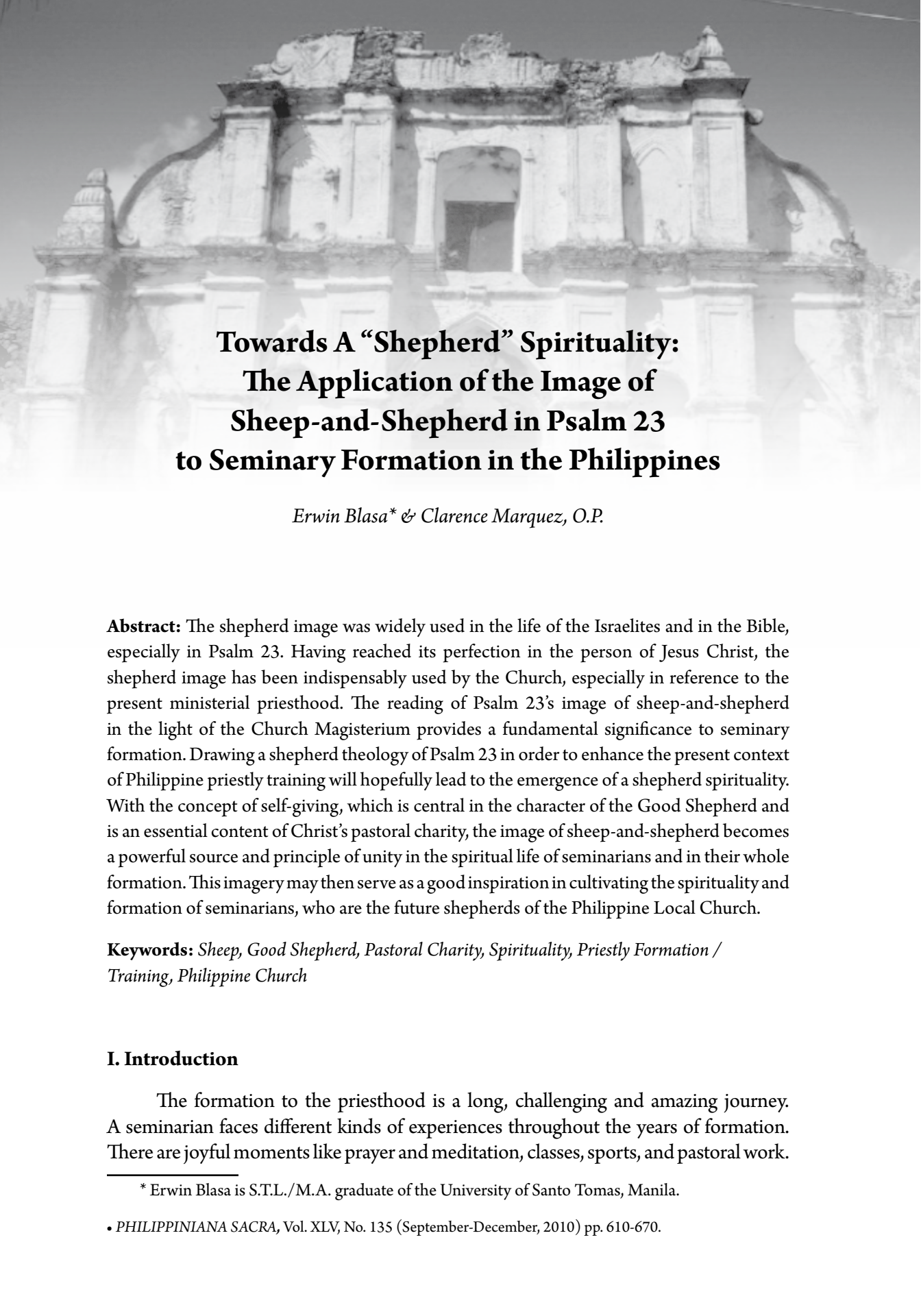




Towards A “Shepherd” Spirituality: The Application of the Image of Sheep-and-Shepherd in Psalm 23 to Seminary Formation in the Philippines

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Abstract: The shepherd image was widely used in the life of the Israelites and in the Bible, especially in Psalm 23. Having reached its perfection in the person of Jesus Christ, the shepherd image has been indispensably used by the Church, especially in reference to the present ministerial priesthood. The reading of Psalm 23's image of sheep-and-shepherd in the light of the Church Magisterium provides a fundamental significance to seminary formation. Drawing a shepherd theology of Psalm 23 in order to enhance the present context of Philippine priestly training will hopefully lead to the emergence of a shepherd spirituality. With the concept of self-giving, which is central in the character of the Good Shepherd and is an essential content of Christ's pastoral charity, the image of sheep-and-shepherd becomes a powerful source and principle of unity in the spiritual life of seminarians and in their whole formation. This imagery may then serve as a good inspiration in cultivating the spirituality and formation of seminarians, who are the future shepherds of the Philippine Local Church.

Keywords: *Sheep, Good Shepherd, Pastoral Charity, Spirituality, Priestly Formation / Training, Philippine Church*

I. Introduction

The formation to the priesthood is a long, challenging and amazing journey. A seminarian faces different kinds of experiences throughout the years of formation. There are joyful moments like prayer and meditation, classes, sports, and pastoral work.

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But there are also times when life in the seminary seems depressing due to lack of focus, dryness in prayer, laziness in studies, family problems, desire for a more pleasurable life outside the seminary, a realization that priesthood might not be God's will for one's self, and many others. A seminarian who does not have the right motivation to the priesthood, the firm decision and focus to follow God as a future priest, and most importantly, the ardent trust and confidence in God in the midst of difficulties and confusion, would easily walk away from the journey and take another direction.

But right motivation, firm decision and focus to follow God, and ardent trust and confidence in Him in the midst of difficulties, arise from an experience and knowledge of Him. One cannot follow and love God without knowing Him. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, "You cannot love the one whom you do not know."¹

And one cannot know God without experiencing Him. There should be an actual experience of God, a religious experience,² wherein one can truly say that, 'at this very moment, I believe that I experience the Lord himself, calling me, asking me, to follow him and be his priest.' Such experience and knowledge of God would be the seminarian's source of strength and inspiration, especially in times of trials and difficulties.

How then shall a seminarian pray in times of joys and victory, and especially in moments of crisis and pain, of dryness and confusion? How shall he address God and describe how the events really are and tell God how he feels?

The Hebrew Bible offers a model of prayer during these times. One of which is the Book of Psalms, particularly, the Psalm 23:

¹ *A Psalm of David*

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;

² he makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters; ³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (RSV)

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 27, art. 2.

² See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 107-109.

It is remarkable how deep the confidence and trust in God that this prayer expresses. More importantly, it clearly exemplifies the depth of trust in God that a seminarian could and should have in his formation.

Psalms 23 (probably the most widely known and well-loved in all the Psalter) shows an extraordinary expression of a trusting relationship with God. Its appeal also lies in the simplicity and beauty of its poetry, strengthened by the serene confidence that it exudes. Its simplicity arises from the use of the sheep-and-shepherd metaphor or image. As Peter Craigie points out:

The psalm is written consistently from the perspective of the sheep; that is, its expression of trust and confidence presupposes an awareness of helplessness and need on the part of the one who trusts. In a distinctive fashion, the psalmist has set forth the fundamentals of the covenant relationship, not in terms of Lord and servant, but in the more intimate language of the shepherd and sheep.³

The image of sheep-and-shepherd might have become unfamiliar or strange to the present times of highly technological and globalized world. Bucolic life seemed to be understandable and accustomed only in the western countries. But it is interesting to know that the Christian Church continues to make use of the shepherd image to refer and describe the life of the Church, especially ministerial priesthood and seminary formation. In the encyclical letter *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II refers in a solemn way to this image of the sheep-and-shepherd. He says:

The figure of Jesus Christ as Shepherd of the Church, his flock, takes up and represents in new and more evocative terms the same content as that of Jesus Christ as Head and Servant.... His whole life is a continual manifestation of his “pastoral charity,” or rather, a daily enactment of it.... By virtue of their consecration, priests are configured to Jesus the Good Shepherd and are called to imitate and to live out his own pastoral charity.⁴

John Paul II considers this image as representing in new and more reminiscent terms the content that the other images, like “head” and “servant,” might have. Consequently, even in the present times, ministers are called “pastors.” And the activity that the priests and seminarians and even the religious women do with the faithful is usually called “pastoral work.”

³ Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 19, Psalms 1-50 (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1983) 209.

⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992) 22. [Hereafter PDV]

How was this sheep-and-shepherd image used especially in biblical times? To whom was it applied? In the introduction of Nicholas Cachia's book, *The Image of the Good Shepherd as a Source for the Spirituality of the Ministerial Priesthood*, an overview of the origins of the use of the shepherd image is given:

The origins of this image go back to the Bible itself. To be more exact, the biblical authors have adopted this image from their near eastern neighbors who made use of it when wanting to describe the person and the work of their gods or kings. The Bible developed and changed this image where it deemed necessary and applied it to God himself and to the leaders of the community. Jesus Christ took over this term and used it to describe his own identity and activity. He used this image also to describe the ministry of those he chooses to be associated with him in the leading of and in the ministering to the community of believers.⁵

There are many books and articles which make use of the application of the image of shepherd to the priesthood. There are even exhaustive studies of the shepherd image in the Scriptures and Sacred Tradition and applied it to the ministerial priesthood, like the book of Cachia mentioned above. However, there is no particular study on how the sheep-and-shepherd image in Psalm 23, or the shepherd psalm itself, can be applied to the life of seminarians, the future shepherds of the Church.

The concern of the present research then is to propose a possible application of the sheep-and-shepherd image in Psalm 23 to seminary formation. This paper aims to articulate the significance of the image of sheep-and-shepherd in Psalm 23 to the spirituality of seminarians, particularly the Filipino seminarians.

Let us then begin with a discussion on the image of 'sheep-and-shepherd' as it is used in Psalm 23.

II. The Image of Sheep-and-Shepherd in Psalm 23

A. Psalm 23: Some Preliminary Notes

Prayer is traditionally defined as raising-up of one's mind and heart to God.⁶ One of the main means of praying is through music or song which has the great capacity to express one's feelings and thoughts. Music or song is one medium which helps man to express his moods and dispositions. The book of Psalms served this expressive purpose for the biblical people, particularly, the Israelites. The Israelites

⁵ Nicholas Cachia, Preface to *The Image of the Good Shepherd as a Source for the Spirituality of the Ministerial Priesthood* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1997) 7.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 83, art. 2, r. 2.

used the Psalms to express their deepest human emotions. Barry Bandstra gives a vivid description of the significance of the book of Psalms to Israel:

The Book of Psalms exposes the pulsing heart of Israel. In it we find the life-blood of the faith of God's people. In it are Israel's songs of faith, expressing joy and confidence in God and God's chosen leaders. In it are Israel's prayers out of times of despair, tragedy and alienation.⁷

The book of Psalms is an anthology of songs and prayers. It served as the hymn book and prayer-book of Israel from early times, and remains the voice of God's people in contemporary Judaism and Christianity.

Psalm 23 is the well-loved and the most familiar psalm, and perhaps the most familiar passage in the whole Bible.⁸ But despite its familiarity, Psalm 23 becomes a challenge for interpreters. Despite Jack Lundbom's claim that Psalm 23 is best understood in the light of the Davidic tradition,⁹ D.N. Freedman has also remarked that "this most popular and best loved Psalm continues to puzzle scholars ... the problems posed by this brief poem do not concern textual corruption or linguistic obscurity, but rather the cohesion of the parts, or the interpretation of the poem as a whole."¹⁰ Ron Tappy enumerates some of the difficulties of Psalm 23. He writes:

As with many psalms in the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 23 lacks any allusion to historical events or high policy in ancient Israel ... Matters pertaining to the original setting of Psalm 23 also vex the modern interpreter: whether or not it emerged mainly from Israel's social, civic, cultic, communal, or private spheres remains ambiguous at best.¹¹

While mentioning the indistinctness of Psalm 23, Tappy also says that the poem is not culturally bound, that Psalm 23 is an essentially timeless piece of work. In this lies much its beauty and impact. Tappy has even highlighted the ambiguities surrounding Psalm 23 when he noted that scholars have offered a broad range of

⁷ Barry L. Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 403.

⁸ J. Clinton McCann, "Psalm 23:1-6, Like a Child at Home," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 767. C. H. Spurgeon calls it "the pearl of Psalms." See A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1-72* (NCBC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1972) 195.

⁹ Jack R. Lundbom, "Psalm 23: Song of Passage," *Int.* 40 (1986): 12-14.

¹⁰ L.L. Orlin, ed., *Michigan Oriental Studies in honor of George C. Cameron* (The University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1976) 139-166, in Mitchell Dahood, "Stichometry and Destiny in Psalm 23,4," *Bib* 60 (1979) 417.

¹¹ Ron Tappy, "Psalm 23: Symbolism and Structure," *CBQ* 57 (1995) 255.

quite specific proposals regarding the date, authorship, and historical circumstance of Psalm 23. He says:

Suggestions have ranged from the monarchic to the Maccabean periods as the time, and from King David to John Hyrcanus (high priest, 135/35-104 B.C.E.) as the author. Recent attempts to see a date of composition and a central theme (a "new exodus") compatible with those of Isaiah 40-55 lack support from within the psalm itself... The language and imagery of Psalm 23 had a very long history of transmission, reaching back at least as far as the Old Babylonian Period... We should also note about the perception of the king as good shepherd which dominated the conceptual world of early Middle Kingdom Egypt during this same period. In Egypt, this representation of Pharaoh did not extend beyond 1800 B.C.E. Thus, one cannot use language alone to assign an incontestable late date to the psalm.¹²

Since little can be brought together from the poem itself that would clarify its origin or background, this study will move beyond such questions.

B. The Life Setting of Psalm 23

B.1. The Structure or Form of Psalm 23

The structure of the Psalm 23 is difficult to define. Opinions are far from unanimous. The metrical analysis is fraught with difficulties.¹³ This present study shall divide Psalm 23 thematically, that is, depending on the question of how many metaphors or images are used to describe relationships between the psalmist and the Lord. Several scholars however have varying views on this matter.

B.1.a. One Metaphor: The Shepherd and His Sheep¹⁴

Only few scholars have suggested that the picture which this Psalm portrays is to be viewed as a single unity. Most recently are the studies of L. Köhler and J. Morgenstern who both argue that the shepherd metaphor is retained throughout the psalm, that Psalm 23 is a continuously uniform hymn in which one single picture

¹² See Tappy, 255-266.

¹³ See the summarized fine structure and gross structure analysis of main scholars like Kissane, Castellino, Dahood, Loretz, Beaucamp, Freedman and Mittman in two articles: 1) Charles O'Connor, "The Structure of Psalm 23," *Louvain Studies* 10 (1984): 206-230; and in 2) Tappy, 255-280.

¹⁴ Scholars that follow this *one-metaphor* structure: L. Kohler and J. Morgenstern (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Continental Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993] 304-305); Bernard W. Anderson (Bernard W. Anderson, *Out of the depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983] 206-212);

appears: that of a shepherd. Hans-Joachim Kraus explains their argument and says that the conception of the change of pasturage is the determining metaphor of the whole psalm (on the so called transhumance, “seasonal movement of livestock between mountain and lowland pasturage”). He elaborates:

With the changes of pasturage, long marches by day are made with the herd. Verse 5a could be understood in connection with transhumance, also with E. Power’s emendation of the verse (E. Power suggested that the word “table” in v. 5 be emended to “weapon” or “spear” to preserve the shepherd image, reading “Over and against my assailants you hold the javelin at the ready in front of me”). Verse 5b is interpreted by Köhler as a devise for dressing wounds (sheep easily wound their heads, and these wounds have to be treated with oil). Köhler manages the handicaps of the texts of vv. 5-6. J. Morgenstern follows the similar argument.¹⁵

Terrien follows the same form asserting that the metaphor of the shepherd remains unchanged throughout the poem, although the symbolism of the shepherd points to four aspects of divine protection with the following four strophes:¹⁶

1. God the Pastor (vv. 1b-3a)
2. God the Guide (vv. 3b-4)
3. God the Healer (v. 5)
4. God the Host (v. 6)

Bernard Anderson further attests to the indivisible unity of the psalm in terms of its theme. Contrasting to the more common view of two-metaphor, he says, “the major problem in interpreting this psalm is that it presents two images that are quite different... the images do not seem to harmonize so nicely.”¹⁷ He then gives the solution by pointing out that both images are set against the background of the desert and by explaining that the shepherd can be portrayed from two standpoints:

He is the protector of the sheep as they wander in search of grazing land. Yet he is also the protector of the traveler who finds hospitality in his tent from the dangers and enemies of the desert... In Psalm 23, YHWH is portrayed as the Shepherd in both aspects of the

¹⁵ See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 304-305.

