The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:2)
PROPHETS, PRIESTS AND KINGS: THE USE OF METAPHORS IN TRAINING GLOBAL LEADERS TOWARDS PASTORAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT: As the center of Christianity moves increasingly towards the Global South, the need for the development of pastoral leaders in these regions will expand exponentially. Many potential leaders face obstacles of traveling vast distances, possessing insufficient finances, or inadequate academic preparation in pursuit of further development. In the sparse number of instances where training is available, Christian leadership development is often focused on practical application rather than foundational theology. With this in view, this paper explores the potential use of metaphors in leadership training for its ability to bridge gaps in contextualization and establish global leaders for the Church who are strengthened by foundational theology that grants them a core identity from which to lead from.

KEYWORDS: Theological Education, Pastoral Training, Global Missions
Prophets, Priests and Kings: The Use of Metaphors in Training Global Leaders Towards Pastoral Identity

David Sills (2010) once observed, “the quickest way to create an unreached people group is to abandon a reached one” (p. 127). His thesis is supported by a historical perspective on missions through which one can observe that a failure to offer ongoing support and training for new leaders in unreached regions has often lead to a syncretistic church which becomes inoculated to the true gospel, producing converts who are more unreached than the original people group. While many will agree that theological training is necessary in unreached regions, little consensus has been reached regarding the type of training necessary to sustain churches for multiple generations. More specific to this paper is the topic of pastoral identity and to what extent our leadership training is producing unbalanced curriculums which place greater weight on practicality and efficiency rather than foundational courses that equip pastors to reflect deeply enough on issues of calling and identity. This paper will briefly explore the potential for the use of pastoral metaphors in theological training by highlighting their ability to offer emerging leaders an internal language that is more easily contextualized, adaptable, and ultimately, lasting. In order to present this thesis, I will highlight the growing need for theological education in the Majority World, summarize a number of key barriers to this enterprise and, finally the way in which the employment of metaphors in pastoral training could aid in the process of developing a healthier generation of emerging leaders in the Majority World while sustaining the church for generations to come.

PASTORAL TRAINING

Shortly after becoming Pope in the year 590 AD, Gregory the Great produced a work entitled The Pastoral Rule in which he set about the task of describing in great detail the nature, duties, and obligations of clergy in relation to the “heaviness” of their work (Schaff & Wace, 1995). Centuries later, in preparation for a “Day of Humiliation” held on December 4, 1655, Richard Baxter (1808) published his own work entitled The Reformed Pastor. Amidst rampant complaints against clergy, Baxter’s work was dedicated to the task of “showing the nature of the pastoral work” (p. B1) in an age of growing distrust of ordained ministers. Both pieces attempted to speak with authority into what appeared to be widespread confusion about the role of pastors in their current contexts.

Highly influential in their respective eras, these works remain but a demonstrable sample of the ongoing necessity of pastoral reflection throughout the ages. In the centuries before and after these treatises were first published, the issue of pastoral identity has scarcely ever been absent in the writings of those concerned about the nature and influence of the Church (Niebuhr & Williams, 1956). In every epoch since the inception of the Christian movement, pastors, theologians and

1 The term “Majority World” will be used throughout this paper to denote regions of the world which have historically been referred to as developing countries, third-world, or the global south. Current shifts to the term Majority World demonstrate a more accurate perspective on these regions as many reside in the north and exist along a continuum of varying stages of development.
2 The phrase “showing the nature of the pastoral work” first appeared as part of the title of the book in the 1657 edition.
scholars of every variety have added their voices to the growing amount of literature dedicated to answering the question, \textit{what is a pastor?}

While each author has considered their own age as a period of ministerial crisis to varying degrees, the sheer multitude of voices throughout the generations lends itself to the more sobering proposition made by William Willimon (2002) when he observed, “Because of its nature, pastoral identity is never secure. In every age, the church must ask, what are pastors for?” (p. 12).

