, this is not to suggest that a pastor's sermons are to be equated with the words of the Almighty, as if some original revelation were given to him. However, as a trustee of God's mysteries he is to expound the Scriptures as the living word of God. That is his "prophetic task."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

*To carry the Word like a burden.* Like Old Testament prophets, the apostles were resolute and passionate in proclaiming God's Word. Also, Paul viewed himself as a man under divine constraint. When he wrote, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Co. 9:16), he was echoing those in the prophetic office who, like Jeremiah, felt compelled to preach.

Recognizing their prophetic identity, pastors today need to sense divine compulsion within their hearts like burning bones if they choose to keep His word inside. Too often sermons become mechanical, but as Packer put it, pastors should preach each sermon as if it were their last.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

*To bear the price.* To be a prophet demands courage, for a prophet of God is called to confront the evil of his day (Am. 3:7-8). Just as prophets of old paid a high price (Is. 6:11; Je. 16; Da. 6; Ho. 1-3; Hab. 3:1-2) so will today's "prophets." This demands a bold and dauntless faith. At times pastors must have the courage to stand up, to be the conscience of the community.<sup>xxxix</sup> A vote on a moral issue, a stance against a powerful, yet unethical parishioner, and a message that will be widely unpopular, yet critical for the moment, will all face today's prophets.

The price may be as subtle but as painful as the small talk in the church foyer, which festers into a cold and distancing congregation. It may be as overt as personal attacks by a community that hates the light. Prophets were not popular in Israel, and pastors today are often not popular, especially in an environment that places a premium on comfort and soothing words.

The minister who never cries "Who is sufficient for these things?" does not understand Christ's calling. To be entrusted with the very oracles of God, to shepherd and feed the flock of Christ, to stand before an amused or hostile world with the folly of the gospel—this is not to choose a profession; it is to choose the crucified.<sup>xl</sup>

This challenge has led some pastors to disregard this part of their identity. Refusing to be prophets, they have become bland and indirect. The need to proclaim the word of God and to view proclamation as an opportunity to promote spiritual change is as critical as ever. Peterson wrote, "I am convinced that we must take seriously a prophetic role for the church in our society. Woe to us, and our nation and our world—if we do not."<sup>xli</sup>

## TO BE A PRIEST

To declare that the pastor's identity, in part, is sourced in the Old Testament priest may be questioned by some. Evangelicals shy from a priestly orientation, fearing that such an emphasis may encourage a pastor to create an unhealthy distinction between himself and the laity.

History argues for such concern. When leaders of the early church began to apply the term of priest to themselves, a title that reached full flower by the medieval period, the priesthood of all believers became obscured.<sup>xlii</sup> The distinction between laity and clergy was amplified by the assumption of a sacerdotal caste. This has led Grudem to warn, "To try to perpetuate such a 'priesthood' distinct from the rest of believers is to attempt to maintain an Old Testament institution which Christ has abolished once and for all."<sup>xliii</sup>

Furthermore, when such an identity is fostered, some may fear that a pastor will usurp the mediatorial role of Christ—and people will look to the minister for absolution from sin rather than to Christ. "There is an entire silence about priestly functions; for the most exalted office in the Church, the highest gift of the Spirit, conveyed no sacerdotal right which was not enjoyed by the humblest member of the Christian community."<sup>xliv</sup>

The New Testament never applies the word "priest" to ordained ministers. Instead, it notes that all believers are priests (1 Pe. 2:5, 9; Re. 1:6). As Wright concludes, "There is no New Testament warrant for ascribing any special qualification of priesthood to ordained persons within the common priesthood of the church."<sup>xlv</sup>

Yet, while these concerns are legitimate, and while pastors share a priestly identity with all believers, there is a legitimate as well as essential link with the Old Testament office that must not be overlooked. Like Old Testament priests, pastors are part of a formally designated and consecrated ministry, the nature of which calls for priestly acts at their deepest levels.