¹⁶ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2003) 238-239.

¹⁷ B. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983) 207-208.

shepherd's life: as the Leader of the flock, and as the hospitable Host.¹⁸

B.1.b. Two Metaphors: Shepherd and Host¹⁹

The more common view divides Psalm 23 into two main sections:

1. The Lord as Shepherd (*pastoral symbolism*) (vv. 1-4)
2. The Lord as Host (*domestic symbolism*) (vv. 5-6)

The first part of the Psalm (vv. 1-4) conveys the divine character with the image of the Lord as shepherd, the dominant image of the Psalm, who tends and guides and protects his sheep. The second part of the Psalm shifts images now to portray the Lord as a bountiful host who richly provides for the one who sings the psalm as his guest (vv. 5-6).

Though many scholars follow this common view, this basic analysis is also subject to criticism. Freedman has argued that the two images are meant to be juxtaposed as a parallel to the question posed in Psalm 78.19.²⁰ Patrick Miller also holds the two images together with neither as the determinative portrait. He writes, "It (Psalm 23) has been properly recognized as a primal declaration of both: a) the basic trust of the one who knows he belongs to God, and b) the nature of God's care for those who belong to the Lord."²¹

Craigie says that there is little disagreement that the first four verses of the psalm utilize the metaphor of the divine shepherd; there is considerable debate, however, as to the interpretation of vv 5-6.²²

B.1.c. Three Metaphors: Shepherd, Guide, and Host²³

Another view adds, alongside the two metaphors, a third metaphor: the travel guide (vv. 3-4):

¹⁸ B. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 208.

¹⁹ Scholars that follow this *two-metaphor* structure: C. J. Callan (Callan, Charles J. *The Psalms* [New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc, 1944] 101-103); Miller (Miller, Patrick D, *Interpreting the Psalms* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986] 112-119); E. Kalt (Kalt, Edmund, *Herder's Commentary on the Psalms* [Wesminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961] 76-79; E.J. Kissane (Kissane, Edward J., *The Book of Psalms: Translated from A Critically Revised Hebrew Text* [Dublin: Brown & Nolan Limited, 1964] 103-105).

²⁰ D.N. Freedman, "The Twenty-Third Psalm," *Pottery, Poetry and Prophecy; Collected Essays on Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980) pp. 301-02, in Beth Tanner, "King Yahweh as the Good Shepherd: Taking Another Look at the Image of God in Psalm 23," *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts*. ed. by Bernard Batto and Kathryn Roberts (Indiana: EisenBrauns, 2004) 270.

²¹ Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 119.

²² Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 204.

²³ Scholars that follow this *three-metaphor* structure: Briggs, 207-212.

1. as Shepherd (vv. 1-3a)
2. as Guide (vv. 3b-4)
3. as Host (vv. 5-6)

Charles Briggs sees the psalm as having three images of the Lord: 1) as shepherd, providing his sheep with plentiful pasture and water (vv. 1-3a), 2) as guide, conducting his companion safely in right paths through a gloomy ravine (vv. 3b-4), and 3) as host, anointing His guest for the banquet and granting him perpetual hospitality (vv. 5-6). This latter suggestion, however, has found little acceptance.

The recent study on the structure of Psalm 23 is given by Beth Tanner²⁴ who follows the one-metaphor structure and argues that this psalm is even more complex than the representation of God as shepherd or host, but that every image can be understood under the rubric of YHWH as king.

Having the image of the sheep-and-shepherd as the main focus, this study favors and follows the one-metaphor structure despite its unpopularity among most scholars.

C. The Genre of Psalm 23

Psalm 23, though well-known, is perplexing to scholars not just by its form or structure but also, by its genre, which is difficult to identify. The following genres are the opinions of the scholars which gain varied degrees of acceptance: a psalm of trust or confidence, a prayer song, a royal psalm, a pilgrimage song, a guest psalm and a thanksgiving psalm.

The key passage of the psalm, according to Gionfranco Ravasi,²⁵ can be found in v. 4b: “You are with me.” The centrality of the declaration, which is obvious from its position at the center of the poem, can be the basis for defining the literary genre of the psalm as *the psalm of trust*. L. Alonso-Schöckel mentions that C. Carniti observes that v. 4b is not just the center of all the verses but most importantly, it is the center in form and content. He says, quoting C. Carniti’s observation:

El quinto verso del poema (4b) ocupa el centro de los nueve versos, pertenece a lo que precede por la imagen, a lo que sigue por la aparición de la segunda persona. Es en centro por forma y contenido. Algunos toman este verso para resolver todo el poema

²⁴ See Tanner, 267-284.

²⁵ Ravasi, Gianfranco, *Il Libro dei Salmi* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniani, 1985) in Felipe Fruto Ll. Ramirez, “The Lord Is My Shepherd,” *Handouts in Theo 218 – Psalms: Religious Songs and Poetry of Israel* (Manila: Loyola School of Studies. First Semester, s/y 2006-2007).

y su material imaginative en una emoción única y simple: 'tu estas conmigo.'²⁶

Ravasi further comments on Psalm 23's genre as a song of trust and confidence. He says:

Il salmo appartiene, come aveva già dimostrato Gunkel, al genere dei canti di fiducia, in cui si celebra l'abbandono sereno e totale al Dio Salvatore a cui si affida l'intera esistenza. Se volessimo essere più precisi. Dovremmo parlare di "confessione di fiducia" (*Vertrauenspsalm*), un modulo che spesso si innesta nella lamentazione (vedi Sal 6) o che può anche sussistere autonomamente dando origine a composizioni vere e proprie come nel nostro caso e come il Sal 3; 11; 16; 27:1-6; 41; 62; 121; 125; 131.²⁷

Furthermore, John Craghan quotes Terrien in describing the psalms of trust and confidence in the following manner. "They reflect a state of spiritual equilibrium and of satisfaction without smugness. In such psalms, there is the unwavering, unruffled steadiness of complete trust. One senses here the sufficient God who neither hides nor haunts."²⁸ A. Anderson, P. Craigie, M. Dahood, R. Davidson, Erhard Gerstenberger, J.C. McCann, Miller, among others follow the same opinion on Psalm 23 as a psalm of trust.²⁹ It is worth noting also that H. Gunkel, at the outset, has characterized Psalm 23 as a psalm of confidence, which

²⁶ Author's translation: "The fifth verse of the poem (4b) occupies the center of the nine verses, pertaining to that which precedes the image, and follows therefore the appearance of the second person. It is the center in form and content. There are some who ask if this verse can resolve all the problems of the poem and on the imaginative materials in a unique and simple emotion: 'you are with my friend.'" L. Alonso-Schokel, *Salmos I* (NEB; Estella Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1992) 400, in Ramirez, "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

²⁷ Author's translation: "The psalm belongs, as already shown by Gunkel, to the genre of songs of trust and assent in which the serene and total abandonment to God the savior is celebrated to whom one entrusts his entire existence. If we would like to be more precise, we should speak of confession of confidence or trust, a form which is usually entwined or inserted in the lamentations (see Psalm 6) or it may also subsist autonomously or independently giving origin to the true and proper composition as our case and as Psalms 3; 11; 16; 27:1-6; 41; 62; 121; 125; 131." Ravasi, 431, in Ramirez, "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

²⁸ John F. Craghan, *The Psalms: Prayers for the Ups, Downs and In-Betweens of Life, A Literary Experiential Approach* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1985) 46. Craghan gives a vivid summary of the theology of the psalms of trust and confidence. See p. 65.

²⁹ A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms, vol. 1, Psalms 1-72*. (NCBC. Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1972) 195; Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 204; M. Dahood, *Psalms: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966) 145; R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Michigan: William B. Eerdsman, 1998) 83; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. (FOTL. vol. 14; Grand Rapids: Michigan: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Co., 1988) 113-116; J.C. McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 127; Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 112.

he argues developed from the complaint psalms or had formal similarities to the individual lament.³⁰

Mowinckel then asserts that one reason about the occasion of being the pearl among the psalms is on the confidence that it exudes. He says, “Perhaps what gives this Psalm a priceless value to all ages may be the very fact that it stands there as a pure expression of confidence in God, unhindered by all special historical circumstances, an adequate expression of the confidence of faith of all sorts of people, and at all times.”³¹

Other proposals on the genre of Psalm 23 differ only in matters of nuance and emphasis. Kraus sees it as a *prayer song*,³² since Yahweh is addressed in the second person in vv. 4-5, John Eaton argues that it is a *royal psalm*³³ in a sense that it was spoken by Israel’s king to Yahweh. Mark Smith argues that the psalm should be understood as a *pilgrimage song*.³⁴ Briggs prefers the term *guest psalm*.³⁵ Ernest Vogt and Elmer Leslie consider it a *thanksgiving psalm*.³⁶ Mowinckel thought the Psalm is really meant to be a *protective psalm* in danger, or a *thanksgiving psalm* after the experience of salvation.³⁷

Moreover, Ravasi remarks that the metaphorical depiction is focused more precisely on the temple, particularly in the second half of the poem. This makes Psalm 23 more closely resemble the *psalm of ascent* or of *pilgrimage* to Zion. He says, “Tra l’altro nel Sal 23 l’incubo della prova, le menzione dei nemici. Il timore, che di solito occupano tanto spazio in alter composizione fiduciali, sono qui solo abbozzati e quasi esorcizzati dalla prevalente forza della fede.”³⁸

This study favors the first genre, that is, as a *psalm of trust and confidence*, the most appropriate genre in understanding the image of sheep-and-shepherd.

³⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1998) 190.

³¹ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, vol. 2, trans. by D.R. Ap-Thomas (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2004) 41.

³² Kraus, 305.

³³ John Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 36-38 in Tanner, 268.

³⁴ Mark S. Smith, “Setting and Rhetoric in Psalm 23,” *JSOT* 41 (1988): 62.

³⁵ Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906) 207.

³⁶ Ernest Vogt, “The ‘Place in Life’ of Psalm 23,” *Biblica* 34 (1953): 195-211; and Elmer A. Leslie, *The Psalms: Translated and Interpreted in the Light of Hebrew Life and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949) 282-285.

³⁷ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, vol. 2., 41.

³⁸ Author’s translation: “In addition, Psalm 23, the test of the proof, the mention of the enemies, the fear which usually occupies much space in other trustful or confidential composition, are here outlined and exorcised by the prevailing force of faith.” from Ravasi, 431, in Ramirez, “The Lord Is My Shepherd.”

D. The *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 23

The above-mentioned proposals on form and content of the psalm, considering their strengths and problems, naturally culminate in a variety of views with respect to the setting of the psalm. The social contexts can be generally categorized to pilgrim, liturgical or cultic, exilic, and royal settings, and personal or familial situations.

First, Smith proposes a *pilgrimage* context of the Psalm. He observes that Psalm 23 reflects on how nature symbolizes the psalmist's condition as a pilgrim. Smith says, "Psalm 23 uses the imagery of pastures, waters, a valley, etc., as occasions to reflect on the personal relationship with the divine: being led by God and God giving rest in pastures and beside still waters in vv. 1-2, being guided by God in the threatening valley in v. 4, and the table which God sets before the psalmist in v. 5."³⁹

Second, A. Anderson mentions that "the reference to the 'house of the Lord' (v. 6) points to a cultic setting and the meal before the enemies may imply a thanksgiving banquet."⁴⁰ Vogt presents an elaborate and reasonable hypothesis⁴¹ concluding from the matter of the psalm as liturgical ritual of thanksgiving, of which a sacrificial banquet was a part. A. Anderson sums up this hypothesis: "We do not know the actual experiences of the Psalm (or what he is envisaged in his poem), but he may have been unjustly accused (or he may have suffered at the hands of his adversaries in some other way). After his acquittal or deliverance, he is offering thanks to God, and this Psalm is an expression of his confident trust in YHWH, being the outcome of a bitter experience transformed by the help of God."

The third proposal on the social setting of Psalm 23 is the *Exile*. Milne interprets the Psalm in an exilic context.⁴² Freedman, Barré, and Kselman, drawing on Exodus and wilderness traditions, argue that the context of Psalm 23 for the depiction of God is the Exile, and that Psalm 23 becomes a subtext for the return from the Exile.⁴³ Craigie further adds, "The shepherd metaphor, which contains with it reminiscences of the Exodus, provides hope for an exiled community cut off from home and temple."⁴⁴ Lundbom mentions Freedman's study on Psalm 23 as having roots in the tradition of the Exodus, Wilderness Wanderings, and Entry to Canaan. He says:

Freedman believes an unknown poet of the sixth century B.C.E. builds on this tradition of Israelite faith in anticipation of the return

³⁹ Smith, 64.

⁴⁰ A. Anderson, 195.

⁴¹ See the detailed discussion of Vogt, 195-211.

⁴² P. Milne, "Psalm 23: Echoes of Exodus," SR 4 (1964-1975) 237-247, in Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 205.

⁴³ Smith, 61.

⁴⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 205.

from exile. It is the Psalm's vocabulary and mental associations which point to a "wilderness experience." Of particular importance to Freedman is the phrase "prepare a table before me," which he interprets in the light of Psalm 78.19. The poet speaks as an individual though at the same time he represents all Israel. The Psalm is recited possibly at one of the great feasts such as Passover or Tabernacles.⁴⁵

Fourth is the *royal setting*. Merrill⁴⁶ asserts a monarchic interpretation of the psalm and argues that the Psalm calls to mind the king's coronation ritual with its procession to the spring of Gihon (1 Kgs. 1.38-40). Eaton⁴⁷ follows the same argument and believes that the Psalm was recited by "a royal head and representative of the community." A. Anderson considers this explanation of the original use of the Psalm and asserts that the Psalm is not applicable in the post-Exilic period.⁴⁸

Lastly, Gerstenberger contrasts most of the above views and asserts the extremely personal tone of Psalm 23. He argues that "the psalm is not from cultic circles but from a very personal or familial situation."⁴⁹ He further remarks that the close relationship shared by Yahweh and the psalmist must come from worship within the small circle of family or clan. Morgenstern further argues that the psalm was not composed for use in temple worship, but was a pious Jew's expression of faith and confidence in the Lord.⁵⁰

The diversity of views mentioned above clearly shows the most fundamental problem with respect to the interpretation of Psalm. Craigie points out that "the language of the Psalm is not sufficiently explicit to establish beyond dispute its original sense and setting."⁵¹ The simplicity of Psalm 23 therefore has created this complexity of interpretation, because the poetry is in essence intuitive and not a detailed exposition. This study is in agreement with Mowinckel who claims that,

This psalm actually breaks all the patterns of 'form history.' Being a pure psalm of confidence, it cannot be immediately classified under any of the 'categories' or 'types' of style history. A real poet using the traditional cultic form of style has here created a poem which has its own type.⁵²

⁴⁵ Lundbom, "Psalm 23: Song of Passage." *Int.* 40 (1986): 12.

⁴⁶ A.L. Merrill, "Psalm 23 and the Jerusalem Tradition," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 354-60.

⁴⁷ See Eaton, 36-38.

⁴⁸ A. Anderson, 196.

⁴⁹ Gerstenberger, 114-115.

⁵⁰ Morgenstern, J. "Psalm 23," *JBL* 65 (1946) 13-24, in Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 205.

⁵¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 205.

⁵² Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 2, 127.

E. The Intentions of the Genres of Psalm 23

"Psalms of confidence," Sabourin defines, "are in reality the 'motives of confidence' from the corpus of the lamentation developed into independent psalms."⁵³ It is the predominance of the expressions of trust and confidence in God that distinguishes them from the laments, and thus the general intention of this kind of psalm. Both the individual and communal psalms of confidence follow key ideas of the all-encompassing presence and greatness of the God of Israel.

