The Salesian Charism and the Good Shepherd Motif

by Francis J. Moloney, SDB

Formulating his Strenna for 2012, the then Rector Major, Father Pascual Chávez Villanueva, decided that the best way to enter more closely into an understanding of the life and person of Don Bosco was a focus on the New Testament text of John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." For some decades now, the Salesians have looked back on Don Bosco through the biblical image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and asked that all of us who seek to continue his charism take on the risk and challenge of imitating Don Bosco, our model of a Good Shepherd.

As I have had occasion to mention, my 55 years as a Salesian tell me that the accommodation of the Good Shepherd image to Don Bosco and the Salesian mission is relatively new. We heard nothing of it in my earlier days. No doubt there was a great deal of good shepherding done over those years, but it had not occurred to those involved with the history and spirituality of the Congregation to turn explicitly to the image of the Good Shepherd. Interestingly, in Peter Stella's fundamental study of Don Bosco's religious outlook and spirituality, the Good Shepherd is never mentioned.[1] A precious reading of the biblical data found in Don Bosco's writing provided by Morand Wirth and Fausto Perrenchio indicates that Don Bosco uses the Good Shepherd passages in the Bible, but never with today's application

1. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco. Religious Outlook and Spirituality,* trans. John Drury (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996). The same result comes from a search through the recent studies of Morand Wirth, *La Bibbia con Don Bosco. Una Lectio Divina Salesiana*, 2 vols. (Roma: LAS, 2011), 2:593-98, and Fausto Perrenchio, *La Bibbia negli Scritti di Don Bosco* (Roma: LAS, 2010). Perrenchio opens his study with a synthetic overview of Don Bosco's use of biblical texts (pp. 17-32). He does not identify any significant use of John 10 (p. 23). The analyses of Wirth and Perrenchio are necessarily based upon Don Bosco's published writings; he may have used the biblical image in a more pastoral/theological fashion in his ministry. However, it is not found in neither Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory* nor *The Biographical Memoirs*. There is no trace of any such interest of Don Bosco himself in the Good Shepherd image, as it is imagined and used by Salesians today.

to the Salesian mission and spirituality. Even in his consideration of John 10, Don Bosco never considers the possibility of its charismatic relevance for the work he was doing for young people.[2] Don Bosco was a loyal and traditional Italian Catholic Priest, with no understanding of critical biblical scholarship, and a fierce devotion to the Papacy. Deeply caught up in what he considered the tragedy of the unification of Italy and the loss of the Papal States, associated with the disrespect shown for Pius IX, the Good Shepherd passage of John 10 is regularly used to judge the evil events of those times.[3]

The image of the good shepherd first began to appear in the post-Conciliar Chapters under the direction of Don Bosco's seventh successor, Egidio Viganò. Although his predecessor Louis Ricceri used it passingly in 1971-1972, it was not articulated as a major aspect of our understanding of Don Bosco until the time of Viganò. It emerged as an important element of our spirituality in successive chapters, and in the revised *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales* that came from those epoch-making years (see Constitutions 45 and 95).

Viganò decided to cast a "Salesian Cross" to mark the centenary of Don Bosco's death in 1988 that many Salesians wear as a sign of their commitment. It features an image of the Good Shepherd taken from Catacomb-art on one side, and the words of Don Bosco, "Studia di farti amare" ("seek to make yourself loved") on the other. It has become a *leit-motif* during the leadership of Pascual Chávez.[4] A slight adaptation of *Constitution* 95 issues the challenge: "We draw on the love of the Good Shepherd, whose witness we want to be … leading us to celebrate the liturgy of life … that should be characteristic of the sons of Don Bosco." This may be a recent insight, but it is part of

2. See the references to Wirth, *La Bibbia con Don Bosco*, and Perrenchio, *La Bibbia negli Scritti di Don Bosco,* in note 1.

3. For a fine presentation of Don Bosco's involvement in this critical period of the unification of Italy, driven by powers regarded as secular and anti-religious by Don Bosco and his contemporaries, see Arthur Lenti, *Don Bosco. History and Spirit*, 7 vols. (Roma: LAS, 2007-2010), 3:59-107; 4:19-44. A briefer and very helpful presentation can be found in Pietro Braido, *Prevention not Repression. Don Bosco's Educational System*, trans. Vinicio Zuliano and Julian Fox (Bengularu: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2013), 5-38.

4. For its continuation into the leadership of Ángel Fernández Artime, see "Like Don Bosco, with the young and for the young," *Acts of the General Council* 96 (420: January-June 2015), 6-9. See especially his passionate appeal on p. 9, where he declares: "This is the key to our existence, our living and putting into practice the Salesian charism."

the tradition of *ressourcement* asked for by Vatican II.[5] On the one hand we are to rediscover the charism of our founder, and on the other, to adopt the "supreme norm … the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel."[6]

This second criteria for renewal is regarded as "the supreme norm." Thus, recent focus upon the image of the Good Shepherd is part of the Congregation's request that we reconsider the following of Christ, as it is put before us in the Gospel. Passages from John 10:1-21 are often referred to in these discussions, but Good (and bad) Shepherd imagery can be traced across a thousand years of biblical tradition, from Psalm 23 to John 10 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.[7] In the light of the insistence of our recent Salesian leadership, we can be guided by reflecting broadly upon this significant biblical tradition – of good and bad shepherds. Instruction can be found in both!

