ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to explore the development of the image of the Good Shepherd both throughout the history and use of Holy Scripture, and also outside of it, in the area of iconography, art and popular use. The dissertation argues that the image of the Good Shepherd is almost universal, and universally understood, and is therefore a suitable and accessible way of considering God's relationship with his people, both historically and currently - but also for the church and Christians of the future. The dissertation will examine Old Testament, New Testament and Apocryphal imagery of the shepherd, and will also view the shepherd within its historical context in both the ancient Near East and in Ireland. As well as this, the dissertation will explore the development of Christian shepherding imagery from pre-Christian times; and the influence of ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic culture on early Christian art and thought. The dissertation will further investigate the use of the Good Shepherd teaching and image in a liturgical context, and in Christian thought and society in Ireland today. The final chapter will conclude by examining ways in which the Good Shepherd is of importance and potential ongoing influence on the church today, at a time when we in the urban Western world have never been so far removed from the original context of the shepherding imagery that our Christian forebears encountered in Holy Scripture.

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