

# Love: A philosophy of pastoral care and counselling

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This article explored the meaning of love as an ethical principle and the aim of providing pastoral counselling and care. The author, inspired by the work of Professor Julian Müller, applied Paul Tillich's notion of love to affirm the value of pastoral counselling as a constituent practice and research focus of practical theology. The focus of the discussion was upon love as the primary witness of the church and motivating factor for offering pastoral counselling and care to those who seek it. Distinctions were drawn between psychotherapeutic counselling and pastoral counselling. Müller's postfoundationalist approach to listening and reflecting upon the work of pastoral counselling and valuing the counselee or co-researcher role as teacher was supported.

## Introduction

There has been a longstanding discussion within the academic study of theology (Browning 1991; Osmer 2008) as to what practical theology is and where pastoral care and counselling might fit in this discourse. Browning (1991), for example, suggests four questions that guide practical theology: how do we understand the concrete situation in which we must act? What should be our praxis in this concrete situation? How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in the concrete situation in which we practice theology? What means, strategies and rhetoric should we use in this concrete situation? This theological debate will not be rehearsed here. Pastoral counselling has value and a place within practical theology. Practical theology supports the interpretation of human needs and praxis of pastoral care. This position is also the claim of Steyn and Masango (2011) that:

This understanding and interpretation of human needs points to a theological and hermeneutical analysis of a practical-pastoral problem. In this context, we mean that pastoral problems cannot be separated from their urge to caregivers to find solutions in the praxis of the same. Furthermore, this understanding and interpretation should also provide the caregiver with the motivational means to offer this pastoral care from within his or her theological convictions. To say one should care for people in need in a pastoral way and yet not grapple with the question of why one should care at all would be somewhat presumptuous. Practical theology should therefore both prompt and sustain the following question: what is the motivation for this conviction to care? (p. 2)

This essay does not address the many different ways healing is understood in different cultural contexts. We have, since our beginning as a human species, sought to define illness and health and assign to it a meaning. We seek advice and help for what troubles us from a variety of healers and sources depending upon our physical and emotional needs and cultural context. Healers are called by many different names ranging from physician and psychotherapist to priests and diviners. Healing practices vary to include our calling upon divine intervention in addition to engaging in other non-traditional and traditional therapeutic practices in our effort to feel better. These practices, as Hucks (2013) suggests:

function as important epistemic and generative resources for how Africana populations [people everywhere ...] deploy religious meaning, invoke counter strategies of resistance, and seek to create remedies of restorative health and wholeness as protective shields from individual and collective affliction, disease, threat, and annihilation. (p. 47)

Jesus asks: do you love me? (Jn 15:19 New International Version [NIV]). I wish to propose that in the developed world context of conceptualising practical theology, love be the primary motivation for pastoral counsellors to care and provide counselling to those in need. Love, as described below as a guiding principle of pastoral caring, lends itself to the orientation that postfoundationalism offers to theological reflection and praxis.

## Pastoral care and counselling

Descriptions and definitions of the meaning of pastoral care and counselling abound (Clebsch & Jaekle 1964; Couture & Hunter 1995; Dittes 1999; Moon & Shim 2010; Pruyser 1976; Wimberly 1979,

1982; Wise 1983). According to the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (2012):

Religious communities have traditionally sought to provide religion-based solutions for those in trouble. Their leaders have listened intently to personal problems for centuries, and have developed religious counseling responses to those who suffer from mental and emotional illness and relational difficulties. Traditional religious counseling continues to help many of these people. It was recognized long ago, however, that in many cases specialized professional therapy was necessary for effective treatment and healing ... Pastoral counseling has evolved from religious counseling to pastoral psychotherapy which integrates theology and other faith tradition knowledge, spirituality, the resources of faith communities, the behavioral sciences, and in recent years, systemic theory. (n.p.)

The integration of psychological theories and methods of counselling with religion, theology and concepts of spirituality, as implied in the above statement from the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, has given rise to the practice of pastoral counselling as a distinct area of practice within the life of parish ministers, as well as those clergy and other religious professionals whose practice context includes other institutions such as hospitals, mental health clinics and the military. The training and practice context of pastoral counsellors vary in the USA. The growth in the interest in religion and spirituality in the field of mental health (Kahle & Robbins 2004) and helping professions, such as social work (Canda & Furman 1999; Hugen & Scales 2002; Lee & O'Gorman 2005; Streets 2009), also reflect the variety of ways that pastoral care and counselling is being understood and practiced in North America.

