

NOT THE GROOM, BUT THE BEST MAN

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The pastor who seeks to learn the art of the cure of souls begins cautiously and humbly; he must have the heart and soul of John the Baptist: *I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom.* (John 3:28-29) The pastor, while compassionate and empathetic to every soul, consciously remembers that the soul is pledged to Another.

The pastor is not a suitor for the soul, he comes to the soul as a friend of the bridegroom. No love but Christ's will unlock the bondage of sin and heal the sin-sick soul. Therefore the pastor's goal in soul cure is to bring the soul to Christ and Christ to the soul. His every word, gesture, and act in dealing with the soul is on behalf of the heavenly bridegroom: *He must increase; I must decrease.* (John 3:30)

Gregory Great in his monumental manual on pastoral care writes: *For that man is an enemy to his Redeemer who on the strength of the good works he performs, desires to be loved by the Church, rather than by Him. Indeed, a servant is guilty of adulterous thought, if he craves to please the eyes of the bride when the bridegroom sends gifts to her by him.*

(Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care* (trans. Henry David, New York: Newman Press, 1950), p. 75.)

H L Senkbeil: "The Art of Spiritual Evaluation" (Fort Wayne: CTS Good Shepherd Institute, November 2000)