As a psalm of trust and confidence, one specific intention of the genre in Psalm 23, Gerstenberger asserts, is that "the prayer of the Psalm aims at re-establishing the personal relationship with God, probably within a ritual of petition for individual sufferer who were perhaps executed or ostracized."⁵⁴

Dahood further notes on the specific intention of this Psalm saying that "the psalmist is quietly confident that Yahweh is his shepherd, who will guide him through the vicissitudes of this life to the eternal bliss of Paradise."⁵⁵

"Thanksgiving psalms," Klaus Seybold explains, "have been derived from the Festival of Thank-Offerings, in which the sacrifice, also called (*tôdah*), was occasionally replaced by the performance of a psalm with the general purpose of thanksgiving for an experience of deliverance, and praise for the deliverer in the presence of the community."⁵⁶ Sabourin adds, "If a deliverance is not yet a reality, the suppliant's confidence rests on his faith on the word of God."⁵⁷ As a thanksgiving psalm, the intention of the genre particularized in Psalm 23, Vogt proposes, is that it is born after the sacrifice, which is before or during the sacrificial banquet, as differentiated to other Psalms.⁵⁸ Leslie follows the proposal of Vogt and says, "Psalm 23 is a psalm of individual thanksgiving rendered in connection with the presentation at the Temple of a thank offering."⁵⁹

"Pilgrim songs, which usually has a notation that appears, 'a song of ascents,'" Sabourin defines, "were in fact meant to provide devotional inspiration to those in pilgrimage."⁶⁰ The purpose of a pilgrimage is to experience the internal journey

⁵³ Sabourin, Leopold, *The Psalms: their Origin and Meaning* (New York: Alba House, 1974) 264-265, 320.

⁵⁴ Gerstenberger, 116.

⁵⁵ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966) 145-46.

⁵⁶ Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, trans. by R. Graeme Dunphy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, Ltd, 1990) 117-18.

⁵⁷ Sabourin, *The Psalms: their Origin and Meaning*, 277.

⁵⁸ Vogt, 210-211.

⁵⁹ Leslie, 283.

⁶⁰ Sabourin, *The Psalms: their Origin and Meaning*, 9-10.

with God through the external, physical journey. The specific intention of the genre of Psalm 23, Smith suggests, is that “it presents the pilgrimage from the internal perspective of the psalmist’s spiritual experience, so much so that reference to the external phenomena of the pilgrimage is less obvious than in Psalms 27 and 42-43.”⁶¹ Mowinckel specifically remarks also, “the Psalm is a parting song to Zion by a pilgrim who, after having enjoyed the liturgy there, returns to his village and implores divine protection for the return trip (See Psalm 121).”⁶²

“The royal psalm,” Seybold states, “only forms a ‘type’ in so far as they relate to the so called ‘Ritual of the King,’ and the royal cult at the sanctuary.”⁶³ In clear words, the general intention of royal psalms is that they all concern the king. Merrill, in suggesting the intention of the genre particularized in Psalm 23 as a royal psalm, says that “the speaker would appear to be the king in the house of the Lord during the coronation ritual,”⁶⁴ with its procession from the sacred tent where the Ark from which the horn of oil is taken to anoint the king (1 Kgs. 1.39) was kept to the spring of Gihon (1 Kgs. 1.32ff) and back to Zion (1 Kgs. 1.33ff).

With the aim to emphasize the image of sheep-and-shepherd and favoring Psalm 23 as a psalm of trust and confidence, this study claims that Psalm 23 is an expression not just of reestablishing but nurturing the intimate relationship of the psalmist to God, with the constant experiences of deliverance, guidance and support of God in all the vicissitudes of life.

F. The Key Concept of Psalm 23: Sheep-and-Shepherd

F.1. “Sheep”

In the Old Testament, “sheep” most frequently translates the Hebrew word *šōn* which is also rendered “flock.” Other Old Testament terms include *kešev*, which is literally translated as “little ram” (e.g., Lev 1.10; 7.23; Nu 18.17); *keveš*, literally translated as “young ram” (e.g., Ex 12.5); and *šeh*, literally translated as “lamb” or “kid” (e.g., Ex 22.1,4,9f; Dt 17.1). The primary New Testament terms for “sheep” are Greek πρόβατον (*próbaton*); in Jn 21.16ff, the term is πρόβατιον (*probátion*) (diminutive of πρόβατον).⁶⁵

The sheep, as ruminant mammals, biologically related to the goats and cattle, have cloven hoofs and hollow horns.⁶⁶ As ruminants, that is, cud-chewing, they graze

⁶¹ Smith, 64.

⁶² Ramirez, “The Lord Is My Shepherd.”

⁶³ Seybold, 115.

⁶⁴ A.L. Merrill, 355.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, et. al., eds. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, Q-Z (Michigan: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1988) 463.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

in the morning but in the afternoon they cease grazing and lie down not to sleep but to regurgitate its food in the form of a ball which it continues to chew. This to a great extent dictates the rhythm of the shepherd's day.

Lawrence Porter gives clear distinctive behavioral characteristics of sheep:

The sheep is by nature a timid and defenseless animal. They have neither the speed nor the strength to protect themselves from predatory animals. Thus, they are wary animals, easily frightened and when frightened they often react in ways that can be self-defeating. For example, at the approach of a predator, the sheep, if alone, becomes petrified with fear, lays down and shivers, if in a flock sheep will readily scatter, or, worse they may pile up against an obstruction causing some of them to smother. Then there is also a fact that while the sheep are naturally gregarious, that is, tending to group and feed together for protection, nonetheless, individual sheep will at times wander off from the herd often inadvertently, that is, while eating. Also, when in quest of food, a sheep can at times get itself in difficult situations. These behavioral characteristics have lent themselves to the impression that sheep are stupid animals. However, this stupidity should not be overplayed, because other aspects of their behavior witness to a certain measure of mental ability. For example, sheep have a well-developed sense of weather; in bad weather they naturally seek shelter, and in hot weather they readily hunt for shade. Also they forage easily for themselves, they recognize good pasturage and will readily go to it.⁶⁷

The sheep of the Bible can be pictured as generally cream-colored, deep-wooled, and having curled horns.⁶⁸ The chief Palestinian breed of sheep today, and doubtless has been from the beginning, is the so-called broad-tailed sheep. The tails, which commonly weigh ten pounds and even as much as fifteen pounds, have always been regarded as delicacy, and for their very choiceness, are called for on occasion as a sacrifice (See Exod 29.22-25).⁶⁹ The male sheep is called a "ram," the female a "ewe," and the young are known as "lambs."

Although sheep have been occasionally used by the people of the Bible as food, they are raised principally for their wool which is used not only for production of clothing but also for rugs. But at the time of slaughter, every part of the sheep is used.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Lawrence B. Porter, "Sheep and Shepherd: An Ancient Image of the Church and a Contemporary Challenge," *Gregorianum* 82, 1 (2001) 55.

⁶⁸ Bromiley, 463.

⁶⁹ *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) 316.

⁷⁰ Bromiley, 463.

Sheep are mentioned in the Bible more than five hundred times and a large variety of terms are employed to describe the different breeds, age, and sex types.⁷¹ In view of the very nature of the sheep mentioned above and the corresponding relationship between the sheep and the shepherd, it is not at all surprising that in figurative-theological language the sheep and the shepherd are repeatedly, and often movingly, employed. In the Old Testament, one thinks at once of such lines as this, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps 23.1).⁷² While most of the references in the Old Testament are literal, practically all references in the New Testament are metaphors comparing the relationship of Christ and his followers to that of the shepherd and his flock.⁷³

F.2. “Shepherd”

The shepherd’s activity is mainly rendered in the Hebrew Bible by the verb root *rā-â*. This root is used 189 times,⁷⁴ mostly in the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Psalms. But aside from that, there are also other terms which deal with the issue of shepherding.

With regard to its cognates, the root *rā-â* is Common Semitic. Apart from Hebrew, it occurs in Northwest Semitic in Imperial Aramaic, Jewish Aramaic, Phoenician, Ugaritic, etc. The verb *rā-â* means “graze, tend, or pasture” It may be used intransitively of flocks and herds (Isa. 5.7; 11.7; 14.30; 27.10; 30.23; 65.25; Jon. 3.7; 3.13; Job 1.14), usually as a metaphor representing the tranquil life of humans and animals in the peaceable kingdom to come. But, most often, when the verb is used transitively, it refers to the work of the shepherd, who tends sheep and goats, more rarely cattle (Mic. 7.14) or donkeys (Gen 36.24). The Qal active participle *ro’eh*, “shepherd,” generally retains its verbal force, being used with an accusative object. The root occurs in the Qal 168 times in the Old Testament, 82 times as the active participle.⁷⁵

“Although there is a great number of passages in the Old Testament which use the rich shepherd vocabulary for YHWH and depict Him in new and vivid developments of the metaphor,” Cachia writes, “it strikes the Old Testament reader that it is only in four places (Gen. 48.15; 49.24; Psalm 23.1; Ps 80.2) that God is

⁷¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, et.al. eds. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996) 1008.

⁷² *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 316.

⁷³ Achtemeier, 1008.

⁷⁴ This includes also the number of times the verbal nouns *h[rm mir’eh* (pasture, pasturage) and *t[rm mar’it* (pasturing, shepherding, pasturage) are used. Cachia, 37.

⁷⁵ See a detailed study of the root *h[r’* and *h[ro* in G. Johannes Botterweck, et. al., eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 13, trans. by David E. Green (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2004) 544-53.

directly called a shepherd."⁷⁶ J. Jeremias comments on this matter: "the surprising paucity of references in which the title is used of YHWH shows that this is not just a formal oriental predication. The application of the shepherd image to YHWH is embedded in the living piety of Israel."⁷⁷

The image of shepherd (and sheep) seems to get passing or sporadic use in the Old Testament literature so as to describe human leadership of God's people and God's own relationship to them. Porter gives an overview of using the term shepherd to the patriarchs and to God Himself in the Old Testament:

The people of the Old Testament were a nomadic people and thus all the patriarchs are portrayed as shepherds: Abel in Gen 4.2, Abraham in Gen 21.28, Jacob in Gen 30.40 and 31.41, Judah in Gen 38.17, Moses in Ex 2.17 and 3.1, David in 1 Sam 17.20 and 34. From this it was an easy move to portray such men as not only shepherds of sheep but also of God's people. In 2 Sam 7.8 we hear the Lord say to David, "It was I who took you from the pasture and from care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel." In Ps 77.20, it says, "You lead your people like flock under the care of Moses and Aaron." In Num 27.17, when Moses invests Joshua with authority he gives as his motivation: "That the Lord's community may not be like sheep without a shepherd..." And in 2 Sam 5.2, God says to Samuel, "You shall shepherd my people and shall be commander of Israel." And there is even one time when the title is given to a foreigner: in Is 44.28, the Lord calls Cyrus the Mede, "my shepherd who fulfills my every wish," because of Cyrus' role in restoring Judah and Jerusalem.

But in addition to its being used as title for leaders of the Israelites, the title shepherd is also used in the Old Testament as a proper title for God Himself. In Gen 48.15, we hear the patriarch Israel speak of "The God who has been my shepherd." In Gen 49.24, we hear Jacob pray: "By the rock of the mighty one of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." This is an epithet found several times in the Psalms, for example, in Ps 80.1, "O shepherd of Israel hearken, O Guide of the flock of Joseph," and in Ps 95.7, "For He is our God and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides." Finally, it gets extended as most famous treatment in Psalm 23 which begins, "The Lord is my shepherd."⁷⁸

What is remarkable here is that aside from being indicative of the Jewish religious frame of mind, the use of the title "shepherd" in reference to God is a

⁷⁶ Cachia, 42.

⁷⁷ J. Jeremias, "Poimhn," *TDNT* 6, 487, in Cachia, 42-43.

⁷⁸ Porter, 60-61.

reference to an experience which an individual or the community as a whole has had of God in history. Cachia clearly explains this matter:

The contexts where God is called “shepherd” emphasize the care and concern God shows for Israel. This contrasts with the way human leaders treat the flock entrusted to them... This metaphor applied to God illustrates the essential of YHWH’s activity, the God who leads his people and calls them to follow him... It expresses in a very particular way the *historical* activity of God and the *covenant* between God and his people.⁷⁹

The image of God as shepherd in Psalm 23 is presented here not just by the main pastoral term *rā’â* but by looking on some other key words in the Psalm that connote characteristics of the purported image and by finding their unity. The convergence of the meanings of these terms is classified into activities of God as shepherd as presented in the Psalm in six distinct, fundamental but complementary roles:⁸⁰ knowing-alliance, leading and guiding, feeding, guarding presence, tenderness-healing, and gathering-delivering. Understanding these roles greatly helps in arriving at significant theological points on the understanding of the image of sheep-and-shepherd in Psalm 23.

G. The Roles of God as Shepherd of the Flock

a. Knowing-alliance

The basic characteristic of an effective shepherd, which is also the principal function of every shepherd, is the knowledge he should have of his flock and the relationship he maintains with them. Such knowledge is clearly stated in the Proverbs 27.23 which says, “Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds.” The verb “to know” is not explicitly found in the text of Psalm 23. But some other words in the Psalm attest to the knowledge of the shepherd and the relationship he has with his sheep.

The unity between God the Shepherd and his sheep is shown in the use of the possessive pronoun “my” in “The Lord is *my* Shepherd.” Such acknowledgment or recognition of the psalmist calling God as “my shepherd” in v.1 presupposes an experience of the psalmist of God’s benevolent provision of care and protection. Psalm 23’s unique characteristic as the only psalm which calls God as “my shepherd” evokes an extraordinary relationship between the psalmist and God. And this relationship implies that it is not only the psalmist who knows God, but more so, it is God who

⁷⁹ Cachia, 43-44.

⁸⁰ Based from Cachia’s classification of roles of God as shepherd in the Old Testament. It presents six distinct, complementary roles of shepherd. See Cachia, 42-63.

knows him well and attends to him. That is why the second line goes, "I do not lack," an expression of God's abundant attention to the psalmist.

Cachia explains the significance of the use of possessive pronoun:

The use of the possessive pronoun refers to something more profound. What is implied is a personal, intimate communion between God and the flock. The possessive pronoun shows us that the bond that unites God to his people is not simply a bond of ownership but a deeper bond of love which God wanted to ratify in the covenant.⁸¹

Also, Cachia mentions that the expression of the Psalmist in v.4c, "you are with me," is "an exceptional way of speaking of God's covenant with his people."⁸² And lastly, according to Keller, the knowledge of the shepherd of his sheep and his relationship is also evidently discerned in the bold statement *ak tōv wāhesed yirdefūni* which sums up all the benefits enjoyed by the sheep and all the diligent efforts and labors of the shepherd for the welfare of the sheep. He says: "this to me is the *supreme* portrait of my Shepherd. All the care, all the work, all the alert watchfulness, all the skill, all the concern, all the self-sacrifice are born of His love – the love of One who loves His sheep, loves his work, loves his role as a Shepherd."⁸³ The knowledge of and the relationship of the Shepherd with His sheep therefore finds its culmination in His love.

With the function of knowing-alliance, *the Lord as shepherd has an intimate relationship with the sheep.*

b. Leading and Guiding

The Hebrew Bible gives three main verbs to say or mean, "leading." They are: *nāhag*, *nāhal*, and *nāhāh*. Some nuances of meaning among these verbs are the following: *nāhag* means "drive, conduct"; *nāhal*, used in Piel, means "lead, guide to a watering-place or station, and cause to rest there; bring to a station or place of rest; lead, guide; refresh"; and *nāhāh* means "lead, guide."⁸⁴

Psalm 23 uses the two verbs *nāhāh* and *nāhal* which were important verbs in the central verse of the Song of Moses in Exodus (15.13): "Thou hast led (*nāhal*) in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed, thou hast guided (*nāhāh*) them by thy strength to thy holy abode." This is considered "the most explicit reading

⁸¹ Cachia, 61.

⁸² Cachia, 62.

⁸³ Keller, 111.