Carroll A. Wise, long ago in his *Pastoral psychotherapy* (1983):

dispenses with the term pastoral counseling and used the term pastoral psychotherapy ... In using the word psychotherapy rather than counseling we are returning to the roots of our religious tradition. The Greek word 'psyche' in the New Testament refers ... to the living person as a total reality or unity. It cannot be taken to mean a spiritual aspect as distinguished from the mental or physical. It is man as a whole, an organic unity ... Pastoral psychotherapy is that psychotherapy done by a person who has a professional identity and commitment within a religious faith group. This means that in addition to all of the problems of human values that are the concern of other kinds of therapists, the pastor openly recognizes the place of ultimate realities and values in all aspects of human life, and is, therefore qualified to help persons to deal with their false ultimate's, or in religious terms, their idolatries. (pp. ix, 3, 12)

At the beginning of his text, Wise (1983) states what the mental health community in North America, even today, would describe as a meaning of psychotherapy:

By psychotherapy we mean a process, engaged in by two or more persons in which one is accepted as a healer or helper, who aims at assisting the other to change feelings, attitudes, and behavior, or, in other words, become in some ways a different person. Psychotherapy deals with intrapsychic processes, with interpersonal relationships, and with the person's response to his total environment, including his cultural milieu. (p. 3)

What is pastoral about Wise's understanding of psychotherapy is the way the religious counsellor understands and explores with his or her counselee the 'ultimate' or religious values and beliefs that influence the way the counselee sees the world and how that perspective contributes to his or her sense of self, illness, health and manner of relating to other people.

The robust interest of the pastoral counsellor and other helping professionals in the spiritual and/or religious orientation of their assistance to others suggests the importance of thinking about the concept of love, more than theology *per se*, as one of the ethical principles guiding the practice of pastoral psychotherapy or pastoral care and counselling. What are some of the ways might we consider the meaning of a pastoral counsellor loving those whom he or she counsels? It is also important not to privilege psychological systems of thought and methods of intervention over some of the traditional and indigenous ways people have understood and coped with their troubles and made meaning out of their experiences. Love is a common factor within the variety of ways people have understood and experienced religion and spirituality and by which they have been motivated to minister to one another. Love is an important idea for pastoral counsellors to consider and reflect upon in their work.

## Pastoral care and theological education

One could easily assume, at least in the developed world, that theological education is also education for the professional practice of ministry. The curricula of most seminaries or divinity schools in the USA are structured according to the students' area of study or concentration such as the Bible, History, Theology and Pastoral practices. There are subdivisions within each of these areas that students can further explore. Literature regarding the nature of theological education in the USA will not be reviewed here.

I have observed from my experience in graduate theological education that there has been a longstanding tension between professional theological education for the practice of ministry and theological education in the developed world (Foster *et al.* 2006). A focus upon practical theology and pastoral ministries of the church, in general, are often less valued by some in the academy as areas of study than those of the Bible, History and historical and systematic theology. These areas of study are considered by the academy as the dominant domain of religious research, scholarship and teaching. Such scholarship has value and contributes to the work and mission of the church and academy. However, the research and teaching in these areas are often highly theoretical and divorced from the situation in which people live and experience life (Foster *et al.* 2006). I have often heard from students in theological education (as was my experience as a Divinity School student) that they feel they are either indirectly or implicitly given the impression by some faculty members – and based upon their experience of the way that

the entire theological education enterprise is conducted – that they should be suspicious of the pastoral practices of ministry as areas of study with scholarly rigour and research muscle.

There is the ongoing need for connections to be made between theological theory and ministerial praxis and the role of human emotions in pastoral care. One would rarely find, for example, as an object of study the idea of empathy in the curriculum or course content of seminaries or divinity schools. In the work conducted by Foster *et al.* (2006:22–26), the term 'pastoral imagination' is used in such a way that it is divorced from pastoral feeling and emotions and framed as primarily a cognitive exercise. Those students who plan to engage the pastoral ministries of the church may find some reference to empathy in some courses on pastoral care and counselling and in the clinical pastoral education (CPE) programme. CPE is an elective offered in many graduate theological schools in the USA and therefore it is not taken by many, if not most, students graduating with a theological degree. It is the author's opinion that graduate theological students who are studying the various meanings of him who came into the world as the 'bread of life' do not sufficiently reflect upon or empathetically imagine the various meanings of life people create for themselves and for which this bread is offered. Kelsey (2005), for example, critically reflects on the important Christian concept of redemption. He does so in the context of a lived experience of a colleague and friend who asked him, as a theologian, to explain the meaning of redemption.

## Pastoral care and the emotion of love

New research into the science of human attachment and negative emotions, such as hate (Bartlett 2012), and positive emotions, such as love and empathy, as important aspects to teach helping professionals (Gerdes *et al.* 2011), show the importance of our need to further understand how emotions like these are developed and nurtured in human beings and how they impact our behaviour. The neuroscientific research of Cacioppo *et al.* (2012) shows that:

Social neuroscience of love is a growing field of research, which only recently has become the topic of intensive and rigorous scientific empirical investigations. By identifying the specific cortico-subcortical neural network as well as the central and peripheral electrophysiological indices of love, we hope to provide an interdisciplinary approach to better understand the complexity of love and its disorders. Although combining knowledge from neuroimaging (fMRI and EEG) studies with standard approach in relationship science still doesn't solve the hard problem of love regarding its nature and origin, an integrative approach combining neuroimaging techniques with other disciplines such as social psychology, animal studies, and genetics has the potential to answer age-old questions as to the function of love, which can have useful applications in mental health and couple therapies. (p. 12)

Locating her argument within her scientific study of emotions, Fredrickson (2013) makes a distinction between

the 'products of love', such as the 'bonds' people may have to one another, and the 'commitments' that connection between them might generate from love itself. She offers, based upon her research, that:

