

# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PASTORAL CARE AND POVERTY

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**ABSTRACT**

The previous approaches to pastoral care are no longer adequate or effective for addressing the many issues related to poverty. The church has done wonderful work in terms of Christian charity. However, more needs to be done to improve the worsening situation of the poor significantly. The clear distinction between pastoral care and Christian charity is a luxury that is no longer affordable. Once we have a holistic understanding of pastoral care and counselling, we will find that we cannot possibly restrict our pastoral attention to encouraging the poor, to giving random advice and to praying. A holistic pastoral theology could lead to empowerment and should be a key concept in pastoral care with poor people and societies. The article offers a theological theory for a holistic approach and some implications of the praxis of counselling.

**INTRODUCTION**

The worsening situation of the poor (see the detailed explanation of the worsening scenario in South Africa provided by S. Coetzee in Janse van Rensburg 2009) is arguably one of the biggest challenges for the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century. Most denominations and many congregations have projects with which they hope to address the challenges. However, we must consider whether the efforts are sufficient to provide significant pastoral healing. Whether they can spiritually sustain and guide those suffering in the throes of poverty is a debatable point. In the past, the option existed to refer cases of benevolence to committees, which then became responsible for seeing that the material needs of the poverty stricken were met. However, hand-outs at soup kitchens and from vegetable gardens have now become inadequate, despite the importance of such material measures. We need to take the holistic pastoral approach further in order to make a significant impact on the lives of poor people and their plight.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the past, efforts to give pastoral support to poor people were made difficult by a very limited understanding of pastoral care and counselling. Switzer (1989:5) is probably correct in stating that any personal crisis from the perspective of the sufferer also causes a crisis for the pastor. Many pastors feel the desperation brought about by a lack of knowledge and the inability to give meaningful assistance to poverty-stricken people. When De Klerk (1978:19) criticises Seward Hiltner's approach to pastoral care, he argues, for example, that there is a vast difference between pastoral care and Christian charity. De Klerk states that, while the pastor tends to the spiritual needs of people by means of pastoral care, Christian charity alleviates the material needs of the person or family concerned. This view on pastoral care and Christian charity as different disciplines within the academic field of Practical Theology is quite understandable, but to consider that the two actions must be strictly compartmentalised in two totally separate categories is simply unacceptable. I have to admit that my thoughts on pastoral care followed these lines for a long time, until I realised the dire need for significant change to relieve the plight of the poor people, as described by De Klerk in his discussion of pastoral care. Subsequently, however, I have come to the conclusion that a more inclusive and holistic approach to pastoral care and counselling is needed, not only for the sake of providing more effective support for the poor, but because revisiting our definition of pastoral care is theologically correct.

**Hypotheses**

The main hypothesis of this paper is that a holistic approach to pastoral care and counselling can have a significant impact on the empowerment of poor people and their communities and, thereby, address a wider spectrum of needs and problems than was addressed by earlier methods. The hypothesis can be split up into the following sub-hypotheses:

- The increasing number of poverty-stricken people necessitates a redefinition of pastoral care.
- The history of pastoral theology offers enough evidence for the need to adopt a holistic approach to pastoral care and counselling.
- A holistic approach suggests more than only the basic actions of pastoral care, namely reading the Scripture, conducting prayer and giving advice.
- A holistic approach requires action to be taken in the widest sense of the word, because the approach includes all that might be needed to develop empowerment and to enhance change.

**A HOLISTIC APPROACH IN PASTORAL THEOLOGY**

The hypothesis of the current article is not really original and it will become clear that many pastoral theologians in the past understood or described pastoral care within a holistic context. For the purpose of the paper, no effort will be made to represent all models or to give a full description of each model concerned. Reference will only be made to particular aspects that give wing to the flight of a holistic pastoral approach. The models are also described without any critical reflection.

## Seward Hiltner

Of great significance for our discussion is Seward Hiltner's (1954:69) metaphorical use of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) to illustrate pastoral counselling. The Samaritan's act of caring for the wounds (healing), of helping the poor victim to mount his beast once more (sustaining) and of taking the victim to the nearest place of care (guiding) suggests a holistic pastoral approach. The holistic view on the needs of our human existence is captured in Anton Boisen's coined phrase 'living human documents' (see the discussion by Henry Nouwen, 1968). People and not just documents of paper and ink, have to be studied for our pastoral efforts to make any difference. Scripture reading and prayer, important although they may be and ministering the Word, as in terms of Thurneysen's *Kerugmatik Model*, are ineffective if they are not supported by true insight into the plight of the poor and their inner psychological processes, which are often at work subliminally.