⁸⁴ The meaning of these as well as of the other verbs is according to *BDB Hebrew Lexicon* (Bibleworks 7 for Windows, CD-ROM, 2006).

of the exodus experience from the point of view of God as shepherd.”⁸⁵ With this, Psalm 23 calls to mind the desert experience which is in the memory of the Israelites connected to the exodus experience. It was God who led them beside the waters of rest (v.2b) in the forty years which the people passed in the desert; it was God who led them in the paths of righteousness (v.3b), the ways that were deemed good for the people. The rod and staff of v.4d are the signs of God’s continuing benevolent guidance.⁸⁶

With the vast desert and pasturage to walk through, *the Lord as shepherd leads and guides his sheep in its way.*

c. Feeding

To give sustenance to the flock is the main motive of God’s leading and guidance as that of a shepherd. “He makes me lie down in green pastures” (v.2a) shows the care of the shepherd for his flock considering that it is not easy to find pastures of grass in the desert area. What is shown here is the expression of the experience of abundance that God gives to his flock. This is clearly expressed in the beginning of the Psalm, “I shall not want (v.1b).” God as shepherd is a bountiful provider of the needs of his flock. And the Psalmist expresses such acknowledgment of the benevolence of God, his shepherd.

With the sheep’s need of sustenance, it is very evident to assert that, *the Lord as shepherd sustains the flock in all its needs with abundance.*

d. Guarding-Presence

Cachia clearly remarks, “One important function of the shepherd is certainly that of the watching over his flock; this entails his continuing presence. This helps the sheep feel secured and protected. The presence of the shepherd is a sign of his love and his complete dedication to his flock.

This guarding presence of God as shepherd is clearly evident in the Psalm in the expression, “for you are with me” (v.4c). This verse, which is at the center of the psalm and even considered as the key element of the text, as mentioned above, evokes the expression of trust and confidence of the psalmist on the continuing presence of God for the assurance of God’s watching over. Notwithstanding the presence of dangers and fears surrounding the psalmist, he will never be afraid because God is with him.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cachia, 46.

⁸⁶ E. Power, “The Shepherd’s Two Rods in Modern Palestine and Some Passages of the Old Testament,” *Biblica* 9 (1928): 434-42.

⁸⁷ While stating that v.4 is at once thematic and transitional, Tappy says that YHWH’s presence becomes the basis of all security.” See Tappy, 277-78.

In times of fear and danger, it is truly acceptable to say that, *the Lord as shepherd stands by the sheep and is willing to lay down his life for the sheep.*

e. Tenderness-healing

The sheep or the flock has many needs that attending to them or taking care of their needs and creating an atmosphere of tenderness and love is a significant function of God as Shepherd.

Such function is clearly exemplified in the Psalm. Cachia gives clear illustrations: God's care of his flock gives his sheep the tranquility that they need. This sentiment is expressed in Hebrew through the verb *rāvas* or "to lie down, stretch oneself out." It evokes a situation of complete calm, serenity and peace. It is God who causes the flock to lie down (v.2a). This presence of the Good Shepherd is also comforting for the sheep. God gives comfort (*nāham*) to his sheep through his rod and staff (v.4d).

Tenderness of the shepherd is also shown in attending to the sheep, for their safety and protection, and especially for their care when sick and wounded. The shepherd usually arranges a meadow ahead of the flock for the safety of the sheep. This means uprooting poisonous herbs and thorny bushes, exterminating scorpions, vipers, and other "enemies" (v.5a) of the sheep. At the end of a shepherd's day, he would examine the animals, one by one, and anoint with oil the heads (v.5b) of those wounded or scratched. The shepherd would even offer from goblet (*kōs*) (v.5) some fermented drink to those about to faint from exhaustion. At critical moments, the shepherd is a nurse, a healer.⁸⁸

With the sheep's utmost need, *the Lord as shepherd is there and takes care of the sheep with tenderness and love.*

f. Gathering-Delivering

"One last important responsibility of the shepherd is certainly that of taking care of his sheep to the point of searching for and delivering those which may stray from the flock."⁸⁹

The mention of the confidence from fear (v.4b), the possibility of walking through the valley of the shadow of death (v.4a), the presence of enemies (v.5a), and the hope of remaining or dwelling in the house of God (v.6c) acknowledge the possibility of the sheep's straying away from the flock. These expressions in the text evoke the extreme experience of the Psalmist and his trust in God as shepherd who

⁸⁸ Terrien, 241.

⁸⁹ Cachia, 51.

would search for and deliver him in times of depressing need. This would make him remain always secured in the presence of the Good Shepherd.

There are times that the sheep strays and get lost, but *the Lord as shepherd is concerned for those sheep outside the fold.*

With these functions of God as shepherd exemplified in Psalm 23, the following characteristic points were stressed: a) knowing-alliance – The Lord as shepherd has an intimate relationship with the sheep; b) leading-guiding – The Lord as shepherd leads and guides his sheep in its way; c) feeding – The Lord as shepherd sustains the flock in all its needs with abundance; d) guarding-presence – The Lord as shepherd stands by the sheep and is willing to lay down his life for the sheep; e) tenderness-healing – The Lord as shepherd takes care of the sheep with tenderness and love; and f) gathering-delivering – The Lord as shepherd is concerned with those sheep gone astray and outside the fold.

The foregoing has shown that the image of the shepherd has been used to refer to Yahweh in reference to His relationship with the people especially in the case of Psalm 23. Moreover, the usage of this image has been adopted by the Church's Magisterium, and it has been used to illustrate the role of the pope, the bishops and the priests as shepherds of God's people. Hence, a survey on some of these documents, where the sheep-and-shepherd imagery is utilized, may be helpful at this point.

III. The Magisterium on the Image of the Sheep-and-Shepherd

A. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*): “The Church as a Sheepfold”

The image of ‘sheep and shepherd’ has been widely used since the ancient times. In the Christian Church, it is interesting to know that the shepherd image is used in the nature and life of the Church.

Article 6 of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, opens with the following words:

In the Old Testament the revelation of the kingdom is often made under the forms of symbols. In similar fashion the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in various images. Taken either from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage, these images have their preparation in the books of the prophets.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 6. All the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council are quoted according to the translation published in A. Flannery, *Vatican Council II*. [Hereafter LG]

Making a survey of no less than seven biblical images – the church as flock of sheep, as vine, a building, a temple, a mother, a spouse, and an exile journeying in a foreign land – the Council first considered the image of the Church as 'shepherd and sheep.' This image was given primary recognition probably because of its wide usage from antiquity, as well as by its frequency in tradition, from biblical to modern times. Article 6 of *Lumen Gentium* states:

The Church is, accordingly, a sheepfold, the sole and the necessary gateway to which is Christ (Jn. 10:1-10). It is also a flock, of which God foretold that he would himself be a shepherd (cf. Is. 40:11; Ex. 34:11ff.) and whose sheep, although watched over by human shepherds, are nevertheless at all times led and brought to pasture by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and prince of shepherds (cf. Jn. 10:11; 1 Pet. 5:4), who gave his life for his sheep (cf. Jn. 10:11-16).⁹¹

Such initial reference to the image of sheep and shepherd in *Lumen Gentium* is heavily Christological. The later use of this image in the same document refers to the pastoral authority of pope, bishops and priests.

Lumen Gentium uses the image of shepherd to describe the dignity of the episcopal office:

The sacred synod, following in the step of the First Vatican Council, teaches and declares with it that Jesus Christ, the eternal pastor, set up the Holy Church by entrusting the apostles with their mission as he himself had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn. 20:21). He willed that their successors, the bishops namely, should be the *shepherds* in his Church until the end of the world.⁹² (Italic mine)

Further, *Lumen Gentium* describes the duties of bishops with the image of the shepherd:

With priests and deacons as helpers, the bishops received the charge of the community, presiding in God's stead over the flock of which they are the *shepherds* in that way they are teachers of doctrine, ministers of sacred worship and holders of office in the government.⁹³ (Italic mine)

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

Lumen Gentium uses the image of shepherd to describe the dignity and duties of priests. The dignity of priests is treated:

Whilst not having the supreme degree of the pontifical office, and notwithstanding the fact that they depend on the bishops in the exercise of their own proper power, the priest are for all that associated with them by reason of their sacerdotal dignity, and in virtue of the sacrament of Orders, after the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest (Heb. 5:1-10; 7:24; 9:11-28), they are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and *shepherd* the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship.⁹⁴ (*Italic mine*)

The duties of the priests, defined by *Lumen Gentium* using the shepherd image, are: “under the authority of the bishop, they sanctify and govern that portion of the Lord’s flock assigned to them,”⁹⁵ and even more precisely, “as good shepherds, they seek after those who too (cf. Lk. 15:4-7), while having been baptized in the Catholic Church, have given up the practice of sacraments, or even fallen away from the faith.”⁹⁶

Lumen Gentium continues to speak more on the dignity, authority and responsibility of bishops and priests. It urges them to imitate Christ who laid down his life for his sheep. It mentions about avoiding heavy handed authoritarianism. It admonishes pastors to acknowledge the talents and services of the laity. It also clarifies the relationship between the bishop and the pope, and between the bishops and the lay faithful.

However, “the most significant use made by Second Vatican Council of the image of sheep and shepherd,” according to Porter, “is to indicate clearly its concept of the People of God as an ordered and disciplined congregation.”⁹⁷ Chapter II of *Lumen Gentium*, in making use of the shepherd image, is entitled, “People of God.” In this chapter, the image of the church is emphasized as an inspired, anointed people, not so much hierarchically organized, but rather universally gifted and inspired by the Spirit: “And so the Spirit stirs up desires and actions in all of Christ’s disciples in order that all may be peaceably united, as Christ ordained, in one flock under one shepherd.”⁹⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, in describing the image of the Church, gives utmost priority to the image of sheep and shepherd *in defining its nature and in describing the duties and functions of its members.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 28.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

⁹⁷ Porter, 78-79.

⁹⁸ *LG*, 15.

B. Decree on Priestly Training (*Optatam Totius*): "Forming Future Shepherds"

One of the main agents of a renewed Church is a renewed clergy, which is made possible through a renewed seminary formation. The Council was fully aware of this – the importance of the decree on the seminaries. It is clearly formulated in the introduction to the decree: "The Council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends in great part upon priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ."⁹⁹ This emphasis on the Christological nature of priestly service is followed by the "three norms mentioned as having guided the decree: the laws that had proved themselves over long experience, the new orientations that had been won in the Council, and the concrete need of the world today."¹⁰⁰

The decree then starts with the instructions on the nature and urgent fostering of priestly vocations, "The duty of fostering vocations falls on the whole Christian community, and they should discharge it principally by living full Christian lives."¹⁰¹ The basic task belongs to the Christian family, "the first seminary, as it were," then to educational system, schools and organizations, to the priests, and finally, to the bishop who has the chief role.

Now the main point of the decree which exemplifies the shepherd image is the basic orientation of the training of priests in the beginning of Article 4, which talks about the major seminaries, "The whole training of the students should have as its object *to make them shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher priest and shepherd*" (Italics mine). With this, the purpose of the seminaries is to provide the necessary uniform training for the future pastoral work of the seminarians, who would eventually be ordained as priests. "The organic unity of training," combining theological education with human maturity, consecration to God with a pastoral care for one's neighbor, "is probably the most urgent need of modern seminary training education."¹⁰²

The orientation is clearly Christological, derived from the threefold office of Christ. The personality of the future priest must be fashioned according to the model of Christ, who is a teacher, priest and pastor. Josef Neuner clearly says on the training of seminarians in this threefold office:

The seminarians must be trained to the service of the Word of God, which they themselves assimilate and preach to others; to priestly

⁹⁹ *Optatam Totius*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Josef Neuner, "Decree on Priestly Formation," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, trans. by William Glen-Doepel, vol. 2 (London: Burns and Oates, 1968) 372.

¹⁰¹ *OT*, 2.

¹⁰² Neuner, 383.

service, by making divine salvation effective in liturgy, above all in the celebration of the Eucharist, and in true sanctification; and to pastoral office, in that they realize in themselves Christ's self-sacrifice and through this surrender of self win men for salvation.¹⁰³

With these, "all the elements of their training, spiritual, intellectual, disciplinary, should be coordinated with this pastoral aim in view."¹⁰⁴ All aspects of trainings are combined towards the one goal of making true pastors. "The whole pattern of seminary life... must be so arranged that it provides an initiation into the future life which the priest shall lead,"¹⁰⁵ the life of true shepherds.

For the spiritual formation (Chapter IV of the decree), *Optatam Totius* hopes students "to live in an intimate and unceasing union with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit... and live His paschal mystery that they can imitate into it the flock committed to them."¹⁰⁶ For their intellectual growth (Chapter V of the decree), it demands that "the mystery of salvation be so proposed that the students perceive the meaning, order, and pastoral end of their studies."¹⁰⁷ Lastly, the decree concerns itself with the pastoral formation of the seminarians (Chapter VI of the decree) by urging that "the students be diligently instructed in those matters which are particularly linked to the sacred ministry."¹⁰⁸

The decree concludes by reiterating that the renewal of the Church and the effectiveness of its work in the world are bound up with the proper training of priests. The decree emphasizes *a unified, pastorally orientated training of priests, forming true shepherds of Christ.*

C. Decree on Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*): "The Life of Shepherds"

Presbyterorum Ordinis begins by presenting visibly the basic outline of the image of the priest. It confirms the tendency which is clear in the title itself: "not the consecration and sanctity of the priest, but his ministry and function within the Church are things which stand in the foreground of the study."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *OT*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ *OT*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Wulf, "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, trans. by Hilda Graef, et.al., vol. 4 (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 214.

In the second half of the first article, a first attempt is made to describe the essence of the priest's office:

Through the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King; they are given a share in his ministry, through which the Church here on earth is being ceaselessly built up into the People of God, Christ's Body and temple of the Spirit.¹¹⁰

The first chapter, entitled *Priesthood in the Church's Mission*, expounds the nature and the necessity of the official sacramental priesthood in the Church in contrast to the general priesthood of all the faithful, and describes the relationship of the priest to the laity and his position in the world. The title indicates that the priesthood in the Church is primarily missionary in character.

In explaining further the nature of priesthood and in portraying the relationship between priest and faithful, the document makes use of the shepherd image in John 10:

As good shepherds they should know their sheep and should also seek to lead back those who do not belong to this fold, so that they too may hear the voice of Christ and there may be one fold and one Shepherd (cf. Jn. 10:14-16).¹¹¹

The second chapter, *The Ministry of Priests*, is divided into three sections, namely the Functions of Priests (as Ministers of God's Word, as Ministers of the Sacraments and the Eucharist, and as Rulers of God's People), the Priests' Relation with Others, and the Distribution of Priests and the Priestly Vocations. It is worthy to take note of the use of the shepherd image in the function of the priests as rulers of God's people. The decree says:

Priests exercise the function of Christ as Pastor (Shepherd) and Head in proportion to their share and authority. In the name of the bishop they gather the family of God as a brotherhood endowed with the spirit of unity and lead it in Christ through the Spirit to God the Father.¹¹²

Further, "in building up a community of Christians, the task of the priests as heralds of the Gospel and pastors (shepherd) of the Church is the attainment of spiritual growth of the Body of Christ."¹¹³ The priests as rulers of the people of God thus act as shepherds. In relationship with their bishops, priests "respect in them

¹¹⁰ PO, 1.

¹¹¹ PO, 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

the authority of Christ, the Supreme Shepherd.”¹¹⁴ In fact, the decree describes the promise of unending priestly vocations:

The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (cf. 1 Pet. 2:25) set up his Church in such a way that the people whom he chose and acquired by his blood should always and until the end of the world have its own priests, for fear Christians would ever be like sheep that have no shepherd (cf. Mt. 9:36).¹¹⁵

The third chapter of the decree is entitled *The Life of Priests*. “The priest’s whole life – his spiritual life, his spirituality, his relationship to the world, to things and to men, must be decisively defined and stamped by his ministry, his function, his mandate and mission.”¹¹⁶ It discusses the call for priests to holiness, together with the particular human and religious requirements that priesthood brings. It also talks about the helps and means available or are required for the priests’ spiritual life, continuing formation and material sustenance.