*To come alongside.* Pastors are called to come alongside, to console and comfort. Following the incarnational pattern of Christ, pastors must enter the depths of human experience, seeking to understand it.<sup>xvi</sup> That is, the “priestly” pastor is keenly sensitive to his people’s spiritual needs. And no matter how deep may be their pain, he is willing to be there with them. Under the shadow of the Old Testament priest, who empathized with his people and stood as their representative before God, the New Testament pastor stands with his congregation.

This reflects itself in several ways. First, he is called to intercede. While all believers have a responsibility to pray for each other (1 Ti. 2:1-2; Ja. 5:16), the ministry of intercession is at the very center of a pastor’s calling—what might be referred to as the central priestly act. Paul modeled this more than any minister of God, for his epistles are filled with pastoral prayers, as he interceded for the flocks God called him to shepherd (Ro. 1:8-10; 2 Co. 13:7-9; Eph. 1:15-23; Ph. 1:3-11; Co. 1:3-14; 2 Th. 1:11-12; 2 Ti. 1:3-7; Phm. 4-7). His letters reveal a heart that was completely and resolutely committed to people. In similar fashion, he wrote his pastoral epistles, instructing future pastors to do the same (1 Ti. 2:1-2, 8).

Second, where there is sin, the pastor enters alongside, seeking to encourage reconciliation with God and with others. Tidball calls this the central thrust of ministry,<sup>xvii</sup> and it is one of the pastor’s most demanding tasks. It costs sleepless nights, great emotional energy, and the pain of potential abandonment. It also requires great intercession. The ministry of reconciliation (2 Co. 5:19) demands nothing less than a priestly intercessory heart.

Third, where there is pain, the pastor is called to share. Where there is suffering, the priestly nature of the ministry calls for him to immerse himself here as well. While many shy away out of fear or unwillingness to face discomfort, the pastor seizes the occasion to be alongside, to hurt with those who hurt. Peterson describes pastoral work as one of “engaging” in human suffering. “The pastor who substitutes cheery bromides for this companionship ‘through the valley of deep shadows’ can fairly be accused of cowardice.”<sup>xviii</sup> It takes a degree of courage to step into a situation where a mother has lost her baby, a parent anguishes over a rebellious child, or a wife has only moments earlier received word concerning the death of her husband. By the pastor’s work, however, the church is better able to be what God has called it to be—a healing community.

*To guard the worship.* Like Old Testament priests, pastors ultimately bear responsibility for the service of worship. While others fulfill certain roles, from arranging flowers to organizing the choir, the pastor carries the responsibility of preserving the dignity of God’s house. He is responsible for presiding over worship services, helping others prepare to meet God.<sup>xlix</sup>

*To be holy.* Because pastors lead their people in worship, they must be men of integrity. Old Testament priests were to be experts on ritual purity, but they were also to maintain absolute personal holiness (Lev. 11-15). Similarly pastors are to maintain not only the purity of worship but also purity in their personal lives. The office of pastor “is nothing less than a vocation to holiness.”<sup>l</sup> Athanasius said it well: “You cannot put straight in others what is warped in yourself.”

*To bless the people.* Like Old Testament priests, pastors are called to a ministry of blessing. Priests were to pronounce a benediction on the people (Num. 6:22-27); this was a crucial priestly duty (cf. Le. 9:22; Dt. 21:5). So, too, pastors are to engage in the ministry of blessing. Benedictions may be given at the close of worship services, as well as in homes. Parishioners expect pastors to carry out such an act.

*To bring an offering.* As a final argument for the pastor’s link with the Old Testament priest, it is worth noting that Paul used priestly language in describing himself and others. He referred to those he had come to shepherd as his “offering” to God (Ro. 15:16). He alluded to himself as a “priest,” ministering the gospel of God. Paul viewed Epaphroditus as a “priest,” because of the offering he brought to Paul (Ph. 2:25; 4:18). Paul viewed himself as a “libation” poured out on the sacrificial offering of the Philippians’ faith (Ph. 2:17).