Love is the momentary upwelling of three tightly interwoven events: first, sharing of one or more positive emotions between you and another; second, a synchrony between your and another person's biochemistry and behaviors; and third, a reflected motive to invest in each other's well-being that brings mutual care. My short hand for this trio is positivity resonance. (Fredrickson 2013:17)

I will return to share some implications of Fredrickson's view of love later in this discussion. The concept of *agape* or *caritas* as described and related to the profession of social work by Tillich (1963) is a description of what I am proposing as a meaning of love for the practice of pastoral counselling:

Here, when I use the term love ... I certainly do not mean the love which is emotion; nor do I think of *philia* – of friendship which only really develops between the social worker and his patient, nor do I think of the love which is *Eros*, which creates an emotional desire towards the patient that in many cases is more destructive than creative; rather, it is the love whose name in Greek is *agape* and in Latin *caritas* – the love which descends to misery and ugliness and guilt in order to elevate. This love is critical as well as accepting, and it is able to transform what it loves. It is called *caritas* in Latin, but it should not be confused with what the English form of the same word indicates today – namely, *Charity*, a word which belongs to the many words which have a disintegrated, distorted meaning. *Charity* is often identical with social work, but the word 'charity' has the connotation of giving for good causes in order to escape the demand of love. *Charity* as escape from love is the caricature and distortion of social work. (p. 29)

The problems of those who seek the assistance of pastoral counsellors are often not unlike the concerns we all have as human beings. Humanity's larger life situation is embedded in the conversation between the pastoral counsellor and his or her congregant or counselee. There are many reported moments in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament when God spoke words to humankind.

## Theological conversations

There are also conversations between God, Jesus and human beings. Perhaps the first dialogue, and I think pastoral conversation, between God and human beings is found in Genesis 3:

God called to man and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He [God] said, 'Who told you that you were naked?' (vv. 8–13 New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])

There are no insignificant conversations between us and God. The first human could recognise the sound of God and the voice of God calling him. The first emotion and problem, according to this story of a human being presented to God, was fear and an awareness of being 'naked' in some way. An adequate biblical exegetical treatment of this story of

the Garden of Eden in Genesis is beyond the scope of this discussion and my expertise (Linzer 2008). My reference to this story is for the purpose of suggesting that in pastoral counselling the counsellor listens for at least four things from the one who comes to them for help, namely:

- How does he or she express their understanding of hearing God in their spirit – their view of their divine nature?
- Of what are they afraid? This is a question of vulnerability and mortality.
- What and/or who is telling them who they are? This is a question of identity and self-understanding.
- What does it mean for them to feel 'naked'? This is a question of feeling defenceless or unprotected.

In the context of this story, God asks Adam one of the most important questions a pastoral counsellor may ask his or her counselee: 'who told you that you were naked?' In other words, what are the sources from which we draw the meaning of our life? Of all the questions God could ask 'Adam' at that particular moment, why ask him 'who told you that you were naked?' I am suggesting that a question such as this one is one that a pastoral counsellor may also ask as it comes from the pastoral counsellor engaging in a 'deep listening, understanding and reflection' process (Mollica 2013:34) and this process characterises the nature of a potentially transformative dialogue that is at the heart of pastoral counselling and care. It is pastoral love in action. Deep listening requires the listener to have empathy for or 'feeling into' the feelings and attitudes of the person whom they are trying to help (Jackson 1999:87). Jackson (1999) further characterises empathetic listening:

The effective healer in the realm of psychological healing has tended to be someone who has been interested in talking with and listening to the other person. And these inclinations have been grounded in an interest in other people and a curiosity about them. Further, such healers have had a capacity for caring about and being concerned about others, particularly about those who were ill, troubled or distressed. The sufferer has tended to seek out an interested, concerned healer responsive to the distress, who would minister to his or her ailments and bring relief, if not cure. Sufferers yearn to be listened to, to be taken seriously, and to be understood, crucial aspects of the healing process. (p. 93)

The impact upon those with whom pastoral counsellors work can last long beyond the professional relationship they have with their counselees. The process of their work together can therefore be a way that love is expressed by the counsellor and experienced by his or her counselee. What then are some of the fundamental convictions and values that undergird the work of pastoral counselling and the nature of the dialogue or conversation between pastoral counsellors and those whom they counsel?

## Listening love: An underlying value of pastoral counselling

Even if in any given society all of its social and supportive institutions were functioning at their ideal conception, we as

human beings would, from time to time, struggle with our experiences of our human limitations, unfulfilled aspirations and ways by which our relationships with other people leave us frustrated. Balancing the fulfilment of our need for intimacy and connectedness with time to be alone is a part of our dance of life. Any number of things can interrupt and/or obstruct our efforts to live a meaningful life. Making meaning of our lives and discerning our own essence and value and coping with the reality of death is a part of our ongoing human agenda that we cannot attend to alone. We are always selves-in-relationship to other people and to nature itself. We become who we are as a result of our relationships with others. In this sense, we are made and healed in relationships just as we can also be destroyed by relationships (Rosenberger 2014; Streets 2014).

There will be a need for pastoral counsellors as long as these human situations exist. We need others to speak to and listen to us. Our need to listen and talk to one another and the healing that we can derive from having such conversations is becoming increasingly important as we allow technology – and our preoccupation with texting and emailing other people whilst we are physically with someone else – to intervene and sometimes interfere with our need to pay attention to one another. The space that the counsellor and counselee shares that is uninterrupted by technology facilitates their communication with one another.