Earlier Biblical Allusions

The theme of God as a shepherd is frequent in the Old Testament.[8] Its earliest full development appears in Psalm 23, a prayer that manifests an awareness of the merciful care of God that dates back to pre-exilic times.[9] Like all references to the shepherd in the Old Testament, the good shepherd of Psalm 23 is God. The psalmist declares that true security comes from God, and not from any military force, and God cares for the *individual* sheep. He

5. The request from Vatican II that Religious families begin a process of "renewal" in which "the spirit and aims of each founder should be faithfully acknowledged and maintained" (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2), did not mean that there should be no "newness" in expression Don Bosco's "spirit and aims." The provision of a biblical model that catches a charism is also part of the Council's agenda. On the Council's agenda of *ressourcement*, see William J. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 40-43, 300-302.

6. Perfectae Caritatis 2

7. For an excellent guide to this biblical tradition, see the recent work of Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd. A Thousand-Year Journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

8. For fuller indications, see Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 31-36.

9. This means in a period of national security, well before the disasters of 587 BCE. See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, A Continental Commentary, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1988-1989), 1:305-306. The numbering of the Psalms can be confusing for Catholics. This is due to the fact that the Latin Vulgate combines Psalms 10-11 into one Psalm. Thus, the Vulgate numbering (used widely in Catholic liturgical books) is one short of the Hebrew numbering. Thus, for many Catholics, the Shepherd Psalm is Psalm 22. In the Protestant (Hebrew Bible) tradition, Psalm 22 opens with the anguished cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

cares for the flock, but devotes attention to each individual (v. 1). This is manifested, especially in the parched Middle East, by the call of the shepherd to enjoy water and green pastures. The shepherd does not "drive" the sheep, but "leads" with a call. There the sheep rests (v. 2). But there is a sense that the sheep has been wayward. The sheep is "restored" to the "right paths" because the sheep cannot find its own way home. Importantly, this happens "for his name's sake." Leading the sheep away from evil and into the paths of righteousness is integral to God; to allow anything else would be denial of God's very self; he is true to his name (v. 3). This is done in the midst of evil and death. Such realities, part and parcel of the human condition, can be faced with security when one places one's trust in the shepherd who appears on the scene with his comforting rod and staff, and follows the him out of the darkness (v. 4). The Lord prepares a meal, but the psalmist indicates that his enemies watch on, angered by what God has done for his sheep. But such opposition and anger do not alter the shepherd's commitment to the sheep, whom he treats and an honored guest, anointing his or her head with oil, and filling the cup to overflowing (v. 5). Like most pre-exilic psalms, Psalm 23 closes with the once wandering sheep returning to the place that should never have been abandoned, the "home" of the sanctuary of God, the Temple of Jerusalem, the space in this created world in which God is present (v. 6).

Important further development of the use of the image appears next, chronologically, in Jeremiah 23:1-8, articulated on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile into Babylon in 587 CE. The development is the first identification of the leaders of Israel as "bad shepherds," personified in King Zedekiah who broke an oath with the Babylonians, and turned to the Egyptians for defense of his fragile realm. Jeremiah rails against these false leaders "shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture" (v. 1), who have "not attended to them" (v. 2). The weak and disloyal King Zedekiah is close at hand. Threat is involved in the words of the Lord: "I will attend to you for your evil doings" (v. 3). But promise is involved in the Lord's role as shepherd: "I *myself* will gather the remnants of my flock … I will bring them back to the fold." The Lord will not act alone; the Lord will enlist other shepherds, and for the first time in Israel's developing religious thought, the possibility of the Shepherd Messiah emerges: "I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them" (v. 4), closely linked with the messianic house of David: "I shall raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king" (v. 5). This Davidic messianic shepherd never eventuated in the ongoing history of Israel's political messianic hopes.[10] This is a promise that

10. A Christian reader senses an echo of what will later be said of Jesus, but Jeremiah points in hope to a future king, and is not identifying the future shepherd messiah at this

remains present in Israel's hopes, but frustrated. Amazingly, however, in the midst of the chaos of the unfaithful leadership of Israel, looking to other gods, and to the political strength of Egypt for rescue from the threat of Babylon, the Lord promises that the remnant will be shepherded back from Babylon. Recalling the first saving action of God, who led Israel from Egypt, in the name of the Lord, Jeremiah affirms that they will once again return "out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them. Then they shall live in their own land" (vv. 8-9). The possibility of a future Davidic messianic "shepherd" has emerged. But the shepherding Lord of Israel will bring them back to the land he gave them. As throughout the Old Testament: God is the shepherd.[11] But the door has been opened to the early Church's understanding of Jesus, not only as shepherd (Mark and Matthew), but as the "good shepherd" (John).