Indeed, in our own period, the search for pastoral identity has been no less persistent, if not made acuter, as the explosive growth of Christianity in the Majority World has placed the new center of faith in the global south, as mentioned extensively by noted missiologists such as Phillip Jenkins (2011), Todd Johnson and Brian Grim (2016). Unfortunately, for a growing number of new pastoral leaders in these regions, the rapid pace of change occurring within global Christianity has not been matched by a simultaneous increase in access to theological education (Werner, 2009). Of the education which does remain available, the sheer number of schools, resources, and publications coming from the West continue to exert a disproportionate influence over the shape of global theology (Greenman, 2012). While admirable in their contributions, institutions in the West remain hampered in their attempts to educate pastors who reside in regions of the Majority World by obvious obstacles such as cost, distance, admission standards, and language barriers (Ngursangzeli Behera, 2015). Perhaps most pertinent to our discussion on theological education in the Majority World, Western institutions have proven to experience great difficulty meeting the unique needs of leaders in the Majority World due to a lack of adaptability and contextualization in their training (Werner, 2015).

In the face of steady declines in student enrollment, ministerial training in the Majority World has suffered in recent years from the need to become increasingly pragmatic, specialized, and efficient. In the process, many degree programs have been shortened while an increase of consumeristic models of education view students as “customers” rather than “learners” (Ott, 2016).

This need for accelerated, graduate-producing, learning programs is equally at play in regions of the world where the demand for trained clergy is on the rise. Unable to leave their communities for years, months or even just weeks for formal studies, emerging pastors in the Majority World often seek out programs and courses that will yield the highest returns for their growing ministries. In most cases, these leaders have a felt need for practical lessons on homiletics, hermeneutics, and counseling or informative courses in theology, and church history. Meanwhile, foundational and theoretical courses meant to undergird these fields are often viewed as supplemental at best, or an extraneous luxury at worst. As Perry Shaw (2014) notes,

Many (students) have only minimal spare time, who given any choice will study only the material that they see helps them answer their questions or gives them tools for effective service and living- in short, the material they consider to be useful (3172, Kindle)

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3 See the Association of Theological Schools data and resources at www.ats.edu

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Particularly as it relates to pastoral identity, a lack of foundational training in the Majority World threatens to define the role of pastoring in these emerging cultures as one that is primarily secured by means of skills acquisition rather than calling. Observing this trend currently at work in my own country of origin, my assertion is that our training in pastoral identity needs to move from the periphery to the center of any efforts in ministerial training in unreached regions.

In his article “Seeking Pastoral Identity”, John Johnson (2007) argues that confusion in pastoral identity stems from deficiencies in pastoral theology. Recognizing this insufficiency, Paul House (2015) exhorts educators to take a longer view of their work stating, “Christians must base their work in Biblical theology, not in current views of what is pragmatic” (3035, Kindle). While concrete training in the functional tasks of pastoring is an essential aspect of any ministerial training program, it needs to be recognized that such courses are often highly influenced by the liturgies and traditions of their country of origin, emphasizing culture-bound challenges and perspectives that often fail to be universal in nature. Furthermore, as stated earlier, an exclusive emphasis on pragmatic courses of study run the risk of producing pastors equipped to perform the tasks of the pastoral role without any foundational understanding of their pastoral identity. While trustworthy global statistics on pastoral longevity in the Majority World remain largely unavailable, suffice to say that any pastoral training that does not emphasize core issues of identity and calling will produce pastors who are likely to wither under the weight of syncretism, persecution, loneliness, and isolation. As Shaw (2014) reminds all educators,

For ministerial formation, the real learning is not what is remembered at the end of the course, but what is remembered five or ten years after taking the course, and even more what shapes in the long-term the character and actions of the learner (2936, Kindle)

For this reason, it is beneficial for scholars of practical theology to think in increasingly creative and contextualized ways as they remain faithful to the task of training global leaders by embracing the inherent value of the use of pastoral metaphors in ministerial training. Developing a universal language could assist the global church with the discovery of a voice that could contribute to pastoral longevity. Increasing pastors’ ability to reflect on their role in culturally resonant terms could promote biblical, self-reflection that could encourage the development of contextualized pastoral identity that is both theologically sound, and cultural accurate.