Tillich (1963:28) describes this listening aspect of our relating to one another in a helping relationship as 'listening love'. I consider this one of the essential acts performed by pastoral counsellors. Tillich (1963:28) writes that listening love is: 'one of the decisive characteristics of love that listens sensitively and reacts spontaneously'. His use of the word 'spontaneously' refers to our natural and immediate response to those situations and people in need of help. I interpret Tillich's use of the word 'spontaneously' as applied to pastoral counselling as the ability of the counsellor to be fully present with those he or she is counselling and allowing their empathy for the counselee to facilitate the pastoral counsellors' disciplined and informed immediate response to his or her counselee's concerns.

Pastoral counselling normally focuses on individuals, couples and/or families and not the wider social context that may also be contributing to the counselees' concerns. Tillich (1963) further advances the idea of Max Wertheimer that 'things cry'. By this, Tillich (1963:28) indicated that 'situations have a voiceless voice'. I take him to mean by this that, like an animal, who cannot communicate using human language, we have to therefore develop techniques and methods of examining the animal to determine its physical condition. The pastoral counsellor has to use his or her listening skills, knowledge and experiences and what the counselee has to teach them about who they are and what it is that they are struggling with in order for them to see, hear and interpret the conditions or 'situations' in which the counselee find themselves and how these are impacting their lives. We are not only selves-in-relationship with others but we are also selves-in-relationship to our environments.

This kind of listening love guards us against the danger of objectifying those whom the pastoral counsellor seeks to help. This is a problem in all of the counselling and helping professions where the professional refers to the client, patient or counselee as a symptom, or by the name of the disease from which they are suffering instead of as 'Mr or Mrs Smith' with a certain diagnoses or condition. Tillich's (1963) warning to social workers can apply to pastoral counsellors of being seduced into becoming a 'dilettante psychoanalyst' by having a mechanistic view and approach to understanding and helping other human beings. Such an orientation:

... made the social worker into a dilettante psychoanalyst, just as the minister in the alliance of religion and psychological counseling is in danger of establishing himself as a minor psychoanalyst – an attitude against which I have warned my students of theology for thirty years now. (Tillich 1963:30)

Listening love requires that the pastoral counsellor give up trying to control or determine the course the counselee will take in addressing his or her problem, or the feeling that he or she must have and provide all of the answers his or her counselee may ask. Their listening love implies that the counsellor not only sees similarities and differences between those whom she or he counsels but also recognises the right and freedom people have to make choices about how they will live their lives. This affirmation of the counselee by the counsellor can facilitate a feeling of mutual love or 'positive resonance' (Fredrickson 2013:17) between the two of them and can lead to a possible transformation in both the counsellor and counselee. A real connection to the counselee, or what Tillich (1963:30) called 'a point of communion', is what facilitates their counselee's healing and/or further thriving. Jackson (1999) observes:

... The attentive listening of a concerned and interested healer has frequently had a compelling effect on the sufferer ... The very process of the sufferer's confiding, in turn, commonly has had a compelling effect on the listening healer. The listening and the talking, the talking and the listening, have had a mutual attachment effect. (p. 94)

Through either Tillich's notion of *communion* or Jackson's idea of *mutual attachment* mentioned above, the healer and the sufferer learn more about themselves in the process of talking and listening to one another.

Jesus seems to never have had a minor or trivial conversation with anyone with whom he spoke, as reported in the New Testament. The Gospel writers never depict Jesus as just talking with others about the weather. Every dialogue between Jesus and someone else mattered both to him and to the person or group of people with whom he was speaking. A conversation between two people can result in each of them being profoundly impacted by what they say to one another. The power of such communication and how it connects us to one another and to ourselves and to God is remarkable. It is also somewhat a mystery as to how human dialogue can negatively impact us or promote our well-being.

Some of the aims of a pastoral relationship and conversation as an expression of love are: to bring some sense of relief to the one who is suffering, to encourage human agency, for the counselee to foster a healthy sense of self and interdependence and for the counselee to consider that he or she is an image of God (the *imago Dei*).

## Pastoral care: Coping with and transforming trauma

Just as a theory of love and nonviolence can become embodied in people, our belief in God can become a personal experience. Love, nonviolence and justice are attributes of pastoral caring that the counselee can experience as real. This healing work is extremely important when the pastoral counsellor is helping someone who has been traumatised (Jones 2009). Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2008) remind us of the powerful impact a traumatic experience can have upon individuals:

Narrating one's life is about finding structure, coherence and meaning in life. Trauma, in contrast, is about the shattering of life's narrative structure, about a loss of meaning – the traumatised person has 'lost the plot'. A fundamental issue concerning trauma is the regaining of meaning after trauma, the rewriting of one's life narrative to incorporate the traumatic loss in the new narrative. (p. 6)