Ezekiel's prophetic utterances are made shortly after those of Jeremiah. Ezekiel is the spokesman of the Lord in the land of Babylon.[12] Already in Babylon from an earlier deportation (598 BCE), he speaks for the Lord in critical times.

> Ezekiel lived through the greatest crisis in Israel's history: the final destruction of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem; the loss of independence in the promised land, exile of all the leading citizens to Babylonia; the tearing down of the temple and the removal of the House of David from kingship.[13]

For this prophet, the contrast between the goodness and mercy God and the failure of the leadership of Israel reaches a high point in Ezekiel 34. The Prophet utters a long so-called "parable of the shepherds." The rhythm of the argument follows the pattern of Psalm 23 and Jeremiah 20. The prophet is called to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel (vv. 1-2a), and he condemns them for their wicked shepherding: looking after themselves, rather than the flock (vv. 2b-3). This means that they have not led strengthened, healed, bound up and cared. Crucially, for Ezekiel's time: "You have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness

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stage. That will come later. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament, Erste Reihe 12 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967), 146-47.

11. Although dated, and unfortunately never translated, I am guided by the classical commentary on Jeremiah: See Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 146-48.

12. On the relationship between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, see Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 74-78.

13. Lawrence Boadt, "Ezekiel, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:713.

you have ruled them" (v. 4). A leaderless people, scattered and wandering, becomes food for wild animals (vv. 5-6).

The leaders can no longer be called the shepherds of the Lord's people (vv. 7-8), and they are dismissed, as God takes over: "I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them" (vv. 9-10). The parable now focuses upon the actions of God, the shepherd of his people: God will rescue them and bring the back from the foreign peoples (vv. 11-16).[14] God will judge the bad sheep (NB, not only the shepherds), as the flock must be saved from all evil presences (vv. 11-16). In a final acclamation, the Davidic future is again promised: "And I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall shepherd them" (v. 22). But it is God who brings the fruits of good shepherding to the suffering people: a covenant of peace and security (v. 25), blessing and prosperity (vv. 26-27). Security will be theirs, as God breaks the yoke of the foreign powers, eliminates the wilds beasts from within. Then "they shall know that I am the Lord their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people" (v. 30). They are his sheep; he is their God (v. 17).

These uses of the image of the shepherd in well-known Old Testament texts follow a similar rhetorical pattern: the wickedness of those who should be shepherds is condemned, and the devastating results of their shepherding described. God intervenes as shepherd to shepherd them out of their sufferings, and even rid them of the evil within them. God restores the security of the people, to lead them home: the temple in the pre-exilic literature (Psalm 23), and back to the promised-land for those suffering exile in Babylon (Jeremiah and Ezekiel).

Although the shepherd imagery is not found, the motif of restoration is developed in Ezekiel 37, one of the most powerful chapters in the book: the allegories of the dry bones and the two sticks, the regeneration of the people, and the unification of the separated kingdoms of Israel. Within that context, through his prophet, God points forward to a messianic figure, someone from the line of David: "My servant David shall be prince over them, and there shall be one shepherd for them all; they shall live by my statutes and carefully observe all my decrees"(v. 24). In a way that looks forward to John 10:1-21, the Old Testament shepherding pattern is again found: the prophet

14. Each of these sections begins with a solemn promise from God: "I will set over them" (v. 22), "I will make with them" (v. 25), "I will make them" (v. 26), "They shall know that I am the Lord" (v. 27b); "They shall know that I am the Lord their God with them" (v. 30). God's initiative dominates the passage.

speaks out in judgment on the leaders in Israel, castigating wicked shepherds, praising good shepherds, and promising a future messianic shepherd.

The theme returns in a final passage that appeared sometime after the conquest of Israel by Alexander the Great (332 CE),[15] in Zechariah 10:2-12. False leaders are described as failing in their task. They are not shepherds, the Lord is angry with them and they will be punished (vv. 1-3a). In intensely military language, unlike anything else in the earlier use of the shepherd image, and most likely reflecting the people's recent experience of military invitation, God demonstrates his care for his flock (v. 3b): God acts as a war horse, a cornerstone, a tent peg, a battle line that cannot be breached, a ruler mighty in battle who will trample his foes in the mud. Enemies will be shamed "because the Lord is with them" (v. 5). God will save the house of Joseph, showing love and compassion, not rejecting them, but bringing the people back, "for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them" (v. 6). In the place of the scattering and suffering Israel has experienced in the diaspora of the post-exilic period, God will establish Ephraim a mighty warrior (v. 7), and with whistle gather the scattered peoples who will remember their origins and return from Egypt and Assyria (vv. 7-8). Once the opponents of Israel – personified as Assyria and Egypt in v. 11, probably reflecting the early diaspora – have been overcome, God will shepherd his people back home, "and they shall walk in his name" (v.8). Thus, only a few centuries before Christ, a prophet speaks out in judgment on the leaders in Israel, castigating wicked shepherds, and acts to bring his people home.