Hiltner's contribution to pastoral theology was greatly enhanced by his pursuit of the principle of eliciting information, which is further proof of his holistic approach. Following this principle, the pastor is no longer the expert and clients have to make use of their inner potential to find a solution for whatever the problem is. The pastor has to elude the solution from the client by means of questions, answers, narratives and other forms of interaction. Although such pastoral theology has been much criticised (Adams 1970; 1979), it has opened up possibilities for a more inclusive approach to pastoral activities.

## Gerben Heitink

Heitink, in taking up Hiltner's (1979:307–311) threefold act of pastoral encounter, adds one more element to further enhance a holistic approach, namely that of reconciliation. Heitink, in fact, has been criticised for emphasising the importance of pastoral care in a service of help (Heitink 1977:15). The suggestion has been made that the approach limits pastoral care to merely rendering help, thereby reducing its scope to crisis management (Bothma 2003:55). However, a reading of Heitink makes clear that the reduction of such care to mere physical assistance is not his intention and neither is such reduction supported by the content of his theology regarding pastoral care. The principle of bipolarity is significant in characterising his pastoral approach as a holistic approach. Opposites attract and become inevitably linked in the pursuit of healing. God and man, theology and psychology, medicine and prayer, body and mind are but a few opposites that complement each other in the act of pastoral care. Such thinking implies that pastoral care should not remain an action to be taken exclusively by the church. Rather, pastoral care should embrace an extra-ecclesiastical vision of the world as part of the context of the church, thereby broadening the field of pastoral action (Heitink 1977:135–144).

Heitink's idea of bipolarity has not yet been analysed and fully utilised in defining the nature of pastoral care and its responsibilities. For instance, although, in the past, pastoral care and counselling were generally understood to be conducted solely by means of verbal communication, currently the principle of bipolarity posits pastoral *action* as the opposite attracting force. Words plus actions present a more inclusive form of communication in pastoral care.<sup>1</sup> Pastoral theology can greatly profit from the many radical neurolinguistic programming principles that render significant contributions in terms of defining poverty and wealth and the intertwined dynamics of morals and poverty. Certainly, there is no doubt about why such an approach is called an all-inclusive approach in the endeavour of helping people with their many needs. The approach is also linked to Heitink's point of departure that pastoral care should have an extra-ecclesiastical thrust, which is a principle on which I rely when defining pastoral care in a holistic context.

1. Louw (2008:74) explains the point succinctly, in terms of the concepts of *fides quaerens intellectum*; *verbum*; *actum*; *spem* and *imaginem*.

## Howard Clinebell

Clinebell is, arguably, the most enthusiastic supporter of taking a holistic approach in pastoral care. In fact, he openly identifies his model with the adoption of a holistic approach (1984:25). So inclusive is the approach, that Clinebell describes every thinkable aspect of our lives as forming part of the pastoral process. Gender, stages of life, body and mind, left and right brain activities and relationships are all part of such a holistic approach (1984:31–50). The whole person must be led to wholeness and be liberated from sin, problems, or whatever may prevent the person from having an abundant life. Clinebell bases the approach on John 10:10 (1984:26, 51). Incidentally, John Patton (1993) argues along the same lines in profiling the pastoral counsellor as a

*representative of an image of life whose meaning is affirmed by his or her religious community. The pastoral counsellor offers a relationship in which that understanding of life and faith can be explored.*

(Patton 1993:214)

'The image of life' and 'the contextual relationship' have become operative phrases when seeking a theological theory for pastoral care. Special attention will, therefore, be given to the covenant and to the Imago Dei under a separate heading.

Growth in all areas is the pastor's responsibility when leading a counselee to healing. This approach is an all-inclusive one wherein mind and body are revitalised and people are empowered to reach their full potential. By uncovering and developing possibilities, which are yet undiscovered, the strong points in their character can facilitate empowerment and growth (Clinebell 1984:29, 75). I have indicated, in another research project (Janse van Rensburg 2009) that starting from what the poor person has and developing such potential is probably the wisest and the most fruitful approach to addressing the plight of the poor. The approach should promote self-help, rather than make the person or community merely the recipient of charity. The method, together with the indispensable need for a right-brain approach in creativity (Clinebell 1984; Janse van Rensburg 1998), could empower the pastor to make life-changing contributions by means of pastoral care.

