THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY IN THREE THERAPEUTIC OUTCOMES – THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS, THE ESSENCE OF BEING, AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Counselling (MC)

City University of Seattle
Vancouver BC, Canada site

June 30, 2015

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Abstract

Historically, the disciplines of psychology and theology have had a tenuous relationship, dismissing each other as unnecessary. This paper is an attempt to address this tenuous relationship, by stating that from a therapeutic outcomes perspective both psychology and theology can assist one another. I will focus on three common therapeutic outcomes – the importance of relationships, the essence of being and the role of community. Relationships will focus on encountering another whole person, and the beloved relationship between God and humankind. The essence of being and identity looks at the existential realities of life and the hope found within it. Lastly, the desire for authentic community has been compromised because of our individualistically based society. Challenging and changing social and political structures, re-orientating social relationships will help us to enter into authentic, life-giving communities.

Keywords: encountering, dialogical, beloved, logotherapy, theology of hope, liberation psychology, Ubuntu, community, growth.

CHAPTER 1: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Introduction

As I start this thesis, I thought it would be helpful to give some background into why I have chosen this topic. Growing up in a very conservative Christian context during the height of Apartheid South Africa, I was finishing grade twelve and I had decisions to make regarding my future. At the time, my two primary options were teaching and psychology. My cultural background was one that the father in the household was to be respected and that he was very influential in the affairs of his family. I was dissuaded from going into teaching, because I have a disability, and family members thought that students would tease me mercilessly, as well as they did not have a high regard for the profession, especially for a man. When I brought up the idea about psychology their retort was that I would probably lose my faith, as psychology was very humanistic and it could undermine and damage my Christian upbringing.

I was encouraged to become an accountant. Upon finishing high school I worked for a non-racial youth mission organisation. For the next two years, I worked and travelled throughout South Africa working in schools, recreation centres, churches and youth facilities. During this time I lived and spent a lot of time in black townships, and the horror of Apartheid became a visible and moving reality for me. I returned from those two years and proclaimed to my family that Apartheid was evil. The backlash from my family, church, my cultural and political upbringing was overwhelming. For me, it was fundamentally an issue of justice, and one that my faith spoke deeply into. It was logical at the time that the

next move for me was to study theology, as I felt that in order to continue working with the youth and young adult population, I needed some formal training. Again my father was vocal about my desire to work in a ministry setting, but for me it was a natural outflow of the transformational journey I was on. For the next twenty years, my academic and working life has centred on working in a Christian faith-based context. In 2009, I came to a crossroads, whereby I felt that I needed a change in vocation, and the idea of psychology and counselling became a prominent pull once more. In my work as a youth worker and pastor, I did an enormous amount of pastoral counselling. I enjoyed doing it, and I was told I was good at it too. I had come to a place where I wanted to continue to empower people, without the restraints of the politics and dogma of the Church, and trying to fit into a structure I don't feel comfortable in anymore.

After a lengthy process of trying to figure out how I could retrain as a clinical counsellor, I was told about CityU in the spring of 2010, and started my program in January 2011. It is almost like I had come full circle, fulfilling a twenty-four year-old dream when I was a graduating high school teenager. Historically, my father's thoughts were not far off in his thinking concerning the two disciplines, as there has been a lot of suspicion from both sides. Psychology comes from a scientific, research and analytical perspective and theology comes from a theistic, church tradition(s) and biblical viewpoint. However, are they as mutually exclusive as they have historically claimed to be? I firmly believe that psychology and theology have a huge amount in common, especially from an outcome point-of-view. Both want change and transformation, both want to

improve the lives and well-being of the individual, to receive healing and

wholeness, and both want people to embrace their true potential and their full

humanity. As an open-minded, liberal thinking Christian, I am very intrigued at

the possibility of exploring what those points of commonality look like, and what

would the experience be of a Christian, or a person of faith or personal

spirituality, both for the counsellor and the client.

     As I have come to the end of my coursework at CityU, with just this thesis

left to complete, I am even more convinced that the integration of these two

disciplines can be of enormous benefit to both the counselling profession and my

own practice as a clinical counsellor.

Spirituality, Religion, and Theology in Psychotherapy

     In approaching the relationship between psychology and theology, I think

it is important to look initially at the broader role that spirituality and religion play

in psychotherapy. As mentioned earlier, psychology, spirituality and religion

have not always been on friendly terms. I believe it is critical to look at this

tenuous relationship between these disciplines before bringing Christian theology

into the picture. In the opening chapter of his book on religious thought and

modern psychologies, Browning seeks "to investigate the potential relationships

between two sources of modern individual identity – religious faith as it has been

formed by the Judeo-Christian tradition of the West and the disciplines of

psychology as these have developed in the twentieth century" (1987). He asks

why give special attention to these two sources and why together? His response

is that traditional religion and modern psychology stand in a special and unique

relationship to one another because they both provide concepts and technologies for the ordering of the interior life (1987). Another important contribution that Browning mentions is that clinical psychologies try to interpret *individual* lives, while theology tries to interpret life – life as a whole, in its entirety (1987).

It is this unique relationship that Browning makes mention of above, that both disciplines must face the question of the framework of meaning from which they make their interpretive judgements. I believe this unique relationship can enhance and improve the therapeutic outcomes for both therapist and client.

Spirituality and Religion

Why Spirituality?

Not a Good Start

Ever since Freud critiqued religion, the historical context between psychology, spirituality and religion has been vulnerable or even questionable. Freud believed that religious experience/s were a regressive phenomenon. He maintained that religious sentiments were born of archaic unconscious sources, which reflected back to the primordial origins of the Oedipus complex (Shafranske, 2005). Any religious ideas were wish fulfilments derived originally in response to conditions of helplessness. Smith states that Freud:

> Took religion to be primarily motivated by fear of retribution that went hand in hand with infantile, peremptory needs for love, care, and protection, it also followed that he saw religion not only as an unreliable basis for ethics but also a generally pacifying and therefore inhibiting factor in the development of the individual and the race. (1990)

Shafranske mentions that for Freud, religion was a stronghold of irrationality, emanating from a child's helplessness and wish for protection. Freud believed that religion strengthened parental and culturally sanctioned prohibitions (2009).

Science

There has been an increased interest in contemporary religious experience that is becoming more apparent throughout the behavioural sciences, which has so often been forgotten within modernity, ignored by science, and marginalised in the dissonance of postmodernism, but is turning out to be a robust clinical variable (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005). There is empirical evidence suggesting a link between health, spiritual and religious factors, even though the mechanisms by which such effects are produced are not yet fully understood, and that the evidence is sometimes exaggerated (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Added to this scientific inquiry, greater detail is being placed on the role of religious faith and spirituality in clinical practice, partly in an effort to humanise psychotherapy (Beck, 2003).

A Renaissance

Values

Changes are beginning to take place in how we approach psychological health, virtues and strengths are being considered alongside vulnerability and psychopathology. The values that inform people's lives and which they are ultimately concerned about, are the critical variables to psychological health and personal well being (Emmons, 1999). Taking spirituality and religious involvement in an individual's orientating system is part of this paradigm shift. At

the core of this paradigm shift is the understanding that there is "something more" to the human experience than what is merely observable. It also allows for a more holistic approach to psychological assessment and treatment, whereby the role of spirituality as a resource in psychological coping may be better understood and utilised in the therapeutic process (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005).

Meaning

By opening up to these transcendent realities that animate spirituality, science is somewhat limited, as it cannot take in all that exists. Concerning existential and global meanings, science is mute (Smith, 2001). It is the existential meanings that enliven daily existence and bring purpose to our deepest desires. Important questions such as "What is the meaning of life?" and "What does my life mean?" are essentially religious and spiritual, and ones that science, including psychological science, cannot answer. Even though science offers no outcomes concerning these spiritual questions, psychology can investigate the means by which people practice their spirituality (and religious beliefs), thereby a spiritually oriented psychotherapy can assist in such endeavours through an understanding of spirituality (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005).

Spirituality and Religion: Similar yet Different

One of the challenges facing this new development of spiritually oriented psychotherapy is defining the meaning of *spirituality*. A common understanding of spirituality conveys the idea that observable, physical reality is located within a larger, transcendent reality, as well as animated by transcendent, sacred realities (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005). Although spirituality and religion have often been

used interchangeably throughout history with intangible like qualities, gradually spirituality has become associated with the private realm of thought and experience, while religion has become related with the public realm of membership in religious institutions, with participation in formal rituals and adhering to certain religious dogma (Fuller, 2001).

Pargament maintains that religion is moving from a broad construct, that includes both the institutional and the individual, the good and bad; to a narrowband institutional construct that restricts human potential. Spirituality, however, is differentiated from religion as an individual expression that addresses the greatest of human capacities (1999). The emergence of spirituality as a distinctive term (from religion), points to a change in the fundamental approach many people today take in answering existential questions of meaning and sacred purpose (Shafranske, 2005).

Spirituality within Psychotherapy

Spirituality as a Resource

Spirituality and religion is an orienting system that provides answers to life's explicit religious questions, but also, more essentially, it shapes perceptions, attributions and affects in the construction of subjective experience, which includes experiences of human suffering (Shafranske, 2001). Psychotherapists who are spiritually oriented would be mindful of the potential impact that spirituality or a religious affiliation would have on the treatment and the alleviation of a person's suffering (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005).

The therapist's task is to identify and integrate the beliefs, values and practices involved in the client's spirituality to enhance their coping. In this clinical setting, spirituality is not the focus of the therapeutic conversation, but rather a factor in the background, one that can be usefully implemented to the forefront to assist in the appropriate treatment (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005).

Spirituality as Conservation and Transformation

Challenges to psychological well-being or physical health may also provoke crises in which spirituality must be conserved, transformed, challenged or lost (Pargament, 1997). In such situations, the psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, hopelessness and anger cannot be separated from the existential and spiritual conflicts that have been triggered by the present life circumstance. For example, when the death of a child occurs, there is a significant sense of betrayal, loss and a violation of trust that may bring a loss of coherence of meaning. When one's worldview is disrupted upon which significance has been established, this may impair the ability to use spiritual means to create significance and meaning, and further exacerbate symptoms of anxiety, depression and hopelessness (Hathaway, 2003).

Therefore, spiritually oriented psychotherapy may provide a safe context, where the client may preserve, re-evaluate, reconstruct or re-create his/her faith perspective in the service of conserving or transforming a coherence of meaning, essential to psychological coping and thus return to psychological health. Clinical situations in which the ontological bedrock of an individual has been challenged, would inevitably involve spirituality as a focus of the therapeutic

process. It stands to reason that one explicit treatment goal includes the re-establishment or creation of the means and ends of significance, by which existence can be meaningful and purposefully encountered. Such a process is required to support the psychological process of healing (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005).

The Spiritual Quest in Psychotherapy

Finding answers to the fundamental questions concerning existence and meaning is indeed a lifelong process in pondering the "wholeness" that surrounds our temporal lives. For some clients, psychotherapy offers the space to initiate a spiritual quest; because psychotherapy provides the context and the process to address important existential issues and matters of faith. However, it needs to be made clear that contrary to previous clinical situations, the client is not presenting or demonstrating a crisis of faith brought on by a psychosocial or health stressor, but rather this clinical situation reflects either a persistent sense of meaningless and boredom, or in a healthier individual, a desire for a more intentional spiritual practice, which is complemented by an advance in psychological health and an increased awareness (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005).