In exemplifying the sacrifice demanded of priests, the decree makes use of the shepherd image:

While they govern and shepherd the People of God they are encouraged by the love of the Good Shepherd to give their lives for the sheep (cf. Jn. 10:11)... As rulers of the community they cultivate the form of asceticism suited to a pastor (shepherd) of souls, renouncing their own convenience, seeking not what is to their own advantage but what will benefit the many for salvation.¹¹⁷

These lines speak of the pastoral activity of the priest. The priest maintains an attitude of selfless integrity over those entrusted to his care, and refrains from seeking his own fulfillment. The priest lives for others, for the service of men, sacrificing his own wishes and plans for the benefit of the many.

Further, the decree makes use of the shepherd image in talking about pastoral charity which is the principle of unity of the priests’ life and work: “By adopting the role of the good shepherd, they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Wulf, 267.

¹¹⁷ *PO*, 13.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

D. "I Will Give You Shepherds" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*): "The Formation Journey of the Shepherds"

The document treats priestly formation quite comprehensively. But, looking at how the sheep-and-shepherd image in seminary formation is presented, the following points are considered: The seminarian, like all the members¹¹⁹ of the Church, receives from God, the Good Shepherd, the initial grace of the common priesthood at baptism. Recognizing the signs of his vocation to the priesthood and taking the necessary steps in admission to the seminary, he becomes a member of a new flock, a community of disciples formed to be future priests. The seminary, with the integrated aspects of formation, trains the students to be future shepherds in communion with Christ, the Good Shepherd. As the gift and task of ordination, Christ's pastoral charity remains the fulcrum, the center, of seminarian's spiritual life. All the formation days of a seminarian is geared towards having the "heart" of the shepherd, a free and generous gift of self.

Taking into consideration the various documents of the Magisterium that would serve as guides in the discussion of the formation of seminarians, it would also be helpful to take a look at how the seminary formation is carried out particularly in the Philippines. Hence, we proceed to the next part of our study.

IV. A Glimpse on the Seminary Formation in the Philippines

A. A Brief Background on Philippine Priestly Formation Programs

In 1970, following the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council's call for *aggiornamento* or renewal in the Church and in the priestly formation, the Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education came up with the Basic Norms for Priestly Formation, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, which was ratified, confirmed and ordered to be published by Pope Paul VI. From and in accordance with this Basic Scheme followed the national and local programs of priestly formation.

It took only two years for the local Church of the Philippines to come up with a national program. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) formulated the Philippine Program for Priestly Formation in accordance with the decree *Optatam Totius* of the Second Vatican Council and with the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, and had it approved by the Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education in Rome in 1972. It was approved for a period of five years, and this was officially promulgated in the Philippines in 1980. The goal of this Philippine Program was the renewal in priestly training:

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

In the light of the pastoral emphasis of the Vatican II and in accord with the norms laid down by the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, the Program has its purpose to promote and direct the renewal of priestly formation required by the special conditions of the Philippines.¹²⁰

During the Eighth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1989, the Synod Fathers focused its reflection on *The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*. It affirmed Vatican II's concern for renewal in priestly training recognizing the primordial work of the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of renewal empowering the *formandi* to respond to the circumstances of the present day. It states:

The mission of priests in the Church and in the world today, the holiness to which they are called, as well as a proper understanding of the spiritual life of priests, demand a proper formation if the needs of the Church in the next decade are to be met. Such a priestly formation is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit who acts through the Church, leading persons both to an intimate knowledge of Christ, the Shepherd of Souls, and to communion in His pastoral charity.¹²¹

The Asian local Churches respond to this positive trend in the renewal of priestly formation promoted by the Universal Church. The Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) in 1990 gave significant recommendations to integrate in the whole process of formation the following points: missiology, inculturation, biblical training, solidarity with the poor, communitarian spirit, an integrated academic approach to philosophy and theology, mass media, pastoral management, and spirituality.¹²² These recommendations led to a conclusive statement which gives a picture of a seminarian in the Church of Asia in the face of the signs of the times:

The seminarian who has become a man of communion will then be ready to face the challenges that confront the Church of Asia: the threatening ecological balance, poverty, the challenges of other religions to the Christian faith, the need of dialogue with all persons of good will, the hard-to-control population explosion, consumerism in the economic-microsystem, and the proper use of mass media.

¹²⁰ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Priestly Formation: Basic Norms and 1980 Philippine Program* (Philippines: Episcopal Commission on Seminaries, CBCP, 1980) 91.

¹²¹ Synod of Bishops, 7th Ordinary General Assembly, "The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," *Instrumentum laboris*, 25.

¹²² See Vicente C. Cajilig, ed., *Clergy of Asia: Lights and Shadows* (Philippines: Lucky Press, 1997) 169-176.

He does this because his mission is to respond to the call to serve humanity living in this part of the globe.¹²³

The local Church of the Philippines has also made excellent efforts in the past forty years not only on the renewal of the clergy, but most importantly on assuring that such aim of renewal goes back to its original general objective, that is, the renewal of the local Church. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) in 1991 has led to a new way of being Church in the Philippines. One of its primary accomplishments was the formulation and approval of the vision-mission statement of the Church in the Philippines. In 2001, a National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal (NPCCR) was convoked to assess the renewal that had taken place ten years after PCP-II and to plan for the future. The NPCCR has also made profound and far reaching implications to seminary formation.¹²⁴ And in 2004, the First National Congress of the Philippine Clergy was held and emphasized in its conferences the need for the renewal of seminary formation as indispensable response to the demand of renewal of the clergy for the Church and the country.

Thus, following the directive of the PCP-II to have this renewal by updating the 1980 Philippine Program of Priestly Formation, the Episcopal Commission on Seminaries of the CBCP has come up with the 2006 Updated Philippine Program of Priestly Formation (PPPF). Bishop Mylo Vergara says on the nature of this document, "This updating was based on the *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* with emphasis on a deep and sound spiritual formation (Art. 75, PCP-II Acts and Decrees)."¹²⁵ Bishop Benjamin Almoneda also expressed the significance of the document on the aimed renewal:

The updating of the PPPF was a logical demand of a Church which wants to renew herself. If the Philippine Church is to inch forward along the pathway of renewal as envisioned by the PCP-II and NPCCR, then the point of departure is always the seminary. A renewed seminary formation produces renewed clergy. Renewed clergy becomes agents of renewal of the Church. And the renewed Church is what we need to renew our country.¹²⁶

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the implications of NPCCR to seminary formation, see Orlando Quevedo, "Pastoral Priorities of the Church in the Philippines and their Implications to Seminary Formation," Carmelo Arada, ed., *Gathered Around Jesus* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Central Seminary, 2004), 31-44.

¹²⁵ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *The Updated Philippine Program of Priestly Formation* (Manila: Episcopal Commission on Seminaries, CBCP, 2006) xi. [Hereafter PPPF]

¹²⁶ PPPF, ix-x.

B. The Context and Vision of Priestly Formation in the Philippines

1. The Context

The PPPF begins with recognizing the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in directing the Church in discerning ways of preparing candidates to the priestly ministry. It has observed that the Philippine society in the past two decades has seen dramatic shifts that call for a new assessment of seminary formation, shifts particularly emphasizing the alarming effects of intense globalization and modernism. Filipinos go to the open world and the Philippines welcomes the coming influences of the world itself. Filipinos benefit from such developments but they are also faced with new forms of poverty, injustice and alienation. The document thus says, “All these taken together have affected family life, human maturity, education, politics, social commitment, and the living of the Christian faith.”¹²⁷

The document says that in discerning the call of the Holy Spirit in this context, the local Church has recognized the call to renew all aspects of life and mission of the Church. PCP-II then affirms the significant role of seminary formation in this objective – that seminarians, while being themselves as products of this new phenomenon, “may be better prepared as agents of renewal in the Church and society through the priestly ministry.”¹²⁸

2. The Vision

The PPPF sees the complementary role and significance of both the vision of the Church and the vision of the ministerial priesthood as proper loci of seminary formation.

a) A Vision of the Church in the Philippines

The PPPF after affirming the need and nature of having a vision of the Church states the PCP-II’s vision of the renewed Church in the Philippines which rests on three main pillars: being a *Community of Disciples of Christ*, a *Church of the Poor*, and a *Church with a Mission of Renewed Integral Evangelization*.¹²⁹ The PPPF briefly elucidates:

The Church in the Philippines, therefore, envisions herself to be the people of God, the Body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit in the life situations and concerns of the Filipino people, especially the poor and underprivileged. It will be a Community of Disciples

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ See Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Don Bosco Press, Inc., 1992), 87-144. [Hereafter PCP-II]

by being a Church of the Poor so that it can truly be a Church in Mission at the service of renewed integral evangelization.¹³⁰

b) A Vision of the Priestly Identity and Ministry in the Philippines

The PPPF clearly upholds the vision of the PCP-II of the priesthood as a ministry within the People of God and for the sake of the People of God. It then says, "PCP-II calls ordained ministers as *servant-leaders* of the community. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Head of the body, priests build up the Christian community of which they are part through their service as leaders and leadership as servants."¹³¹

PPPF recalls the identity, the true dignity, the source of joy, and the very basis of the life of priests as being configured to Christ through the sacrament of Holy Orders, acting in the person of Christ the head.¹³² By ordination, priests enter in sacramental communion with the Bishop and his fellow priests and become pastors to one another and serve the local Church as a unified presbyterium. With the PCP-II's vision of the Church, "priests are to devote themselves to animating and guiding all its members so that together they can make the vision a reality."¹³³ Finally, the PPPF emphasizes that "priests can be true to their identity and ministry only to the extent that they are sustained by priestly spirituality."¹³⁴

Indeed, the vision of the Church and the vision of the priestly ministry go hand in hand. Seminary formation shall be held and guided according to the vision of priestly ministry at the service of the vision of the Church not only in the Philippines and Asia, but in the other parts of the world.

C. Spiritual Formation: Principle of Unity in Seminary Life

With the call of Vatican II and the Philippine Church's response to the challenge of renewal in priestly formation, many important details and ways can be discerned and explored. But there seems to be one significant aspect which integrates all possible areas of renewal, that is, spiritual formation.

a) Nature and Function of Spiritual Formation

The religious dimension in every human person, that is, the fundamental and irrepressible need and longing for and transcendence to the Divine, forms the basis

¹³⁰ PPPF, 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12. The teaching of PCP-II summarized here is found in PCP-II, 507-573; See also John Paul II, PDV, 16-18.

¹³² See PO, 2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Manila: ECCCE Word and Life Publications, 1994) 1563. [Hereafter CCC]; PDV, 13-15.

¹³³ PPPF, 14.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

of spiritual formation. The 1989 Synod Fathers sees spiritual formation as the work of the Spirit and is rooted in the experience of Jesus' cross. It states:

It is the work of the Holy Spirit and engages a person in his totality. It introduces him to a deep communion with Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, and leads to the total submission of one's life to the Spirit, in a filial attitude toward the Father and a trustful attachment to the Church. Spiritual formation has its roots in the experience of the cross, which in deep communion leads to the totality of the paschal mystery.¹³⁵

While applicable to all the faithful, spiritual formation has a prime significance to the life of priests, that is, as a principle or center of unity in their lives and ministry. John Paul II clearly states:

And just as for all the faithful spiritual formation is central and unifies their being and living as Christians, that is, as new creatures in Christ who walk in the Spirit, so too for every priest his spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his *being* a priest and his *acting* as a priest.¹³⁶

To see the role of spiritual formation in seminary training, it is good to consider the areas of formation and know their relationship. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* gives a complete description of the areas of formation: human formation, called also affective-relational, is the basis of all priestly formation; intellectual formation is the instrument; spiritual formation is the heart; and pastoral formation is the goal. Archbishop Joseph Pittau explains well the relationships of these aspects. He said:

The four aspects of formation are not separate, but together they make up the integral formation of the candidate to the priesthood. They are not compartmentalized but integrated. They grow together and are all indispensable for the formation of a good priest. This integration is not reached once forever, but it is an ongoing process; formation means dynamic movement and evolution progress... There are different stages in formation and in life, and according to these stages the integration too should change and the progress of self-formation should grow.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Synod of Bishops, 7th Ordinary General Assembly, "The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," *Instrumentum laboris*, 30.

¹³⁶ PDV, 45.

¹³⁷ Pittau, Joseph. "The Seminary: Human, Intellectual, Spiritual and Pastoral Formation." *Origins* 32: 20 (2002) 328.

Aware of the integral role of the spiritual training in seminary formation, the 1989 Synod Fathers identify spiritual formation as the interior principle of unity for priestly formation. It states:

Formation to the priesthood is customarily divided into various aspects: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Despite these divisions however, formation ought to reflect a fundamental unity... Spiritual formation standing at the heart of the formation of priests, is *the interior principle of unity* for all priestly formation.¹³⁸ (Italics mine)

John Paul II further explores the interconnection of all other aspects of seminary formation to the spiritual dimension. He explains:

Human formation, when it is carried out in the context of an anthropology which is open to the full truth regarding the human person, leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation.¹³⁹

Formation which aims at giving oneself generously and freely, which is something helped also by the communal structure which preparation to the priesthood normally takes, is a necessary condition for one who is called to be a manifestation and image of the good shepherd, who gives life (cf. Jn. 10:11, 15). From this point of view, *spiritual formation* has and should develop its own inherent pastoral and charitable dimension, and can profitably make use of a proper devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, one that is both strong and tender.¹⁴⁰

Intellectual formation has its own characteristics, but it is also deeply connected with, and indeed can be seen as a necessary expression of, both human and spiritual formation.¹⁴¹

The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character.¹⁴² But without spiritual formation, *pastoral formation* would be without foundation.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Synod of Bishops, 7th Ordinary General Assembly, "The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," *Instrumentum laboris*, 30.

¹³⁹ *PDV*, 45.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 45.

These statements do not only reveal the interrelationship among all aspects of seminary formation but also express the central role of spiritual formation as the principle of all priestly training, unifying all the areas of formation.

Now, what does spiritual formation contain? The essential content of spiritual formation specifically leading toward the priesthood is well expressed by the Vatican II's decree *Optatam Totius*. It states:

Spiritual formation... should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Those who are to take on the likeness of Christ the priest by sacred ordination should form the habit of drawing close to him as friends in every detail of their lives. They should live his paschal mystery in such a way that they will know how to initiate into it the people committed to their charge. They should be taught to seek Christ in faithful meditation on the word of God and in active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the Divine Office, to seek him in the bishop by whom they are sent and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, little children, the weak, sinners and unbelievers. With the confidence of sons they should love and reverence the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to the disciple by Jesus Christ as he was dying on the cross.¹⁴⁴

The preceding statement has laid out the concrete areas that seminary programs must attend to in assisting seminarians in their spiritual formation.

In the Philippine context, it is indispensable in seminary formation to highly consider what the PCP-II envisions of the spirituality of diocesan priests to be rooted and centered in Christ: ministerial, collegial, lived in the spirit of the evangelical counsels, diocesan, missionary, Eucharistic, contemplative, and Marian.¹⁴⁵ The PPPF expresses that "the converging views of PCP-II and *Optatam Totius* simply confirm the direction that spiritual formation needs to take."¹⁴⁶

After exploring the nature of spiritual formation and discerning its vital role as unifying principle in seminary life, and after identifying its essential content according to Vatican II and PCP-II, it is now proper to look at the concrete areas in which Filipino theology seminarians find themselves, specific areas which will be highlighted and put in question by the biblical text under study, that is, by Psalm 23.

¹⁴⁴ OT, 8.

¹⁴⁵ PCP-II, 532-555.