## Daniel Louw

Due to the significance of his many publications on pastoral theology, Daniël Louw deserves special attention. Louw calls his pastoral approach a convergent model. It is not difficult to see why. He builds on the positive aspects of previous models, bringing them all together in his pastoral goal of salvation and healing (Louw 1999:28). In his explanation, the saving implications of the gospel are not substituted, but are expanded by a redemptive characteristic (1999:39–40). After presenting a carefully worked out pastoral anthropology, Louw describes human beings as God's creation and as a union of both body and spirit. To the three basic functions of human existence (cognitive, affective and connotative), he adds the functions of bodily existence (including sexuality) and moral responsibility. The pursuit for healing is guided by the humanity of Jesus Christ, who becomes the perfect image of faith maturity, which Louw contrasts with psychological maturity. During the pastoral encounter, the counselee is led to seek faith maturity. In so doing, the eschatological anticipation is made a reality in the present. Louw's hermeneutical approach involves the counselee in all aspects of the process leading to healing,<sup>2</sup> as well as in an all-inclusive salvation that encompasses both spiritual and physical well-being.

The thought-provoking model is further developed in two of his later publications. In 2004, in the first edition of his book

2. Clinebell's (1984:31–50) holistic approach includes all dimensions of life.

*Mechanics of the human soul*,<sup>3</sup> he investigates the inner workings of the soul and indicates pastoral ways of dealing with intricate psycho-pathology. The soul is defined in terms of its substantial position, that is to say in the reality of its existence and in the dynamics of its interactive relationships. In his latest publication (*Cura vitae*), Louw (2008:28) refers to the theology of space as 'inhabitation'. Wisdom and discernment (*phronesis*) are needed to exist, to understand and to live according to God's will. The soul is, therefore, not a thing, but a dimension of experiencing life, referring, as it does, to the totality of life in the presence of God, *coram Deo* (Louw 2008:79). The word 'soul', therefore, refers to the stewardship given to human beings to represent God in the world (2004:17–18). As such, the soul has a moral quality, which reiterates Louw's high regard for the moral aspect of human identity, which is a concept that he described in a previous publication (1999; 2004).

For Louw, the description of the word 'soul', within the context of interactive relationships, implies a paradigm shift towards a systems approach that, in terms of morality, has two very distinct characteristics:

- Sin and dysfunctional behaviour must always be interpreted within the many contexts of a system within which a particular individual exists.
- The Christian perspective of grace implies that individuals are 'more than' their transgressions.

These characteristics deserve to be further developed in pursuing a holistic pastoral theology for combating poverty. In a final retrospective summary of Louw's approach, he is seen to deal with the concept of a holistic anthropology in the individual sense of embodied spirituality and in the corporate sense of a systems approach to his theology of inhabitation. The aspects are interrelated and have very relevant consequences for a theology of combating poverty.

### More recent holistic approaches

In a similar vein to Louw's concept of an embodied spirituality, Van den Berg (2008:118–132) champions 'the importance of construing a more bodily theological anthropology and spirituality for pastoral care, embodying a new understanding of engagement with various scientific domains' (2008:119). Although the concept of engagement with various scientific domains can hardly be accredited to the post-foundationalist paradigm and the concept of embodied spirituality,<sup>4</sup> his views reiterate the importance of a holistic approach to pastoral care. However, some of the variations in the approach require our attention.

I have not chosen to follow the route of Van den Berg, which sacrifices theology,<sup>5</sup> and the belief in a metaphysical reality, for a post-foundationalist embodied spirituality, in which 'there is no additional metaphysical element such as mind or soul or spirit' (Murphy, quoted in Van den Berg, 2008:122). Louw (2004:15) follows a different route, identifying spirit and soul as 'that faculty in our being human that can transcend the physical limitations of mind, brain and body' (2008:57; and also 2008:62). Previously in 2005, Louw identified certain basic assumptions about the soul in relation to our existence as human beings. In both the references, he acknowledges the 'self' identity of the soul and the function of the soul as reflecting the human 'I' (the ego). He explains the intricate unity between mind, soul and body as follows: 'A human being is an embodiment of soul and an ensoulment of body. One does not have a soul; one is one's soul in terms of mind, will, emotion and body' (2004:16).