Other clients seek psychotherapy not because they have challenges, crises or psychological conflicts, but rather in an attempt to find a spiritual dwelling of purpose and meaning, a home, a respite from a more chronic spiritual malaise. These clients include a portion of the population whose spirituality typifies what Wuthnow referred to as "seeking" and illustrates the nature of the variable character of religion as quest. They may seek counselling to fill an

existential void or to counter the insufficiencies they discover in their "empty"

religion or "naked" spirituality (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Shafranske & Sperry,

2005). For many, counselling serves as a means to explore transcendent

realities in a highly experiential, personal, non-institutional way that they desire.

This is especially important for those who identify themselves as spiritual but not

religious (Fuller, 2001). Such an approach involves a transformation or following

of the self to a life orientated towards a relationship with the sacred, a spiritual

journey and experience, or a spiritual being.

Things to Come

       In the following three chapters, I am going to lay out the therapeutic

outcomes that I believe both psychology and theology have in common. In

chapter two I will discuss the importance of relationships, and how **all**

relationships – both human and divine – are necessary for the desired

therapeutic outcome between the client/s and therapist, and the benefit that the

client/s receives from these relationships. The third chapter will focus on the

essence of being. It is my firm belief that as human beings, we are defined by

knowing who we are (our internal being), and not by what we do or accomplish.

So much of our value is unfortunately derived from our work, status and

achievements. Chapter four emphasises that in order for the client/s therapeutic

needs to be met, it takes more than just the work they are doing with the

therapist. They need more than the typical support and care they get from their

communities. Fundamentally, what does it mean to be part of a community, to

be seen and understood as a whole person, not judged or understood by some external classifications?

    After completing the three formal chapters briefly described above, I will wrap up my thesis with a concluding summary. This concluding summary entails pulling together the thread of ideas that I have discussed in chapters two through four, and a summing up of how the topic of my research has sought to answer the desired goals that I have set out to achieve.

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

1. Introduction

From my perspective, relationships are at the core of being human. Relationships are a source of life, beauty and wonder, as well as the source of angst, pain and suffering. For me, the core of relationships is the ability to give and receive love. Love comes in various manifestations, but the basic desired outcome of all forms of love is goodness, justice, healthiness and wholeness for the wellbeing of all people. When these love outcomes are met, relationships are deemed healthy, good and greatly desired.

From a therapeutic perspective, relationships are the essence of psychotherapy. The primary relationship of psychotherapy is the one established between the client and the therapist. Nevertheless, in order for healing to take place, other relationships play a vital role beyond just the therapeutic one, thus all relationships become important.

In therapeutic circles, the name of Martin Buber is widely regarded for his contribution to the profession. His existential philosophy has had an impact on theology, philosophy and psychotherapy. For Buber, relationships are the ultimate purpose of life, both with God and with each other (Ventimiglia, 2008). His understanding of life with God and the other emphasises the deep intertwining of his unique interpretation of Jewish theology and his worldview. Moore (1996) states, "Any serious study of Martin Buber must recognize the fundamental importance of his faith as a Jew to his philosophical, sociological, and religious thought" (p. 3).

Similarly, from a theological perspective, relationships are the foundation, essence and the identity marker of what it means to be human. From a biblical point-of-view, Christians would ascertain that our humanity is intricately based in the reality that humankind is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). It is this belief, that we (as humankind) have been created above all of creation that distinguishes us from the rest of creation. Yet it is easy to forget the importance of this doctrine, both in the way that we view ourselves and in the way that we treat others: As image-bearers, we reflect the glory of God (Kline, 1986). The implications have a significant and practical outworking in our lives. How we view God and our relationship with Him effects how we relate to others. That is why Jesus stressed the "double commandment," to love God and to love your neighbour.

In theological circles, the name Henri Nouwen is synonymous with spiritual, devotional writing. His writings have had an enormous influence in Christian anthropology and spiritual theology. In both my theological training and personal experience, a lot of evangelical theology stresses "a personal relationship with God." While this theological tradition emphasises a relationship with God to be founded on love, personally, I have come to the alternate conclusion rather that this relationship is built on fear and judgement. Nouwen's theological focus is to remind his readers that God, based not by acts of omission or commission but by the simple reality that we are Her/His children, loves us. In his book "Life of the Beloved," Nouwen explores this love based on the biblical passage Luke 3:21-22, where God declares Her/His love for Jesus by saying:

"You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you." Nouwen focuses on the

word "Beloved" and what this might mean for his relationships with his friends,

"whether they belong to any particular tradition or not" (Nouwen, 1992, p. 30). It

is this "Beloved" relationship that I believe is the core of all relationships, defined

in love, belonging and acceptance.

I will now look at Buber and the essential contribution he made to the

discipline of psychology by emphasising that therapeutic relationship/s between

client and therapist are fundamental to the outcomes of successful therapy.

2. Buber, Relationships and Psychology

Buber's understanding of humanity's relationship to God

For Buber, God is ever-present. He is "YHVH" (Jahweh), the biblical God

found in Exodus (Friedman, 1955, p. 292). God is described as "Absolute

Person, a Being which becomes Person in order to know and be known, to love

and be loved by man" (Friedman, 1955, p. 267). God in his nature is relational

(Buber, 1971; Silberstein, 1989). This is vitally important, as it is impossible to

know "Him as He is in Himself!" (Friedman, 1955, p. 268). God created

humankind so that he could converse with them (Buber, 1952; Friedman, 1955).

He is the "Eternal Thou," he is never experienced in abstract reflection, he is only

known through relationship. Humankind, in immanent existence can only

recognise God through human interaction (Ventimiglia, 2008).

Buber believes it is the integral relationship between two persons that

makes the presence of God a possibility, that people can enter into an intense,

unique experience of each other (and the Transcendent) by the reality of one

meeting the other. He calls this meeting an "I-Thou encounter" (Buber, 1971;

Silberstein 1989; Moore, 1996). Buber continues saying that humankind is

created with an "inborn Thou," translated as the "innate You" (Buber, 1971;

Kramer, 2003). As a result of this innateness to know and be known that every

particular I-Thou relationship mirrors the relationship with the Eternal Thou who is

God (Ventimiglia, 2008). Kramer emphasises this by saying: "The central tenet

of his life's work was that the I-Thou relationship between persons intimately

reflects the I-Thou relationship humans have with God. Genuine relationship

with any Thou shows glimpses of the 'eternal Thou'" (p. 24).

Buber emphasised that God desires people to be actively engaged in life,

to be communicating with one another. For Buber, God makes a single plea of

us, that is a willingness to do as much as we possibly can at every single instant.

It is when a person is acting on her/his own volition, choosing and deciding, who

is aflame with her/his goal that s/he is closest to God (Moore, 1996; Buber 1967).

Moore carries on to describe Buber's passion for living responsibly before God:

"It is this awesome responsibility of continual dialogue, of openness to the world,

to which the biblical believer is called…by a continual effort to hallow the

everyday" (p. 6).

I-Thou and I-It

Buber understands the world of human relating divided into two types of

communication. The first type is the combination I-Thou. I-Thou interactions

involve two people who are open to each other in their fundamental uniqueness

(Buber, 1971). These interactions "are necessary for becoming whole human

beings" (Kramer, 2003, p. 18). According to Buber, a person cannot exist as a personal being in isolation, rather s/he must be brought out into the full realisation of her/himself by the gaze of the other. This meeting is reciprocal, as each individual in the dialogue becomes a Thou for the other if each is committed to an honest interfacing. Also, neither person objectifies the other, and neither is controlled or defined as some thing (Ventimiglia, 2008; Friedman, 1993; Kramer, 2003). Friedman writes: "The I-Thou relationship is spontaneous, but it is not unconscious. It is the awareness of self that comes from responding to the other, rather than from thinking about oneself, from knowing one's uniqueness precisely in being called out and in responding to what is not oneself, rather than from some inner inventory of comparison and contrast" (Friedman, 1997, p.170).

The second type of human relating is the I-It relationship. In this instance, the other person is objectified, meaning, s/he becomes the invention of my thinking. S/he therefore becomes what I want them to become because I do not listen to their words from their perspective. I can only respond to a caricature or variation of them, so in essence I'm having a monologue (Friedman, 1955; Buber, 1971; Kramer, 2003).

Potentially, two monologues can be going on. These modes are necessary in everyday life. Basic things need to be accomplished. Transactions must be made and information needs to be shared. The I-It relation refers to a one-sided experience of "knowing," "using" and putting things in "categories." Parsimony is needed concerning the events of the world. However, I-It does not address the unique personhood of each participant, and neither is it meant to.

The real knowing of another person only happens through a direct, mutual reciprocity of engagement (Ventimiglia, 2008; Kramer, 2003).

Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

Buber was a trailblazer in philosophical anthropology, discovering a new realm that up until then had been largely ignored, the realm of engagement between two people. Dialogue emerges when one whole person encounters another whole person, an encounter that allows each individual to give her/his whole being to the other, without holding anything back. In Buber's mind, a genuine encounter often involves confronting the other, not wanting to impose oneself or to change the other, but rather to confirm and accept the other as an equal partner in the dialogue. Confirming the other in no way implies approval; rather it is accepting the other with her/his difference and uniqueness. What Buber is trying to counteract is the Western philosophical tendency to dichotomise the subject-object relationship, which results in a distancing of the individual from the beings that confront her/him (Gordon, 2011).

Buber's understanding of dialogue refers to a unique kind of immediacy and connection of two beings without a conscious intent of influencing the other. For him, "dialogue means that I communicate with you for no purpose I wish to accomplish, that I expect nothing specific from you, and that my experience of you is not limited by ideas I have formed from our previous encounters" (Gordon, 2011, p. 210).

Embracing the Other

Taking his cue from the relationship between the educator and her/his students or indeed a psychotherapist and her/his clients, not all relationships can unfold into complete mutuality and reciprocity. Buber insisted that if an educator wanted to help students realise their full potential, s/he must grasp them as a whole and not only as a sum of qualities and aspirations. This is only possible if the educator encounters these students in a dialogical relation. However, Buber recognised there is a certain tension and discord between the educational relation and complete mutuality. Likewise, he stated that the therapist-client relation couldn't endure a total reciprocity; especially if the client sought to embrace the feelings of the therapist it would undermine the therapeutic relationship. It is here that Buber used the term "embrace" to refer to the act of identifying with someone else's position and lived experience while simultaneously maintaining a clear identity of oneself (Gordon, 2011).

In his 1925 address "Education," Buber raised the notion of embracing but in that instance used the term *inclusion* (thus, embracing or inclusion may be used interchangeably). Inclusion or embracing attempts to adopt the other's lived reality without in any way forfeiting one's own (Gordon, 2011). Higgins states that inclusion is experiencing the other side, but also requires us to keep close sight of our own side (Higgins, 2003).

Dialogue and Listening

For Buber, dialogue is mostly a verbal encounter between two subjects, but the I-You relation is not limited to speech. Buber believed that while the I-

You relation can arise in three spheres – life with nature, spiritual beings and human beings – it's only dialogue with human beings that manifests in language and speech. Buber plainly emphasises that the dialogical relation between two people is not limited to speech. Rather, a glance, a look, or a stare that meets the eyes of another person is enough for dialogue to take place. Peter Roberts writes:

> For Buber, dialogical relations are not confined to conversational communication: dialogue can occur without speech and even in the absence of sound and gesture. At its most basic level, dialogue is the experience of, and more particularly the acknowledgement of, an other: a being through which the self is defined. (Roberts, 1999, p. 184)

If dialogue involves acknowledging and responding to someone, it presupposes then that listening is involved. What then is the relationship between speaking and listening in Buber's model? Buber on rare occasions mentioned listening in relation to dialogue, and was never explicit in defining what listening meant to him. In his work *Between Man and Man*, Buber suggested that the act of listening is being attentive to the other's speech, involving two essential conditions. One, listening entails us to be attentive to the other's words directed specifically at us and some general person/group or an abstract entity. Two, listening involves an attentiveness that is active, not passive, whereby the other who is (also heard) actively "experiencing" the speech. Listening therefore, implies that people are actively and deeply

engaged; but it also does not require that all listeners heed or discern the same message (Buber, BMM, 1969).