Pastors must be willing to view themselves at times as sacrificial victims, paying a certain price for people's sins. When does a pastor do this? Whenever he bears up with their pain and experiences the hurt of their sin. On another occasion Paul likened himself to a poured-out drink offering (2 Ti. 4:6). Using again the metaphor of a libation, Paul thought of his life as a sacrificial offering, a challenge he issued to all believers (Ro. 12:1). Just as sacrifice and forgiveness were the domains in which Old Testament priests lived, so these will be the experience of pastors. The ministry of reconciliation and sympathy will enlist their highest powers.<sup>li</sup>

## TO BE A SAGE

Like sages of the Old Testament, pastors are to fulfill the following roles.

*To search for wisdom.* A pastor is identified by his affection and passion for truth. Von Rad has noted that the essential task of the sage was to perceive truth.<sup>lii</sup> Similarly pastors are to hunger to perceive understanding, to discern prudence. Searching for understanding, as for gold, is more than a passion. It is painstaking labor (Pr. 2:1-5), but it is spurred by the conviction that wisdom is a gift imparted from above (Ja. 1:5-6; 3:13-18). Being faithful in this search, ministers become the sages others are encouraged to seek out.

*To observe life.* Because the pastor is a sage, his study will never be an ivory tower, a haven to escape the demands of ministry or to run from the needs of his people. The sage was more than a person on a sapiential quest. He was committed to integrating truth with life—to deliver truth in memorable statements. This demanded he spend much time with people, studying those lives God placed before him.<sup>liii</sup>

Pastors face the same demands. They need to be at their people's workplace, in their homes, and on their campuses, observing and feeling life's realities. This means knowing about a deacon's workplace, where an insecure manager makes the office a difficult place. It calls for being with the shut-in who must rely on his tape-recorded sermons to sustain her during the week. It means sensing the fears of a professional who knows, with corporate downsizing, that his employment may be terminated tomorrow. Such firsthand experiences enable pastors to speak with greater wisdom from the pulpit.

*To give wise counsel.* Whether from the pulpit or in personal counseling, pastors are called to minister the practicalities of spiritual truth. The issues may range from marital conflict to discerning God's will. "The pastor who maintains a consistent counseling ministry will move in the direction of life-situation preaching. Preaching will start where people live."<sup>liiv</sup> The office of sage assures pastors that this role is essential to their pastoral identity. Like Solomon, pastors sometimes are asked to referee between people in conflict. "The pastor will be called upon to deal with persons facing quite different states of life crises. He must remain responsive to all the different levels and developmental stages of the life cycle. Counsel must be attentive to those developmental differences."<sup>liiv</sup>

*To live an ordered life.* Fulfilling the office of sage also means that a pastor is impressed with order, and his life results in some sort of measured pattern. At the heart of the sage's worldview was a conviction that what is wise is that which is ordered. Chaos, hurry, and disorder are the antitheses of wisdom. In the sage's view of reality, God has established an orderly universe. Man's principal responsibility is to live in harmony with this order.<sup>livi</sup> This comes as a result of conforming to the discipline of instruction.<sup>liii</sup>

Such an order, described and mandated in the Old Testament wisdom books, is underscored in a concise way in Ja. 3:17, in which James described the orderly way heavenly wisdom manifests itself. An ordered life is, first and foremost, a pure life, with passions under control (Pr. 5-7). An ordered life is arranged in such a way as to promote peace. When a pastor takes on the characteristics of a sage, he brings with him a spirit of conciliation (cf. Pr. 3:17) and gentleness (cf. Pr. 15:1). He is known as a mediator and a peacemaker. James also described the wise man as one who is righteous (Ja. 3:17). Truth and kindness are the inseparable qualities of a wise person whose life is orderly.