The significance of the explanation is enhanced by the second part of the quote, which reads: 'The religious dynamic in this

embodiment and ensoulment is spirituality as expressed in our directedness towards transcendence (the divine and the ultimate).' Louw seems to be referring to his eschatological *proprium* for pastoral counselling, which includes the 'not yet' of a coming metaphysical reality and a *promissio* therapy of hope, which is of great importance when pursuing a bodily spirituality and (I might add) in a pastoral theology of combating poverty.

Although Van den Berg acknowledges the importance of an eschatological pastoral theology, one has to ask whether, in terms of his post-foundationalist epistemology, such theology is to be understood as exclusively metaphorical and as a spiritual resurrection and 'not [as a] re-clothing of a 'naked' soul with a (new) body, but rather [as] restoring the whole person to life - a new transformed kind of life' (Murphy, quoted in Van den Berg 2008). The metaphorical meaning of the resurrection has long been acknowledged in pastoral care, but without a real bodily resurrection, as described by Scripture (1 Cor 15), it can only be regarded as a one-dimensional phenomenon.

Also, many unanswered questions remain if we pursue a biological spirituality in which mind, soul and body are so intertwined that their separate existence or functioning can no longer be acknowledged. How, for example, can the contribution of the cognitive sciences be praised (Van den Berg 2008:123) if the cognitive has no separate identity and function in a bodily spirituality? How can spiritual experiences be reduced to the bodily experiences of pain, delight, sexual arousal and the appreciation of art, music and dance (2008:123)? Further investigation of complications of a bodily spirituality is likely to lead us too far astray. Suffice to say that the holistic approach to pastoral care is well established within such an approach of an embodied spirituality.

### IMPLICATIONS OF USING A HOLISTIC APPROACH WHEN GIVING PASTORAL CARE TO THOSE WHO ARE POVERTY-STRICKEN

A panoramic view of the history of pastoral theology clearly shows that the presence of a holistic approach in terms of pastoral care is well established, although many variants and various possible applications of the principle are found. Therefore, the concept of a holistic approach is not really new. However, applying the principle in the field of pastoral care offered to poverty-stricken people is not only very rare, but is also extremely complex and very difficult, because of the many variables that can influence the contexts of poverty.

Currently, there is a need for research into the many dimensions of a holistic approach that can be taken in pastoral care in regard to poor people and societies. It is significant that, of the many books on pastoral care and counselling that were consulted for the current article, few were found to contain any *specific* references to poverty. Despite Douglas John Hall (1989:78), in his book *Thinking the faith*, listing ten different contexts that require special pastoral attention, it is noteworthy that the plight of the poverty-stricken is *not* listed. Similarly, although Switzer (1989) describes the different crises that are encountered in pastoral counselling, in terms of which he mentions the need

*to respond to those persons who have just lost jobs or farms or businesses, the long-time unemployed, the financial problems of persons and families and even whole communities where there is unemployment, persons and families who are evicted from their homes, the poor and the hungry . . .*

(Switzer 1989:6)

Switzer gives no further attention to this matter in the various chapters that he includes on a variety of crises. Du Plessis (2009) valiantly endeavours to stress the point that attention should be paid to the worsening plight of the poor, making a number of

3. First published in Afrikaans under the title: *Ratwerke van die menslike siel*.

4. See discussion in Janse Van Rensburg 2000:77–78.

5. See Louw's important remarks on the nature of Practical Theology as theology and not as phenomenology (2008:17).

important suggestions as to how the church ought to address the onslaught of poverty. For instance, he holds the church responsible for referring the poor to psychological counselling to help them to cope with the trauma of poverty, which abnegates pastoral responsibility in this regard. Indeed, most research into poverty focuses mainly on the provision of Christian charity and congregational ministry in general, tending largely to avoid dealing with the challenge of poverty in the context of pastoral care and counselling. This unhealthy situation seems to indicate that the hypothesis that poverty in the past was usually addressed by referral to a committee for Christian charity and that a sustained pastoral approach was lacking is probably true.