Individuals, families, communities and entire nations can be impacted by traumatic events such as mass murder, civil unrest, disease, famine and war, as well as by events of less magnitude that are embedded in the vicissitudes of our common life, or our existential condition as human beings (Epstein 2013). Being able to talk with someone whom we sense cares about us and in an atmosphere that is safe can help us feel supported and some relief as we carry the weight of what burdens us. This feeling of buoyancy can lead to creating options for how we might handle the problems we are facing and this can increase our sense of being empowered. The thought that we should be able to resolve many of our life's challenges alone reinforces the narrative of being the 'rugged individualist' that is prominent in parts of the world. Helping the counselee to see our mutual dependence upon one another as an asset rather than as a personal liability or weakness can foster their capacity to ask for help and see the value of being in community with others. Our failures and disappointments can blur our self-value, detracting from the creation of a healthy self-image and making it difficult for us to remember that we are created by God whose image we as human beings reflect. When the counselees experience pastoral counselling as love, or when its aims as indicated above are seen as values that guide its practice, then pastoral counselling and care as a form of love, according to Tillich (1963):

... transcends the limits of its techniques. It is certainly understandable that this aim is not always conscious to those who have the burden of the daily work. It may be of inspiration to us to think that we contribute to the ultimate aim of being itself in our small way – and every individual's way is small ... In helping every individual to find the place where he can

consider himself as necessary, you help to fulfill the ultimate aim of man and his world, namely, the universal community of all beings in which any individual aim is taken into the universal aim of being itself. (p. 65)

I like Tillich's (1963) notion of 'feeling necessary', which he qualifies in the following way:

Being necessary is, of course, never absolute. Nobody is indispensable. Nevertheless, somebody who does not feel necessary at all, who feels that he is a mere burden, is on the edge of total despair ... There are many reasons for every effect, but one of the reasons for this is that in our secularized society one thing is lost, namely, that, whatever their external destiny may be, people no longer have an eternal orientation, an orientation which is independent of space and time. It is the feeling of having a necessary, incomparable, and unique place within the whole of being. The easy way in which politically we are playing now with collective suicide is analogous to the phenomenon of individuals who have lost the feeling of a necessary place, not only in their work and community, but also in the universe as a whole. (p. 30)

A personal conversation that has as one of its objectives to help the counselee to feel 'necessary' does not exclude exploring the limitations, weaknesses of our human nature and how religion – any religion – understands human sin.

## Listening: Bridging practical theology, pastoral counselling and Postmodernism

According to Van Wyk (1995):

Practical theology is intent on being part of the theological sciences. Although practical theologians would admit that it is a 'how-science', its role is not that of searching for techniques or for rules on how to conduct religious meetings, etc. It is a procedure which involves scientific researching and description of certain events and communicative actions. Practical theology cannot accept the claims sometimes made by other theological disciplines to the effect that they produce universal theories which can open up reality in its entirety and which are capable of interpreting all phenomena. According to this view, practical theology makes no contribution to the epistemology of the theological disciplines. Rather, practical theology is intent on being the theory of practice. It is intimately concerned with praxis in worship and faith. However, its approach to praxis is not pragmatic, but critical-analytical. (p. 17)

Müller (2005) asserts that:

Practical Theology happens whenever and wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God. There are obviously various levels of Practical Theology. It can be very spontaneous, informal and local. It can also be very formal, systematic and organized. It can be part of ministerial activities on the congregational level, or it can be highly academic on university level. In any case, it is always guided by the moment of praxis (always local, embodied, and situated). (p. 2)

A narrative-based approach to doing theological research is central to Müller's (2003) conception of practical theology

and is another way of understanding and using a qualitative method as a research paradigm:

The aim of research is to listen to stories and to be drawn into those stories. We do not strive for objectivity, but rather for subjective integrity, with a method of participatory interaction. (p. 7)

Furthermore, referring to the work of Pattison and Woodward, Müller's (2003) notion of pastoral or practical theology is:

At its best, like cultural anthropology ... It needs to pay minute attention to seeing and understanding a particular phenomenon and to listen before moving into carefully chosen words. Contextuality and situationally sensitive pastoral theologies will be modest in their claims and assertions. (p. 7)

Müller's description of practical theology affirms the art and science of pastoral counselling, or what Wise (1983) advocated as pastoral psychotherapy, and restores to it its religious values orientation, as well as the importance of the multiple meanings of its context of practice and the active role that both the pastoral counsellor and his or her counselee, or what Müller (2005) refers to as researcher and co-researcher, play in the listening-healing relationship.

So much can be said in just a few words and so much meaning can be implied by a few words that are either sung, spoken and/or written. A conversation between two people can affect their quality of life. A conversation can be 'crucial' because it can be 'transformative' (Patterson *et al.* 2002:2). A postmodern approach to understanding pastoral counselling is ever evolving because its dynamic encourages that the pastoral counsellor see the counselee as the pastoral counsellor's teacher. Both of them seriously take into account their cultural, gender-based, social, political, economic and sexual orientation that help to shape how they each see themselves and the nature of human suffering and potential. Each of Müller's (2005) seven movements in his 'A postfoundationalist HIV-positive practical theology' paper are involved in the understanding and interpretive process of pastoral counselling and care and provide aid at each stage of deep listening, understanding and reflection. Remaining curious, suspending judgement about the value of a phenomenon, an emotion or thought, embracing a 'not knowing stance' when in the presence of those who are suffering or troubled and holding in balance valuing the scientific search for truth with the beauty that is embedded in the art of human beings listening and responding to one another as they investigate the meaning each gives to their experiences, are all acts of love. This way of discovering new knowledge, ways of knowing or a new epistemology is an outcome of this kind of loving relationship between the counsellor and counselee (i.e. co-researchers).