Missing in Zechariah is the promise of a future messianic shepherd, but in Jewish pre-Christian literature outside the Bible, this theme strikes a deep vein in Israel's religious thought and expressions of messianic hope. Although the Old Testament texts only foreshadow the development of a Davidic messianic shepherd, later non-biblical Jewish reflection, from times both before and after Jesus, developed this thought into a major expression of messianic hope: God will send a Davidic messianic shepherd figure who will punish the wicked leaders, lead his people home, and God will once again be their God.[16] It is upon this biblical and Jewish tradition that the Gospels

15. Our current book of Zechariah comes from two periods in the history of Israel. The first eight chapters are attributed to the Prophet Zechariah, and are dated from 518-520 CE. However, chapters 9-14 are recognized as "Deutero-Zachariah," and come from the period after the return from exile. Zechariah 9:13 shows awareness of the Greek armies.

16. It is beyond the scope of this reflection to analyse this non-biblical Jewish literature indicating a strong Jewish messianic expectation at the time of Jesus and the early Church. For a very good summary, see Johannes Beutler, "Der alttestamentliche-jüdische Hintergrund der Hirtenrede in Johannes 10," in *The Good Shepherd Discourse of John 10*

build. However important the prior biblical tradition on the shepherd, the Gospels are more profoundly shaped by the "memory" of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and especially the saving significance of his death and resurrection.[17]

The Shepherd Theme in the Gospels

There are several places in the Gospels where the image of the shepherd and shepherding is found. The most significant of these does not actually contain the word "shepherd" (*poimēn*), but addresses the issue of good "shepherding" lost sheep (*probate*). Found only in the material common to Matthew and Luke, what we call "Q-material," thus prior to both, and embedded in a tiny parabolic question, we find words that no doubt reach back to the penetrating and culture-breaking teaching of Jesus himself: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep, if you lose one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it."[18] This question reflects the awareness of the craziness of God's love for his people, indicated by a shepherd who does something that no sensible shepherd would do: leave nine-nine sheep in the wilderness so that he might seek out the lost one.

Luke uses this text as a preface to the parable of the father with two sons. This important parable is a paradigm of the role of God, and subsequently his Son, Jesus, in shepherding. As such, it should serve as a paradigm, from the teaching and practice of Jesus himself, of what it means to adopt a "good shepherd" spirituality. The focus of attention in reading this text is the behaviour of the father. This is often missed, as hearers and readers focus their attention on the first son. But there are two sons, and the father is the common factor. Jesus' telling the parable of the "father" reaches into the imagination of the listener and the reader of this parable, asking that she or

and its Context, eds. Johannes Beutler and Robert T. Fortna, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 18-32. For further information on the religious background of the shepherd image, see John D. Turner, "The history of religions background of John 10," in *The Good Shepherd Discourse*, 33-52.

17. Although not a part of the Old Testament "shepherd" literature, the final Song of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) was instrumental in the development of the early Church's understanding of the significance of Jesus' death. The prophet describes Israel: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way" (53:6). The one who "bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (v. 12) is described as "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter."

18. *Lk* 15:5; *Mt* 18:12

he recognize "the Father" in the parable and respond accordingly.[19] Most surprising is the attitude of the father, who does not want to dominate or to subject his sons to his own will; he does not want to possess his sons in any morbid way. He sets them free (Luke 15:12, 31–32), and in their freedom they are able to make their mistakes: the younger one in the uselessness of a wasted life (vv. 13–15) and the elder one with his arrogant animosity, rooted in jealousy (vv. 28–30). The point of the parable is that the elder brother might find a home with his father (vv. 31–32), just as his younger brother has, despite the errors of his ways (vv. 22–24). The father never preaches a sermon or demands a confession of sins. The younger son, at the turning point of this story, recognizes the depths to which his wastefulness has led him and decides to return to his father. He prepares a speech that he will give on his arrival: "I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants'" (vv. 18–19). When he arrives he finds a father full of compassion, eagerly waiting for him, rushing to meet him, kissing and embracing him (v. 20). He tries to recite his prepared speech, but his father will not allow him to complete it. He will not hear the words of his son: "treat me as one of your hired servants" (see v. 21, where those words do not appear).