METAPHORS

Central to my belief in the value of pastoral metaphors for pastoral training is the inescapable nature of their constant presence in our conscious, and subconscious behaviors, as well as in our values and beliefs. “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As Richard Neuhaus (1992) once observed,

It is not an academic exercise but a day-to-day struggle to make sense of who we are and what we are doing. Models are crucial to this struggle because, in a very down-to-earth manner, we all live from models. That is, none of us lives a life of raw facts. We live in a world of interpreted fact, and models are controlling concepts in that interpretation (p. 33)
As such, metaphor possess the ability to help us discern our context while simultaneously giving guidance to our behavior, personal identity, and role within the larger framework of the communities we dwell in. As Erazim Kohak (1996) notes, “a metaphor is a mask that molds the wearer’s face” (p. 31). The unique power of metaphors lies in their ability to not only transfer meaning from one object to another but to also shape subconscious ideas and patterns of thinking in ways completely distinct from other communication devices. Metaphors shape the “core of our identities” by affecting not only our actions, but also the more subconscious aspects of our identity bound tied to faith and beliefs” (Richardson, 2011, p. 62). In this way, metaphor is able to play a vital role within entire communities as they unify through the clarification of shared symbols and models.

While a simile stimulates this transfer of meaning through explicit comparisons between objects using the words “like” or “as” (i.e. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field.” Mt 13:44), metaphors make comparisons implicitly. For example, when Isaiah speaks of God saying, ”For You are our Father” (Is 63:16), he transfers the collective understanding of the roles and expectations of an earthly father to God himself, appealing to him as the one who is faithful, providing protection and justice to His heirs. Even though simile and metaphor are used almost interchangeably in some writing, their subtle differences should not be overlooked. Due to the explicitness of the strictly comparative nature of similes (denoted by the presence of the word “like” or “as”), reification is far less likely to occur. There is a guard, so to speak, from taking the comparison too far. In short, similes provide boundaries.

When using metaphors, however, the full range of meaning is far more easily transferred, for better, or for worse. To say that ”Paul is like a father to the church at Corinth” is to invite editing in the interpretation. The reader/hearer has an opportunity to envision in what ways Paul may or may not be like a father and transfer those attributes accordingly. However, to say “Paul is a father to the Corinthian church” allows for a virtually unbridled transfer of the full emotional and conceptual range of meaning of the word “father” for his audience.

Such differences between similes and metaphors (Laniak, 2006; Bennett, 2004) are highly applicable in our discussion of contextualized theological training, as metaphors grant individual cultures the freedom to not only adopt and adapt the language employed by their clergy but also participate in the very shaping of ideas that foster deeper theological reflection and enhanced pastoral identity. By their very nature, metaphors are contextual, deriving their meaning from the models, language, and archetypes in a localized context (Kovecses, 2015). The specifics of what it means to be a “shepherd” will most certainly vary whether you are discussing the term with pastors in sub-Saharan Africa, or the highlands of Scotland.

METAPHORS AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

Those involved in biblical translations have recognized this for decades as they have pursued a wide variety of means to communicate the gospel to unreached cultures. Don Richardson’s (2005) famous “peace child”, Bruce Olson’s (2006) “hammock”, or the current debate over the use of “Father” and “Son” in Biblical translation among Muslims (Gray, Gray, & Brown, 2011) are but a small sample of the role that metaphors have played in foreign missions, and the degree to which local contexts play a dominant role in shaping a metaphor’s meaning and application. Joseph Richardson (2011) observes,
The challenges of intercultural communication multiply in religious discourse, with its objective of translating abstract ideas into cultures and languages with sufficient power to transform individual, ethnic, and regional identities and to build cohesive communities of faith. Metaphor plays a primary role in this transformative communication. (p. 62)

Biblical writers clearly understood this same principle and went to great lengths to portray leaders through a myriad of metaphors including shepherd, ambassadors, witness, athlete, architect, father and mother (cf. Jer 3:15; 2 Cor 5:20; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim 4:7; I Cor 3:10; 1 Thes 2:7). Such variance in terminology has the ability unbind the image from cultural constraints while granting significant freedom for recipients to self-theologize and contextualize the meaning for their own community. In this way, as educators make use of metaphors for pastoral training they empower national leaders to develop language informed by the local culture. In the post-agrarian United States, many pastors have abandoned the use of the term shepherd in favor of business metaphors like executive pastors, leadership teams, boards, and capital campaigns (Willard, 2016). While familiar concepts to those living in capitalistic, urban areas, the use of such metaphors in the rural villages of Sierra Leone would prove to be futile in their attempts to foster any lasting effect on pastoral identity.