It can be argued that Wise's (1983) definition of psychotherapy, given earlier and restated here, is a traditional or foundational developed world conception of what psychotherapy means:

By psychotherapy we mean a process, engaged in by two or more persons in which one is accepted as a healer or helper,

who aims at assisting the other to change feelings, attitudes, and behavior, or, in other words, become in some ways a different person. Psychotherapy deals with intrapsychic processes, with interpersonal relationships, and with the person's response to his total environment, including his cultural milieu. (p. 3)

It implies that the counsellor who operates from this framework brings to bear on his or her interpretation of the counselee's story a judgement about how and what 'feelings', 'attitudes' and 'behaviour' the counselee wishes to change; that, in fact, changing the counselee is the goal of the conversation. In this model of treatment, the reality of the counselee is reconstructed by the interpretive reality of the counsellor. Cornett's (1998) understanding of psychotherapy in relationship to a counselee's view of spirituality can be applied to other beliefs or views a counselee holds and is a slightly different expectation of a goal of therapy than that advocated by Wise. Cornett (1998) writes:

One of the most helpful things that therapy can do with regard to spirituality is not to change a client's view but to amplify it or bring it into sharper focus so that the client may scrutinize it more carefully and decide whether it truly fits the individual circumstance of life. (p. 38)

Cornett's approach to doing psychotherapy reflects a postfoundationalist-like perspective on the nature of a counselling relationship. The rationalist or scientific positivism paradigm is dominant in developed world thought. This philosophical orientation has value and should be respected but it is only one way of interpreting human experience. The emphasis Cornett (1998:12) cautions us about is that: 'human behavior is explainable, predictable, and ultimately controllable with accurate knowledge and the application of that knowledge' limits our exploration and understanding of how the historical and cultural context of people and groups construct and live into the reality they create. There is no purely objective conception or research orientation to the development of any theory or to practical theology. It seems to me that a more diverse methodology of working with people and perspective on interpreting human experience is looked upon with suspicion by some academics and practical theologians. This is unfortunate.

## Pastoral theological thinking and Postmodernism as black theology

The attempt to have a meta, or an overall and overreaching, theory and method of helping people to fit all groups can be less than helpful and even harmful to some people and communities. In the USA during the 1970s and 1980s, for example, a theological discourse emerged as black theology or the black liberation theology movement. This movement revolutionised theological education and ministerial practices in the USA and influenced the black struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Cone (1969:120) wrote, 'Black Theology knows no authority more binding than the experience of oppression itself. This alone must be the ultimate authority in religious matters.' Cone later (1970) defined theology as:

a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. (p. 66)

Howard Thurman (1976), much earlier in his *Jesus and the disinherited*, proposed a theology of God being on the side of the oppressed and the need for African-Americans and the church as a whole to interpret the life and teaching of Christ to confront and transform the situation of a racist society in which both black and white people found themselves. In a real sense, the work of scholars such as Thurman and Cone predates the idea of a postfoundational perspective of doing theological research and practical theology. Critiques and supporters of Cone's propositions are too numerous to justly review here.

Like Cone and Thurman, Wimberly (1979, 1982, 2000, 2006) and Martin and Martin (1995, 2002) advance a theological hermeneutical reflexive praxis and practice of pastoral and counselling care of African-Americans in the context of their situation of oppression in America. Wimberly's (2006) comment is worth noting fully here as a further example of postmodern practical theological thinking:

In this context of internalized racism, the role of pastoral counseling is to enable individuals, married couples, families and mediating structures that bridge between the individual and the wider society to edit or re-author the negative internalized stories and identities that African Americans have embraced. The editing needs to facilitate and enable us to participate fully in society. Such editing is understood as *a practice of the self* that enables individuals and small groups of people to alter the way they have been recruited into identities that are oppressive and self-destructive. Editing is also a *practice of care* exhibited by caregivers who create safe environments and provide help and prompting in understanding evil of the past and the possibilities for the future that are necessary for persons to revise and re-author the internalized negative stories frustrating their growth and development. Practices of the self and practices of care are inherently political processes ... The terms 'practice of self and practices of care' are rooted in the practices of conversation and recruiting. (pp. 22, 23)

## Pastoral care and parish ministry: A postmodern approach

Parish ministers are sometimes called upon to offer pastoral counselling to others when they least expect to have to offer such a service. The phone rings and the voice on the other end belong to a person who shares with them that they are having suicidal thoughts but not a plan to act on them. Another person calls and indicates that they wish to be prayed for only to reveal that they have been through a traumatic experience. A woman, not a member of my congregation, called me late one evening and said that her husband was drunk and was holding her hostage with a gun pointed at her. He told her that she could make one phone call. She called me. This happened many years ago before we had cell phones or email capacity and so we were on the only one phone line we had at the time. Therefore, I was not

able to use a different phone to call for emergency assistance whilst talking to her. I immediately asked her to put him on the phone. A conversation between us lasting over an hour ended when he fell asleep whilst talking to me. I then told his wife to take the gun, get out of the house and call the police, which she did.

