

# **INCORPORATING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND PASTORAL CARE IN MODERN CHRISTIAN LIVING**

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### **Abstract**

This paper argues that pastoral care in the modern Church should adopt a multifaceted approach by embracing three aspects: pastoral care; psychosocial support services; and, counselling psychological services. This is because the present Christian Church has to contend with several aspects of modern living. The evangelical pastoral care role will in turn include comprehensive strategic services such as home based care, counselling and psychotherapy so as to enhance psychological support services that take on board the challenges of our contemporary society.

*Key words: Pastoral counselling and care, counselling psychology services, contemporary society*

### **Preamble**

Pastoral work may in certain instances appear to be at odds with the prevailing modern culture. This is because religion and faith per se and its insistence on spiritualism, the ultimate power of God and other values may be seen to be challenged by the present scientific and technological advancement, technological efficiency and sophisticated techniques governed by our present lives. The vast majority of people in the world today, especially in the developed world, might slowly have ignored faith, while others in the developing world appear to be quietly sweeping religion aside. We may be slowly so overwhelmed by ‘modern technology religion’ that we perceive can resolve our life challenges or issues and in far reaching circumstances fail to turn back to the power of our creation. The momentum of this increasingly depersonalised culture has intensified with modern forms of seeking help, or healing such as medicine and counselling psychological services. And, perhaps this requires us to merge more than ever, pastoral care with modernity.

I should make it clear at the outset that this is a short presentation and I shall be primarily concerned only with how counselling psychology can be incorporated in religion. More discussions about religion and philosophical foundations are peripheral to my subject. I shall therefore keep to religion and counselling psychological services in the context of traditional-cum-contemporary societies focusing particularly on Kenya.

## **Rationale for Counselling and Pastoral Care**

It is best to begin by setting the records straight; pastoral care is the sole prerogative of the religious leader, the pastor if you like. Pastoral care involves preaching, teaching and the guiding in worship. Additionally, it has the leadership role in the church and hence guidance and counselling on religion faith and spiritualism. Pastoral care involves caring of the soul; it is the pastors' calling, a core function and a role in the pastor's life and work. Part of pastoral care is pastoral counselling, the guidance and counselling based on the religion and faith. Understandably, a lot of pastoral care and counselling is carried out in the preaching and teaching of the religious faith, doctrines and overall religious philosophy – the pastor is a role model of their faith. This is why there is pastoral counselling since issues presented in life and/or therapy has implications on religion and spiritualism.

The Bible mentions the words counsel in several verses depending on the translation. There is also word 'guide'. Let me just concentrate on a few verses that precipitate the pastoral counselling role in the word 'counsel':

1. First seek the counsel of the Lord (1 Kings 22:5)
2. Walk in the counsel of the wicked (Psalms 1:1)
3. You guide me with your counsel (Psalms 73:24)
4. Despised the counsel of the Most High (Psalms 107:11)
5. Counsel and sound judgement are mine (Proverbs 8:14)
6. Plans fail for lack of counsel (Proverbs 15:22)
7. Wonderful in counsel and magnificent (Isaiah 28:29)
8. The whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27).
9. So I counsel young widows to marry (1 Timothy 5:14)
10. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined (Revelation 3:18).

My argument of the need to align pastoral care with modernity has three powerful reasons. In the first place, counselling psychological services are not as such confined to the experience of the secular, and neither is religion restricted to sacredness. Instead, there are clear instances where pastoral care is actually a means of extending counselling psychological services. In that case, people have tended to turn to religion or counselling psychology interchangeably and altogether, both acknowledge an association with each other.

Secondly, and more importantly arising from the above, is the conviction that pastoral care more accurately conveys the dual emphasis on the client's phenomenological world. The therapeutic activity in pastoral care is essentially the development of a relationship between the spiritual and the cognitive self; the religious and secular world are of equal importance in the forging of a relationship with the self, and with others, which will serve the needs and interests of the client. The concept of relational vigour between the spiritual and the cognitive has great significance in psychopathology. This is because the human person is at depth working toward a place in the universe that is predominantly a spiritual, as well as social environment. At best, pastoral care is essentially a relationship between the concepts in the self; the spiritual and the social, both of whom are communicated to moving towards greater fullness of being.

