

A three musketeering approach to pastoral care: Reflections on collaboration between pastoral care, narrative therapy and positive psychology

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In the current times of change, deconstruction and ever-growing relativisation, pastoral praxis finds itself in methodological *limbo*. Pastoral practitioners currently face the challenge of effectively reaching postmodern people through the pastoral process. This challenge is intensified by the innate tension between revelation and experience in pastoral theology as well as the philosophical migration from modernism to postmodernism, which necessitates an on-going rethinking of pastoral praxis. This research investigates a collaborative approach between pastoral care, narrative therapy and positive psychology as a possible method for dispensing pastoral care. A broad outline of these approaches as well as their underlying philosophical frameworks is contemplated in order to evaluate their suitability for a pastoral collaboration. Markers for a collaborative model are suggested where the narrative and positive psychology are employed as strategies in a so-called three- musketeering approach to pastoral care.

Introduction

The quest for an appropriate paradigm for pastoral care in the current time of philosophical migration seems to be far from over. This could become – or has possibly already become – something that pastoral theologians will have to contend with on an on-going basis. However, it does not necessarily imply a burden as Browning (1991:281) observed that crises help to expose the inadequacies of older structures. In this regard, the international pastoral fraternity has indeed been enriched theoretically since the dawn of postmodernism. Both the philosophy and the effect of this new way of thinking forced practical theologians back to the drawing boards of *cura animarum* and compelled everybody involved in the field to reflect critically on what they are doing.

Whilst the paradigmatic debate between practical theologians in academic circles¹ is continuing, there does however appear to be some void in the area of the *praxis* of pastoral care. Practitioners in the field, especially those working within a traditional pastoral approach – for example, clergy in ministerial pastoral practice, Christian therapists and the like – are most likely experiencing feelings of being in *limbo*. Well aware of paradigm shifts and epistemological debates, they remain the daily providers of pastoral care to the people of the postmodern era. Irrespective of whether the person sitting in front of them is a native, foreigner or immigrant² in the postmodern world, soul care must be provided for these faith pilgrims. Assuming both a pastoral and socio-anthropological conscience, pastoral practitioners are most probably confronted with the question of *how to respond* to pastoral challenges whilst remaining congruent to a sound pastoral theology and remaining true to the experience of people coming to terms with changing times. It should be clear in this context that *praxis* is understood as being more than 'how to', but it also refers to a theory and praxis of pastoral care that is aligned with the wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible, which has the good and best in mind for the people created by him.³

This article will try to address this void by assessing narrative therapy and positive psychology as possible partners for pastoral care. Creating unique outcomes (White & Epston 1990) and promoting the best in human behaviour (Seligman 1998, quoted in Baumgardner & Crothers

1. This research recognises that practical theology is practised on different levels. As Müller (2005:73) points out, it can range from an informal practice to an academic activity at university level. This article is interested in how practical theology is perceived and applied at a ministerial level, that is, how practitioners like ministers can dispense pastoral care, cognisant of different approaches.

2. Sweet (1999:147) is of the opinion that the people of our time can be categorised as either *natives* (people who are comfortable within the current time), *foreigners* (those who are stuck in the past) or *immigrants* (those who are still coming to terms with changes). The implication is that people seeking pastoral guidance may have different philosophies and world views, based on the degree of assimilating postmodern thinking and living.

3. Louw (2010:73–74) explains that 'praxis' in pastoral care refers to more than the mere practicalities of the pastoral encounter, such as skill or technique, but must be understood as 'the intention of actions as related to the meaning and destiny'. In pastoral care, praxis is theologically anchored in the wisdom of God. The search for finding ways of *doing* pastoral care is in essence always a theological venture.

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2010)⁴ do in fact correspond with the outcomes with which the pastoral approach is concerned. A closer analysis, however, reveals their undeniable different philosophical roots. In the case of the narrative approach, a postmodern paradigm is at work whilst positive psychology seems to be an exact science, empirically assessing positive human behaviour. This makes the employment of these methods in a pastoral context somewhat more complex and necessitates further theological reflection.

Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument on which this research is based is that collaboration between pastoral care, narrative therapy and positive psychology is possible and that the proposed collaboration can serve as a basis-theoretical framework for contemporary praxis of pastoral therapy.

Several notions underlie the central theoretical argument. The first notion is that the rapidly changing world culture compels not just on-going pastoral theory formation but also the active contemplation and evaluation of different approaches to pastoral praxis. Secondly, pastoral practice can successfully latch onto practices conducted by neighbouring disciplines, which are also part of the quest to stay relevant and effective in current societies. Thirdly, collaborations of this kind need not be conceived as a theological threat. Fourthly, critical reflections in this regard will stimulate much needed thinking about pastoral relevance in changing times, which will lead to meaningful contributions from a Christian perspective to the helping disciplines.

Epistemology and research method

As this research intends to make a contribution to the field of pastoral care, it will operate within the epistemological paradigm of practical theology. Definitions of practical theology are abundant. Some of these are broad in nature, like that of Müller (2005:73), which states that practical theology happens 'whenever and wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God'. Others are more structured, for example that of Osmer (2008:4), who describes the task of practical theology as an interpretive one which operates through the use of four questions:

- What is going on?
- Why is this going on?
- What should be going on?
- How might we respond?

My contribution will methodologically align with Müller's definition because there will not be sufficient space to do more than reflect on (pastoral) practice from a practical theological (Biblical) stance. In doing so, Osmer's definition regarding the interpretive task of practical theology will also come into play in an attempt to provide a response to the question of

⁴It is widely accepted that Martin Seligman coined the phrase 'positive psychology'. In his 1998 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, he proposed a shift in the focus of psychology, away from studying dysfunctional human behaviour towards promoting the best in human behaviour (Baumgardner & Crothers 2010:3).

how pastoral practitioners must currently respond to the pastoral needs of people. As indicated in this formulation, the 'perspective of the experience of the presence of God' (see Müller 2005:73) is, for the purpose of this article, equated to God's revelation of himself in the Bible as the Word of God is deemed as the primary source of experiencing (hearing) God. This epistemological point of departure also forms the basis of what is believed to be pastoral care, that is, 'the expression and representation of the sensitivity and compassion of the Scripture's understanding and portrayal of God's encounter, intervention, interaction and involvement in our being human' (Louw 2010:73). In light of these definitions, the goal of pastoral care could primarily be seen as *change*. By bringing God's involvement into the lives of people during the pastoral encounter, 'being human' is transcended through the grace of God, the promises of his Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. *How* this change is to be effected, however, is the focus of this research as it is suspected that the vehicles of narrative and positive psychology provide interfaces that will bring postmodern believers and pastoral care into a more symbiotic relationship.

To achieve this, the research will unfold as follows: the analogy of the three musketeers is discussed as framework for a collaborative pastoral approach. It will be argued that this analogy is applied in a qualified sense, that is, in a mechanical rather than an organic sense in an attempt to avoid epistemological discrepancies. The need for a collaborative approach will be motivated in light of the innate tension between the revelational and experiential dimensions found in pastoral care as well as in light of the changes in current thinking that necessitates an on-going rethinking of ministerial pastoral practice. Following on the motivation of collaborative pastoral care, models for collaboration will be suggested. Narrative and positive psychology will be described in an exploratory fashion, and the philosophical framework of each will be highlighted. The research concludes with cursory markers for a collaborative approach to pastoral care where the pastorate, narrative and positive psychology is merged in a so-called three-musketeering approach.

A three-musketeering approach to pastoral care

The title of this research proposes 'a three-musketeering approach to pastoral care'. Drawing on the analogy of Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* [The three musketeers], this approach suggests a collaborative style for pastoral care. Dumas's characters *Athos*, *Porthos* and *Aramis* challenged their opponents with the motto *un pour tous, tous pour un* [all for one, one for all] and achieved remarkable success through it. Through collaboration, they became victorious in the face of adversity even though they remained *Athos*, *Porthos* and *Aramis*: three distinguishable individuals.