In the early 1980s, I was visiting a congregant, Rob (not his real name), about whom I have written before (Streets 2008, 2013), a young man in his early thirties who was in the hospital with AIDS. He was having a difficult time during the period in which my hospital visit with him occurred. At a point when there was a pause in our conversation, he broke what seemed to be a respite silence and asked me: 'do you love me?' I responded, 'Yes, as a brother in Christ.' This was my honest and sincere reply and it seemed to please him. Sometime earlier he had visited with me in my office where he shared with me his diagnosis of having AIDS. We only saw one another once in this context. I also visited with him and his parents in their home soon after his visit with me in my office. They were loving and supportive of their son. A few days after seeing him in the hospital he died.

Upon his initial visit with me at my office, Rob told me that he came because he felt it was 'safe' for him to share his condition with me after hearing me preach about AIDS and the need for us to be compassionate towards those with HIV or AIDS. It seemed that he was also saying to me that 'safe' meant to him that he would not be judged by me as being a bad person for whom his diagnosis of AIDS was a judgement from God because of his sexual orientation and having contracted HIV. I assured him of my support and expectation that he would remain involved and visible at the church as long as he felt able to do so.

I continue to reflect on the time we spent together and at his bedside in the hospital. Parish ministers often have similar but brief significant conversations with people who are suffering. His question to me whilst I was visiting with him in the hospital, 'do you love me?' caught me by surprise because I thought the way I had been reaching out to him and his comfort with me expressed my loving acceptance of him as a person. Time did not permit us to explore how he may have re-authored (White 2007, 2011) his life had he lived longer. Within this time limitation and our 'thin' conversation, one could see Müller's (2005) seven movement process unfolding, with each step requiring deep listening, understanding and reflection. These seven steps briefly noted are:

- Specific context is described – Rob is an African-American man in his early thirties living with AIDS and in the hospital.
- Experiences recounted within this context – Rob as an African-American gay man in the 1980s and active member of a Baptist congregation.
- Collaborative interpretation of these experiences – Rob seeing the minister and church as a safe person and space.
- Experiences are described and informed by the various traditions of interpretation operating in the context – Rob's question of, 'do you love me?'

- Religious and spirituality are explored in the specific situation – Rob wondering, 'what does God think of me as a gay person?'
- Interdisciplinary reflection on the description of the experience – what does the Bible, theology and psychology and the American black church and wider communities have to offer Rob?
- Alternative interpretations that go beyond the local community – the church rallies around Rob and starts an AIDS outreach ministry.

It seemed that Rob was trying to re-story (White & Epston 1990; Wimberly 2006) his life before he came to see me as his pastor. This was, at the time, my best tentative impression, hypothesis or theory about what Rob was framing as our conversation. He impacted the congregation and his death resulted in their starting an HIV and AIDS outreach ministry. I continue to reflect upon my experience with him and its impact upon my meaning of ministry and pastoral relationships. The question, 'do you love me?' is a provocative and profound question that anyone could ask another person. Rob and congregants like him become for pastors, even posthumously, their co-researcher in creating a meaning of human suffering and flourishing. If the opportunity had presented itself, part of my conversation with Rob would have focused upon his understanding of himself as an African-American gay man and how his view of himself informed the meaning of liberation and what would have been our work together and understanding of God's presence. This would have been explored along with the traditional notions of guiding, sustaining, reconciling and healing found in the historical framework of the meaning of pastoral care.

### Pastoral relationship

Tillich (1963) reminds us that as an attribute of loving those whom the pastoral counsellor seeks to help, the counsellor must know the counselee. To know just the facts about a counselee is primarily to treat him or her as an object. This is done in:

detachment, through an empirical approach. The second is done through participation in the inner self of the other one. The first is unavoidable, but never enough in human relations. The second gives the real knowledge, but it is a gift given alone to the intuition of love. No amount of actual knowledge about each other can replace the intuition of love, which remains love even if it judges. (Tillich 1963:29)

Tillich's intuitive love reflects Fredrickson's (2013:17) idea of love as 'a reflected motive to invest in each other's well-being that brings mutual care'.

It is by loving that the pastoral counsellor listens and engages in his or her reflection upon theology, the Bible, the healing rituals of the church, the lived experiences of those whom he or she seeks to help, as well as his or her own, and a mutual sharing of him or herself with others, that the pastoral counsellor comes to know those whom he or she seeks to

help. This understanding of love in action undergirds and guides pastoral care and counselling as practical theology.

## Postmodern pastoral care: Operationalising love

Love as the capacity to stimulate a *positive resonance* in ourselves and with other human beings is shown by scientific research (Fredrickson 2013) to be the most generative, creative and healing of all our emotions. The emotion of love can be researched and theories about the meaning of love can be advanced. We must be careful not to privilege one set of lenses, scientific or philosophical, in our approach to understanding our experiences. The experience of love has to be learned and nurtured. This is at the heart of the ethics of offering pastoral counselling to those seeking help from a religious counsellor. Pastoral counselling is a constituent of practical theology. Love of our fellow human beings ought to be the queen motive of helping professionals in general, whether or not they are religious. However, love is more than a concept to be reflected upon theologically. It is the witness of the church that love has to be lived as it was embodied in the life of Christ. In this way love's aim is as Tillich (1963:29) suggests: 'descends to misery and ugliness and guilt in order to elevate.'