An ordered ministry, then, is critical to a pastor's priorities. This is crucial, for few professions have the potential to be so chaotic. Working with volunteers, who come and go, working with a schedule that is largely self-determined and interruptive, and working against a spiritual tide that will do all it can to unsettle, pastors need the model and counsel of the sage to stand their ground and pursue order.<sup>lviii</sup> Therefore the pastor's home, his life, and his marriage must be in order.

## TO BE A KING

Though a pastor is not called to reign over his church, he is called to three essential characteristics that were true of Israel's rulers.

*To be a leader.* As a learning church needs a teacher, and a feeding church needs a pastor, so a working church needs a leader.<sup>lix</sup> Every church must have trusted leadership. While pastors differ in their leadership styles, they must unite people toward a common goal, call people to decisions, and lovingly lead people forward (cf. Jos. 24:14-24). If one is not capable of such leadership, he should not be in such a position. As Oden notes, "They are not just pastors to individuals, but to a community that hungers for a wise and useful ordering of itself."<sup>lx</sup> Terms like "elder" and "overseer" underscore the importance of leadership as part of pastoral identity.

Wise pastors will not override the judgment of their people by the force of their own prerogatives. Instead, wise pastors recognize that authority ultimately rests with God, and that the way up is down. The godly Old Testament king realized the same truth. Pastors are not to lead in coercive ways, but must boldly guide, based on the Lord's will and an empathetic sense of what the congregation needs. As overseers, pastors are to govern their congregations and to influence opinion.

*To impart a vision.* Pastors must be sensitive to the vision God is imparting. Churches look to their pastors to cast the vision. Part of pastoral identity is wrapped up in climbing the mountain, looking out over the horizon, charting the course, and collecting the people along the way.<sup>lxi</sup> Like the sons of Issachar, pastors must understand the times and know what their people must do (1 Ch. 12:32).

*To steward the resources.* A congregation consists of redeemed people, uniquely gifted, to do some work of service (Eph. 4:11-16). God has given the church pastors, so that saints might be equipped and ministry accomplished.<sup>lxii</sup> Just as a king was to be a steward of Israel's resources and called the people to action, so pastors must do the same with the churches they are called to guide. This task balances the priestly side of the pastoral role for without this engaging of members in ministry, one can assume too much ministry.<sup>lxiii</sup>

*To lead in battle.* Just as a king was called on to lead a nation into battle, so pastors are to take the lead in spiritual conflicts. This means articulating the principles and procedures of spiritual warfare, whether that be wisely expounding Eph. 6:10-17 or putting their lives on the line for their church.

These tasks are not easy to carry out. Just as kings faced resistance to leadership, so will pastors. Congregations, at least by words, want a pastor to be a leader. Yet, when he exercises leadership, it may not always be well received. While they need to be leaders, giving vision, they will face congregations that all too often are committed to the status quo. Wise is the pastor who realizes he is called to lead and yet who works to gain the trust of his people and works hard to engage others in participating in an imparted vision.

## CONCLUSION

The Old Testament offices provide a solid framework from which to measure pastoral identity and function. They give legitimacy to a pastor's commitment to prepare and preach the Word, a pastor's

responsibility to pray and intercede for his people, a pastor's need to serve as a counselor to his people, and a pastor's task to administer and lead a church.

Though pastors' gifts, temperament, and training will cause them to gravitate toward one identity more than the others, these four offices teach them to maintain their ministry in the church in balance. By maintaining these four areas of responsibility, a church leader functions properly as a "pastor," or shepherd, thereby identifying himself closely with the Lord Jesus who called Himself "the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11, 14).