Even though Buber mentioned speaking more than listening, he would probably have acknowledged that this would need to be characterised in a reciprocal manner. This is reinforced that "dialogue is not an excess of giving, or even a sequence of giving and then receiving, but a receiving that gives and a giving that receives" (Metcalfe and Game, 2008, p.352).

Buber's Impact on the Dialogical Psychotherapy Movement

In his essay "Healing through Meeting," that Buber wrote as an introduction to the posthumous book of his friend, Swiss psychoanalyst Hans Trüb, is at the heart of what psychotherapists call "dialogical psychotherapy." Essentially, it is not what goes on within the minds of therapist and client, but what happens *between* them (Friedman, 2008). It is Trüb who took Buber's thoughts and writing and made it his lifework, that of the life of dialogue. He found himself confronting his clients not as an analyst, but as human being to human being (Friedman, 2008). Richard Hycner writes: "The unfettered elementalness of human meeting demands that the therapist *first* be a person available to others as a human being, and *secondarily* be a professional trained in the appropriate methods of practicing psychotherapy" (Hycner, 1991, p. 135).

3. Nouwen, Relationships and Theology

Being the Beloved

In his book "Life of the Beloved," Nouwen is specifically writing to his friend Fred (a self-confessed secularist Jew), and starts out by saying to him that

"the greatest gift my friendship can give to you is the gift of your Belovedness" (1992, p. 30). He carries on to say that he can give that gift only insofar as he's claimed it for himself. That is what real friendship is about – giving to each other the gift of Belovedness. Nouwen asserts that there's that voice, the voice that speaks from above and from within, that whispers softly and declares loudly: "You are my Beloved, on you my favour rests" (Nouwen, 1992, p. 31). It is however not easy to hear that voice in a world filled with negativity, challenging your worth, beauty and identity. It is a great trap – the trap of self-rejection. Nouwen believes the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity or power, but self-rejection. Yes, these can present a great temptation, but their seductive quality more often comes from the way they are presented as part of a much larger temptation to self-rejection. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us "Beloved" (Nouwen, 1992).

The soft and gentle voice that deliberately calls us the Beloved, comes to us in many ways; our parents, friends, teachers, and the many strangers who have crossed our path all sounded that voice in different manifestations. We have been cared for with tenderness and gentleness, rewarded and praised for success, however, somehow we question and doubt all these signs of love, of being Beloved. Beneath the perceived strong self-confidence, there remains the question: "If all those who shower me with so much attention could see me and know me in my innermost self, would they still love me?" (Nouwen, 1992, p. 35). Nouwen states that this agonising question rooted in the depths of our inner

shadow, keeps persecuting us and makes us run away from the very place where that quiet voice calls us the Beloved can be heard. Every time we listen with detailed attentiveness to the voice that calls us Beloved, we will discover within ourselves a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply. It is like discovering a well in the desert. Once we have touched the wet ground, we will desire more; the One who longs to quench our thirst will help us discover it. All we really need is a desire to find the water and drink from it (Nouwen, 1992).

Becoming the Beloved

Nouwen declares that not only are we Beloved, but we have to *become* the Beloved.

Becoming the Beloved means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfleshed in everything we think, say, or do…What is required is to become the Beloved in the commonplaces of my daily existence and, bit by bit, to close the gap that exists between what I know myself to be and the countless specific realities of everyday life. Becoming the Beloved is pulling the truth revealed to me from above down into the ordinariness of what I am, in fact, thinking of, talking about, and doing from hour to hour." (Nouwen, 1992, pp. 45-46)

Nouwen asks the question whether it's possible to be as articulate about our spiritual journey as we are about our psychological journey. Can we be in touch with the mysterious process of becoming the Beloved in the same specific way as we are in touch with the "dynamics" of our minds? Nouwen states that psychodynamics are different from the movements of the Spirit, but they do

connect and intersect in many ways too. In identifying the movements of the

Spirit, Nouwen uses four words: "taken," "blessed," "broken," and "given." These

words summarises his life as a priest around the communion table with his

parishioners – I take bread, bless it, break it, and give it. More importantly, these

words summarise Nouwen's life as a human being because in every moment of

his life somewhere, somehow the taking, the blessing, the breaking, and the

giving are happening. They express the most spiritual as well as the most

secular truth, and they speak about the most divine as well as the most human

behaviour (Nouwen, 1992).

Taken

Nouwen contends that in order for us to live a spiritual life, we have to

claim for ourselves that we are "taken" or "chosen." As the Beloved, we are

God's chosen ones, seen by God from all eternity and seen as unique, special,

precious beings. To be chosen as the Beloved of God is something radically

different. Rather than excluding others, it includes others. Instead of rejecting

others as less valuable, it accepts others in their own uniqueness. It is not a

competitive choice, but rather a compassionate and loving choice. It is

impossible to compete for God's love. God's love is a love that includes all

people, each one in her or his uniqueness. Once we have claimed our own

uniqueness and place in God's love that we can experience this all-bracing, non-

comparing love and feel safe, not only with God, but also with all our sisters and

brothers (Nouwen, 1992).

Blessed

Nouwen notes that as fearful, anxious, insecure human beings we are all in need of a blessing. We all need each other's blessings – parents and children, teachers and students, bishops and priests, doctors or therapists and clients. The word "benediction" used in church liturgy literally means: speaking well or saying good things of someone. We all need to hear good things being said of us. Nowadays, we hear people saying that we need to affirm one another. Without affirmation, it is hard to live well. Therefore, to give somebody a blessing is the most significant affirmation we can offer. To give a blessing is to affirm and say "yes" to a person's Belovedness. Giving a blessing creates the reality of which it speaks. A blessing touches the goodness of the other and calls forth her or his Belovedness. Nouwen concludes by saying that when we claim our own blessedness, it always leads to a deep desire to bless others. The blessed one always blesses, and people want to be blessed (Nouwen, 1992).

Broken

The term broken can have negative implications concerning our humanity, especially in the sense that something is "wrong with us." This is not what I'm alluding to here; rather, brokenness involves suffering and pain. "Suffering – be it physical, mental, or emotional – is almost always experienced as an unwelcome intrusion into our lives, something that should not be there…it must be avoided at all costs" (Nouwen, 1992, p. 93). Suffering touches us in the most unique, intimate and vulnerable parts of our individuality (Nouwen, 1992).

Nouwen believes that confronting suffering and anguish involves being willing to face it and live through it is the way to healing. However, we cannot do it on our own. We need others, both professional and personal caregivers to keep us standing in it, to assure us that there is peace beyond the anguish, life beyond death, and love beyond fear. The spiritual call of being Beloved of God allows our brokenness and pain to be removed of the curse of its shadow, and to be put under the light of the blessing. The great task becomes allowing the blessing mentioned above to touch us in our brokenness (Nouwen, 1992).

Given

Nouwen emphasises that we are chosen, blessed, and broken so as to be given. It is in giving that it becomes clear that this is not for our own sakes, but that all we live finds its significance in its being lived for others. "Our humanity comes to its fullest bloom in giving. We become beautiful people when we give whatever we can give: a smile, a handshake, a kiss, an embrace, a word of love, a present, a part of our life…all of our life" (Nouwen, 1992, p.106). For Nouwen, true joy and happiness comes from the giving of ourselves to others. Our deepest human desire is to give ourselves to each other as a source of physical, emotional and spiritual growth (Nouwen, 1992).

Nouwen explains that the most intimate expressions of giving ourselves to each other can be manifest in two directions: giving oneself in life and giving oneself in death. Firstly, our life itself is the greatest gift to give. It is not a question of "What can we offer each other?" but rather, "Who can we be for each other?" It is the gift of our own life that shines through all we do. Secondly, we

are called to give ourselves not only in life, but also in death as well. As Beloved

Daughters and Sons of God, dying becomes the complete experience of being

the Beloved. The deaths of those who love us and whom we love opens the

possibility of a new, more radical communion, a new intimacy, a new belonging

to each other (Nouwen, 1992).

Living as the Beloved

The final part of the book emphasises the lived reality of being the

Beloved. The good things of the world we live in and that life has to offer are

ours to enjoy, only when we truly acknowledge them as affirmations of the truth

and reality that we are the Beloved of God. This truth allows us the freedom to

receive the beauty of life, nature, and culture in gratitude, as a sign of your

Belovedness. Nouwen writes:

> The change of which I speak is the change from living life as a painful test
>
> to *prove* that you deserve to be loved, to living it as an unceasing "*Yes*" to
>
> the truth of that Belovedness. Put simply, life is a God-given opportunity
>
> to become who we are, to affirm our own true spiritual nature, claim our
>
> truth, appropriate and integrate the reality of our being, but, most of all, to
>
> say "Yes" to the One who calls us the Beloved. (Nouwen, 1992, p.133)

The unfathomable mystery of God is that S/He is a Lover who also wants

to be loved. The One who created us is waiting for our response to the love that

has given us our being; asking us to say "Yes" to her/his invitation to "Do you

love me?" This is the spiritual life: the opportunity to say "Yes" to our inner truth.

The Spirit of God, the Spirit that calls us the Beloved, also unites and makes

whole. The discernment of God's Spirit is identified in moments of unification, healing, restoration, and reconciliation.

The "Life of the Beloved" indeed confirms for me that this unique relationship between the divine, God and Her/His relationships with Her/His children is a critical part of the therapeutic outcome/s for clients who believe that faith is an important part of their healing in and through the counselling that they receive. Nouwen reinforces throughout this book, that once we come to an experiential understanding of being Beloved, an intimate relationship founded on the reality of knowing I am simply loved, that's it, nothing more, we truly can begin to live with all the beauty, wonder, excitement, and passion that life has to offer us.

CHAPTER 3: THE ESSENCE OF BEING

1. Introduction

The essence of being is enormously important in understanding "who we are" and what defines us as humankind. Coming to some self-awareness and personal identity as to who we are as individuals, allows us to define ourselves more than what we do or accomplish. Too often, when we are introduced to new people, or asked about ourselves, we define who we are (our being) by our career, jobs, accomplishments or roles. Rarely do we define ourselves by talking about what excites or inspires us, the passions and drive from within.

The issue of defining this "essence of being," for me is critical from both a psychological and theological point-of-view. Psychologically, if a person can know "who am I?" and make sense of the meaning to the existential issues of life, then s/he is most likely going to be far more healthy and at peace with her/himself. Theologically, being also has significant importance, as from a Christian perspective our being is defined beyond ourselves. The Christian sees her/his being and identity founded on a belief that God gives the individual a renewed, transformed identity and being.

In trying to define "being," it is critical for me that "to be" or existence is an emerging, a becoming, a process of being that is not determined or characterised by a particular set of traits. *Being* is a verb form, a participle, implying there is an active and dynamic process. Existence or being does not only occur within the individual, but rather between individuals and the world they live in (Prochaska and Norcross, 2010).