Practical theology involves doing research, using empirical data and the use of self, all of which requires an authentic investment by the practical theologian or pastoral counsellor. According to Setleis (1975):

To be authentic is to know oneself in terms of one's self-definition that can be affirmed in the engagement with either the phenomenon that is the object of one's scholarship or the object of one's practice. It is in accordance with one's self-definition that either phenomenon it ordered and rendered meaningful. Scholarship and practice require different uses of the authentic self. (p. 9)

The competences of empathy, listening skills and our use of our theological, biblical, psychological knowledge and insights about the relationship between a person and their environment and their existential situation considered from multiple sources and disciplines and perspectives, along with our self-awareness and the 'conscious use of our professional selves' (Rosenthal 1979:3) in practice, are the means to the end which is love.

Linzer (1978) states that:

William Rosenthal has elaborated different levels of awareness upon which human behavior is predicated. The naive or natural attitude is absorbed in one's doing or experience without standing back or reflecting on it. When the natural attitude has been jogged, either through the client's intervention or by self-generation of the professional, a level of reflective awareness has been achieved. This is what is meant by consciousness of self and it is a second level of awareness. The conscious use of this self, or the professional self, is realized in the selectivity and control of second level awareness of acting and doing, based on a set of values. The social worker's conscious use of self-entails

affirmative action in relation to the client and actions of restraint on self needs, e.g. to give solutions, express irritation with the client and desire to control. (p. 310)

In the USA, the work of Schoen (1983) addressed the meaning of professional practice. Carroll (1986), considering the research of Schoen, raised three concerns about the professional model of the practice of ministry:

... Among the liabilities of the professional model is its tendency to foster a sense of the professional as set apart from the laity, just as it can also encourage creation of a dependent laity. (p. 11)

Carroll's (1986) second caution is when the practice of ministry is to adopt psychological and sociological theories and methods and apply them to ministerial or pastoral practices as the sources of professional ministerial authority, identity and functions. This practice becomes divorced from or devoid of a 'critically thought out theological vision that gives coherence to the functions' (Carroll 1986:12) and runs the risk of not being the church or addressing the values, ethics and morals that are important to its witness.

The third pause Carroll (1986) introduces is:

With its heavy emphasis on acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for competent ministry, the professional model of ministry neglects the calling of ministers and the formation of their spiritual life. The result is often competent pastors ... who lack the spiritual authenticity and integrity that have been associated with both the sacramental and evangelical models of ministry ... the minister's relationship to God has priority. (p. 13)

A postfoundational perspective and approach to practical theology and pastoral counselling and care takes the context of the counselee (co-researcher), and the relationship she or he has with their pastoral counsellor, seriously and examines the meaning the counselee gives to their experiences, interpreting them in light of the perspectives that are relevant from a variety of additional sources and disciplines. This is the transversal character of the work between the counsellor and counselee of creating knowledge. Müller's (2005) seven movements in this process, mentioned earlier, reinforce the theological integrity of this work as a reflection of the values of the church. Muller's (2008) orientation to practical theology includes the three following guiding questions, (1) 'What are the concerns of the counselee?', (2) 'How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the interdisciplinary table?' and (3) 'Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by researchers from other disciplines?'. This method and these questions are potential correctives to Carroll's (1986) abovementioned three concerns about the professional practice of ministry losing its Christian theological focus and values. One of those values is love, as I have proposed here.

The postmodern definitions and descriptions of practical and pastoral theology and the narrative (story) approach to counselling discussed here are in addition to, rather than a substitute for, many of the historical or traditional ways of

doing research, interpreting data and applying the results of these endeavours in an effort to interpret the meaning of a phenomenon and assist others. Taking a tentative versus a curious and exploratory stance rather than a perspective that sees the limitations and contribution that each of them has and can make to the other, narrows a theological vision of the human meaning-making experience and its inherent uniqueness or specificity, messiness, diversity and paradox. This aspect of human experience is mine by a narrative and interdisciplinary approach to thinking and doing practical theology.

## Conclusion

### Pastoral theology: Multiple perspectives

So much of our understanding of the experiences of others would be severely limited if these other 'ways of knowing' (i.e. postfoundationalist practical and pastoral counselling and care theology, black theology and black liberation theology, feminist and womanist theology) were not a part of our toolkit of learning more about other people and ourselves. Our discerning the nature of God and the witness of the church in our time (context) and situation are embedded in these methods and theoretical orientations to our doing researching and theological reflection upon the various meanings of faith and practices of ministry.

It is most important that the pastoral counsellor allow and create the space for those whom they seek to help (the co-researcher) to teach them about and the meaning of what they are experiencing. This requires that pastoral counsellors increase their awareness and be intentional in our practice of loving others and themselves. Pastoral counsellors contribute through loving in their own small way, not only to the possibility of helping other human beings to love themselves and to flourish but also to do the will of God for humankind. God's will is that we love one another. It is inspiring to consider that pastoral counsellors, those whom they counsel and the field of practical theology using the framework discussed here as postfoundationalism can foster our love for God, ourselves and one another.

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