Within the limits of the current paper it is not possible to address all the concerns related to such an issue. Since this article is part of a much larger research project conducted for the NRF, careful attention will be given, in separate articles, to the various categories related to poverty, taking the application of a holistic approach as point of departure. Some general implications should, however, be highlighted here.

### Multitasking in the congregation

In terms of a holistic approach, much more can be done to use congregation members as extensions of the pastoral process. Clinebell (1984:310–322) talks of 'lay pastoral counselling'; he also aptly describes the purpose of growth groups as the development of unused potentialities, in a form of 'here and now effectiveness in living, rather than focussing on past failures and present hang-ups' (1984:360). It is not difficult to see to what extent such an extension of pastoral care could benefit the poor.

J.J. Ploeger-Grotegoed (see Weverbergh 1988:12) refers to a congregational model that emerges 'from below', in terms of which congregation members share responsibilities with the minister for funerals and emotional support during a time of bereavement, for example. Although the adoption of such a dispensation was necessitated by her being a part-time minister, Ploeger-Grotegoed motivates the functioning of a congregation 'from below' as a basic principle of operation and not just as an emergency measure. Thus, a more holistic ministry should not be the result of organising measures, but should exist because of a true understanding of individual members in a congregation experiencing a specific calling and being given the opportunity to act on that calling.

In terms of this perspective, pastoral ministry to the poor must be seen as an integral part of congregational ministry, extending across the boundaries of the different activities in a congregation (Hendriks, Ploeger-Grotegoed & Weverbergh 1988). This means that pastoral care and the other aspects of ministry, including Christian charity,<sup>6</sup> evangelism and actions of empowerment should be seen as aspects of the same action, being, as the expression goes, two sides of the same coin. I have the distinct impression that a system in which the various committees of a congregation each has its own separate work description has many disadvantages, starting with it causing discontinuity. For instance, in terms of such a system, a pastor may hand over a 'case' of poverty to the deacons responsible for Christian charity, either considering that the poor person's predicament is 'no longer their problem', or in order to avoid having to be available<sup>7</sup> for alleviating the plight of those adversely affected by poverty.

Furthermore, when there is a lack of continuity in a system, approaches might differ. Whereas the pastor concerned might be sympathetic and kind, the deacon responsible for Christian charity might be more clinical and appear to be unsympathetic

towards the poor.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that various church committees should not exist, but, rather, that the strong divide that tends to be caused by observing strict boundaries of responsibility should be reconsidered. Again, the implications in this regard are likely to be different in each congregational context, with the narratives of the people involved differing from one another. The general principle is, however, clear. The various committees of the church should work together, with all participating in addressing the many aspects of poverty and the whole congregation being part of the general office of believers, in the light of all Christians being called to be kings, prophets and priests (Trimp 1983:11–16)<sup>9</sup>.

Ploeger-Grotegoed, in a very interesting discussion, illustrates how her view of the importance of Christian charity and her responsibility as a pastor were combined with the efforts of a working group for charity, with all concerned embracing their responsibilities as kings, prophets and priests (Weverbergh 1988: 20–23). Their combined efforts resulted in much more attention being paid to the needs of the indigent (Weverbergh 1988: 16–19). Congregation members and office bearers jointly attended meetings of the working groups concerned. In response to the model concerned, Dingemans (1988:35–46) comments that the adoption of a more structured and practical theological ecclesiology should work towards a clearer demarcation of the model. Firet (1988:47–52), in response to Ploeger-Grotegoed's model, identifies some basic issues in such an approach to illustrate that, besides the many advantages involved, there may also be hidden dangers. One danger, for instance, may be an overemphasis on the general office of believers, which could lead to underestimating the offices of pastor, elder and deacon. Although the warning still rings true, many congregations, particularly in South Africa, have accepted such a 'members of the body of Christ' approach, which they have refined into a workable model for congregational ministry.

A simplified example of this might help to explain my meaning more clearly. A man and a woman, not married, start attending worship services. They then ask for pastoral assistance. The first discussion reveals a narrative of abuse and aggression, with their having no income, owing to a loss of jobs, which has resulted in their current state of poverty. In terms of a previous approach, the pastor concerned would have, after first addressing the spiritual needs of the couple, referred the 'case' to the committee for Christian charity, so as to alleviate the couple's immediate material needs for food, clothes and so on, doing nothing to alleviate their feeling embarrassed and unwanted. Clearly, such an approach is no longer (and, in fact, never has been) acceptable.