The third reason concerns the trends in modern development. The world is both spiritual and secular. The situation in the World, in Africa and the in Kenya has taken a complex turn which renders the field of pastoral care more complex. There has been an immense advancement in technology, more diseases can be cured than was possible at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and hunger and poverty should be a thing of the past. However, there have been several challenges as well. The emergence and spread of the HIV and AIDS epidemic has presented an unprecedented task, environmental degradation is on the increase and disasters are more profound if not more prominent. Those offering pastoral care must therefore reflect on their own practice as we invariably experience an encounter between counselling and religion, and we must in turn attempt at a more richly expressive experience that penetrate the heart.

Counselling is significant and the best summary is found in 2 Corinthians 1:3 - 4:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

It can be deduced that counselling is a calling that exalts God who is the source of relieve and comforts recapitulated as follows:

- (i) We must exalt God in all our works, '*Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus.*'
- (ii) God is the source of all comfort 'father of mercies', '*God of all comfort.*'
- (iii) It is God who comforts us '*comforts us in all our tribulation.*'
- (iv) Pastors must comfort others, that is, those in pain, suffering and afflicted, '*able to comfort those who are in any trouble.*'

The central role of religiousness and spirituality in human life as well as the importance of psychological research on these topics is clearly outlined by Paloutzian and Park (2005) but for the purpose of this paper, we will briefly mention the main characteristics of transient societies of our context and the content. In the end, pastors must find out what is plausible in religion and faith and even, as they have been propounded, they must identify what is unacceptable in that certain religions, sects or faith may contain contradictions and other logical inadequacies.

### **Traditional-cum-contemporary societies: Religion in a transient transition**

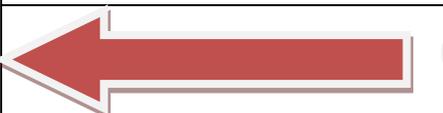
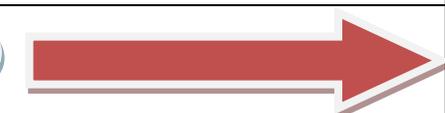
<b>Period</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Traditions</b>	<b>Remarks</b>	<b>Critique</b>
<i>Pre-colonization</i>	<i>Sacred + Secular</i>		<i>Religion and traditions were exceedingly intertwined.</i>	<i>Certain traditions such as killing of twins and other forms of human sacrifice were harsh. Cruel and retrogressive.</i>
<i>Colonization</i>	<i>Missionaries and evangelization, exploration and colonisation</i>	<i>Seen as primitive, several customs and beliefs discarded</i>	<i>A new religion, Christianity was highly opposed to traditions (both religion and customs).</i>	<i>Christianity argues for a need to discard various religions and customs. This led to suppression of traditional customs</i>
<i>Independence and a new world order, modernity</i>	<i>Christianity, Islam and other religions</i>	<i>Freedom and a need to identify with traditional philosophy</i>	<i>Acquisition of freedom and self rule was an opportunity to review the influence of the new religion and colonization.</i>	<i>People had moved from traditional to the new religion. It is possible that the zealotness in religion was maintained except the change in faith and spiritualism.</i>

It is possible that some scholars will make a distinction between primitive religion and higher religion. For the purpose of this paper, primitive religion refers to the more traditional religion with various rites and rituals some of which in several ways may be incongruent with modernity. On the other hand, higher religions incorporate (or should integrate) more rationale including human rights issues. The reason why I delved a bit into religion is because pastors must be careful with issues presented for therapy, especially when the issue or problem has religious, faith or spiritual significance or implications. These include beliefs and practices. In my view, this implies precious comparison, as well as critical analysis. It is unnecessary for me to point out the inadequacies of one or other point of view or what are acceptable beliefs and practices especially since one cannot make a general statement about religion or social phenomena.

Psychology too cannot be prescriptive after all. This is because there is the emotion, and social psychological function and the interpretation may be diverse. This is because there are people who

remain traditionally inclined to their religious traditions (curses, traditional ceremonies, religious procedures and/or rituals) while there are those who practice a more moderate approach. There are still others who are overzealous and interpret modernity within an entirely faith doctrine (apocalypse, fate, life and death, health and wellness). It can be argued that religion and spiritualism could be in three phases.

