

Fr. Perozich comments —

*Pás - tor - al*, accent on the first syllable, describes the **action** of guiding the sheep. *Pas - tór - al* is the **description** of a bucolic scene in a picture or on a roadside trip.

The author posits that persons in power, along with many other words, are changing the meaning of *pástor* in order to attain their goals of redirecting the behavior of other people and of the powerfuls' pursuit of self contentment and dominance.

The opening line of the article regarding the will of the Shepherd states: **It is evident from the Scriptures that *pástor* ministry, like prophetic ministry, is not based only on the feelings and sensibilities of the flock. It is based firstly on fidelity to the will of the Chief Shepherd.**

the author continues, “[*pástor*] is **not based only on the feelings and sensibilities of the flock. It is based firstly on fidelity to the will of the Chief Shepherd.**

These citations from the bible show the will of the Shepherd Jesus to all future shepherds including popes, bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay faithful

*Matthew:28:19f* “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

*John 10:12-14* “I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me.”

*John 3:5* ““Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

*John 6:53-57* “Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.

*John 14:23* “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.

*Acts 4:12* “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”

*Acts 17:28* “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being,’ as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’”

*1Timothy 2:3-6* “This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all.”

Chaos, indoctrination, change of meaning, ideology all for diseducation to reform the mind and souls of the faithful seem to be happening.

The author states, **“the chief duty of those who claim to be pastors ought to be to provide principally for the spiritual needs of their flock, and to protect them from dangers to their salvation.”**

The author warns, **““accompaniment” and “presence” to our people. All these things, much like the word “pástor”, seem good on the outside, but they conceal a paradigm shift in what these actually mean in practice. As with most things, it’s important to observe not what people say when they use these words, but more so to observe what they do.”**

The author implies that doctrine and dogma have been abandoned so that the faithful be controlled by those doing so. **“dogma and doctrine for us are both launching points and guard rails. They serve to give us sure and secure points, based on reason and revelation, from which we may grow to understand the mystery of God and his work in time.”**

As a priest who speaks with fellow priests, I hear from them precisely what the author says, **“Most perplexing above all are those priests who are criticized for not being “pástor” by their bishops when they are doing precisely what the Church says she wants.”**

The new role forced on pastors is, **“The pastor should be the one who manages all temporal affairs while providing for the people’s ‘needs’, precisely as they view them.”** [virus/vax, immigration, climate theory, race theory, socialism, income redistribution, reparations, equality of outcome.]

***“I know that, as a member of the clergy, my first and foremost duty is the spiritual welfare of those in my charge. Why is it that helping to obtain someone’s green card is more pastoral than making sure people are in valid, successful sacramental marriages?”***

*Priests need faithful shepherds too, those faithful to Jesus, not to their own ideas, to the UN, to the government, to NGO’s, to donors, to powerful social change groups.*

*To conform priests to the will of such world leaders, even Pope Francis has used judgmental undefined slogans and euphemisms to condemn priests as clerical, rigid, without clear definition of these terms, because the priests have a love for tradition in worship, in personal devotion, in clerical attire, and on. <https://www.churchmilitant.com/news/article/rigid-seminarians>*

*Holy Father, we need you to draw us to the teachings on the Good Shepherd, not to beat us and try to reform us according to peculiar ideas of clericalism.*

*Enough from me. The article below says a lot.*

## **What does “pastoral” even mean anymore?**

It is evident from the Scriptures that pastoral ministry, like prophetic ministry, is not based only on the feelings and sensibilities of the flock. It is based firstly on fidelity to the will of the Chief Shepherd.



*(Image: Pawan Sharma/Unsplash.com)*

**One of the foremost signs of the degradation of a culture is the degradation of its language.** Language is the color of thought, and enables us to communicate as best we can the things we see, conceive, and imagine. Words and their meanings can change and adapt over time, but a certain stability or continuity is always needed so that language can convey what it must between peoples and generations. **When that stability or continuity is upended by highly motivated actors, the resultant chaos can result in an inability of people to conceptualize and grasp a problem, so that they cannot name the problem,**

**because that is antecedent to solving it.** The exorcists tell us that knowing the name of a demon gives a certain amount of leverage over it.

A study of heresiology [heresies] shows us how a basic knowledge of Christian heresies can be a strong aid in helping us to know what true orthodoxy is. These are just some examples of how, truly, it pays in almost every case to “know your enemy”; or at the very least, **to be able to step into the conceptual world of another person or frame of mind.**

Many writers and cultural commentators in the past twenty years have lamented the fact that the so-called ‘free world’ is increasingly engaged in a **project of dis-education.** It is a fact that the average eighth-grader today, when tested, does not demonstrate the same capacities of a child in the same grade nearly fifty years ago. Literacy seems to have peaked in much of the Western world, if we take that to mean the brute capacity to interpret the phonographic symbols we call letters and words.