This last remark is important in terms of the use of the term collaboration in the framework of this research. Collaboration

in this research denotes a form of *interdisciplinary* cooperation rather than a form of *intradisciplinary* cooperation.⁵ Another way of describing what this article suggests as collaboration could be to say that it is interested in mechanical collaboration rather than organic collaboration. In an interdisciplinary approach, as will be contemplated here, different approaches are employed without necessarily engaging one another's epistemologies. In terms of the analogy employed, collaboration on this level suggests that pastoral care is interested in the 'swords' (strategies) of the other musketeers and not their 'personalities' (epistemologies). In an intradisciplinary approach, it becomes possible for different approaches to merge on a deeper level and for epistemologies to engage in mutual conversation. This becomes clear in the notion of transversal or postfoundational rationality. As Van Huyssteen (1999:136) suggests: 'Transversal rationality thus emerges as a place in time and space where our multiple beliefs and practices, our habits of thought and attitudes, our prejudices and assessments, converge ...'

Locally, the postfoundational notion of practical theology was pioneered by Müller (cf. 2005, 2009; Demasure & Müller 2006) who indicated that interdisciplinary conversations can indeed be integrated on an in-depth level (intra-level), getting different theories with different epistemologies to engage to the benefit of a contextualised practical-theological approach. The possibilities of this postfoundational notion of practical theology were convincingly illustrated in pastoral scenarios where a postmodern approach like the narrative was employed within a practical-theological framework (cf. Müller 2009).

In this exploratory reflection on collaboration between a Biblical, modernist and postmodernist approach, a more traditional approach will however be followed. The main thrust of the research is exploratory in nature, introducing narrative and positive psychology as possible partners for pastoral care, working side by side with one another. It therefore engages with both the analogy of the three musketeers and the mentioned approaches on one level only, laying no claims to being conclusive or introducing a final model for pastoral care. As the reference to a postfoundational notion of practical theology indicated, other possibilities for integration exist although it falls outside the scope of this research. This article wants to be, as the title indicates, a *reflection* on collaboration, sensitising pastoral practitioners about some of the collaborative possibilities of narrative and positive psychology.

To collaborate or not to collaborate?

This research proposes that effective pastoral counselling would be hard to achieve when it is conducted in isolation from other helping disciplines. Therefore, pastoral collaboration should be considered for two reasons.

Since the early days of scientific reflection on pastoral care, it was clear that pastoral care has always carried an

5. See Janse van Rensburg (2000:79) for a detailed discussion on the differences between interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary approaches in pastoral care.

innate burden, namely the tension between revelation and experience (read: the horizontal or revelational and vertical or experiential dimensions of pastoral care). This resulted in an *either/or* approach which was characteristic of many of the earlier designs for pastoral care in which either the theological aspect was overemphasised or the experiential needs of the counselee received preference.

Die Lehre von der Seelsorge (1957)⁶ and *Seelsorge im Vollzug* (1968) by Thurneysen serve as good examples of the so-called European or Reformed approach to the pastorate, also known as the *kerygmatic* approach. This approach relied strictly on revelation and emphasised that '[p]astoral care is and remains proclamation of the Word to the individual and neither can nor should be anything else' (Thurneysen 1963:201). This obviously created the danger of seeing the pastoral encounter as an individualised kerygmatic endeavour without hearing or accommodating the needs of the counselee.

This shortfall was soon to be amended by Hiltner, who tried to accommodate the horizontal aspects of counselling by drawing on the insights of the rapidly developing American psychological movement of the 1950s through his educive approach (Hiltner 1958):

The new knowledge that is coming from psychology, from psychiatry, from anthropology, and from other sources is not easy to assimilate; but its riches are such that no thoughtful person can set them aside. (p. 25)

This 'new knowledge' refers to the client-centeredness which was popularised by Carl Rogers and which was further elaborated on by pastoral theologians like Wayne Oates, Paul Johnson and Carrol Wise (De Jongh van Arkel 1988:2). Even though the pastoral theology of Hiltner tried to achieve a balance between revelation and experience, it created the risk of subjecting the revelational aspect of the pastoral process to the needs of the counselee.