It could be said that the father made his first mistake when he divided his living between his two sons (v. 12). He then made another mistake when he received his wayward son back into his home and household (vv. 20–24). He again errs in discretion when, after learning that his second son "refused to go in" and was *outside*, full of rage at not having been treated as well as the sinful son (vv. 25–27), he "came out" (v. 28) to speak with his son. The father thus joins a second son, who is in danger of being lost to the household, outside, no longer in the family hearth where the celebrations are taking place. He tells his angry son that there is every reason for joy, for that which was lost has been found (v. 32). But the danger that the elder son may be lost is not resolved within the parable. Jesus does not tell his listeners whether the second lost son was found, because his main concern is his presentation of the father. He simply reports the words of a loving father to another wayward child: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (v. 31). As always with Jesus' parables, the sting is in the tail: the father (Father?) is found "outside," with his son in the darkness of his sin and failure, seeking a lost child, promising him all that he has. Jesus tells his audience that they

19. For what follows, I have been inspired by commentaries on the Gospel of Luke and in particular by the reflections of Eduard Schweizer in *Luke: A Challenge to Present Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 80–81.

are looking for God in the wrong places! The Father is to be found "outside," seeking his lost child.

But Jesus not only *told* this parable; he *lived* it. In terms of the narrative timespan in Luke's Gospel, shortly after telling this parable Jesus was arrested, tried, and convicted as a criminal.[20] Everyone knows that he is innocent (see Luke 23:4, 14–15, 22, 41, 47). Hanging on the cross, he forgives those who have tried and crucified him (v. 34) and promises paradise to a convicted criminal (v. 43). He hears the misunderstanding screamed at him by the rulers: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One" (v. 35; see 9:29). Jesus' mission is not to save himself but to save others, and thus he is totally powerless because he has decided to love. He has nothing more than his heart full of love and compassion. Like the father in the parable, he forgives the people around him and asks them to come to the banquet hall of his Father (vv. 34, 43). Jesus' life and death instruct that his Father is to be found, first of all, where the father is found at the end of the parable—out in the darkness, doing all he can to save his lost children—even, in Jesus' case, to the point of an innocent death.[21] This parable, like many of Jesus' parables, questioned the way God was understood and revered in the religion and culture of his time.[22] The parables are more dangerous than the similitudes. They invite the hearer of the parable to recognize that Jesus' living of the parable of the compassionate Father renders God present among us. Although he never used Luke 15 in this way, Don Bosco's whole life took the next step. He rendered that Gospel image of Jesus Christ present among the "lost ones" of his time, especially poor and abandoned young people, out special preserve. Here is a precious challenge for Salesians searching for biblical models that point to a radical return to the Gospel, under the heading

20. "Narrative time" follows the chronology within the story. Jesus tells the parable (Luke 15:11–32) at the midpoint of his lengthy journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44). His arrival in Jerusalem leads to conflict, arrest, trial, and crucifixion (19:45–23:49).

21. Some might object that my use of Luke 15:11–32 in conjunction with Luke 23 does not go back to Jesus of Nazareth but to Luke's interpretation of him. The Lukan theme of the compassion of Jesus, which reveals the compassion of God, did not *begin* with Luke, no matter how beautifully he has incorporated it into his Christology and theology.

22. There are many fine books on the parables that demonstrate this in detail. My favorite remains Jan Lambrecht, *Once More Astonished. The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Lambrecht not only shows the surprising message of Jesus' parables in his own time but also rightly points out that they continue to "astonish."

of the shepherd who leaves all behind to go into the desert in search of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7).

There is one further text in the Gospels that calls for brief attention. Accepting that Mark is the first of all Gospels, at the final meal with his disciples, he warns them that they will all be scandalized, and all fall away, like sheep when the shepherd is struck (Mark 14:27.). But he promises that, despite their failure and their scattering (reminiscent of the sheep of Israel in Psalm 23, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), he announces: "But after I am raised up I will go before you into Galilee" (v. 28: RSV. See also Matt 26:31-32). This image of Jesus' "going before" the disciples, who have been described as scattered sheep in v. 27, conjures up a further image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, never abandoning his stricken flock, even when their fear and lack of faith is the reason for their failure. Indeed, the Greek verb "to go before" (*proagō*) is widely found in texts that describe the shepherd leading his flock, another action broadly canvassed in our Old Testament passages. In fulfilment of this promise, the women at the empty tomb of Jesus are instructed by the young man they found there: "He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see him" (16:7. See also Matt 28:7). This further Shepherd material points powerfully to a Jesus who finds the lost and the sinful, and leads them to a place where he re-establishes discipleship with them. This theme is especially important in Mark, where the final appearance of the disciples is found in 14:50: "And they all forsook him and fled." Only the women stay through the passion, see the place of his burial, and go to the tomb. But in the end, even they fail: they do not report what the man said to them (v. 8). Thus, God meets the disciples in Galilee, not because the women told them to go there, but because God has initiated the loving and forgiving presence of his Son to the disciples. There would be no Gospel of Mark unless there had been an encounter with the Shepherd in Galilee.[23]

The Johannine Good Shepherd

The most famous Gospel passage presenting Jesus as the Good Shepherd is no doubt Jesus' discourse, aimed at the "bad shepherds," the leaders of Israel, in John 10:1-18.[24] Almost every element in this famous discourse

23. For a detailed development of this theme, see Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 349-54. On Mark 14:50 (and vv. 51-52: the flight of the naked young man), see pp. 298-300. On the shepherding theme involved in the use of the verb "to go ahead," see Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 55-65.