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## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Richard Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 38.
  - <sup>2</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *The Christian Pastor* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 129.
  - <sup>3</sup> A helpful resource is H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel. D. Williams, eds., *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Harper, 1956).
  - <sup>4</sup> David L. Larsen, *Caring for the Flock* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), xi.
  - <sup>5</sup> David Fisher, "A Ministry for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Lecture Series, Western Baptist Seminary, January 26-30, 1993.
  - <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>7</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 232.
  - <sup>8</sup> Edward T. Oakes, "Evangelical Theology in Crisis," *First Things* 36 (October 1993): 40.
  - <sup>9</sup> Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, 40.
  - <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 40-41.
  - <sup>11</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983), 5.
  - <sup>12</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 219.
  - <sup>13</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 39.
  - <sup>14</sup> George H. Williams, "The Ministry of the Ante-Nicene Church (c. 125-325)," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, 28. Williams observes that by the second century, the pastor emerged as one representing the "fullness" of ministry. Williams's configuration matches the Old Testament offices. Speaking of the pastor's identity, he writes, "He was prophet, teacher, chief celebrant at the liturgical assembly, and chairman of the board of overseers of the Christian synagogue" (ibid.).
  - <sup>15</sup> One might also note the work of Derek Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 327-328. He makes the point that ministry is not monolithic, arguing for a definition of ministry as teacher, pastor, priest, and prophet.
  - <sup>16</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 50.
  - <sup>17</sup> Oden refers to Christ as the Minister par excellence, stating, "Christ intended that our current ministries continue to embody His own ministry to the world" (ibid.).
  - <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 60.
  - <sup>19</sup> Fisher, "A Ministry for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."
  - <sup>20</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 282.
  - <sup>21</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1974), 21.
  - <sup>22</sup> Louis Goldberg, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:284.
  - <sup>23</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (October-December 1979): 304.
  - <sup>24</sup> W. Robert Cook, "Is There a Fourth 'Office' of Christ?" (Unpublished paper, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, n.d.), 1.
  - <sup>25</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 18:15; 1 Samuel 3:4-14; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 2:11.
  - <sup>26</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), xxxii.
  - <sup>27</sup> J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 373.
  - <sup>28</sup> Thomas Oden, *Ministry through Word and Sacrament* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 58.

- <sup>29</sup> John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), ix.
- <sup>30</sup> Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 55.
- <sup>31</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 166.
- <sup>32</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1:113.
- <sup>33</sup> Oden, *The Word of Life*, 285.
- <sup>34</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 137.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 86-87.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Cited in Oden, *Ministry through Word and Sacrament*, 37.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 86.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 288.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 139.
- <sup>xl</sup> James D. Berkeley, ed., *Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1: 15.
- <sup>xli</sup> Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, 159.
- <sup>xlii</sup> John R. W. Stott, *One People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 28-29.
- <sup>xliii</sup> Wayne Grudem, *I Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 101. Tidballs' warning is appropriate here: "The pastor who puts himself above his fellows and has an over grand conception of his responsibility will spend most of his ministry suffering from fatigue and seeing other people as a burden or a problem" (*Skillful Shepherds*, 35).
- <sup>xliv</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1873), 184.
- <sup>xl v</sup> D. F. Wright, "Priesthood of all Believers," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 531.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 90.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 330.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, 136.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 90.
- <sup>l</sup> Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, 210.
- <sup>li</sup> Washington Gladden, *The Christian Pastor and the Working Church* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1906), 61. "No matter what view a pastor may take of his office, the real value of his service to his people will be found in his personal and spiritual, rather than in his formal and ecclesiastical relations to them. His usefulness among them will be due not to any powers by which he is elevated above them or separated from them, but to a character which in the fullest sense he shares with them" (*ibid.*).
- <sup>lii</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 22.
- <sup>liii</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.
- <sup>li v</sup> Oates, *Wisdom in Israel*, 148.
- <sup>l v</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Counsel* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 129. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 129.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 217-219.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Leo G. Perdue, "Cosmology and the Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, 458.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Neuhaus offers a powerful warning against "acedia," the tendency to dawdle away the time in chaotic ministry (*Freedom for Ministry*, 227).
- <sup>lix</sup> Gladden, *The Christian Pastor and the Working Church*, 62.
- <sup>lx</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 154.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Darius Salter, *What Really Matters in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).
- <sup>lxii</sup> A. Duane Litfin, "The Nature of the Pastoral Role: The Leader as Completer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (January-March 1982): 57-66.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 170.