¹⁴⁶ PPPF, 65.

b) Significant Areas of Spiritual Formation

1) Spiritual Direction and the Role of Seminary Administrators

Vatican II's *Optatam Totius* expresses that seminarians “should be prepared by special religious formation, particularly through spiritual direction for them to follow Christ with generosity of spirit and purity of heart.”¹⁴⁷ The same decree emphasizes the role of spiritual direction in spiritual training, that is, in living in an intimate and unceasing union with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸

Spiritual direction is a moment of spiritual dialogue with a spiritual father where the movements of God in the seminarian's life are discerned.¹⁴⁹ John Paul II further explains the nature and advantages of spiritual direction:

It ensures spiritual formation. It fosters and maintains faithfulness and generosity in the carrying out of the ministry. As Pope Paul VI wrote before his election to the pontificate, ‘Spiritual direction has a wonderful purpose.’ We could say it is indispensable for the moral and spiritual education of young people who want to find what their vocation in life is and follow it wherever it may lead, with utter loyalty. It retains its beneficial effect at all stages of life, when in the light and affection of a devout and prudent counsel one asks for a check on one's own right intention and for support in the generous fulfillment of one's own duties. It is a very delicate but immensely valuable psychological means. It is an educational and psychological art calling for deep responsibility in the one who practices it.¹⁵⁰

The Spiritual Director is a co-discerner, a companion on the way to recognizing the Lord's presence.¹⁵¹ He helps the seminarian in his discernment of vocation so that he himself reaches a mature and free decision.¹⁵² The spiritual director is privileged to guide the seminarians not only through spiritual conferences but also from sacredness and intimacy of the heart.¹⁵³

The spiritual formation of the seminarians is the responsibility, not only of the spiritual director, but of all seminary personnel. The PPPF expresses this role of formators and gives some point on how to foster the seminarians' spirituality:

¹⁴⁷ *OT*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴⁹ *PPPF*, 82.

¹⁵⁰ *PDV*, 81.

¹⁵¹ *PPPF*, 82.

¹⁵² *PDV*, 50.

¹⁵³ *PPPF*, 90.

By their fidelity to personal and communal prayer, devotion to the Eucharist, consistency in silence and solitude, discerning attitudes, caring for others, especially the poor, they generate a milieu where the seeds of spirituality could grow.¹⁵⁴

Vergara further explains the role of formators as models in the spiritual life of the seminarians. He notes:

All formators, and not only the spiritual director, should be exemplary witnesses in the spiritual life. They become living icons for seminarians in their formative process which should serve as an inspiration for seminarians to be primarily spiritual leaders in the ordained ministry.¹⁵⁵

Spiritual direction is an on-going process. Vincent Billota and Claire Lamoureux, in their vision of formation of diocesan priests, express that “an important dimension of the formation process is to accompany candidates from initial contact through ongoing formation and into retirement.”¹⁵⁶ This implies that spiritual direction is not limited during the seminary years only but an ongoing process even in the entire priestly life. This further implies that even the spiritual directors, all formators for that matter, must each have their own spiritual director for sound and credible leadership in seminary ministry.¹⁵⁷

The main factor or problem PPPF identifies concerning spiritual direction is the “preponderance of unresolved personal human and family issues that affect the seminarian’s quality of prayer and openness to spiritual direction.”¹⁵⁸

2) Praying the Word of God

An essential element of spiritual formation is the prayerful and meditated reading of the Word of God (*lectio divina*). John Paul II expresses that “by the light and with the strength of the Word of God, one’s own vocation can be discovered and understood, loved and followed, and one’s own mission carried out.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, the seminarians are to be led to an appreciation of God’s revelation in the Word.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁵⁵ Mylo C. Vergara, *Renewal of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries*, Ph.D. diss. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2001) 94-95.

¹⁵⁶ Vincent M. Billota and Claire M. Lamoureux, *Formation Vision: A Description and Guide for the Diocesan Priest* (Whitinsville, MA: Formation Consultation Services, 1993) 18.

¹⁵⁷ Vergara, 105.

¹⁵⁸ PPPF, 66.

¹⁵⁹ PDV, 47.

Pastores Dabo Vobis states that "the first and fundamental manner of responding to the Word is *prayer*, which is without doubt a primary value and demand of spiritual formation."¹⁶⁰ Prayer is a humble and loving listening to God who speaks in man's hearts. To be a man of God, a man of prayer, is what people ask of priests. The seminarians are to be trained therefore in praying the Word of God by immersing themselves in the Scriptures by constant reading, diligent study and meditation. "The Word strengthens him for participation in Jesus' announcing the Good News. And familiarity with God's ways through praying the Word provides dynamism to the seminarian's apostolic work."¹⁶¹ The seminarians must therefore be trained to be man of the Word since the Church is a community formed by the Word¹⁶² and the preaching of the Word of God is itself the primary task of ordained ministry.¹⁶³

One factor that PPPF identifies that affects the seminarian's experience of praying the Word is that "the appreciation for prayer and its role in life seems to be superficial. Thus, generosity and perseverance in prayer also falter."¹⁶⁴ Another factor PCP-II related to this aspect is the fact that Filipino Catholics are hungry for the Word of God,¹⁶⁵ looking for preachers who have experienced the Word in their lives and deliver it not only with learning, but with conviction and the power of the Spirit.

3) Eucharist and the Sacramental, Liturgical Life

The spiritual formation of seminarians necessarily includes sacramental and liturgical formation, "becoming inserted in a living way in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ who died and rose again and is present and active in the Church's sacraments."¹⁶⁶ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* expresses that the gift and fruit of the sacraments which hinge the whole of spiritual life is the communion with God, and their task and responsibility is for the believer to live in this communion.¹⁶⁷ Such communion with Christ and with the other members of the Body, the Church, brings spiritual growth of seminarians which emerges and flows from the Eucharist, the summit and source not only of Christian prayer but also of Christian life.¹⁶⁸ With this, the seminarians must be devoted to the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice and to the Blessed Sacrament.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶¹ PPPF, 67.

¹⁶² PCP-II, 519.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 520.

¹⁶⁴ PPPF, 66.

¹⁶⁵ PCP-II, 521.

¹⁶⁶ PDV, 48.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ PPPF, 69.

The PPPF identifies a specific factor which affects the seminarian's spiritual life on this concern, that is, "a creeping materialistic attitude which contributes to a noticeable weakening of the sense of the sacred not only during spiritual and liturgical exercises but also even in daily life."¹⁶⁹

4) Personal Prayer, Solitude and Silence

The PPPF emphasizes the seminarians' need of the practice of personal prayer and solitude to maintain their zeal and direction in apostolate. It states:

Regular moments of intimacy with God are necessary... In solitude they learn to listen to their inner selves and to the promptings of the Spirit. They confront themselves before God and purify their motivations for service. They experience the deepest of communions in the silence of their hearts.¹⁷⁰

The seminarians therefore are taught how to seek and maintain interior silence that they may have a discerning life and be able to assist people in this aspect.

On this same issue of silence the PPPF mentions a factor that affect the spiritual life of seminarians, that is, "maintaining prayerful silence becomes increasingly difficult for some seminarians, given the external and internal noises that compete for their attention."¹⁷¹

5) Community Retreats and Recollections

Aside from the usual form of communal prayers through regular liturgical and sacramental celebrations, the PPPF emphasizes the value of community retreats and recollections, which provide a special moment of solitude with other members of the community. It states the significance of such communal solitude:

They teach seminarians that solitude is neither being an isolationist nor an individualist. Genuine solitude forms bonds of communion with God and with the community. Conversely, true community respects and nurtures solitude.¹⁷²

A concrete significance of this communal solitude is the strengthening of the brotherhood among the seminarians, the fraternity which binds the seminarians together to grow in friendship, support and care for one another and grow spirituality as a community.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 75. See also PDV, 47.

¹⁷¹ PPPF, 66.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 77.

Nevertheless, one thing that should be considered in this aspect is the diversity of each member's personality and the various level of maturity which at times lead to conflicts in the community. One negative factor PPPF has identified on this concern is that “spirituality tends to be individualistic.”¹⁷³

6) Seeking Christ in People

Another important aspect of spiritual formation that PPPF stresses is the encounter with God in neighbors, that is, seeking Christ in people. John Paul II notes that “spiritual life is an interior life, a life of intimacy with God, a life of prayer and contemplation.”¹⁷⁴ This seeking of God's face in others brings the seminarians to giving themselves to others, serving them in a humble and disinterested way in the manner of Jesus's service.¹⁷⁵ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* speaks well about this giving of oneself in which spiritual formation finds its inherent pastoral and charitable dimension: “Formation which aims at giving oneself generously and freely... is necessary condition for one who is called to be a manifestation and image of the Good Shepherd who gives life (See Jn. 10; 11.15).”¹⁷⁶ The said inherent dimensions of spiritual formation lead to its orientation towards social transformation. And PCP-II concretely mentions the preferential option for the poor as part of the spiritual growth of seminarians.

From this seeking of Christ in people springs some qualities that human formation also stresses in the light of self-giving. PPPF states, “Seeking Christ in people is one basis of a properly spiritual approach to chastity, obedience and simplicity: loving Christ present in persons, trusting Christ in the bishop and in fellow priests, and serving Christ in the poor.”¹⁷⁷

The PPPF also identifies one factor which affects this value of seeking of Christ, that is, “an unhealthy and excessive focus of oneself that undermines the capacity for self transcendence, and trusting surrender to God and to others.”¹⁷⁸

After exploring the nature and unifying role of spiritual formation and identifying its essential content and the concrete areas that concern the Filipino seminarians, areas to be highlighted by the biblical text in the next section, let us refer back to the question raised earlier: “what is the internal principle which animates the spiritual life of the seminarian for his integral formation?”

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷⁴ *PDV*, 49.

¹⁷⁵ *PPPF*, 83.

¹⁷⁶ *PDV*, 49.

¹⁷⁷ *PPPF*, 84.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

Pastores Dabo Vobis clearly answers this by referring to the nature and purpose of pastoral charity in the life of priests. It states:

The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the head and shepherd, is *pastoral charity*, as a participation in Jesus Christ's own pastoral charity, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.¹⁷⁹ (Italics mine)

The spiritual life of the seminarian, then, the future priest, should be "marked, moulded and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity."¹⁸⁰ The pastoral charity of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, becomes the key to the seminarian's life of holiness in preparing himself for the priesthood. It is a gift that he prays for, a call that he prepares himself to respond to, and a task to which he commits himself with. The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ's love for his flock.

V. The Application of the Image of Sheep-and-Shepherd to the Seminary Formation in the Philippines

Having studied the image of sheep-and-shepherd, through an exegesis of Psalm 23 and a survey of the Christian tradition that affirms the use of the image, we now come to the focal point of the study, which is the discernment of the spirituality that this image brings.

The coherent dialogue between the exegesis of Psalm 23 and the theological affirmation of the Church Magisterium documents on the aspect of spirituality in the Philippine seminary formation is presented in the following main points. Each item begins with a metaphor related to shepherding, followed by the exploration of a theological point.

A. The Staff: Knowing and Loving Jesus

One essential symbol, if not the most important, in shepherding is the shepherd's staff. The staff identifies the shepherd as a shepherd. No one in any other profession carries a shepherd's staff. It is uniquely an instrument used for the care and management of sheep – and only sheep. It does not do for cattle, horses or hogs. It

¹⁷⁹ *PDV*, 23.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

is designed, shaped and adapted especially to the needs of the sheep. And it is used only for their benefit.¹⁸¹

How does the staff look like and what does it symbolize? The shepherd's staff is normally long, slender stick, often with a crook or hook at the end. It is especially selected by the shepherd with care. It is shaped, smoothed and cut to best suit the hand for the owner's personal use. The staff is essentially a symbol of concern, the compassion that a shepherd has for his sheep. No other single word can better describe its function on behalf of the flock than that it is for their *comfort*. But the comfort that the staff gives is not just for the sheep alone, rather, for the shepherd himself also. Keller gives a moving picture of this:

Some of the most moving memories I carry with me from Africa and the Middle East are of seeing elderly shepherds in the twilight of life, standing silently at the sunset leaning on their staffs, watching their flocks with contented spirits. Somehow the staff is of special comfort to the shepherd himself. In the tough tramps and during the long weary watches with his sheep, he leans on it for support and strength. It becomes to him the most precious comfort and help in his duties.¹⁸²

Keller further explains that there are three areas of the sheep management¹⁸³ in which the staff plays the significant role. First is *for drawing sheep together into an intimate relationship*. The shepherd uses his staff to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother if they become separated. Second is *for reaching out and catching individual sheep and drawing them close to the shepherd for intimate examination*. The staff is very useful this way for the shy and timid sheep that normally tend to keep at a distance from the shepherd. And third is *for guiding sheep*. The tip of the long slender stick is laid gently against the animal's side, and the pressure applied guide the sheep in the way the shepherd wants it to go. Thus, the sheep is reassured of its proper path.

The main symbolism of shepherd's staff, therefore, is the identity of the shepherd and his intimate relationship with his sheep. In the context of priestly training, particularly in the spiritual formation, the concrete area which deals directly to knowing the identity of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and the seminarian's relationship with Him is the spiritual direction and the role of seminary administrators. The spiritual direction and the formators function as the shepherd's staff in drawing the seminarian as the sheep into the relationship with Jesus, in reaching and catching

¹⁸¹ Keller, 86.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 86-87.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

him when he goes a distant from Him, and in leading him in the path of formation. Now, how are spiritual direction and the role of seminary administrators advanced by Psalm 23?

The first theological point raised in the exegesis on the knowing-alliance function of the shepherd is that *the Lord as shepherd has an intimate relationship with his sheep*. Just as the intimate relationship between the Lord as shepherd and his sheep is emphasized in Psalm 23, so too is the relationship between the seminarian and Jesus Christ is given much attention in the spiritual direction and the role of seminary administrators.

Psalm 23's unique characteristic as the only Psalm which calls God as "my shepherd," evokes the extraordinary relationship between the psalmist and God. Exegetical studies reveal that the use of the possessive pronoun "my" refers to something more profound, that is, a personal, intimate communion between God and the flock, the bond that unites God to his people. In the same way, the essential content of spiritual formation that Vatican II's *Opus Dei* states is "that students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit."¹⁸⁴ *Pastores Dabo Vobis* mentions that the first value and demand of the spiritual path trodden by the candidate for priesthood is "living intimately united to Jesus Christ."¹⁸⁵ This is also the main goal of spiritual direction and the role of seminary administrators, that is, the growth in spiritual life by maintaining an intimate relationship with Jesus.

The main problem identified by PPPF that affects the spiritual life of seminarians is the "preponderance of unresolved personal human and family issues that affect the seminarian's quality of prayer and openness to spiritual direction."¹⁸⁶ In the journey to priesthood, it is natural that problems and crises come. But what is consoling in this journey is that Jesus, in the person of the spiritual director and other persons concerned in the formation together with the aid of confidence in Christ, the seminarian is able to endure difficulties. Psalm 23 also exudes such confidence in the expression of the Psalmist in v.4c, "I fear no evil; for thou art with me." Such statement is also an exceptional way of speaking of God's covenant with his people, of Jesus' union with the seminarian in formation. In line with this, the spiritual director serves as a shepherd to his seminarian-directee who, despite many difficult issues and problems and pains, is confident because the spiritual director is in his company.

The knowledge of the shepherd of his sheep and his relationship with them is also evidently discerned in the bold statement "surely goodness and mercy shall

¹⁸⁴ OT, 8.

¹⁸⁵ PDV, 46.

¹⁸⁶ PPPF, 66.

follow me" which sums up all the benefits enjoyed by the sheep and all the diligent efforts and labors of the shepherd for the welfare of the sheep. Likewise, this statement also shows the beneficial effect of spiritual direction in every stage of the seminarian's life, as what is mentioned in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. It does not just give spiritual consolations, but also helps to faithfully carry out one's task in the spiritual journey. Such statement further expresses the spiritual director's and the seminary administrator's efforts of listening to the seminarians, accompanying them in their spiritual welfare.

Indispensable in spiritual direction, that is, in the spiritual life of seminarians, and even in the whole priestly training, is the prime acknowledgment of the role of the Holy Spirit, the principal agent in spiritual life.¹⁸⁷ In relation to the metaphor of the staff, Keller gives a primary theological symbolism: the "staff of God" is symbolic of the Spirit of God. Keller suggests, "In our walk with God, we are told explicitly by Christ Himself that it would be His Spirit who would be sent to guide us and to lead us into all the truth (Jn. 16.13)."¹⁸⁸ Thus, the staff symbolizes not just the intimate relationship of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to the flock, the Church, or the seminarians in particular, but more so, the shepherd's staff symbolizes the Holy Spirit. "It is the Spirit who comes quietly but emphatically to make the life of Christ, the Good Shepherd, real and personal and intimate in everyone."¹⁸⁹

This advancement of the aspect of spiritual direction then implies concrete actions¹⁹⁰ for the seminary spiritual life. Of primary importance is the seminarian's docility with the promptings of the Holy Spirit in his life. The PPPF thus particularly recommends fostering in every seminarian a positive attitude towards spiritual direction, that is, that they may freely submit themselves to regular direction. Spiritual direction becomes also an occasion for counseling. The spiritual directors then need to equip themselves with necessary training that they may be competent and effective ministers in this aspect. Consequently, seminary administrators, headed by the bishop and the rector, should be always reminded of their significant role in the spiritual growth of the seminarians, that is, to be living witnesses and models.