24. For a more detailed presentation of what follows, see Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 289-312.

has its origins in the biblical tradition of God as shepherd, but now the focus is entirely Christological. Jesus' presence in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles began in 7:2; it concludes with the shepherd discourse. At the Feast Jesus has claimed to be living water (7:37-39) and the light of the world (8:12; 9:5). Jesus left the Temple in 8:59, and as he passed by (*paragōn*) he saw a man blind from birth (9:1). Somewhere outside the Temple a blind man comes to sight and faith in the Son of Man, while Jewish leaders move steadily toward blindness (9:1-38). They claim to "see," but are in fact blind, and remain in their sin as they reject the light of Jesus (vv. 39-41). This condemnation runs into the Shepherd Discourse of 10:1-18. As in the Old Testament, Jesus' discourse blends descriptions and condemnations of the action of the Jewish leaders, described as "bad shepherds": thieves, robbers, strangers, and hirelings who do not care for their sheep, and the qualities that mark a good shepherd (10:1-13). Only towards the end of the discourse does Jesus present himself: "I am the good Shepherd" (10:11, 14), and uses this final moment during his presence at the Jewish celebration of Tabernacles closes to reveal himself as the messianic Good Shepherd (10:14-18). Jesus' self-revelation leads to division among "the Jews" (vv. 19-21).

As Jesus' encounter with the man born blind closes, "some of the Pharisees" cannot accept Jesus' suggestion that they may be "blind" (9:39). They ask: "Surely we are not blind, are we?" (v. 40). Their words generate Jesus' reflection which begins in v. 41, leading into the discourse of 10:1-18. In 10:1-6 Jesus tells a brief parable to describe how good and bad shepherds behave. Good shepherds enter by the gate, are followed by the sheep who recognize their shepherd's voice as he calls each one of them by name. The bad shepherds break into the sheepfold, and do violence to the sheep who will not follow them, as they not recognize the violent voices. In 10:6 the narrator interrupts words of Jesus to comment that the Pharisees cannot understand what Jesus is saying to them: "Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them." But Jesus is continuing his words to the Pharisees by applying a significant biblical image to them. Jesus has healed (9:6-7) and sought out (v. 36) the man born blind, while the Pharisees have treated him with disdain and arrogance, throwing him out from their midst (v. 34). The narrator explicitly identifies the Pharisees with the thieves and robbers in v. 6.

The rest of the discourse unfolds in two parts. From vv. 7-13 Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd and others. Jesus reveals himself as "the gate of the sheep" (v. 7). We would expect Jesus to immediately identify himself as the Good Shepherd, but that must wait. For the moment he claims: "I am the gate for the sheep" (v. 7). The parable used the door as the place

of right access to the sheep (see vv. 1-2), and Jesus presents himself is that gate. Only through Jesus can one have right access to the sheep, and the sheep have exit to good pasture (v. 7. See v. 9). Jesus claims that those who came before him were thieves (*kleptai*) and robbers (*lēistai*). This has been dramatically portrayed in their treatment of the man born blind in 9:1-34. The claims of "the Jews" to be the leaders of God's people are false. They are thieves and robbers, purveyors of a messianic hope of their own making: "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from" (v. 29). As the response of the man born blind to their interpretation of the Mosaic tradition has shown (cf. 9:24-33), the sheep have not listened to them. This forced him out of their company (v. 34) into belief in the Son of Man and the company of Jesus (vv. 35-38).

The image of v. 7 returns in v. 9, as Jesus explains what it means to be the door of the sheep: Jesus is the mediator who will provide what the sheep need for life. Jesus has come that the sheep may have pasture (cf. Ezek 34:14), thus have life, and have it more abundantly (cf. Ezek 34:25-31). Jesus is the "gate" *through whom* access to good pasture is made available, and by means of which a sheepfold is protected. Those who enter are saved; those who go out, find pasture (v. 9). Jesus, the gate (v. 7), offers both salvation and pasture, providing the sheep with abundant life (v. 10). It is through him (v. 9) that others have life (cf. 1:3-4, 17). "The gate" of the parable (see v. 2) has been rendered christological in vv. 7-10.

The contrast between Jesus and his opponents intensifies as he finally claims, "I am the Good Shepherd" (v. 11a). The shepherd of the parable (see v. 2) is again rendered Christological in vv. 11-13. The introduction of the image of the Good Shepherd links Jesus with the tradition of a messianic shepherd of the people of God. As we have seen, beginning with the fact that David was a shepherd, the biblical notion of God as shepherd has been applied to someone from the Davidic line, who would prove to be Israel's shepherd—Messiah. Surprising as it may seem, to this point in the Gospel of John Jesus has *never* accepted a messianic title, or identified himself as the Messiah. Within the tradition of the Jewish feasts, however, Tabernacles was the time when intense messianic expectation was voiced. Across John 7-10, the question about Jesus' messianic status has been regularly raised (see 7:26-27, 31, 40-42). In the shepherd discourse, this changes. *For the first time in the story*, Jesus claims messianic status: "I am the Good Shepherd."