How far should the church go in efforts to find a more permanent solution for the plight of such as these? Should the church, for instance, accept the responsibility of trying to find jobs for the unemployed? Should there be a support group to assist the pastor in such efforts? How should congregations deal with the issue? The adoption of a holistic approach necessitates a positive answer to such questions. One of the many options could be that congregation members with a ministry of hospitality should ensure that the poor are made to feel welcome and wanted in both the congregation and the community.

All of these attempts to assist poor people should be seen as extensions of pastoral care in terms of the adoption of a holistic approach. Without such extensions of ministry, pastoral efforts could be seriously jeopardised and even nullified.

### Networking and referral

Networking and referral should be considered as indispensable strategies in the pastoral process of assisting the poor. Introducing

6.Revisiting the key words used to define Christian charity, as discussed by Oosterhoff (1991:47–59) makes clear the inseparable link between Christian charity and pastoral care and counselling.

7.John Patton (1993:213–234) stresses the importance of pastoral availability.

8.Starreveld (1991:96) expresses the urgent need to change negative impressions of deacons' spirituality and approach to the plight of the poor.

9.We shall return to this important theme a little later in the current article.

people to other people and to agencies or groups relevant to a particular need can broaden the boundaries of effective pastoral assistance (Patton 1993:224). Clinebell (1984:310–322) devotes a full chapter to the principle of referral counselling. However, once such referrals and introductions have been undertaken, under no circumstances may they be regarded as ending the responsibilities of pastoral involvement. Furthermore, referrals should not be restricted to liaising with psychologists, as important as such liaison may be. The broadest spectrum of referral resources should be included in any holistic approach. In terms of such a spectrum, we think of medical doctors, social workers, agents for job creation, influential and wealthy people, housing agencies, etcetera, depending on whatever the particular need may be. With the permission of the indigent, the congregation may, likewise, be used as a source of information and assistance. For example, members of the congregation could be asked to help look out for jobs, to help with temporary housing (such as making a spare room available) or to provide food supplies for the interim. The viability of involving Christian business people in coinvesting in a fairly large facility to house the homeless might be investigated, as might the possibility of placing equal investments in an interest free trust. Keeping such possibilities in mind might be worthwhile, because increasingly more breadwinners might be laid off and left without an income in the future (see Coetzee's remarks in Janse van Rensburg 2009). Such actions would, naturally, necessitate seeking the necessary legal advice and keeping the relevant documentation.

### Community involvement

Part of the liaising process, consisting of the contact and communication with the community, is extremely important and requires special attention (Patton 1993:239). John Patton's (1993:23–25) important contribution to the literature regarding the liaising process has laid a firm foundation for a theology of community. His important premise concerns the prevention of allowing a mere social and economic view of community from predominating the overall view. According to Patton, God is the author of every community and creates it as an expression of human relationality. Patton continues (1993):

*This relationality, however, is not a passive condition. It is brought into being through human action, empowered through their relationship to God. Through their vocation of caring for the earth, human beings learn to care for one another.*

(Patton 1993:24)

Thus, the key concepts in a theology of community should be those of caring, action and responsibility.

Cultural resources can offer a wealth of information in many ways, without which the pastor might be left relatively uninformed. Understanding the context in which actions take place, to use Patton's phrase once again, facilitates obtaining the necessary cultural information, allowing for empowerment to take place. If people in a particular culture are poor, that culture has often been considered worthless in the past, because those belonging to it have been seen as being unable to help themselves. Such an understanding, however, limits the enactment of a holistic approach, since the approach in question considers culture only as a possible source of material support and ignores the importance of information, contributions and the moral support offered by communities.

Information, communication and motivation can be seen as being of equal importance in the fight against poverty. In this regard, Johnson (1953:318–324) made a legitimate point about the interaction between communication and communities. What we now know as the phenomenon of globalism and its influence on communication (as in the writings of Jean Baudrillard, e.g. 1981:173; 1983:99; 1988:72) is already acknowledged in Johnson's premise as consisting of 'cosmic processes' that occur within a 'cosmic community', in which 'interpersonalism' functions. Johnson's premise is that communities are the real basis of

communication. The dimension, applied in terms of a holistic vision on poverty, requires further investigation. The goal, in this respect, should be on ascertaining how communication can be used to obtain information, to strengthen and unify efforts and to mobilise allies in our efforts to combat poverty, as well as on finding out what disadvantages poverty might cause.