Yet **reading and listening comprehension appears to be increasingly rare.** It is interesting for me to hear parents, even very liberal ones, complain about **the indoctrination occurring in government (public) schools**—not so much because they disagree with transgenderism and critical race theory, but more so because, in an already jam-packed schedule, they would rather have their children learning skills applicable to the real-world. Or, at the very least, skills that will make them truly “well-educated”. To them, it seems like a quasi-

luxury to have their children learning about sex and drugs when they could be learning about math and science.

Indoctrination, even when you agree with it, can never substitute for true education, because **indoctrination does not expand the mind or the heart of the learner. True knowledge, when shared, naturally opens up new questions and new approaches.** This is the root of the richness of human thought on everything from biology to theology. Indoctrination, in contrast, is the equivalent of highly processed food: super-palatable but barely satiating to the inquisitive. And just as the body gets fat and indolent on a diet heavy in such foods, so too does **the mind get 'fat' and lazy when it simply repeats the ideology of its handlers.**

Some critics may say that the Church, in her catechetical mission, is no better. Of course, I highly disagree, for two reasons. First, **dogma and doctrine for us are both launching points and guard rails. They serve to give us sure and secure points, based on reason and revelation, from which we may grow to understand the mystery of God and his work in time.** They also serve to keep us from making serious errors, which imperil our souls. Second, when the Church makes dogmatic formulations in response to heresies, these almost always tell us, in the strictest sense, what may *not* be said of God. They do not tell us the full extent of what may be said *of* God. They do not so much exist to constrain the soul or mind as **to redirect them toward their proper end. Words have meanings**

**which help us to understand these ends better; or at least, they should.**

In recent days, indeed, in the past half-century, perhaps **no other word or concept has been so abused by the Church as that of the term “pastoral”**. “Pastoral” seems to me to be one of those words which, like “racism” or “diversity”, **has taken on a life of its own**. Because this word has “gone rogue”, I believe it to be somewhat dangerous, because like the adjective *doubleplusgood* in an Orwellian dystopia **it is vague enough to be shaped by bad actors, yet good sounding enough to conceal their true intentions**.

Let’s start with the basic etymology, though. **“Pastoral” in the most fundamental sense means that which concerns the *pastor*, which in Latin simply means “shepherd”**. Nothing more, nothing less. That which is “pastoral” is ultimately that which pertains **to the work of guiding sheep or other livestock**. Therefore, that which pertains to the **flourishing of the flock seems to be the chief goal of ‘the pastoral’**. So, chiefly, for a shepherd to do the work of “shepherding” means to **provide for the legitimate needs of the flock and to protect it from danger**.

This basic consideration I believe should form all future discussion on the topic. Moving from the basic etymology to Church affairs, this must mean that **the chief duty of those who claim to be pastors ought to be to provide principally for the spiritual needs of their flock, and to protect them from dangers to**

**their salvation.** I would modify this just slightly to say that we should not understand this duty as *solely* spiritual, but *principally* spiritual. This is because both of the reality of humans as embodied beings, and also the high value Our Lord places on the Corporal Works of Mercy. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that the pastoral pertains principally to the spiritual order, all the while not excluding consideration given to the temporal welfare of the flock.

**“Pastoral” is a word which has come under considerable abuse in the past eight years,** roughly contemporaneous with the election of Pope Francis. Clergy constantly have been admonished to have the “smell of the sheep” and we have been urged toward **“accompaniment” and “presence” to our people.** All these things, much like the word “pastoral”, seem good on the outside, but they conceal a paradigm shift in what these actually mean in practice. As with most things, it’s important to observe not what people say when they use these words, but more so to observe what they do.

In the past eight years, virtually all talk of “pastoral” ministry has been used in regard to sinners and sin. We must accompany and be present to adulterers, people who are active homosexuals, and those who worship idols, yet claim that these rites and lifestyles are somehow compatible with Christian worship and identity. Certainly Our Lord was ‘present’ to all these kinds of people, as were the his Apostles. Yet at the same time, there was a definite limit, as is reflected in both the Gospels and the Epistles of

the New Testament, as to how far this accompaniment could go. St. Paul could, with equal fervor, appeal with such tenderness to his spiritual charges as “little children”, even comparing his pain at their sinfulness to that of a mother in labor (Gal 4:19-20), all the while calling them “stupid” (Gal 3:1) at another point for their falling into error.

It is evident from the Scriptures that pastoral ministry, like prophetic ministry, is **not based only on the feelings and sensibilities of the flock. It is based firstly on fidelity to the will of the Chief Shepherd.**

The abuses of the word “pastoral”, especially after the promulgation of *Traditionis Custodes*, once again have taken center stage, as bishops worldwide attempt to grapple with the meaning of the motu proprio. On a local level, **“pastoral” seems to be for many that which causes the most amount of public contentment, most of the time.** In other words, if the parish or institution is generally happy with its leadership, and the leadership is not of such a nature as to provoke strongly worded letters and complaints, one’s “pastoral ministry” is generally considered a success.