But surprise is in store. From the first use of the image in his self-revelation, Jesus also introduces his uniqueness: "the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11b). This self-gift of the shepherd unto death for his sheep has no parallel in the Jewish texts that speak of the messianic

shepherd.[25] Jesus does not fit the model of the expected Davidic shepherd-messiah. Illuminating the self-gift of the Good Shepherd, the hireling is described in an ironic recalling of what happened in Israel as the "wolf" of Rome descended upon them. The wicked shepherd flees in the face of danger, leaving the sheep exposed to the murdering and scattering presence of the wolf (v. 12). Written towards the end of the first century, John's Christian readers look back to the events of the Jewish War of 66-70, aware that this is exactly what happened. Already Jewish tradition had spoken of its false leaders as those who did not perform their God-given responsibilities, but left them prey to the wolves (cf. Jer 23:1-8; Ezek 34; 22:27; Zeph 3:3; Zech 10:2-3; 11:4-17; *1 Enoch* 89:12-27, 42-44, 59-70, 74-76; 90:22-25; *T. Gad* 1:2-4). Those prophecies had come true in the experience of Israel. In Jesus Christ the true Israel has a shepherd who will never abandon them, but who will give his life for them, while "the hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep" (v. 13).

In the second half of the discourse, running from vv. 14-18, conflict disappears. Jesus announces, for the second time: "I am the good shepherd" (v. 14). He is only interested in the relationship he has with his flock (vv. 14-16) and with his Father (vv. 17-18). This is made clear by a spiralling play upon the use of the verb "to know." Jesus is the Good Shepherd who *knows* his sheep, and his sheep *know* him (v. 14), but behind the mutuality of the Good Shepherd and his sheep lies the fundamental mutuality between the Father and Jesus: as the Father *knows* Jesus, so also does Jesus *know* the Father (v. 15a). The use of "just as the Father know, so also I know" in v. 15 expresses an intimacy between the mutual knowledge of Father and Son. This mutuality can be seen in the self-gift of the Good Shepherd. The expected Davidic shepherd-messiah has been eclipsed by Jesus, the Good Shepherd Messiah who lays down his life for his sheep. The image of the Good Shepherd may come from Jewish messianic traditions, but Jesus' being the Good Shepherd flows from his oneness with God (vv. 14-15). It is precisely this issue which

25. We have surveyed all the biblical texts, and no such allusion was made. The same can be said of the non-Jewish texts, surveyed in the study of Johannes Beutler (see above, note 14). Only in the Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53:7 is the lamb led to the slaughter. This may have been a secondary force in the Johannine development of the Good Shepherd image, as its primary Johannine reference is "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 35), and the link between the death of Jesus and the timing of the slaying of the Paschal Lamb "about the sixth hour" in 19:14.

"the Jews" will not accept. As they said to the man born blind: "We do not know where he comes from" (9:29).

Further surprises emerge: others will be brought into the fold so that there will be one shepherd, one fold. The idea of one shepherd leading one people of God came from biblical tradition (cf. Mic 5:3-5; Jer 3:15; 23:4-6; Ezek 34:23-24) and continued in later Jewish literature (cf. *Ps Sol.* 17:24, 40; CD 13:7-9; *2 Bar.* 77:13-17), but something more is claimed by Jesus. He does not abandon the traditional image of the Good Shepherd, but expands it in a way unknown to Jewish tradition. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep because of the union between himself and the Father (v. 15). The world outside Israel will be drawn into the fold of Jesus through his willing gift of himself unto death (v. 16).

The crucial function of the relationship between Jesus and the Father dominates Jesus' final words on the Good Shepherd (vv. 17-18). The Father's love for Jesus is shown in Jesus' laying down his life so that he might take it up again (v. 17). "What is being said here is that in his sacrifice the Father's love for him is truly present, and that this sacrifice is therefore a revelation of the Father's love."[26] Jesus will die a violent death, but will take up his life again because the Father loves him.

Jesus closes his discourse by speaking of his authority (v. 18b). The story that lies ahead will report the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. But these events will not fall upon Jesus like some terrible accident, or merely as a result of the ill will of those who hate and persecute him. In Jesus' decision, the exercising of his authority, he will lay down his life and take it up again (v. 18b). No one takes it from him (v. 18a).

Regularly throughout the celebration of Tabernacles Jesus words have produced *schism* among "the Jews" (cf. 7:12, 25-27, 31, 40-41; 9:16). The report of Jesus' presence at the feast closes with a further *schism* (v. 19). On the one hand, the majority totally reject his word, judging him to be possessed by a demon and insane. His words, therefore, are not worth listening to (v. 20). But a minority group are still open to the possibilities of his word. The curing of the man born blind, the event which led up to Jesus' words on sheep and

26. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, trans. George R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 384.

shepherding, is recalled (v. 21). He does not speak as if he were possessed, and he has cured the blind man.