The first theological point of Psalm 23, *The Lord as Shepherd has an intimate relationship with his sheep*, advances the aspect of spiritual direction and role of seminary administrators, and leads to the fundamental role of *the seminarian as a sheep*, that is, to grow in knowledge of Jesus and maintain an intimate relationship with Him through the Spirit.

¹⁸⁷ PDV, 33.

¹⁸⁸ Keller, 88.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ PPPF, 88.

B. The Rod: Living with the Guidance of the Word

When the shepherd is afield with his sheep, it is customary for him to carry some equipment. Usually he brings a rifle slung over his shoulder and a long slender staff in his hand. At times, he also has a bag to put his lunch, bottle of water and perhaps some first-aid kit for his flock. But in the Middle East, the shepherd carries only a rod and a staff. And these are the common and universal equipment of the primitive sheepman. The focus on the rod is given attention here.

Keller first gives a vivid description of a shepherd preparing or selecting his rod:

Each shepherd boy, for the first time he starts to tend his father's flock, takes pride in the selection of a rod and staff exactly suited to his own size and strength. He goes into the bush and selects a young sapling which is dug from the ground. This is carved and whittled down with great care and patience. The enlarged base of the sapling where its trunk joins the roots is shaped into a smooth, rounded head of hard wood. The sapling itself is shaped to exactly fit the owner's hand. After he completes it, the shepherd boy spends hours practicing with this club, learning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It becomes his main weapon of defense for both himself and his sheep.¹⁹¹

Now, how are rods used¹⁹² and what do they symbolize? Keller again describes clearly this concern. First, the rod was an *extension of the shepherd's right hand*. It stood as a symbol of his strength, power and authority in any serious situation. Interesting to know is that in the language in the West, the slang term "rod" has been applied to handguns such as pistols or revolvers carried by cowboys, or also to knobkerries. In Psalm 23, v.4d, the sheep asserts that the shepherd's rod, his weapon of power, authority and defense is a continuous comfort to him. And it will also be recalled that Moses used his rod to demonstrate the power vested on him by God (Ex 4.4; 7.10,19,20; Ex 8.5,16). Second, the rod is used by the shepherd for the welfare of his sheep – namely that of *discipline*. If a sheep goes wandering on its own, the shepherd hurls his rod through the air to send the wayward sheep back to the fold. Third, the rod in the shepherd's hand was used *to examine and count the sheep*. This refers to the passing "under the rod" in the Old Testament (Ez. 20.37). Keller gives a description on this:

Passing "under the rod" meant not only under the owner's control and authority, but also to be subject to his most careful, intimate,

¹⁹¹ Keller, 82.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 82-85.

and firsthand examination. A sheep that has passed "under the rod" was one which had been counted and looked over with great care to make sure all was well with it.¹⁹³

Finally, the shepherd's rod is an instrument of *protection* both for himself and his sheep when they are in danger. It is used both as a defense and a deterrent against anything that would attack.

Getting into the prime theological symbolism of the rod, it is worthwhile to take note of Keller's noble assertion, "just as the staff of God is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, so the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God."¹⁹⁴ Exploring this statement brings to the affirmation of the nature and function of the Word of God in the context of an area in seminary spiritual formation being enhanced by Psalm 23.

The second element of spirituality that has been identified is *praying the Word of God*, the prayerful and meditated reading of the Word of God. How does Psalm 23 advance this area in seminary formation?

To answer this question, it is necessary to be reminded of the nature of the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures. St. Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy, says, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3.16-17). Paul means that the Word of God is not just for teaching, for reproof and for correction, but more importantly, "it trains a man in righteousness until he is equipped for every good work."¹⁹⁵ Thus, the seminarian is trained not just to be a righteous person, a person truly led and guided by the Word, but more so, to be a man of the Word.

Psalm 23 significantly enhances this aspect with the second theological point in the exegesis, *the Lord as shepherd leads and guides his sheep in its way*. The Psalm does not only refer back to the function of the Scriptures in one's life but to the Word itself, God who is truly alive in one's life. In the exegesis, in the leading and guiding function of the shepherd, Psalm 23 calls to mind the desert experience which is in the memory of the Israelite connected to the exodus experience. It was God who led them beside the waters of rest (v.2b) in the forty years which the people passed in the desert; it was God who led them in the paths of righteousness (v.3b), the ways that were deemed good for the people. Likewise, Psalm 23 enables the seminarian to discover and experience Jesus' living presence in the Scriptures through prayer, the humble and loving listening to God who speaks in man's hearts.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁹⁴ Keller, 87.

¹⁹⁵ William Barclay, "Barclay's New Testament Commentary," *Liguori Faithware Bible* (Bible on Disk for Catholics. Liguori Publications and CTI, 1995).

Prayer, which is the first and fundamental manner of responding to the Word is enhanced by the Psalm with the verse 2b, “He leads me beside still quiet waters,” which as seen in the exegesis could mean, “He (the Lord) knows where the still, quiet, deep, clean, pure water is to be found that can satisfy His sheep and keep them fit.”¹⁹⁶ Keller further explains that “‘to drink’ in spiritual terminology simply means ‘to take in,’ ‘to accept,’ or ‘to believe.’ That is to say, it implies that a person accepts and assimilates the very life of God in Christ to the point where it becomes part of him.”¹⁹⁷ Being led beside still waters, therefore, means progressing in the life of prayer with the guidance of the Word, where one’s own vocation is discovered and understood, loved and followed, and one’s own mission is carried out,¹⁹⁸ living and personally meeting with God, sharing in the filial conversation between Jesus and the Father.¹⁹⁹ This responds to the present problem identified by the PPPF, that is, the superficial appreciation for prayer and its role in life which leads to falter in generosity and perseverance in prayer.

In v.3b, “paths of righteousness” as seen in the exegesis can be translated as “straight (right) paths,”²⁰⁰ “paths which lead to happiness,”²⁰¹ “a way of life,” a spiritual and moral regeneration, on being put on the right track with the Lord. This statement enlightens the challenge for seminarians to be trained in praying the Word of God by immersing them in the Scriptures by constant reading, diligent study and meditation. They should read the Scriptures, “believe what they read, teach what they believe, and practice what they teach.”²⁰² This in turn responds to the PCP-II’s identification of the challenge and need of the Church’s faithful preachers of the Word.

Going back to the metaphor of the rod, and the nature and function of the Word of God in the seminarian’s life, the following convergences can be asserted. First, just as the rod gives comfort to the sheep because it stood as the shepherd’s strength, power and authority, so too the Word of God vested with the power, veracity and potent authority gives comfort and assurance in the heart of every seminarian. In the rod’s function of discipline, the Word of God comes swiftly to the seminarian’s heart to correct and reprove him when he goes astray and convicts his conscience of right conduct to walk in righteousness.²⁰³ As the rod is used to examine and count the sheep, so too the Word of God searches the heart of every seminarian, purifies his motivations, and gives him concern and consolation. Lastly, just as the rod is used for protection, so too, the Word of Christ that confronts Satan in the desert temptation is the same Word that protects

¹⁹⁶ Keller, 47.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹⁸ PDV, 47.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰⁰ Briggs, 209.

²⁰¹ Kissane, 104.

²⁰² See *Ordination Rite for Deacons*.

²⁰³ Keller, 83.

the seminarian from the prevalent temptations in the journey of formation. Indeed, the Scriptures are His rod which leads and guides the seminarian.

The second theological point of Psalm 23, *The Lord as Shepherd guides and leads his sheep*, therefore advances the aspect of praying the Word of God, and brings one to the challenge that *the seminarian as a sheep should live in obedience and discipline under the guidance of the Word of God*.

C. The Green Pasturage: Gratitude in Abundance

Another metaphor or image of shepherding to be taken up here is the green pasturage. The terms in v.2 of Psalm 23, "lush grass" or "green pasturages," and the "refreshing waters" are the places where the shepherd leads his flock to lie down, freed from fear, tension, aggravations, and hunger.

Some notes are to be considered in understanding the metaphor of the green pasturage. First, its description can be traced in the Scriptures from the picture portrayed of the Promised Land, to which God tried so hard to lead Israel from Egypt, the "land flowing with milk and honey." Keller gives a good picture of this one. He said:

Not only is this figurative language but also essentially scientific terminology. In agricultural terms, we speak of a "milk flow" and "honey flow." By this we mean the peak season of spring and summer when pastures are at their most productive stages. The livestock that feed on the forage and the bees that visit the blossoms are said to be producing a corresponding "flow" of milk or honey. So a land flowing with milk and honey is a land of rich, green, luxuriant pastures.²⁰⁴

Second, green pastures do not just happen by chance. Keller, on this concern notes:

Green pastures were the product of tremendous labor, time, and skill in land use. Green pastures were the result of clearing rough, rocky land; of tearing out brush and roots and stumps; of deep plowing and careful soil preparation; of seeding and planting special grains and legumes; of irrigating with water and husbanding with care the crops of forage that would feed the flocks.²⁰⁵

Thus, all these description of preparing a green pasturage means a tremendous soil and skill and time for the careful shepherd. And the third consideration is on the

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

necessity of green pasture. Green pastures are essential to success with sheep. Keller further illustrates:

When lambs are maturing and the ewes need green, succulent feed for a heavy milk flow, there is no substitute for good pasturage. No sight so satisfies the sheep owner as to see his flock well and quietly fed to repletion on rich green forage, able to lie down to rest, ruminate and gain.²⁰⁶

These important notes on green pasturage lead to the discernment on what it signifies in the context of seminary formation. The researcher believes that green pasturages can generally signify all the graces and blessings that a seminarian receives in his life and most especially in his formation. Of prime importance is the gift of vocation and all the privileges and responsibilities connected with it. But in the spiritual aspect, green pasturage can signify the sacramental life and liturgical prayer of seminarians which find their highest expression in the Eucharist, the summit and source not only of Christian prayer but also of Christian life.²⁰⁷ The greatest gift and fruit of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist is that communion with God. This gift in turn becomes a task and responsibility to live in such communion.²⁰⁸ This is because the grace received in the Eucharist that renews Christian life is the grace of Jesus himself.

Such abundance in the divine grace is also expressed in Psalm 23 with its third theological point, *the Lord as shepherd sustains the flock in all its needs with abundance*.

In the beginning of the Psalm, “I shall not want (v.1b),” the expression of the experience of abundance that God gives to his flock is clearly shown. God as shepherd is a bountiful provider of the needs of his flock. The psalmist expresses such acknowledgement of the benevolence of God, his shepherd. Exegesis reveals that the word “want,” as used here does not only mean that of not lacking – not deficient – in proper care, management, or husbandry, but also, the idea of being utterly contented in the Good Shepherd’s care and consequently not craving or desiring anything more. This is so because in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, the grace that is received that renews Christian life is the grace of Jesus himself who died and rose again and continues to pour out his sanctifying Spirit in the sacraments.

Pastores Dabo Vobis has identified the abundance that the candidates to the priesthood receive and share in the *intimate* dispositions which the Eucharist fosters:

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁰⁷ *PPPF*, 69.

²⁰⁸ *PDV*, 48.

Gratitude for heavenly benefits received, because Eucharist is thanksgiving; *an attitude of self-offering* which will impel them to unite the offering of themselves to the Eucharistic offering of Christ; *charity* nourished by a sacrament which is a sign of unity and sharing; *yearning to contemplate and bow in adoration* before Christ who is really present under the Eucharistic species.²⁰⁹

The Psalm then fosters the essential importance of the Eucharist for the priest's life and ministry, and as a result, in the spiritual formation of the candidates for the priesthood. Thus, just as the Psalm exudes the psalmist's expression of gratitude for the experience of fullness of blessings of the shepherd's provision, so too should a seminarian give essential importance to the devotion to the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice and to the Blessed Sacrament. The PPPF thus recommends a "daily participation in the Eucharist and make it the high point or the essential moment of the day from which flows the nourishment of daily Christian life."²¹⁰

The PPPF identifies a specific factor which affects the seminarian's spiritual life on this concern, that is, "a creeping materialistic attitude which contributes to a noticeable weakening of the sense of the sacred not only during spiritual and liturgical exercises but also even in daily life."²¹¹

"I shall not want" is a proud, positive and bold statement of the Psalm which obviously shows the sheep's satisfaction with its owner, perfectly content with its lot in life. In the same manner, the seminarian, with his love of the Eucharist fostering an attitude of satisfaction with the graces and blessings he experiences learns to combat such materialistic attitude and observe simplicity in lifestyle.

With the above statements and following the points raised on the metaphor of green pasturage, the following matters can be ascertained. First, on the real nature of spiritual life, just as the expression "flowing with milk and honey" is mentioned that it is not just a figurative language but a scientific fact, so too the sacramental life and liturgical prayer of a seminarian are not just external structures and symbols for him to follow and participate in, but they contain the real presence of Jesus Christ which he ought to experience and cherish. Second, on the tremendous task of preparing the green pasturage, the Lord Jesus who has prepared all the blessings for the seminarians, continues to do the laborious task of offering these graces, most especially his daily sacrifice in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. And third, on the necessity of green pastures, just as lush grasses and still waters are needed for the sheep to lie down and be nourished, so too for the

²⁰⁹ PDV, 48.

²¹⁰ PPPF, 70.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

seminarians to nurture their vocation and spiritual life is for them to find the real source and summit of their nourishment particularly in the Eucharist.

The third theological point of Psalm 23, *The Lord as Shepherd sustains the flock in all its needs with abundance*, advances the aspect of the seminarian's sacramental and liturgical life in the Eucharist, and brings one to the challenge that *the seminarian as a sheep should inculcate in his heart the sense of gratitude in formation fully expressed in the Holy Eucharist*.

D. The Confident Sheep: Staying with Jesus' Guarding Presence

The next important metaphor that needs to be emphasized is that of the confident sheep. A confident sheep may be pictured as "boasting to its unfortunate neighbor across the fence about the excellent care it receives from its own shepherd on the home ranch throughout the winter and spring."²¹² Or it could be a serene, humble sheep that experiences a long, adventurous trek through the high mountains. Though dangerous, the sheep remains trusting because it knows that its shepherd is present, guarding the whole flock whatever may happen on the way. The source of the sheep's confidence could always be the intimacy between the sheep and shepherd expressed in this guarding presence especially during the journeys through the dark valleys illustrated in the exegesis of the verses.

Such trust and confidence in the seminary context can be explored and developed in the seminarian's practice of personal prayer, solitude and silence, an important element in seminarian's spiritual life concretely identified for the Filipino seminarian. The PPPF emphasizes the necessity of having intimate moments of solitude with God for the seminarians to maintain their zeal and direction in formation and apostolate. The PPPF further identifies the present problem on this concern, that "maintaining prayerful silence becomes increasingly difficult for some seminarians, given the external and internal noises that compete for their attention."²¹³

Psalm 23 has important thing to contribute on this concern. The Psalm acknowledges the presence of the said "noises" which may be internal problems or fears, or external situation of difficulties pictured by the term "the shadow of death" in v.4a. By exegesis, the said term could be read as "darkness," or even "total darkness." Such a valley of deep darkness, both in its literal and metaphorical sense, may fill one's heart with dread and fear.

What is remarkable in the Psalm is that, in the presence of dread and fear in one's heart, the psalmist can affirm that he fears no evil even in such circumstances. "I fear no evil," this statement thus exudes grandeur, quietness, an assurance that sets the soul of

²¹² Keller, 71.

²¹³ PPPF, 66.

the psalmist at rest. The reason for the psalmist's confidence in the seemingly dangerous situation is his experience that the Lord, his Shepherd, is with him in every situation, in every trial, in every dismal disappointment, in every distressing dilemma.