Training pastors with the concepts of metaphorical language invite an exploration into the connectedness of pastoral ministry to the life of the community through meaningful symbols and terminology that reinforce, rather than confuse, the role of the pastor in their given locale. According to Ian Prattis (2001),

Symbols are thus not merely abstract, intellectual constructs -- they have to be experienced and engaged with in an almost visceral manner for their meanings to surface. In this sense, the symbolic process is a continual response system in which the symbol has to be integrated with everyday experience if a deeper understanding of it is to be the end result. (p. 39)

Towards this end, metaphors play a leading role in the construction of a living language that is continually shaping even as it shapes those that employ it, fostering a positive feedback loop through which pastors become the kind of adaptive learners conducive to longevity in ministry.

CONCLUSION

I recently explored this phenomenon during a seminar I gave to seminary students in Liberia. Drawing on St. Augustine’s imagery of the Church as an “embassy”, I challenged ministerial students to consider their role as pastors one in which they were called to live as “ambassadors” for the Kingdom of God. This would mean, in turn, that their calling would require them to serve as bridge builders between what St. Augustine (2014) referred to as “the city of God” and the “city of man.” Within this calling, I introduced them to John Calvin’s threefold model of Christ as Pastor, Prophet, and King to further define this role of an ambassador (Calvin, 2008).

Of interest to me was the way in which these pastoral students instinctively engaged the metaphorical language in contextualized nomenclature, instilling localized meaning into the terms which effortlessly unbound it from Western interpretations and perceptions. In a land of political corruption, governmental coups, witch doctors, and tribal chiefs, Calvin’s metaphors inherited native interpretations and cultural rootedness that catalyzed internal ownership and application evidenced by the personal reflections and discussion that followed. Of particular interest to me was

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the way in which these Liberian students identified their pastoral calling with the metaphors of kingship and prophet. Traditionally in the West, these pastoral metaphors are often associated with the pastor as preacher (prophet) and administrator (king). However, in the minds of these students in West Africa, these metaphors were a powerful symbol of their authority to confront systemic oppression at the hands of their government. As survivors of years of civil unrest, these young pastors began to self-theologize their calling as one that should wield influence over cultural change beyond the four walls of their church. Much of this stemmed from their associations with the symbol of kingship, still relevant amidst a culture of tribes and villages dominated by monarchial language. While in the West we often utilize the model of kingship to guide our understanding of pastoral duties, Liberian students were drawing on the metaphors ability to communicate positional status within the community.

This is but one of numerous additional examples that could be given following similar training sessions in Siberia, Indonesia, India, or Myanmar. Suffice to say here that a key endeavor for the future of leadership training within, and for, the church in among Majority World cultures must always be to emphasize the development of leaders concerned with longevity and faithfulness in mind rather than expediency. Moving forward, the questions we need to be asking, according to Paul House are not “How do we give our constituents what they want (or) sell degrees like any other commodity? But instead “What sort of education fits the Bible’s vision of ministerial preparation, what sort of minister does the church need, and what is the right thing to do in complicated times?” (House, 2015).

If our ultimate concern is to see the church not merely planted, but flourishing and reproducing in the regions of the world where the gospel has yet to take root, we need to look beyond short-sighted attempts to educate with the goals of convenience or feasibility alone and begin to foster educational programs that will feed the church for generations to come. The depth, contextualization, and foundational nature of metaphorical language serves as a promising path for the church and academy to travel together in the decades to come.

REFERENCES