Conclusion

Across the Feast Tabernacles, Jesus presented himself as the light of the world (see 8:12; 9:5), the living water (see 7:37-39; 9:6-7), and most surprisingly, as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, and to gather others into his fold. A longing for light, water and a Good Shepherd, are part of many religious traditions. There are clear indications why John chose to use them in presenting the person of Jesus. In a document that appeared about the same time as the Fourth Gospel, written to address the problems of the loss of Jerusalem and its Temple, the author of *2 Baruch* reports:

> The whole people answered and they said to me, "...For the shepherds of Israel have perished, and the lamps which gave light are extinguished, and the fountains from which we used to drink have withheld their streams. Now we have been left in the darkness and in the thick forest and in the aridness of the desert."
>
> And I answered and said to them, "Shepherds and lanterns and fountains came from the Law and when we go away, the Law will abide. If you, therefore, look upon the Law and are intent upon wisdom, then the lamp will not be wanting and the shepherd will not give way and the fountain will not dry up."[27]

The author of *2 Baruch* looked to the Law for the never failing presence of shepherd, light, and water.

As post-war Judaism and the Johannine form of post-war Christianity struggled to establish their different identities, both looked to their Jewish heritage. The author of *2 Baruch* looked to the Law for the never failing presence of shepherd, light, and water. These symbols, intimately associated with the celebration of the feast of Tabernacles, have not been abandoned by Johannine Christianity. The Johannine story of Jesus' presence at the celebration of Tabernacles announces access to living water, to light and to the shepherd. However, Jesus is the living water for *any one who thirsts* (7:37), the light *of the world* (8:12; 9:5), and the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, *to gather into one, sheep who as yet do not belong to this fold* (10:15-16). "The Jews" insist they know that God has spoken to Moses (9:29), and are thus in agreement with the author of *2 Baruch* on the need to hold fast to the Law. It is essential to the evolving postwar identity of Judaism.

27. 2 Baruch 77:11, 13-16.

For the text of 2 Baruch, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983-1985), 1:647.

But the Johannine Christians respond that God has perfected the former gift, given through Moses. God is made known to them through Jesus Christ. Gone are national boundaries, and gone is the centrality of the former gift of the Law. The signs and shadows of the celebration of Tents in the Temple, and only for the Jews, have become flesh in the person of Jesus, the Sent One of the Father. Water, light and shepherd are available to all who believe in Jesus, of whatever race or nation.

Age-old biblical, Jewish and non-Christian traditions of "shepherding" have come to their literary and theological conclusion in the Gospels. Our God and Father ceaselessly searches out the lost one (Luke 15:5; Matt 18:12; see Matt 10:6; 15:24). The theme of the Lord as our shepherd is rendered Christological as Jesus gathers the sheep without a shepherd and nourishes them, in the never-ending gift of the Eucharist (Mark 6:31-44). The Risen Jesus goes ahead of his scattered and fragile flock (Mark 14:27-28; 16:7), leading them into fresh pastures (6:39).

The Johannine Christology of the Good Shepherd continues and transforms these categories that are Christian developments of the shepherd theme in Jewish tradition. They are not only transformed, but totally eclipsed. Ezekiel 37:24 promised: "My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd." The Johannine Jesus affirms: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. … I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also and they will hear my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd."[28]

As Salesian educators, part of an evolving tradition that looks beyond Don Bosco to the Sacred Scriptures, we have uncovered something essential to our charism. The biblical model of the Good Shepherd should be a feature of all that we do and are in our care for one another, and for all those whose lives we touch as educators. This means everything: our lives as professional educators, as individual and communities of Salesian religious, as creative elements for good in contemporary society. This model lies at the heart of a Salesian life and ministry. Catching up a tradition that was not part of Don Bosco's original thought, the *Constitutions* state this eloquently: "We draw on the love of the Good Shepherd, whose witness we want to be … leading us to

28. John 10:11, 14-16

celebrate the liturgy of life … that should be characteristic of the daughters and sons of Don Bosco" (*Constitution* 95).

Christian tradition asks us to find them in the person and mission of Jesus that contemporary Salesian leadership, and our renewed Constitutions, invite us to continue among the young, especially those most in need. Jesus is the living water for *anyone who thirsts* (7:37), the light *of the world* (8:12; 9:5), and the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, *to gather into one, sheep who as yet do not belong to this fold* (10:15-16). Salesians are challenged by this recent adoption of the model of the Good Shepherd as a reflection of our charism to take the consummate risk: to lay down one's life to bring all possible into a fold. Increasingly, that fold, with Jesus as its Good Shepherd, is very strange to them. They too often find their shepherd, light, and water, elsewhere. The challenge is spelt out in what was a biblical word on the shepherd roughly contemporary with the Gospel of John:

> Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.[29]

29. 1 Peter 5:3-4. The authorship and dating of 1 Peter is widely debated. For the possibility that it comes from a "Petrine school/tradition" and should be dated from 70-90 CE, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 718-22.