"For thou art with me," this verse, which is at the center of the psalm and even considered as the key element of the text, evokes the expression of trust and confidence of the psalmist on the continuing presence of God for the assurance of God's watching over. Notwithstanding the presence of dangers and fears surrounding the psalmist, he will never be afraid because God is with him.²¹⁴ Another theological point is seen in this respect, that is, *the Lord as shepherd stands by the sheep and is even willing to lay down his life for the sheep*.

The same thing happens in the journey to the priesthood. The researcher says in the introduction that the formation to the priesthood is a long, challenging and amazing journey. A seminarian faces different kinds of experiences throughout the years of formation. There are joyful, high moments. But there are also times when life in the seminary seems depressing. A seminarian who does not have the right motivation to the priesthood, the firm decision and focus to follow God as a future priest, and most importantly, the strong trust and confidence in God in difficult, confusing situations, would easily walk away from the journey and take another direction. But with deep faith and confidence that Jesus is always with him in the journey, the seminarian would go on and strain forward following God in the most intimate way in his formation.

Such confidence in God can only be formed if the seminarian has a real, intimate relationship with Him. Such intimacy is well expressed in Psalm 23 through the change of person in verse 4. Verses 1 to 3 are in the third person. Now it turns to address the shepherd directly. The personal pronouns *I* and *You* enter the conversation. It obviously becomes a most intimate discourse of deep affection. This literal emphasis on the Psalm gives a strong implication to spirituality. That is, it is in intimate discourse done in personal prayer, solitude and silence that a seminarian "learns to listen to his inner self and to the promptings of the Spirit. He is able to confront himself before God and purify his intentions of service. He experiences the deepest of communion in the silence of his heart."²¹⁵

The fourth theological point of Psalm 23, *the Lord as Shepherd stands by the sheep and is even willing to lay down his life for the sheep*, advances the aspect of the seminarian's practice of personal prayer, solitude and silence, and brings one to the challenge that *the seminarian as a sheep should develop a confident response in Jesus' guarding presence*.

²¹⁴ Tappy, 277-78.

²¹⁵ PPPE, 75.

E. The Sheepfold: Growing in Fraternity despite of Frailties

Another significant metaphor of shepherding is the sheepfold, the flock, particularly its aspect of productivity as a livestock and to the land. Keller interestingly notes the two poles of raising sheep. He said, “Sheep can, under mismanagement, be the most destructive livestock. In short order they can ruin and ravage land almost beyond remedy. But in bold contrast, they can, on the other hand, be the most beneficial of all livestock if properly managed.”²¹⁶

Sheep by its nature is beneficial both individually and more so as a group. Individually, in the biblical times, although sheep were used occasionally as food, they were raised for their wool which was used not only for the production of clothing but also for rugs. But at the time of slaughter, every part of the sheep was used.²¹⁷ As a flock, the sheep has various ways of benefits to the land. Keller gives examples of this:

The sheep’s habit of seeking the highest rise of ground on which to rest insures that the fertility from the rich lowland is redeposited on the less productive higher ground. No other livestock will consume as wide a variety of herbage. Sheep eats all sorts of weeds and other undesirable plants that might otherwise invade a field ... In ancient literature sheep were referred to as “those of the golden hooves” – simply because they were regarded and esteemed so highly for their beneficial effect of land.²¹⁸

This shows what “goodness and mercy shall follow me” means in v.6a of the Psalm. Keller continues to explain:

Goodness and mercy had followed my flocks, the shepherd would say. The sheep left behind them something worthwhile, productive, beautiful, and beneficial to both themselves, others and me. Where they had walked there followed fertility and weed-free land. Where they had lived there remained beauty and abundance.²¹⁹

These characteristic of the image of a sheepfold speak well when read in the context of the seminary community. Each seminarian is gifted with talents, intelligence and skills. Each one has something to contribute for the community. And the community as well, is full of capacity to contribute for the betterment of the society. On this concern the seminary becomes the source of renewal for Church and society.

²¹⁶ Keller, 112.

²¹⁷ Porter, 56.

²¹⁸ Keller, 112.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

The fifth concrete area of spiritual life in the formation of Filipino seminarians that is given emphasis is the community, particularly, communal retreats and recollections which provide seminarians special moments of solitude with others in the community to discern the stated potentials and challenges. The PPPF states that community retreats and recollections teach seminarians that solitude is neither being an isolationist nor an individualist and that genuine solitude forms bonds of communion with God and with the community.²²⁰ The PPPF also acknowledges the negative factor on this concern, that is, with the presence of conflicts in personality and different levels of maturity, spirituality tends to be individualistic.²²¹

How is this aspect of spiritual formation advanced and enlightened by Psalm 23? Discernment can be done in the shepherd's function of tender healing. It is seen in the exegesis that the sheep or the flock has many needs that attending to them or taking care of their needs and creating an atmosphere of tenderness and love is a significant function of God as Shepherd. Such tenderness is seen in giving the sheep the tranquility (letting them lie down in green pastures) and comfort (the presence of the Shepherd, and through the rod and the staff) they need.

More so, the tenderness of the shepherd is shown in attending to the sheep, for their safety and protection, and especially for their care when sick and wounded. It is true that though by nature sheep are timid and defenseless animal, wary and easily frightened, "they are naturally gregarious, that is, tending to group and feed themselves together for protection."²²² Terrien illustrates how a shepherd nurses his sheep:

At the end of a shepherd's day, he would examine the sheep, one by one, and anoint with oil the heads (v.5) of those wounded or scratched. The shepherd would even offer from a goblet (v.5) some fermented drink to those about to faint from exhaustion.²²³

Such anointing with oil by the shepherd is further illustrated by Keller in his actual experience of the sheep: The shepherd applies or anoints²²⁴ an antidote to their heads, that is, a linseed oil, sulfur and tar, which is smeared over the sheep's nose and head as a protection against nose flies and a medicine for the disease caused by scabs.

These statements lead to the fifth theological point of Psalm 23, *the Lord as shepherd takes care of the sheep with tenderness and love*, which enhances the area of community retreats and recollections.

²²⁰ PPPF, 77.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²²² Porter, 57.

²²³ Terrien, 241.

²²⁴ Keller, 99-106.

Community retreats and recollections is one aspect of spiritual formation in the seminary where seminarians experience the Lord's tenderness and healing. In the special moments of solitude, the seminarians experience tranquility. Their deeper awareness of God's presence through the Holy Spirit and the Word (the rod and the staff) gives them spiritual comfort. And in midst of conflicts, difficulties, problems, crises and pains, the sacrament of penance and the communal acts of forgiveness and reconciliation gives healing.

The emphasis of the community is held in this respect. Just as the sheep, though timid and defenseless animal, wary and easily frightened, are gregarious and tend to group and feed themselves together in the sheepfold for pasturage and protection, so too the seminarians, with different personalities and various strengths and weaknesses, bind themselves together in the community for formation. The seminarians form themselves as a Christian community of persons related, in the Spirit of Jesus, in friendship with God and with each other, and who are committed to the vision, the meanings, the values, the lifestyle of the Gospel.²²⁵ One thing unites them – they are a community who shares one vision and one mission – to be shepherds of God's people. So despite their frailties, they experience Jesus' tenderness and love. They strive to develop in friendship and brotherhood in preparation for a unique fraternity that ordination brings, that is, the intimate sacramental bond among priests. Growing in this fraternity leads them to have a better communion with fellow-priests in their ministry in the diocese.

The fifth theological point of Psalm 23, *the Lord as Shepherd takes care of the sheep with tenderness and love*, advances the aspect of the community retreats and recollections, and brings one to the task that *the seminarian as a sheep should be a brother to his fellow sheep*.

F. The Sheep Outside the Fold : Compassion for Others

One last image of shepherding that may be explored is the "sheep outside the fold." All things considered, the welfare of any flock is entirely dependent upon the management afforded them by their own shepherd. It is worth describing here a poor shepherd on the farm next to the good shepherd. Keller vividly describes such picture which is worth mentioning in detail:

He (the poor shepherd) was not concerned about the condition of his sheep. His land was neglected. He gave no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they could. They fell prey to dogs, cougars and rustlers.

²²⁵ Daniel Patrick L. Huang, "Living God's Dream of Communion: Community in Seminary Formation," in N.V. Abalajon and C.P. Arada, eds., *Gathered Around Jesus* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Central Seminary) 88.

Every year, these poor creatures were forced to gnaw away at bare brown fields and impoverished pastures. Every winter there was a shortage of nourishing hay and wholesome grain to feed the hungry ewes. Shelter to safeguard and protect and suffering sheep from storms and blizzards was scanty and inadequate.

They had only polluted, muddy water to drink. There had been a lack of salt and other trace materials needed to offset their sickly pastures. In their thin, weak, and diseased condition these poor sheep were a pathetic sight.

In my mind's eye, I can still see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little knots, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side.²²⁶

The above description clearly shows how a selfish, heartless and indifferent shepherd handles his sheep. He simply does not care. The sheep need and want green grass, fresh water, shade, safety and shelter. They want relief from wounds, bruises, disease and parasites. But, a poor (selfish) shepherd will simply not care.

Looking at the context of seminary formation, this metaphor of the sheep outside the fold of the good shepherd gives a unique challenge to seminarians, in the light of the shepherding, that is, to be concerned with those sheep outside the fold, meaning, to those who are in greater need, those who are poor, suffering, exploited, underprivileged, those who belong to other beliefs, the non-Catholics and non-Christians. The PPPF has identified this specific concern, that is, the need for seminarians to learn and foster the value of seeing the face of Christ in neighbors. Seeking Christ in others is also the value which brings the seminarians in giving themselves to others, that is, learning to sacrifice their own comforts for a free and generous service to others in need. Such self-giving brings the seminarian to faithful observance of chastity, obedience and simplicity and to serving Christ in the poor.

But the PPPF has also identified one present problem on this concern, that is, the seminarian's "unhealthy and excessive focus on oneself that undermines the capacity for self transcendence, and trusting surrender to God and to others."²²⁷

What does Psalm 23 say on this concern? A deeper look on the shepherd's function of gathering and delivering is worth undertaking. The mention of the confidence from fear (v.4b), the possibility of walking through the valley of the shadow of death (v.4a), the presence of enemies (v.5a), and the hope of remaining to dwell in the house of God (v.6c) acknowledge the possibility of the sheep to be

²²⁶ Keller, 27.

²²⁷ PPPF, 66

strayed away from the flock, to become a wandered sheep, a cast down, a helpless sheep. Keller has given a moving image of a cast down sheep, saying, “a ‘cast’ sheep or a ‘cast down’ sheep means a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself. If the owner does not arrive on the scene within a reasonable short time, the sheep will die.”²²⁸ Good thing is that there is the attentive shepherd, quick and ready to come to its rescue – ever patient and tender and helpful.

With the confidence that Psalm 23 evokes, the psalmist expresses that he remains always secured in the presence of the Good Shepherd, that even if he strays, God, his Shepherd, would search for and deliver him in times of depressing need. This draws back to the theological point, *the Lord as Shepherd is concerned for those sheep outside the fold*. The Shepherd is not only concerned for those sheep in the flock that are astray, but more so, the Lord as Shepherd is concerned with those who are outside his flock but needs his shepherding care.

In the same manner, Psalm 23 enhances the challenge to seminarians to seek Christ in others with the challenge to be formed with the heart of the Good Shepherd himself. Like the heart of the Shepherd, seminarians must be concerned for everyone, especially those who are in great need, those who are outside the sheepfold, the cast down, helpless and hopeless people. Seminarians must develop in themselves the value of self-sacrifice for the welfare of others. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* speaks well about this giving of oneself in which spiritual formation finds its inherent pastoral and charitable dimension: “Formation which aims at giving oneself generously and freely... is necessary condition for one who is called to be a manifestation and image of the Good Shepherd who gives life (See Jn. 10; 11.15).” The PPPF rightly states the blossoming of the seminarians’ human qualities with the aspect of seeking Christ in others: the loving Christ present in persons, trusting Christ in the bishop and in a fellow priest, serving Christ in the poor.

The sixth theological point of Psalm 23, *Lord as Shepherd is concerned for those sheep outside the fold*, advances the aspect of seeking Christ in others, and brings one to the challenge that *the seminarian as a sheep should have a compassionate and missionary zeal in his heart to see Christ in others*.

These above-mentioned theological points which are matters of advancements of the spirituality in the present context of seminary formation in the Philippines drawn from the application of the fullness of meaning contained in the exegesis of Psalm 23 with the aid of theological affirmation on selected Church Magisterium documents has now led to the emergence of a shepherd spirituality in seminary formation.

²²⁸ Keller, 53-56.

VI. Conclusion

It has been shown in the foregoing that the "sheep-and-shepherd" is indeed a powerful imagery that illustrates the pastoral charity of Christ, as anticipated by Psalm 23 and affirmed by the documents of the Magisterium of the Church. The seminary formation must then serve as a locus for the cultivation and practice of Christ's pastoral charity. The journey in formation must invite the seminarians to partake of the benefits of Christ's shepherding, through the spiritual directors and seminary administrators, so that they could imbibe it in themselves and share it to the flock whom they would shepherd in the future. The seminary formation is indeed a training but not just of the intellect - and it is not only concerned with the acquisition of skills for preaching, teaching and administration - but also an opportunity that provides the seminarians the kind of spirituality that would make them better suited to practice the pastoral charity of Christ when they are sent to their own missions in the future.

Hence, it becomes more obvious that it is basically the seminarians' gift of self for Jesus and the Church, the flock they are called to serve, which functions as the hinge in the theological points raised in this paper. This is illustrated in the following brief exploration which shows their relation to the seminarians' training in pastoral charity:

a. *On knowing and loving Jesus.* The seminarian's growth in knowledge and intimate relationship with Jesus, through the persons of the spiritual directors and seminary administrators, will eventually lead him to imitating and living out Jesus' pastoral charity.²²⁹ Pastoral charity is the virtue by which the seminarian will learn to imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what the seminarians do, but rather, their gift of self, which enables them to manifest Christ's love for the flock.²³⁰

b. *On living with the guidance of the Word.* As the seminarian tries to give himself to the observance of obedience and discipline, it is the motive of pastoral charity which helps him determine his way of thinking and acting²³¹ in accordance with the guidance of the Word.

c. *On gratitude in abundance.* As the seminarian develops his sense of gratitude fully expressed in the Eucharist, his growth in pastoral charity is strengthened since it is in the Eucharist, the center and root of the priestly life, where pastoral charity also finds its full expression and supreme nourishment.²³² Such devotion to the Eucharist grants the seminarian's life a "sacrificial" dimension.

²²⁹ PDV, 23.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

d. On staying with Jesus' guarding presence. In moments of personal prayer, solitude and silence, it is the spirit of pastoral charity, the dynamic inner principle, which unifies the many different activities in formation. The seminarian's growth in pastoral charity provides him the unity between his interior life and all his external actions and obligations²³³ in formation. This will better prepare him for the difficulties of his future mission.

e. On growing in fraternity. The seminarian's relationship with his fellow seminarians is impelled²³⁴ by pastoral charity to make this relationship personal and truly a brotherhood that is shown in mutual respect, support and friendship. This same brotherhood empowered by pastoral charity will bring the seminarian to a deeper bond of communion with the bishop and with his brother priests when he is ordained.

f. On compassion for others. The seminarian's compassion brings him to mind that his gift of self, the source of and synthesis of pastoral charity, is directed towards the Church.²³⁵ This reminds him that the gift of self has no limits, marked as it is by the same apostolic and missionary zeal of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

It is the seminarian's free and constant willingness to give himself for others that gives life to the above-mentioned assertions as elements of the emerging shepherd spirituality. It is the seminarian's total self-giving, the essential content of pastoral charity, which is the fulcrum of the shepherd spirituality. This is also the same principle of unity and driving force in his seminary formation.

With the concept of self-giving, the essential content of pastoral charity, the center of shepherd spirituality, the image of sheep-and-shepherd finds its fundamental significance to seminary formation, that is, as the source and unifying criterion, the principle and guide of unity, not just in the spiritual life of seminarians, but in all aspects of their formation namely, the human, the spiritual, the intellectual and the pastoral.

This then justifies the claim that the image of sheep-and-shepherd in Psalm 23 may serve as a powerful imagery that would inspire the spirituality and formation of seminarians, the future shepherds of the Church, particularly in the context of the Philippines.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*