### Expression of Religion and Faith: Conventionalism or Over-Zealousness

Ancient / Pagan Worship	Moderate / Modest Religion	Overzealousness / Extremism
		
<p><i>This consists of convinced religious ceremonies, rites and / or rituals of passage such as exorcism, circumcision of girls, animal and/or human sacrifice as a means of pleasing the gods</i></p>	<p><i>A person is likely to be more logical and aligned to reason. s/he is sensitive to the feelings and rights of others while at the same time committed to their faith</i></p>	<p><i>Person is overzealous and goes to the extreme of faith such as hanging self on the cross to imitate Christ, acts of aggression to promote a faith or seeks prayer for healing by refusing to adhere to prescribed medical care all in the name of faith or religion.</i></p>

Interpretations are different and can be made on diverse levels. Likewise there is no reason why people cannot make several different explanations of the same phenomenon, for example, illness, childlessness, death or suffering, misfortunes; people will have different explanations of the same type of phenomenon at different levels, or on the same level. Religion and spiritualism is a part of it and hence its ultimate significance.

### Pastoral Counselling and Care, and Psychotherapy in Contemporary Society

For many people, religion is at odds with the prevailing culture, including counselling psychology. There are people growing up that are convinced religion has no place in our hearts, and in our lives. These groups are persuaded that there are quick answers and many possible solutions in the technological dominance of the civilized world.

Pastoral of the religion have to underpin themselves for the reception of values and ideas that altogether consciously take in the role of pastoral care in the contemporary society. There are various challenges that depict the desperate plight that has engulfed our world. I will name a few:

- The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in September, 2001
- Conflicts in Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq

- Post election violence in Kenya in 2007
- Earthquakes and floods in America, Japan and other areas
- Nuclear accidents and the spread of cancerous illnesses
- Middle east conflict between Israel and Palestinians
- Discontent in Iran, North Korea, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.
- Environmental degradation and global warming
- The advancement in the economies of China and India

These humpy and other incidents are a reflection of both a competitive society undergoing immense changes, some planned, many others haphazard or rather outside our sphere of influence. The momentum of this increasingly depersonalised culture tends also to intensify the extent to which the young generation is growing up and knows nothing other than the fanaticism of a ‘lack of religion’ or the ‘submergence in computers and Internet’, including emails, face book, computer games, television, mobile phones, videos and DVDs, pump music and other forms of entertainment. This rapacious technological culture governs the lives of a vast majority of young people and will gain momentum in the years to come.

It is important to examine critically the concept of what Paloutzian and Park (2005) call Religious Meaning Systems (RMS). This is because the pastor or member of the clergy in our traditional-cum-contemporary society is often confronted by persons who lean towards Christianity while at the same time cling to various traditions, yet lives in the modern world. Yet Christianity is a religion while traditional societies had their religious beliefs. Paloutzian and Park (2005) argued that religion should be conceived in terms of religious meaning systems, that is, as a subset of meaning systems in general. In counselling psychology these comprise mental processes and hence will be a function of the social psychological and physiological perspectives. In terms of religion, a person’s faith or spirituality has relative importance to their live and in their interpretation of their world.

Thus, I am in agreement with Paloutzian and Park (2005) that our religiosity, consciously and/or nonconsciously has a direct effect on our spiritual (and for counselling psychological) perspective. This is because religion or faith has certain guidelines that regulate our behaviour, and these include our values and morals, beliefs and emotions, actions and reactions. Religion is therefore a part of us, albeit in an awkward sense since it is part of our affects and actions.

## **Application of Pastoral Counselling in Context**

There are many people in desperate plight in the world today. These include refugees and internally displaced persons, people who are sick and suffering, the hungry and others suffering from mental disorders, depression, frustration, drugs, alcohol and other substance of abuse, and numerous other forms of addiction. These add immeasurably to the fall in global market, increasing poverty coupled by an ever more demanding through expansive global world.

The net results of technological advancement, catastrophes and other forms of human suffering add to induce panic and pain, frustration and disappointment, anxiety and depression and a sense of insecurity. In such context, the Church has both a pastoral and social role to incorporate aspects of moral responsibility coupled with pastoral counselling, care and psychotherapy. Many people have often raised critical questions such as, does the church have a role in government policies? What is the role of spiritualism in a person's wellbeing, in family, mental care and other spheres of life? The psychological world has as a matter of course created a situation where the interest of the corporate society cannot be divulged from religion or the church. Impulsive solutions must be sort, and often at times imposed upon the proliferating problems of our society. The church in turn has an inherent potential and responsibility to regulate society in several areas of interpersonal involvement. This includes the Church, school, media, politics as well as other areas.