Along such lines, Fourie (2005:50–55) argues that sustainable prosperity can only be secured if we have a change of heart and attitude when helping to empower poor people and communities with the requisite knowledge, skills and opportunities. The church, parents, infrastructures and business initiatives are all required to play major roles in the process of empowerment, with individual mentorship also being utilised as a vehicle for change. In this regard, Schaller (1990:218–228) highlights the importance of allies and coalitions. Allies can take the form of inspired and motivated people, organisations and businesses both inside and outside the congregation. Such allies should not only use their influence to help others, but should also become individually involved in turning the pastoral dream into a reality. Without such allies, all pastoral efforts are most likely doomed, so that, ultimately, they are merely a waste.

Research into such areas of endeavour as the economy, psychology and culture and into the bearing that they have on poverty and pastoral care is required. Switzer (1989:19) demonstrates a profound understanding of the present-day predicament in his recognition of the many secular contexts that create and influence the range of contemporary crises. His conclusion, however, needs redressing. From the many different secular variables in existence, he concludes: 'Pastoral care is not the only one in which healing is brought about.' I am convinced, however, that, in terms of a holistic approach, interdisciplinary action should involve joint pastoral participation with all other disciplines in all those cases requiring secular input.

One of the most productive examples of liaison and empowerment is found in the outstanding initiative taken by a minister and a member of the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church of Pretoria Oosterlig (Fourie 2005:57–60). The initiative took the form of a well-planned and structured project directed at job creation, in which several 'allies' were canvassed to inform and provide a group of the unemployed with basic skills training, including how to compile a curriculum vitae, how to manage household finances and how to liaise with different agencies, congregations and businesses so as to find relevant job openings. The model concerned is worthy of emulation, although it would clearly be more difficult to follow in some contexts, such as in those of smaller towns and congregations. Many other practical models and examples of similar bearing can be found in the writings of Burger, Meiring, Van Niekerk and Wepener (2005) and Nel (2006).

### A pastoral anthropology applied

At the core of a holistic approach in pastoral care lies the theological premise of man being created in the image of God. A pastoral anthropology of the inseparable unity of body and soul (Louw 2008), the human potential that includes being created in the image of God (Hiltner 1954), the bipolar dynamics that are continuously in play between spiritual and bodily needs (Heitink 1984) and the possibilities of an embodied spirituality (Louw 2008; Van den Berg 2008) all necessitate the providing of pastoral words of comfort and advice that are supported by pastoral actions. Such provision could, at least, attempt to address the material needs of those involved in a more substantial manner than occurred in the past. The point of departure concerned has clear implications for society as a whole (Hermans & Van Roosmalen 1985:54–55). Perkins (1993:35–37) identifies the most prominent needs of people as consisting of the following:

- the need to belong
- the need to feel significant and important
- the need for a reasonable amount of security.

Of course, the lists of human needs (including such as Maslow's list of the most basic needs) are never complete and there are many other needs that cry out for inclusion. However, the relevance of Perkins' list is that it concentrates on spiritual needs (with physical and material implications), addressing both the pastoral need for healing words, as well as the need for actions that will address the specified needs in a life-changing manner. The title of Perkins' book (*Beyond charity*) says all that needs to be said. In the work, charity is juxtaposed against community development as a much more radical and all-inclusive action of empowerment. Helping individuals in their context (whether that of community, culture, or other) should be the goal of the pastoral process. Rather than stopping at the addressing of immediate needs (charity), the focus should be on developing the community as a whole from which the individual comes. Due consideration should be given to how such development should take place. Perkins (1993:35) explores the implications of an old Chinese saying to accentuate the difference in approach. Rather than providing handouts that leave the indigent mired in the helpless and undignified state in which they might find themselves, we are to:

*Go to the people, live among them, learn from them, love them, start with what they know, build on what they have: But of the best leaders, when their task is done, the people will remark 'We have done it ourselves'.*

(Perkins 1993:35)

In terms of such an all-inclusive approach, feelings of human dignity and pride, which should be an implicit part of the realisation of being created in the image of God, can be restored. Perkins (1993) strongly emphasises the aspect concerned:

*Not only is the slum dehumanizing to the people who dwell there, but our failure to respond to the slum is an indictment on the church. As Christians our love for a just God should cause us to act when we see the crushed spirit of the slum dweller.*

(Perkins 1993:41)

Perkins's emphasis on what he calls 'the Need for a New Theology' (1993:41) corresponds with the point of departure used in the current paper. In short, we require a new definition of pastoral care and counselling.