Living in a complex, ever-changing world, our lives are bombarded with messages, images and advertising, trying to define and manipulate us into beings and identities that are not our true authentic selves. Therefore, daily we are faced with decisions and life challenges. For some, these decisions and challenges can cause great anxiety, disorientation, and frustration, resulting in questions around meaning and identity. At such times, these experiences can be termed in a variety of "existential crises," or at the very least, the inability to see their current circumstances in an authentic or objective perspective.

An understanding of being and existence is the foundation of my therapeutic lens. Being/existence becomes critical for clients to find meaning, congruency, authenticity and honesty in their lives. It is no surprise that my approach to therapy is existential, based on helping clients to grapple with, and to come to terms with these crises or faulty perspectives, with the outcome of gaining a healthy, authentic and congruent reality within which to live.

From a psychological perspective, the name of Viktor Frankl is commonly understood to be one of the leaders and pioneers in Existential therapy. From a theological point-of-view, the name of Jürgen Moltmann stands out for his theological treatise "Theology of Hope" as a lived reality based on the eschatological doctrine of Christian hope. For both men, a hope for the future is essential to their understanding towards the meaning and purpose of life. Frankl states: "Logotherapy focuses rather on the future, that is to say, on the meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future" (Frankl, 1959, p. 120).

Moltmann writes that Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ,
and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ (Moltmann, 1967).
Let us look more closely at both Frankl and Moltmann's perspectives on being
and existence.

2. Frankl and Existential Therapy

Logotherapy

For Frankl, he defines his theoretical lens as his own, calling it
"logotherapy," based on the Greek word *logos*, which denotes "meaning."
Logotherapy focuses on the meaning of human existence and humankind's
search for such a meaning. This striving for meaning in a person's life is the
primary motivational force within humankind. However, this motivation for
meaning is unique and specific to each individual, and they can only fulfil that
alone (Frankl, 1959).

Frankl states that meaning can be frustrated, leading to "existential
frustration." The term "existential" may be used in three ways: (1) *existence*
itself, the human mode of being; (2) the *meaning* of existence; and (3) the striving
to find a concrete meaning in personal existence, that is, the *will* to meaning.
Existential frustration may result in neuroses, called "noögenic neuroses" from
the Greek word noös, meaning mind. Noögenic neuroses relate specifically to
the human dimension and conflicts arising from existential problems. However,
not all conflict is neurotic, as some conflict is normal and healthy. It is important
to mention that existential frustration is in itself neither pathological nor
pathogenic. A person's concern (or despair) over the worthwhileness of life is an

existential distress and by no means a *mental disease.* Sometimes this existential distress may be interpreted as a mental disease and treated with a barrage of medication, but the counsellor/healthcare professional's task is to pilot the client through her/his existential crisis of growth and development. Logotherapy therapy assists clients to find meaning in their lives (Frankl, 1959).

Frankl asserts that humanity's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium, and such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. In helping a person survive the harshest conditions, nothing is so effective as having the knowledge that there is meaning in one's life. In the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*" (Frankl, 1959, p. 126), Frankl sees these words as a motto holding true for any psychotherapy. In the concentration camps, Frankl could tell that those who knew there was a task to be done were most apt to survive. Sharing more personally, Frankl reveals that when he was taken to Auschwitz, a manuscript of his was confiscated. His deep desire to write "Man's Search for Meaning" helped him survive the rigors of the camp he was in (Frankl, 1959). Even though Frankl does not say it deliberately, for him, meaning is foundational to hope, and effective therapy offers the client a striving after hope and purpose, giving the client a better understanding of their identity.

The Existential Vacuum

According to Frankl, the existential vacuum is a twofold loss. One, at the beginning of human history, humankind lost some of the basic animal instincts in which animal behaviour is embedded and secured. Such security, like Paradise,

is lost to humankind forever. Two, humankind has suffered a more recent loss, as the traditions, which supported and reinforced behaviour have now diminished. Thus, no instinct or traditions tells them what they ought to do, or what they wish to do. Rather, a person wishes to do what other people do (conformism), or does what other people wish her/him to do (totalitarianism). The existential vacuum reveals itself mostly in a state of boredom. Taking his cue from Schopenhauer, Frankl says humankind was doomed to fluctuate between the two extremes of distress and boredom. Boredom now causes more problems (for mental health professionals) to solve than distress. Take for example the "Sunday neurosis," a kind of depression afflicting people because of the lack of content in their lives once the busyness of their work and weekday activities is over, and the void within them becomes apparent. Widespread phenomena such as depression, aggression and addiction cannot be understood unless we acknowledge the existential vacuum underlying them. This is true of the crises of pensioners and the aging population. Frankl also notes the masks in which the existential vacuum appears. Not surprisingly, the will to meaning is often explicitly rewarded by: a will to gain power, especially visible in the will to make money. Another place of frustrated will to meaning is taken by the will to pleasure, often displayed in sexual compensation, where sexual libido becomes the rampant expression in the existential vacuum (Frankl, 1959).

The Meaning of Life

Frankl is quick to say that there is no definitive answer to understanding the meaning of life. For him, the meaning of life differs from person-to-person,

from day-to-day and from hour-to-hour. What should matter however, is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at any given moment. Every situation in life represents a challenge to a person and presents a problem for her/him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. In a word, each person is questioned by life; and s/he can only answer to life by answering for her/his own life; to life s/he can only respond by being responsible. Therefore, "logotherapy sees in responsibleness the very essence of human existence" (Frankl, 1959, p.131).

The Essence of Existence

Logotherapy seeks to make the client fully aware of her/his own responsibleness. The client is given the option of for what, to what, or to whom s/he understands her/himself to be responsible. The logotherapist is least likely to impose value judgements on her/his clients. Thus, it is up to the client to decide whether s/he should interpret her/his life task as being responsible to society or to her/his own conscience. To Frankl, the logotherapist is like an ophthalmologist, who tries to enable a person to see the world as it really is. The therapist's role involves widening and broadening the visual field of the client in order that the entire spectrum of potential meaning becomes conscious and visible to her/him. Frankl also stresses that the true meaning of life is to be discovered and encountered in the world rather than within a person's own psyche, as though it were a closed system. Frankl terms this "the self-transcendence of human existence" (Frankl, 1959, p.133). This denotes that being human always points to something or someone other than oneself; be it a

meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets

her/himself, the more human s/he is and the more s/he actualises her/himself.

Therefore, self-actualisation is only possible as a side effect of self-

transcendence (Frankl, 1959).

To Frankl, because the meaning of life differs on a regular basis, and it

never ceases to be, in logotherapy we discover this meaning in life in three

different ways: (1) by inventing work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing

something or encountering someone (especially the unique person-to-person

connecting of love); (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering.

The first, the way of work and accomplishment is self-explanatory. The second

and third ways need further elaboration (Frankl, 1959).

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost parts

of her/his being. No one can have a full awareness or understanding of another

human being unless love is experienced between two people. By loving another

person, s/he is able see traits and personality in the other person; and even

encounter the true potential in the other person which is not yet actualised but yet

needs to be actualised. Love thus enables the beloved person to actualise these

potentialities. Also, love is as primary a phenomenon as sex. Normally sex is

often understood as a (physical) mode of expression for love, but for Frankl it is

much more; sex is a way of expressing the experience of the (emotional and

spiritual) ultimate togetherness, which is called love (Frankl, 1959).

We can also find meaning in life even when we are confronted with a

challenging or hopeless situation that cannot be changed, for example an

untimely death or a terminal illness or disease. Therapy in such circumstances cannot change the fate of a person's situation, but Frankl states it is possible to change the person's attitude to her/his irreversible fate, and come to a place of finding some meaning in her/his suffering. He asserts that meaning is possible even in spite of suffering, provided that the suffering is unavoidable (Frankl, 1959).

The Super-Meaning and Life's Transitoriness

The ultimate meaning exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of humankind; in logotherapy, we speak in this context of a super-meaning. Frankl declares that what is demanded of humankind "is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. *Logos* is deeper than logic" (Frankl, 1959, p. 141). Importantly, super-meaning can also be understood through a client's religious convictions and experience, offering healing to her/his suffering. The transitoriness of our existence does not make it meaningless, but rather it does constitute our responsibleness, as everything centres upon our realising the essentially transitory possibilities, as logotherapy is not pessimistic but rather activistic. At any moment, humankind must decide, for better or for worse, what will be the memorial of their existence (Frankl, 1959)?

3. Moltmann, Existentialism and Christian Hope

"Logos" and Christian Eschatology

In the opening pages of his book "Theology of Hope," Moltmann immediately asserts that the popular meaning/s of Christian eschatology have been misplaced and not fully understood. To begin with, the logos or meaning of eschatology has been widely understood to mean the "doctrine of last things" or the "doctrine of the end." Moltmann states that these "end events" were meant to break into the world from somewhere beyond history, by putting an end to history in which all things here live and move. By relegating these events to the "last days" they were robbed of the uplifting importance and critical significance for all the days spent on earth, that is, this side of the end in history. These teachings about eschatology, have led to a barren reality of the existence and essence of Christian being; the resurrected life and hope in Christ, celebrated every Easter (Moltmann, 1967).

Moltmann, like Frankl, also makes reference to the Greek term *logos*, referring to:

A reality which is there, now, and always, and is given true expression in the word appropriate to it. In this sense there can be no *logos* of the future, unless the future is the continuation or regular recurrence of the present. (Moltmann, 1967, p. 17)

What then do we make of Christian eschatology regarding the future? Moltmann rightly argues that Christian eschatology does not speak of the future as such, but rather it sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the

future of that reality, its future possibilities and its power over the future.

Christian eschatology emphasises the resurrection of Jesus Christ and *His*

future, and therefore, all theological statements about the future are grounded in

the person and history of Jesus Christ (Moltmann, 1967).

Moltmann continues to say that if the crucified Christ has a future because

of His resurrection, that means all statements and judgements about Him imply

something about the future, which is to be expected from Him. This announcing

of Christ's future is understood in terms of promise, and points the Christian

believer/s in Him towards the hope of His still outstanding future. In the

promises, the hidden future already announces itself and exerts its influence on

the present through the hope it awakens. Hope's statements of promise

however, stand in contradiction to the reality, which can at present be

experienced. They do not result from experiences, but rather are the condition

for the possibility of new experiences (Moltmann, 1967).

The present and the future, experience and hope, stand in contradiction to

each other in Christian eschatology. The result of this contradiction is that

humankind is not brought into harmony and agreement with the given situation,

but is drawn into the conflict between hope and experience:

The contradiction to the existing reality of himself and his world in which

man is placed by hope is the very contradiction out of which this hope

itself is born – it is the contradiction between the resurrection and the

cross. Christian hope is resurrection hope, and it proves its truth in the

contradiction of the future prospects thereby offered and guaranteed for

righteousness as opposed to sin, life as opposed to death, glory as

opposed to suffering, peace as opposed to dissension…It is in this

contradiction that hope must prove its power. Hence eschatology, too, is

forbidden to ramble, and must formulate its statements of hope in

contradiction to our present experiences of suffering, evil and death. For

that reason, it will hardly ever be possible to develop an eschatology on its

own. It is much more important to present hope as the foundation and the

mainstream of theological thinking as such, and to introduce the

eschatological perspective into our statements on divine revelation, on the

resurrection of Christ, on the mission of faith and on history. (Moltmann,

1967, pp. 18-19)

The Kingdom of God and Hope

The real heart of eschatology, and the underlying concept that it

constantly employs in varying content, is founded in the promise and expectation

of what is known as the "Kingdom of God." If the meaning and essence of

Christian eschatology is grounded on the reality of the resurrected Christ, then

the message of Christian eschatology is established on Christ's proclamation of

the Kingdom of God. Moltmann writes that the peculiar feature of His

proclamation of the Kingdom lays in the fact that nearness to, entry into, and

inheritance of, the Kingdom are bound by Him to the decision of the hearers and

their attitude to His own person. The future is bound up with the mystery of His

own presence. Jesus is understood as the last prophet of the coming Kingdom,

the character of the final eschatological decision. "By proclaiming his hour as the

last hour of decision, Jesus himself demythologizes the apocalyptic pictures of the kingdom for the sake of existential actualization" (Moltmann, 1967, p. 218).