In an increasingly bleak world, the Church cannot, and will not despair. Instead, the Church must be convinced that the situation is now so dire that we must approach and adopt a paradigm shift that will align our role with the world. People must find in religion, especially through pastoral care the full vigour and a new source of strength and inspiration. People come to church to feel a sense of worth, the Bible and our faith offers the ultimate hope to people, and to the world. It is through religion that people are able to assess their self worth, and in turn access their own thoughts and feelings. Spiritualism allows meditation and a reflection of which we are, our relationship with the universe, our past, present and future. This is because people become increasingly conscious of their own vulnerability, and the existence of a greater more supreme power. This in turn renews the inner personal power. With that consciousness comes a new freedom to make decisions (these decisions must be wise and concrete as sought in help through counselling), and enable gain a sense of a purpose (counselling calls it insight). Perhaps that is why pastoral care and counselling are most transformative of all. Religion is at best an escape through discovery from loneliness in the world and the self and brings forth the experience of being in a relational depth.

The Church has to contend with these realities. Some of the issues may include the following:

- Poverty and social economic status including corruption in the developing world.
- HIV and AIDS, cancer and other terminal illnesses.
- Sexual orientation (even in our so called traditional setting, there are people who feel disorientated in their sexuality (so called male-female).
- Drugs, alcohol and other substances of abuse and other forms of addictions.
- Marriage and family, and therapy.
- Marginalised groups and other minorities, displaced groups including refugees and other vulnerable groups. These include girls and women, orphans, widows, the aged, persons with disabilities.
- Adolescence growth and sexuality especially in the era of HIV and AIDS and promiscuity.
- Pastoral care, spiritual growth and nourishment and the need to expand theology into psychology and philosophy (hence pastoral counselling, care and psychotherapy).

It is this experience of living the tenets of the pastoral care that drives me to suggest that pastoral care and counselling requires to be enhanced, and with impetus to professional practice. This can be demonstrated as follows:

### ***Structured Formalised Pastoral Counselling, Care and Psychotherapy***



The development into pastoral care, counselling and psychotherapy demonstrates a progression in which pastoral care and counselling together reach out to assist the client. This would enable pastors of religion (clergy) to grasp a hope that seems to lie beyond despair in the religion (spiritual realm), and merge it with the cognitive being (counselling psychology). This will daily confirm the power and efficacy of the approach we must embrace in psychological counselling that takes in pastoral care. This will in turn be based on both of theory of religion and psychological,

and discipline that merges our spiritual as well as our needs, a readiness really based on the process and importance of client counselling. The central argument to Rogers and in person centred counselling is that the client knows best; it is the client who knows what hurts, where the pain lies, and it is in the client who in the final analysis, will discover the way forward. The task of the counsellor is to be the kind companion. The counsellor relates to the client in such a way that the client can access their own wisdom and energy towards, and recover self direction.

In my view, the issue should clearly be a precise distinction of the role, that is: preaching or teaching, counselling or worship, pastoral care, counselling and psychotherapy, the care of the soul, private worship and as happens often at times a search for faith. The pastoral care culture will be a fast approaching the human spirit and mind that does not predispose a predicament. Instead, based largely on the person centred counselling, it will embrace empathy acceptance and congruence as central to the client counsellor (pastor) relationship. That relationship will be a companionship and outstanding; it will involve a greater readiness to embrace the key concepts of the person centred approach, and to find for the client a resource for a more positive and helpful relationship. The pastor will be a friend, spiritual leader, expert but ultimately a companion. It is to these concepts that the client will turn and find solace.

## **Conclusion**

The counselling process is characterised by action. I'm convinced that the religion aspect too has action if not the firm commitment to the principles of that religion. Action is the outcome of three important developments: the therapeutic process leading to an enhancement of the client's well being; the gradual development to independence, ability to make decision and 'cope' with the pressures of life; and, a more fulfilled individual. Pastoral care would lead to psychological adjustments that are characteristics of what has been achieved. This might be more evident in client's who achieve a turnaround in their attitude to self and others. We must experience our humanity and taking it to others to give meaning, purpose and fulfilment. This is our calling.

## ***Acknowledgements***

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*educated, but none the less non-specialists in counselling and psychology. Had I been speaking to counselling psychology professional colleagues, I would sometimes have expressed myself in somewhat different language. I also want to mention that I am a Christian and a believer in God hence my conviction and faith in religion may appear biased to some scholars who disregard religion and faith altogether. I have also drawn heavily on several articles particularly on religion and psychology. I am always delighted to share with several Pastors their counter-narratives of Pastoral Counselling, Care and Psychotherapy and to provide opportunities for conversations about contemporary issues including faith, palliative care, spirituality, home care, loss and bereavement, counselling and psychotherapy.*

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