### Pastoral encounter with the plight of the poor

Within the epistemological context of a post-foundationalist epistemology, the dimension of spirituality as an all-inclusive principle of being and the meta-theoretical input of non-theological disciplines in this regard (Van den Berg 2008:121), could make a meaningful contribution to the enormous task of handling pastoral encounter with the plight of the poor. To introduce but one exciting possibility, a bodily understanding of spirituality could approach the essence of poverty-stricken sufferers in terms of their own context. Van den Berg (2008:126), in line with Louw's theology of habitus, confirms that we need to prevent a kind of 'spiritual' pastoral care that fixates on comfort and compassion and that only offers relief by the provision of a kind of 'pie in the sky when you die by and by'. Furthermore, a bodily understanding of spirituality would serve to open up dimensions of poverty not previously reckoned with in pastoral care. In terms of such an understanding, we are thinking of empowerment, the psychological dimensions of poverty and a theology of poverty, amongst other aspects of the situation. As a consequence of the recognition of the need for a bodily spirituality, Van den Berg also elaborates on the need to 'enter the domain of an embodied spirituality in the business world' (2008:126). The realisation of such a need concurs with the findings of recent qualitative research undertaken in this regard (Janse van Rensburg 2009), in which it became clear that pastoral encounter with poverty must necessarily include the responsibility of finding more lasting and life-changing economic means of empowerment, if we are meaningfully to contribute to improving the plight of the poor.

### Innovation

Some time ago, I investigated the potential of right-brain strategies for pastoral therapy and counselling (1998:65–78). From the said vantage point, principles could be derived to address the many challenges given rise to by poverty. Innovative solutions to existing problems might be of substantial importance in helping to support and sustain the poor. However, the particular applications in respect of poverty must be defined more precisely.

### CONCLUSION

This brief exposition of pastoral care and poverty illustrates that a theory for the praxis of pastoral care in the context of poverty barely exists and is much needed. Furthermore, it should be clear that the theological principles for a holistic approach, already established in respect of pastoral care and counselling, should be applied to the pastoral challenge presented by poverty. In this regard, we should understand that a holistic approach entails responding appropriately to the personal challenge to work with individuals, in all the dimensions of their life, as well as using a systems approach to work in extended spheres of the community, such as the economy.

Faber's revelation of our ignorance of the praxis and the challenges of pastoral care (1984:201–208) applies particularly in relation to the research problem dealt with in this research. We need more information about possible methods and strategies and what we must explore further is how to obtain such information. As Faber, in referring to research into pastoral care, points out, the standard methods of research (in terms of theological theory supported by empirical statistics) are no longer sufficient. A new dialogue is called for, which calls for observing, documenting and developing a new theory of practice. Faber (1984:206–207) finds such a method in the means of participatory action research, which has been used in the field of sociology since its initial stages in Europe from 1984 onwards, since when it has become increasingly well established, even within the realm of practical theology (see Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

The implications of such a methodology for the research problem of the current paper must be considered. It seems quite clear that we will not get very far in developing a model for pastoral care and poverty without the input of as many pastors as possible in a participatory action research project. Such a project will not necessarily include pastoral theologians, but rather ministers, who practice in the field of pastoral labour with the poor and their communities and who are willing to share their methods and strategies, as well as their frustrations and failures. By so doing, we will be able to learn from one another and to refine our strategies, in such a way as to heighten our level of effectiveness. How we shall approach such a project requires some attention. Possibly, a network of interested ministers might have to be created, with a central database containing information about contexts, practical problems, methods and strategies, as well as about successes and failures. As part of my ongoing research into pastoral care and poverty, I am interested in initiating such participatory action research in the very near future.

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