The Kingdom of God and Jesus are synonymous with one another. Simply put, Jesus is the Kingdom of God in person. Jesus brings the Kingdom of God to humankind in His own unique way, and guides us into the breadth and beauty of the Kingdom. If we want to understand who Jesus really is, we have to experience the Kingdom of God. But what exactly is the Kingdom of God? Moltmann rightly states that Kingdom is understood differently from person to person, both culturally and politically. The most common translation would be the "rule of God." From a Christian theological perspective, if everything is under God's rule, and Jesus is Himself God, then Jesus becomes the Lord or king of this Kingdom. Jesus did not bring a new concept regarding the Kingdom (contrary to certain popular opinion); rather He brings God's Kingdom Himself (Moltmann, 1994).

In the opening chapter of the biblical book of Mark verse 15, we read concerning Jesus: "The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" The word "Kingdom" means a future in which God is finally and completely present, in which humankind receives their freedom in God, and all the misery and pain of creation, is overcome. The "good news" here is in the words which communicate the medium between this future and the present. "Repentance" in this verse means the radical transformation of humankind and their circumstances so that they are turned around to face God's future. The proclamation of Jesus breaks through the Jewish expectation of

justice and the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not promise the Kingdom to the just

and judgement to the unjust, but He promises the Kingdom to the poor and the

unjust, because of God's grace and mercy. He announced the Kingdom, not as

judgement but as joy and hope. Jesus anticipated the Kingdom of God among

the poor, the righteousness of God among those without rights, and the glory of

God among the sick and the lepers. He was condemned and crucified as a

blasphemer because He practiced the justice of grace, violating the religious and

political law and order of the day (Moltmann, 1975).

The Kingdom of God and Liberation is Now Present

In theological circles, the question of whether the Kingdom of God is a

present reality or a futuristic event that has no bearing on our current existence

has been debated at length. A large number of Christians see the Kingdom as a

future entity whereby Jesus will come as judge and destroy the world in a

cataclysmic event. This popular view I believe is a faulty understanding of who

Jesus is, as well as a misguided reading and interpretation of what Christian

eschatology is all about. We have already stated that Christian eschatology is

grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and not some "end event." We

have also said that Jesus is the embodiment of the Kingdom of God. The

Kingdom is experienced in the present in companionship with Jesus (Moltmann,

1994).

What does experiencing the Kingdom look like in the present? For me, as

Moltmann asserts, Jesus promised the Kingdom to the poor, and imparted God's

power on the sick. He also brought God's justice to people who knew no justice,

and to the unjust – to people the biblical text calls "sinners and tax collectors."

Jesus demonstrated this publicly through his friendship and hospitality with them,

something the religious leaders criticised him for by saying that he "welcomes

sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). He shared a banquet with these unjust

and unrighteous people, offering compassion and practising the divine justice of

grace. The self-respect of anyone who is shut out and rejected is severely

injured and damaged. We feel like rubbish and discarded, and we accept this

judgement, making it our own, and we begin to despise and hate ourselves.

However, if in a situation of this kind, we find others who accept and affirm us

without any judgement, because they believe in us and offer us hope, we feel

supported and therefore liberated. The acceptance of despised people is the

social healing that Jesus offers to those "sinners and tax collectors." Moltmann

proclaims: "In this way the kingdom of God comes into the world of the humiliated

and insulted, and breaks open the psychological prisons of self-contempt"

(Moltmann, 1994, p. 16).

More broadly, if Jesus and His Kingdom bring justice, acceptance and

self-respect in a new identity, what does that imply to Christian theology (and the

Church), the world and its powers, laws and structures – both socially and

politically? At the beginning of His public work and ministry, Jesus enters the

synagogue, opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads the following: "The

Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news

to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery

of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's

favour" (Luke 4:18-19).

From a theological point-of-view, how do we read the biblical text? Do we

read it with the eyes of the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed, or do we read it

as a book of religion, laws and dogmatic ideologies? The sick, the leprous, the

humiliated and the godless experienced Jesus as a concrete liberator from their

concrete misery, and they believed in this liberation. Do we understand faith and

solidarity in Jesus as a concrete event of liberation, or do we believe only in a

freedom that does not really exist? Do we understand Jesus in a comprehensive

sense, as liberator from every act of enslavement and inhumanity, or do we think

of Him only as a religious liberator? (Moltmann, 1975).

For theology (and the Church) to make the Kingdom of God meaningful

and relevant today, evangelisation and liberation will be required. For Moltmann

this means that the Church's mission is to proclaim the "good news" of the

Kingdom to all human beings, the poor of this world first and foremost, so as to

awaken the faith that consoles and strengthens us, and gives the hope and

certainty of eternal life. Alongside this, the Church's mission is to bring liberty to

the oppressed, human dignity to the disgraced and those without honour, and

justice that is due to those without rights. Jesus' missionary charge and

revolutionary imperative is this: the preaching of repentance, and the

transformation of unjust economic, social and political conditions, peace with God

and the struggle for a peaceful world. Where the Kingdom of God is near, God's

people gather together. We are called to be present and engaged, not apathetic, introspective, self-righteous or uncompassionate (Moltmann, 1994).

4. A Common Context Informs Frankl and Moltmann's Existentialism

Both Frankl and Moltmann share a common context that informs their existential view of being. As is commonly known, Frankl is a Holocaust survivor, and his experiences in the Nazi Death Camps further informed his already well-developed psychological training as a psychiatrist. Moltmann, soon after his eighteenth birthday in July 1944, received his call-up for military training to the heavy weapons company of an infantry battalion. In February 1945, Moltmann became a Prisoner Of War (POW) surrendering to British soldiers. He was sent to a Belgian prisoner of war camp (Frankl, 1959; Moltmann, 2008).

Frankl's Experience in the Nazi Death Camps

In the opening pages of "Man's Search for Meaning," Frankl makes an important observation regarding methodology and scientific observation. Psychology (as an academic discipline) seeks to have a necessary level of scientific detachment, and this detachment is granted to an outsider to be as objective as possible. Sometimes however, this outsider is too far removed to make any statements of real value. Only the person on the inside knows, and her/his judgements may not be objective, her/his evaluations may be out of proportion. This is inevitable. For people who have experienced the horror and dehumanisation of war, trying to tell their story without bias, would be difficult in a book such as this. Frankl makes it clear that the story in this book is his experiences as an ordinary prisoner. Yes, logotherapy is built largely upon his

experience as a Holocaust survivor as well as his training as a psychiatrist, and that is why his emphasis on meaning, existence and being is such a rich contribution to the world of psychology (Frankl, 1959).

Frankl states that in spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of life in a concentration camp, it is possible for spiritual life to deepen. For Frankl, this made him think of his own relationship with his wife. He clung to his wife's image, imagining it acutely; hearing her answer him, seeing her smile, her frank and encouraging look: "Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise" (Frankl, 1959, p. 57). For the first time in his life a thought transfixed him regarding the truth. The truth concerns love, and love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which humankind can aspire. Frankl says he grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of humankind is through love and in love. Love goes far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in her/his spiritual being, her/his inner self (Frankl, 1959).

Frankl poses the question of human liberty, and whether there is spiritual freedom in regards to a person's behaviour and reaction to their surroundings, especially in a concentration camp? Frankl's response is that humankind does have a choice of action, and they can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, independence of mind, even in such horrific conditions of psychic and physical stress:

Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various

mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in

certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person

the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result

of camp influences alone. (Frankl, 1959, p. 87)

Lastly, Frankl believed that the prisoner who had lost faith in the future –

her/his future – was doomed. With her/his loss of belief in the future, s/he also

lost her/his spiritual hold, letting her/himself decline and becoming subject to

mental and physical decay. There is a close connection between the state of a

person's mind – their courage and hope, or the lack thereof – and the state of

immunity of their body. This would be understood with the sudden loss of hope

and courage, which could and did have a deadly effect. A friend of Frankl's died

because the expected liberation he was looking forward to never came, causing

severe disappointment. His faith in the future and his will to live dissipated and

his body became ill and he died from typhus (Frankl, 1959).

Moltmann's Experience as a Prisoner of War

Soon after becoming an eighteen-year-old POW in early 1945,

Moltmann's dream of mathematics and physics were lost to him.

What was the point of it all? Then there were those sleepless nights when

the tormenting memories rose up, and I woke up soaked in sweat – when

the faces of the dead appeared and looked at me with their quenched

eyes…One was exposed without any defence to what one had

experienced and suffered, and had to 'come to terms with it,' if that is, or

can be, the proper phrase to describe this mental and spiritual torment. (Moltmann, 2008, p. 26)

Not only was Moltmann traumatised by the horror of the war and being in captivity, he also describes that many German soldiers were exposed to Nazi terrorism. Among his fellow prisoners were Hitler Youth leaders and members of the SS who would beat up any soldier who doubted the "final victory," or made critical remarks about Hitler and the Nazi party.

Once the war ended, Moltmann was sent to a camp in Kilmarnock on the Ayrshire coast of Scotland. As a way of getting out of the camp, Moltmann kept himself busy by volunteering and working at every chance he could take. Work gave him a sense of purpose, as well as it allowed him the opportunity to be an interpreter and to meet the families of the nearby village who bought toys that some of the prisoners were making in the camp. Moltmann describes that these families were the first to come and meet the POW's, former enemies but now offering hospitality that profoundly shamed them. "We heard no reproaches, we were not blamed, we experienced a simple and warm common humanity which made it possible for us to live with the past of our own people, without repressing it and without growing callous" (Moltmann, 2008, pp. 28-29).

It was this warm hospitality and being given the gift of a Bible from a military chaplain that Moltmann says caused his depression to begin to leave him and he experienced a new hope in life. While reading the Psalms and hearing the echo of the psalmist's suffering and tears within his own soul, Moltmann felt something stir within him. He then read Jesus' death cry "My God, my God, why

have you forsaken me?" and there was a growing conviction within Moltmann

that this is someone who understands us completely, who is present in our cry to

God and has felt the same forsakenness we are living in the present. "Jesus'

God-forsakenness on the cross showed me where God is present – where he

was in my experiences of death, and where he is going to be in whatever comes"

(Moltmann, 2008, p. 31). This divine truth for Moltmann, that when he was a

POW, in the dark pit of his soul, "Jesus sought me and found me" (Moltmann,

2008).

　　　For both Frankl and Moltmann, it is no surprise that in spite of the horror

and suffering of enduring death and war, both come to the same therapeutic

conclusions that love and a hope of the future are an integral part of our

existence. Experiencing ongoing healing towards wholeness continues to be the

journey of becoming human, embracing our true identity, and living as

authentically as we can, in pursuing love and living with hope in all we are and all

we do.

CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

1. Introduction

A lot has been written about the importance that community plays in lives of people. Worldwide, humankind strive to find belonging and/or connection, whether it's a belonging to a particular type of social group – a labour group, a member of a particular gang, sect, club, church, or a platoon to name a few. The very first community to which people belong is the family; and initially a child belongs to the mother's womb, where this place of belonging is profoundly deep and intimate (Vanier, 1979).

In thinking about how psychology can have an impact on community, often we limit this impact to making sure clients have good support and community around them while they're going through therapy. While this no doubt is critical to a client's well-being and healthy therapeutic outcomes, there is more to this topic of psychology's impact on our communities.   The name Martín-Baró has become synonymous with the work known as "liberation psychology." Becoming a champion and humanitarian for the poor, Martín-Baró's life was dedicated to improving the lives of those in Latin America. In the following pages, I will unpack the paradigm shift that Martín-Baró was proposing, both from the professional and academic perspective, as well as how psychology as a profession relates to the community at large.

Similarly, from a theological point-of-view, community in our Western societies has mostly been limited to church congregations, community life groups or larger church events orchestrated around a theme or common purpose (for

example, "Promise Keepers" a men's Christian group seeking to connect faith with other men). Little is being done to form real community, with the intentionality of allowing human-to-human connection where there is authentic openness and hospitality, emotional vulnerability and spiritual humility. The theology of Desmond Tutu seeks to highlight the common humanity of Ubuntu, whereby people see one another on an equal level of existence, free from prejudice or any class distinction. Lastly, Jean Vanier offers a practical understanding of what true community entails and how to seek it with love, forgiveness in a spirit of celebration.

2. Liberation Psychology and the Contribution of Ignacio Martín-Baró
A Contextual Understanding of Liberation Psychology

From an historical point-of-view, the genesis of the liberation psychology movement flowed out of liberation theology's confrontation with the elite in Latin America. The Catholic Church had historically served the interests of wealthy landowners and businessman. Liberation theologians proclaimed a commitment to the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalised, which they understood to be consistent with the message of the Gospels of Jesus and His Kingdom. For these scholars, sin became defined to be the absence of personhood and love in our relationships with one another and to God. Rather it became synonymous with the exploitation and domination of others. Liberation theology drew inspiration from the Exodus story in the Old Testament, whereby the Israelites were able to find freedom from the oppression and exploitation of their Egyptian captors (Watkins and Shulman, 2008; Gutiérrez 1988).

In 1968 at the Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Columbia, liberation theology was initiated with an invocation of the Exodus story, uniting faith and social liberation by reclaiming the political dimensions of the Gospels. Liberation theology and its confrontation with slavery and oppression has also been important to African-American Christians and the Civil Rights Movement, as well as for black South Africans and the Black Consciousness Movement during the horror of Apartheid. For liberation theologians, faith in God requires our acting on behalf of justice, because God in the Exodus story and in Jesus' teachings desires liberation from oppression and justice towards all humankind (Watkins and Shulman, 2008; Ellis 1987).

It makes sense that liberation theology has had such a profound effect on the formation and thought of liberation psychology. Therefore, liberation cannot be understood or spoken of from an individualistic perspective only, as is so often the case in contemporary (Western) psychology. It is imperative that the impact of psychology's work needs to be holistic, embracing the social, economic and political structures that contribute to the mental health of our clients. Negotiating these challenges, while seeking to offer meaningful resources of support and community care, would only heighten the effectiveness and outcomes of psychology as a whole.

Historically, European and American psychology was (and still is), heavily based on individualism and hedonism, all of which assumed that the unit of psychological analysis was an unattached autonomous individual whose single most important goal was personal happiness or satisfaction. In this

psychological construction, there is no sense of commitment to sacrifice, solidarity, social justice and community building. The majority of psychological theories of the 1970's and 1980's were ahistorical and universalist, with the assumption that the fundamental realities of personality and psychopathology were the same across times and cultures:

> They had a homeostatic vision, which assumed the persistence of essential social structures rather than their transformation. Many psychological theories leaned towards a sterile scientism, focusing solely on quantifiable variables measurable in laboratory situations rather than an analysis of lived experience. (Watkins and Shulman, 2008, p.24)

Watkins and Shulman continue to say that most academic psychology in the Western world continues to focus primarily on the natural sciences, the dominant core of the discipline ever since it's beginning. These dominant approaches within psychology are exported throughout the world, whereby clinical psychology programmes tend to focus on individuals in isolation from their communities, without taking into account local cultural, social and economic disparities. It is of no surprise then that much of mainstream psychology has emerged as a search for universals, for norms of emotional life and behaviour, and for modes of treatment for individuals who deviate from these norms. This kind of orientation decontextualizes the individuals under its inquiry. Concealing the impact of collective trauma on mental health has led to treatments for individuals, while leaving intact the social settings that mitigate against psychological well being. There is a need to address social issues, a critical

psychological approach to symptoms that is careful to understand the dynamic interrelation between psychological suffering and the cultural and historical context. A new perspective emerges when individual thought and behaviour are seen and understood in a wider context, and when psychology is placed in the service of addressing the healing of individuals within this larger framework (Watkins and Shulman, 2008; Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2005).

Rather than trying to maintain the status quo, liberation psychology places the importance on identifying, supporting and nurturing psychological attempts of individuals and groups alike to re-author their own sense of identity. This requires a critical and honest analysis of oppressive power relations, including those within psychology itself. These psychologies of liberation gather together resources to help people understand the possibilities for the numerous lenses and layers of interpretation through which the world that has been imposed upon them can be understood and, as a result, be reorganised. With embodied practices, people are given the freedom to re-symbolise their worlds through creative conversation and activity in the arts. Thus, they are able to commit to transformative efforts through social and political action. Liberation psychology develops the research and practices that lead to understanding and supporting such directions and outcomes (Watkins and Shulman, 2008).

Unlike a universal approach, liberation psychology seeks to implement learning practices similar to wellsprings erupting out of the ground in many places throughout the world, each marked by its own culture and location. These practices seek to focus on the well being and self-organisation of people and

their communities, promoting critical reflection and transformation in their local arenas, with a goal that is not the imposition of a prescribed yardstick of development, but rather an opening towards greater freedom in imagining the goals of life. This opening is based on the interrelatedness of individuals, communities, cultures, histories, and economic and social environments. Most of the data and research projects collected emphasise that this involves learning the skills of dialogue and reconciliation across differing points-of-view, in order to build new solidarities. This work would need to proceed gently and slowly over months and years, as people learn to let go of fixed and faulty ideas (based on decades of repression without a voice), allowing new symbols, emotions, relationships and structures to enter their lives (Watkins and Shulman, 2008).

The Work of Ignacio Martín-Baró

As I now begin to reflect on liberation psychology and Martín-Baró's critique of Eurocentric psychology's impact on Latin America, I firmly believe that these critiques can be applied globally, not just to South America. Therefore, in understanding the impact and contribution that Martín-Baró seeks to offer to the discipline and practice of psychology in Latin America, I would want the readers of this paper to expand their thinking of this impact and contribution to the global community as a whole.

Ignacio Martín-Baró was both a Jesuit priest and a psychologist who was assassinated in 1989 at the University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador. He was the head of the psychology department, obtaining his PhD at the University of Chicago. Martín-Baró aligned himself with the poor in Latin

America, in the years following the Medellín Conference in 1968. During his years in Latin America, he was instrumental and a part of developing a powerful and popular movement, mobilising thousands of people to imagine an alternative to their present conditions. He called for psychology to critically examine itself, to become a force for transformation, rather than to conform to the status quo cultural arrangements that continued to contribute to injustice, poverty, violence and war (Watkins and Shulman, 2008).

Martín-Baró lays out a platform in what he describes "toward a liberation psychology." He starts by affirming that any effort at developing a psychology that will contribute to the liberation of his people has to mean the creation of a liberation psychology. Creating a liberation psychology is not simply a theoretical task; first and most importantly it is a practical task. If Latin American psychology seeks to walk on the road to liberation, it must break out of its own enslavement. Simply put, in order to achieve a psychology of liberation demands firstly that psychology be liberated (Martín-Baró, 1994).

Martín-Baró proposes three essential elements for the building of a liberation psychology for Latin America: a new horizon, a new epistemology, and a new praxis.

A New Horizon

For Martín-Baró, psychologists must stop focusing their attention on themselves, their personal careers and publications in academic journals. Instead they ought to focus more on the needs and sufferings of the majority of people who are numbed by oppressive life circumstances.

Nevertheless, psychology has for the most part not been very clear about

the intimate relationship between an unalienated personal existence and

unalienated social existence, between individual control and collective

power, between the liberation of each person and the liberation of a whole

people. Moreover, psychology has often contributed to obscuring the

relationship between personal estrangement and social oppression,

presenting the pathology of persons as if it were something removed from

history and society, and behavioural disorders as if they played

themselves out entirely in the individual plane. (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 27)

Liberation psychology ought to illuminate the links between an individual's

psychological suffering and the social, economic, and political contexts in which

s/he lives. As psychologists, we need to learn to connect psychic fragmentation

and apathy that force people "to learn submission and expect nothing from life"

within the social structures, discourses, and ideologies that creates its subjects to

be in a state of "marginalised dependency" and "oppressive misery," while (at the

same time) snatching away their ability to define their own lives (Martín-Baró,

1994; Watkins and Shulman, 2008).

A New Epistemology

Martín-Baró declares if liberation is to serve the needs of the Latin

American people, this requires a new way of seeking knowledge, because the

truth is not their present reality. Therefore, the truth for the people is not to be

found, but rather made and created. This new perspective needs to be from

below, from the same oppressed majorities whose truth is to be created. Martín-

Baró asks a few profound questions: Have we seriously asked what the psychosocial processes look like from the perspective of the dominated rather than that of the dominator? Have we given thought to look at educational psychology from where the illiterate stands, or industrial psychology from the place of the unemployed, or clinical psychology from the point-of-view of the marginalised? What would mental health look like from the perspective of a tenant farmer on a hacienda (that is an estate or plantation), or personal maturity from someone who lives in the town dump, or motivation from a woman who sells goods at the local market? Martín-Baró makes it clear that this is not about us bringing them our ideas or thinking for them, rather it is thinking and theorising with them and from them (Martín-Baró, 1994).

Martín-Baró draws from insight of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's work that puts forth pedagogy "of" the oppressed and not "for" the oppressed:

It was the very person, the very same community, that constituted the subject of its own conscienticizing literacy, that in community dialogue the educator had to learn to read its reality and write its historical word. And just as liberation theology has underlined the fact that only from the poor is it possible to find the God of life enunciated by Jesus, a psychology of liberation has to learn that only from the oppressed will it be possible to discover and build the existential truth of the Latin American peoples. (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 28)

The role of the psychologist becomes multi-faceted, as that of a witness, a co-participant, and a holder of faith for a process through which whose who

historically have been silenced may discover their own capacities for historical

memory, critical analysis, utopian imagination, and transformative social action.

The psychologist will be able to "relativize" and "critically revise" theories and

histories that have been developed in the past, in each local arena where they

may or may not apply. Truth in this new epistemology becomes democratised.

Each participant evolves in finding a meaningful voice; a way of making sense of

the world that is both valued and provisional within the larger context of

community listening and discernment. Psychologists surrender their role as

experts and develop facilitation and group processes (Watkins and Shulman,

2008).