Granted, priests, like anyone else, can be gruff and insensitive in the accomplishment of even worthy objectives. Conversely, even the most empathetic and sensitive priest may struggle to get certain malcontents (and I believe it is true, if we were to do a study, that 1% of complainers generate 90% of complaints) on board with good initiatives. **Most perplexing above all are those**

**priests who are criticized for not being “pastoral” by their bishops when they are doing precisely what the Church says she wants.** *For just one example, the Church says in her official documents that Latin and Gregorian Chant should be preserved, and the latter should even have “pride of place” in liturgy. Yet when certain priests do just that, that is often considered “unpastoral”.*

**This leads to a question: “unpastoral” according to whom?** I recall once hearing a priest of the Byzantine Rite complain, “When I was ordained, I was eager to shepherd the sheep of Christ. As I have grown older, I have discovered I am increasingly shepherding the goats.” Lest the reference be lost, the priest was referring to the “goats” who are the damned in the Last Judgment, as depicted by Christ in Matthew 25. It seems to me that there is a question few people are asking: to whom, exactly, are we supposed to be pastoral? If this were the world of agriculture and cattle, it seems reasonable to assume that we should direct sheep in a different way than we would, say, raise chickens. A goat, if it could complain, certainly would if it was guided in a way more proper to a sheep.

**“Pastoral”, then, when applied to ministry, is vague and ineffectual if it does not take into account the persons shepherded, and the goal to which they are led.**

Another angle to look at here is not just **what is valued in regard to pastoral, but also what is prioritized.** It seems that initiatives which are charitable

or collectivistic tend to receive the adjective “pastoral” to describe them more so than the cultic or the individual. For example, **to work with migrants, refugees, and immigrants in many circles seems to be a form of ministry and work which merits to be called “pastoral.** In this case, it seems that “pastoral” is synonymous with “compassionate”.

I too have had this experience in my own ministry. If one opens the parish to immigrants and migrants, one may be called “pastoral”, and perhaps rightly so. But if one asks the inconvenient question whether these migrants know the Hail Mary or the Our Father, such considerations seem somehow insensitive.

It reminds me of Dorothy Day’s famous quip: “When I give the poor food, they call me a Saint; when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist.” I would say something similar: when I give an immigrant food, I am called pastoral. When I ask why they have no faith, I am called a xenophobe. Why is that? I know that, **as a member of the clergy, my first and foremost duty is the spiritual welfare of those in my charge. Why is it that helping to obtain someone’s green card is more pastoral than making sure people are in valid, successful sacramental marriages?**

A further problem we face in using the word “pastoral” is the concomitant and **related abuse of the word “service”**. All too often, it seems that we view service not as self-gift, but as product output. The “pastoral” pastor in most of the Church seems to be the person who keeps the external ‘machinery’ of the Church

humming: a full bank account, timely diocesan assessments, and able administration of buildings. **The pastor should be the one who manages all temporal affairs while providing for the people's 'needs', precisely as they view them.**

This approach is especially dangerous in tandem with the rise of “**moralistic-therapeutic Deism**“. **Religion, in this conception, has two purposes: to make people get along, and to make people feel good.** When it infects the clergy, it invariably corrupts the word “pastoral”. “Pastoral” work involves being as nice as possible while trying to make people be nice to each other. It also means making people feel good about themselves, most of the time. Returning to the point on self-gift, a priest and his people can be intensely narcissistic and self-serving in their “service”, in how they placate and soothe each other in order to get what they want out of the other. The priest wants a good collection, the people want a person who tells them how wonderful they are. Even the jargon of “servant-leadership”, so in vogue in the 1980s (and having an unfortunate reemergence at present) struggles to define what exactly it means, just like the word “pastoral”. **This is, in summary, precisely what happens when we substitute means for ends, and ends for means.**

To resolve this problem and to put flesh and bone on what “pastoral” means, **our first objective should be to study closely the lives and words of Christs, the Apostles, and the Prophets.**

Secondly, we must be clear about what exactly we truly want to achieve as a Church. In other words, who are we? **Are we the bride of Christ, the ark of salvation, or are we a social club?**

Thirdly, we must return to theological ontology. How do we steer our collective behavior more closely to resemble our common theological commitments, rather than our common convenience? We may find that at the root of the abuse of the word “pastoral” is that insidious vice we call acedia. That is to say, acedia slips in when we have lost touch with the roots of our faith and that charity which compels us to do that which Christ commanded, and to find joy therein. As the spiritual masters have often observed, it is common in people who are immersed in the vice of acedia to be extremely attentive to process, but extremely negligent in purpose. Acedia has a nasty way of appearing to be busy outside, while being dead inside.

The same is true in the abuse of the word “pastoral”. What amounts to the pastoral can be exteriorly very good, or at least neutral. But it can become deranged when we forget what it is for. Until we remember why we are pastoral, the ‘how’ of being pastoral will continue to elude us.

*(Editor’s note: This essay originally appeared, in slightly different form, on **the Scutum et Lorica site.**)*