A New Praxis

Martín-Baró emphasises that all human knowledge is subject to limitations

imposed by reality itself. Often that reality is obscured and muddy, and only by

getting involved, by transforming and tweaking it, can a person get the necessary

information about it. What we see and experience is determined from our

personal perspective, but it is also determined by reality itself. To acquire new

psychological knowledge, takes more than just placing ourselves in the

perspective (or environment) of the people; it necessitates involving ourselves in

a new praxis, the activity of transforming reality. This transforming reality lets us

know about what is and what is not, and thereby attempts to orientate and place

ourselves towards what ought to be (Martín-Baró, 1994).

Martín-Baró continues to successfully argue that on a general level,

psychologists enter into the social process through the structural powers that are

already in place. Any attempt at scientific purity means in practice the

perspective of taking the side of those in power and acting from a position of

dominance. For example, educational psychologists, industrial psychologists

and community psychologists work from the demands of institutions, corporations

and governmental projects, with no assistance from students, employees or

people directly from the communities they seek to help. These psychologists by

default (because the structural powers are intentionally placed) work from a

position of power. It is very difficult to figure out how to place us as psychologists

in solidarity alongside the dominated rather than alongside the dominator.

Psychological research needs to emerge between people out of their common

concerns and towards their common desires. Martín-Baró proposes: "to

transform and humanize repressive or failing human institutions, all of the people

who participate in them must also be transformed and humanized through

participatory dialogue and creative imagination about alternatives" (Watkins and

Shulman, 2008, p. 27). Such praxis is nurturing towards individuals being able to

dream, while creating a world together in which it will be easier to love. Martín-

Baró also warns if we do not embark on this journeying towards a new type of

praxis that transforms both ourselves and the reality that we are a part of, it will

be extremely difficult to develop a Latin American psychology that contributes to

the liberation of its people (Martín-Baró, 1994; Freire, 1989).

The Role of the Psychologist

In the late sixties, the question of "why psychologists?" was asked by

French psychologist Marc Richelle. This query lay in what he called the sudden

and "disquieting proliferation of a new species." Another Frenchman Didier

Deleule offered this radical reply: the proliferation of psychologists can be

explained because contemporary society requires an ideology of exchange, and

psychology provides this exchange. Psychology offers an alternative solution to

social conflict; it seeks to change the individual while preserving the social order,

or at least present the illusion that as the individual changes, so will the social

order – as if society were a summation of individuals. Martín-Baró says that

Deleule makes a lot of sense. The question is not what this or that subfield of

psychology is trying to do, but first and most importantly, in what direction is

psychology being propelled by the weight of its own activities. What objective

effect does the activity of the psychologist and her or his profession produce in a

particular society? The psychologist's imperative is to examine not only what we

are, but also what might have been and what we ought to be given the needs of

our people – whether or not we have pre-existing models and structures (Martín-

Baró, 1994).

        Martín-Baró affirms that the role of the psychologist is to return to the

historical roots of psychology itself. This involves reverting back to a time that

restricted psychological analysis to behaviour – observable behaviour – and turn

our eyes and thoughts again to the "black box" of human consciousness.

Consciousness is not simply the private, subjective knowledge and feelings of

individuals. More so, it represents the confines within which each person

encounters the reflex impact of her or his being and actions in society, where

people take on and work out a knowledge about the self and the reality that

allows them to be somebody, having a personal and social identity. Consciousness is the knowing or lack of knowing ourselves, through the world and others, where praxis comes before mental knowledge (Martín-Baró, 1994).

In light of what has been mentioned above, Martín-Baró asserts that the fundamental horizon for psychology as a field of knowledge is *concientización*. *Concientización* is a term coined by Paulo Freire (the Brazilian educator mentioned earlier) to characterise the process of personal and social transformation experienced by the oppressed of Latin America, when they become literate in dialectics with their own world. According to Freire, literacy is not only learning to read and write; literacy is above all learning to read the surrounding reality and to be able to write one's own history. It involves learning to say the word of one's own existence, which is both personal and more significantly, collective (Freire, 1971).

For Martín-Baró, concientización requires the psychologist in Latin America, to produce (or at least assist to produce) an answer to the great problems of structural injustice, war and national alienation that overwhelm its people. One cannot do psychology without trying to make a contribution towards changing the dehumanising conditions that affect the vast majority of the population, alienating their consciousness and obstructing the development of their historical identity. Martín-Baró poses that the difficulty for most psychologists:

Is not so much in accepting this horizon for their endeavour as in visualising their job in practice. What does concientización mean in and

for the activity of psychology? Does it have to do with applying some

particular technique? Must it include in its processes some form of

political reflection? Does it mean changing the types of tests that are

used, or the topics of those now in use? Should we be abandoning

individual therapy and doing something like collective ergotherapies?

(Martín-Baró, 1994, p.42)

Martín-Baró takes two examples of how concientización can be used in

psychology impacting both the individual and the community at large; the victims

who have suffered as a result of war and the limited role education has played up

until now.

A more serious concern in Latin America is the problem of victims of war –

whether they are wounded and disabled soldiers, people who have been

traumatised, dehumanised and raped, experiencing unrelenting terrorism and

torture, or orphaned children fleeing from prolonged periods of war and living in

fear. Martín-Baró believed at that time (in the 1970's and 1980's) although it is

still very applicable today through many regions of Latin America, Africa, the

Middle East and Asia, that psychology needs to pay special attention to these

victims of war. This involves providing clinics and support groups to the majority

of the population who have suffered the most from the horror of war. Clinical

attention to these victims would involve the process of concientización, a process

that returns the word to these human beings – both individually and as part of a

people. Here, psychotherapy's aim must be directed at the social identity worked

out through the prototypes of oppressor and oppressed, thereby shaping a new

identity for people as members of a human community, in charge of a history

(Martín-Baró, 1994). This process and outcome of concientización that Martín-

Baró envisions for the role of the psychologist towards the victims of war is very

similar to the process and outcome of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

in South Africa, whereby both the oppressors and the oppressed were given the

opportunity to shape a new identity and history, both individually and collectively,

for the people of South Africa.

Education is a very divisive issue, no more so when political powers and

structures use education (or the lack thereof) to oppress people or stifle the

educated voices of those who protest against such oppression and tyranny.

Martín-Baró states that many Latin American psychologists are employed as

educational psychologists. At times, this work is simply reduced to a systematic

administering of test batteries, determining the academic and developmental

progress of students, confined within the structures of the existing society and

political climate. Educational psychology's work here would never question the

basic schemata by which Latin American people live, nor how social roles are

determined for people. Martín-Baro writes:

> An educational psychology with concientización presupposes an effort to
>
> construct alternative social schemata: the critical and creative ability of
>
> students, as opposed to what school and society offer them; a different
>
> style of confronting social and occupational life. It would have to do not
>
> only with students learning pre-designed academic curricula but, above
>
> all, with learning to confront the reality of their existence through critical

thinking. So, just as there is a junior Chamber of Commerce which

initiates adolescents into small business administration, there might be

something like national reality laboratories, where young people could

directly confront the social conditions of the majority of the population and

reflect critically on those conditions. (Martín-Baro, 1994, p. 44)

He continues to say that for clinical practice as much as for educational

psychology the horizon of concientización would assume an important change in

the profession's way of conducting its work. It does not entail the psychologist

giving up the technical role s/he performs, but it does involve eradicating

theoretical assumptions regarding adaptation and interventions made from a

position of power and/or privilege. Martín-Baró's use of concientización here

once again mirrors my own background growing up in South Africa. The

"Architect of Apartheid" Hendrik Verwoerd once stated: "There is no place for [the

Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour...

What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in

practice? That is quite absurd" (Clark and Worger, 2004, p. 48). The political

activist and founder of the "Black Consciousness Movement" in South Africa

Steve Biko understood the philosophy of concientización. His influence on the

political and educational landscape led to the phrase "liberation before

education," which played a part in expediting the downfall of Apartheid. Martín-

Baró concludes by emphasising the role of the psychologist in society should not

be centred on *where* the work is done, but rather on *by whom*; and not looking at

how something is done, instead it should be *for whose benefit*. The historical

consequences and activity of psychology in Latin America is at stake, and this needs to be thoroughly questioned (Martín-Baró, 1994; Woods, 1978).

3. Ubuntu and Community – A Theological Contribution

Ubuntu

While Martín-Baró's work has been seminal in its contribution to community from a socio-political and structural position, the philosophical and theological contribution of "Ubuntu" is understood at a more interpersonal, intimate position; a person-to-person engagement in the context of the whole community. It is very unfortunate that a more contemporary association with the word "Ubuntu" is a computer software platform that is open-sourced, communal and free. While this software has benefited the computer industry, it has not served the communal and humanitarian understanding of the word very well.

In Western culture people knowingly or not live by the Cartesian understanding of life: "I think, therefore I am." Essentially, this means that countries, provinces, towns and suburbs are made of individuals who, although connected in complex webs of family, work, study, recreation and community relationships, define themselves primarily as individuals. That worldview is often reflected in the admiration of those who boast: "I am a self-made person." This claim in most cases, relieves others (the community) and God of a great responsibility. It always takes "another" to build anything (Wanless, 2007).

From an African point-of-view, peoples' understanding of themselves is expressed in the saying: "I **am**, because we **are**." This humanitarian concept is called *Ubuntu*. Another way of expressing this phrase with a slightly different

understanding is: "I am a person through other persons." Roy Briggs writes:

"Whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual

can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'."

(Wanless, 2007, p.117). Its maxim is "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which

directly translated is "A person is a person through persons" (Wanless, 2007).

From an historical perspective, Ubuntu is a Bantu characteristic, and

Bantu means people. All Bantu languages have the root "ntu," with the prefix

"ba," which denotes the plurality (as in Bantu), while the prefix "mu" refers to an

individual person (like in Muntu). However, the term Ubuntu is a Xhosa and Zulu

reference to the social conduct of a Muntu. Ubuntu is a communal way of life,

with the understanding that society must be designed and administered for the

benefit of all, requiring co-operation alongside sharing and charity. Ubuntu is the

quality of being human. It involves caring, sharing, respect, and compassion,

ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family

(Muwanga-Zake, 2009).

From a social and a societal way-of-life, Ubuntu defines the individual in

terms of rules of conduct or social ethics in relation with others. For example,

Bantu are warm, welcoming, hospitable, generous and open. They are willing to

share (attributes that could be argued contributed to the colonisation of Bantu).

Bantu are always available to others, willing to support and affirm others, and are

well meaning to others because of the understanding and assurance that they

belong to a community. Therefore, Ubuntu is about amicable personal

relationships, accentuating the importance of agreement, and a capacity for the

pursuit of consensus and reconciliation. Bantu democracy relies on extensive

and in-depth discussions that provide a platform to every person until some

solidarity and consensus is reached. During such discussions, each Muntu

expresses her/himself to others, during which differences or ill feelings are

smoothed over in a homogenous agreement that is mindful of the norms and

values of that particular community. Discussions confront plurality, seeking to

interrogate truths and credibility (Muwanga-Zake, 2009).

Muwanga-Zake continues to elaborate that Ubuntu respects the

particularity of the other, thereby linking up closely to its respect for individuality

that is not Cartesian. The shortcomings of the Cartesian models, especially the

modernistic individuals, are that they exist prior to, or separately and

independently from the rest of the community such that the rest of society is an

added extra to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being. Cartesian individualism is

solitary, and at times against communal interests. Collective Cartesian

individuals can often translate into competitiveness, which becomes Western

democracy and capitalism. In contrast to this type of Cartesian individual, while

individual decisions and capital ownership are made and acquired, competition

would not be severe in Ubuntu, which defines the individual in terms of

relationships with others. The Bantu thus discourages a Muntu to take

precedence over the community. The "individual" Muntu may flourish, but always

assists and interacts with, others. Consequently, a Muntu signifies a plurality of

personalities in a community (Muwanga-Zake, 2009).

Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu

In his book "Reconciliation," Michael Battle discusses Desmond Tutu's theology of Ubuntu in light of the South African context. For the purposes of this paper, I am going to look at some of Tutu's perspectives on a theological understanding of Ubuntu, and how this impacts and informs the importance of community.

Interdependent Community

Ubuntu, according to Tutu, is the environment of vulnerability that builds true community. This vulnerability can only begin to be manifest when human divisions and fear are set aside. We are designed for fellowship (a theological word meaning Christian communion), because only in a vulnerable setting of relationships are we able to recognise that our humanity is bound up in the humanity of others. Contrary to our Western culture, Ubuntu theology excludes competitiveness. Communal competition for Tutu makes humans and their community into a pack of animals. Human systems that encourage a high level of competitiveness and selfishness, therefore, exhibit the greatest inconsistency – a disproportionate difference – from God's creation of interdependence (Battle, 1997).

Ubuntu asserts that people ought to rejoice in how God has made us differently, so that new meanings and identities are always possible. No person can be absolutely self-sufficient. Rather, we belong in a network of delicate relationships of interdependence. "Human categories and effort will not ultimately achieve the goal of a flourishing community. Therefore, an appeal to

participate in that which is greater – God – provides the theological impetus for Ubuntu" (Battle, 1997, p.42).

People are Distinctive

In anticipating criticism of Ubuntu's emphasis of the many outweighing the few, or the individual's inability to self-determination, Tutu stresses the Christian definition of relationships to define Ubuntu. Ubuntu theology affirms that people are ends in themselves only through the discovery of who they are in others. Humans therefore, become persons only by living in an environment that fosters the interaction of diverse personalities and cultures. If no such environment is present, personhood does not survive. "The distinctiveness of each person depends upon her or his connection with other persons and a recognition of a more encompassing context. All humans are born with potential, according to ubuntu theology, but this potential can be understood only in the context of others and God" (Battle, 1997, p. 44).

Tutu believes that in Ubuntu theology personhood is formed fundamentally through the Church, as the Church bears witness to the world that it is God who loves human identities into being. That is to say, God's love is present before everything else and therefore, God is the source of all power. Through Ubuntu, we learn how to negotiate the life of grace in God, and any claim of control or power is utterly foolish. For Tutu, being recognised as a distinctive person requires that a person be transformed to a new identity, and to be connected to the power source. Tutu elaborates:

God does not love us because we are lovable, but we are lovable

precisely because God loves us. God's love is what gives us worth…So

we are liberated from the desire to achieve, to impress. We are the

children of the divine love and nothing can change that fundamental fact

about us. (Battle, 1997, p.44)

Integrates Cultures

Ubuntu, as we have already mentioned is the interaction in which one's

own humanness is recognised and present in the other. This recognition is

initially present from our own unique cultural backgrounds, but it also transcends

culture because of the human interaction. By recognising one's identity in the

other, Ubuntu theology guards against the propensity for differing classifications

– whether they be racial, cultural, gender and economic. Tutu seeks to display

that persons are more than these classifications; they are *human* (Battle, 1997).

When we view ourselves through the identity of the other, Ubuntu is once

again imposing imago Dei (the image of God) we discussed in chapter 2, God's

beautifully distinctive creation in the other, and the divine life of that person.

Ubuntu entails a system in which not only is each individual unique, but so are

the nations of the world. The world is to be internationally recognised, and not in

name only. This implies an "international society" that is truly above class, race,

gender and exploitation. It becomes "a touchstone by which the quality of a

society has to be continually tested, no matter what ideology is reigning. It must

be incorporated not only in the society of the future but also in the process of the

struggle towards that future" (Battle, 1997, p. 46).

Jean Vanier on Community

A lot has been said about community from a psychological/political (liberation psychology and Martín-Baro) lens, a philosophical/theological (Ubuntu and Tutu) lens, but little has been said about community and what it looks like from a practical, theologically lived experience. Jean Vanier is the founder of the world-renowned L'Arche community, an intentional community for the mentally disabled and their live-in helpers. Since 1964, L'Arche has set a precedent in what intentional community ought to look. In this section on community, I'm going to glean from what I think are some of the important aspects of community that have not been said already in this paper. For the sake of space, I'm focusing on what community offers us as human beings living with pain and brokenness, desiring greater connectedness, belonging and personal identity.

In the opening pages on community, Vanier states that the deepest yearning in a child is to be in communion with its mother and father, as this is the most fundamental need of every human being. It is the source of all other needs and desires. Every person experiences the joy of acceptance and the pain of rejection. There is an innate desire for communion and belonging, but at the same time there is a fear of it. We want to belong to a group, but fear a type of death, because we may not be seen as our unique selves, or we fear being manipulated, smothered and spoiled. We are all so ambivalent toward love, communion and grace (Vanier, 1979).

Vanier mentions his trips to Africa and his realisation that through their rituals and traditions, they are living community life (as in Ubuntu, as previously

mentioned). Africans do not need to talk about community as they live it organically and intensely. Vanier is quick to warn that belonging in community can get in the way of seeing other groups or tribes objectively and lovingly. This is how tribal wars start. Sometimes, African community life is founded on fear. The group gives life and solidarity, protection and security, but if people sever ties with the group, they are alone and isolated, facing evil forces and death. These fears are experienced in rites or fetishes, which are also a force for cohesion. This is not community either. Vanier emphasises that true community is liberating and authentic, open to communing with God, humankind, and the universe (Vanier, 1979).

Vanier continues to say that community involves openness to others, establishing vulnerability and humility, where members of those communities grow in love and compassion. "The fundamental attitudes of true community, where there is true belonging, are openness, welcome, and listening to God, the universe, to each other and to other communities" (Vanier, 1979, p. 19). Alongside belonging and openness, Vanier adds that community entails caring for one another. People matter, not in some passing way, but with permanence similar to that of a family. Community demands us to love and care for each other, just as we are. Out of a genuine care for one another, people in community are called to co-operate with one another. Work has to be done – food bought and meals prepared and house cleaning chores – all connected with prayer and camaraderie (Vanier, 1979).

When people become a part of community, they often come from a place of loneliness, rejection or isolation. This could be a terrifying undertaking, because community is a place of relationship, it would involve exposing wounded emotions and painful experiences. Community reveals our limitations, our fears, our weaknesses and our egoism. However, it is also the place of healing and growth, a safe place where people really listen to us; so that little by little we can trustingly reveal the darkest parts of ourselves. It is here that we discover that we are loved by God in a profound and intimate way. Community life with all its pain and discomfort is the revelation of those deep wounds, thereby becoming the place of liberation and growth (Vanier, 1979).

If liberation and growth is part of being in community, so is forgiveness. We are a mixture of light and darkness, of love and hate, of altruism and egocentricity, of maturity and immaturity, and yet we are all children of the same Father. When we accept that we have weaknesses and flaws, that we are broken before God and others, and yet we are both forgiven and can extend forgiveness towards one another, that allows us to grow in the freedom of love. That means we can look at all women and men with realism and love. As mortal and fragile beings, there are few better feelings than hearing the words "I forgive you." It gives us hope and the ability in return to forgive others, as Jesus said, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14; Vanier, 1979).

In choosing to live in community, often it is because it offers a certain dynamism, warmth and radiance, a place of happiness. However, if there is a

crisis, filled with tension and turmoil, we begin to doubt the choice we have made by thinking "maybe I made a mistake." When we *enter* community, we do so because we choose to. However, Vanier argues that we will *stay* only if we become more aware that it was God who chose us to be in community. It is only then that we will discover the innate strength to live through tumultuous times. Similar is the core understanding of a (religious) marriage that they were brought together by God, and this union is to be a sign of love and of forgiveness towards one another (Vanier, 1979).

Vanier's emphatic culmination of his book is that celebration is at the heart of community. For Vanier, forgiveness and celebration are at the heart of community, the two faces of love. Celebration is a communal experience of joy and thanksgiving. We celebrate the fact of being together, the gifts and blessings we have been given. Vanier writes lavishly:

> Celebration nourishes us, restores hope, and brings us the strength to live with the suffering and difficulties of everyday life. The poorer people are, the more they love to celebrate. The festivals of the poorest people in Africa last for several days. They use all their savings on huge feasts and beautiful clothes…These festivals nearly always commemorate a divine or religious event – they are sacred occasions. In richer countries we have lost the art of celebrating. People go to movies, or watch television or have other leisure activities; they go to parties, but they do not celebrate. (Vanier, 1979, p. 313)

In recognising that there are many people who are depressed, living on the edge and without hope or purpose, Vanier says it's important to announce and celebrate our hope in God. Celebrations do not have to be loud or boisterous; they can be sober, declaring our trust and our love that God is indeed present amongst us (Vanier, 1979).

4. Final Thought

I firmly believe that this chapter on community has revealed more than the other chapters preceding it that the therapeutic connection between psychology and theology is inextricably entwined. The opening five pages of this chapter give an important historical context to the emergence of liberation psychology, which has its roots deeply entrenched in liberation theology. Martín-Baró, Tutu and Vanier emphasise the importance that life should not and cannot be lived as individuals in isolation of thought and experience from one another. Replacing our Western dominated cultural identities is no easy task, however, changing our lived experience as therapists, mental health workers or members of communal religious groups can begin to change the landscape gradually with gentleness, peace and passion.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING SUMMARY

As this paper has progressed I have noticed that the chapters have lengthened accordingly because I think each chapter has built upon each other. In chapter two, the building block for therapeutic outcomes is built on trusting, secure relationships. Once a person establishes healthy, loving relationships it is easier for that person to gain a true understanding of their being and identity, that essence of self, as seen in chapter three. Having gained a true sense of selfhood through secure, loving relationships, I believe the innate desire for community and greater human connection would be a natural progression and fulfilment of human dynamics, as chapter four outlines.

What started out as three common, connecting points between psychology and theology – relationships, being/identity and community have a natural on going cyclical dimension to it, as can be seen in the diagram below.
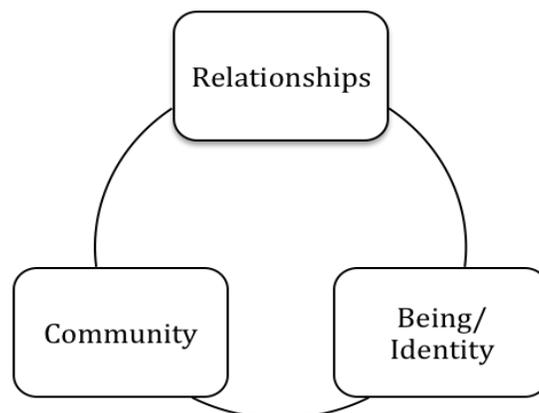
If healthy therapeutic outcomes are the same for both the counsellor and the priest/minister, the desired hope is that we in each of our areas of influence may be instruments in developing strong relationships, whereby people would know and have a clear identity of who they are, and would naturally seek out

community as a place of belonging, acceptance and mutual empowerment for

the benefit of the entire community and beyond. It is my firm belief that both the

disciplines of psychology and theology/spirituality need to actively engage in

supporting one another for the mutual benefit of our communities. Both parties

need to set aside their pride and indifference to the other, acknowledging that

they need each other in order for to help establish and build healthy

communities. We also need to stop focusing exclusively on individually focused

therapies and insular church or group based programmes that do not seek to

offer a broader healing to society at large.

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