This pendulum movement in the design of pastoral models gained momentum with the introduction of Adams's *Biblical Counseling*, which was essentially a *nouthetic* model for pastoral care that was seeking an answer to human problems in a confrontational model where counselees should be lead on the path of confession of guilt as Adams saw in guilt the foundation of human misery. Louw (2000:47) described this as a *nouthetic reaction model*, thereby pointing out Adams's desire not to be caught up in a model which in any way compromised the Biblical integrity of pastoral care. Adams (1979:9) was adamant that contributions from the field of psychology and psychiatry stood in an antithetic relationship to pastoral care.

In the light of this pendulum tendency in the development of pastoral care, the contribution of Heitink should be seen as a positive attempt to bring the revelational and experiential poles of pastoral care into a meaningful relationship. Defining his approach to pastoral care as *Hulpverlening* [rendering help], Heitink attempted a synthesis between the kerygmatic

6. Later translated into *A Theology of Pastoral Care* (1963).

and educative approaches by means of a bipolar model. Pastoral care as a process of rendering help points to the encounter where the pastor enters into a helping relationship with the person in need and where they (the pastor and the counselee) seek answers to life's questions in the light of Scripture and in relationship to the faith community (Heitink 1979:79). What makes Heitink's contribution noteworthy and important is that he proposed a model where the horizontal and vertical poles of the pastoral encounter can be accommodated in a relationship where neither dominates the other: *'Dit bewaart het pastoraat voor secularisering enerzijds en spiritualisering anderzijds ... We spreken dan ook van een polaire definitie'* (Heitink 1979:79).

The cursory history of pastoral theology provided above is intended to provide preliminary answers to the questions on the necessity of pastoral collaboration by suggesting that pastoral care ought to seriously consider collaborating with neighbouring disciplines. The motivation for collaborating is to safeguard the pastoral process from the more negative aspects of the tension between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of this practice which have become clear in the history of the development of pastoral work.

The second, even more compelling, reason for pastoral collaboration is to be found in the recent epistemological and philosophical changes that are evident in the world around us. If it is accepted that pastoral ministry does not function in isolation from current changes in worldviews and philosophies, the importance of contemplating collaborative efforts becomes even more apparent. This contemplation is necessary because, through it, pastors are trying to reach inhabitants of a changing environment where the changes in their environment have implications for the way they understand themselves, the world, the things that happen to them and ultimately God and faith.

In this regard, Reader (2008) pleads for a reconstruction of practical theology because the effects of globalisation rendered many of the traditional theological approaches ineffective. The danger of rapidly changing times is that (practical) theology can cling to so-called 'zombie categories', which Reader (2008) describes as:

the tried and familiar frameworks of interpretation that have served us well for many years ..., even though they are embedded in a world that is passing away before our eyes. (p. 1)

In much the same way, Osmer (2008:235) refers to 'shell institutions', denoting institutions from the past which are 'not up to the challenges of a new context'. It should be evident then that pastoral sensitivity is crucial with regard to the question of how we are carrying the pastoral torch in a certain era, thereby seeking avenues for effective ministry.

This became apparent in the on-going epistemological theorising which became characteristic of pastoral theology in recent years. South African pastoral theologians witnessed several epistemological migrations over the last decades. The main movement seemed to be the migration from a

diaconological to a practical-theological paradigm (Dreyer 1998:14–15) and, in some instances, to a postmodern paradigm (Janse van Rensburg 2000). These migrations could most probably be read as attempts to remain relevant in the growing global village – thus, a theological coming to terms with a changing environment.

Unfortunately, this very attempt to stay epistemologically relevant often defies the purpose of the practical theologian's endeavours. Janse van Rensburg (2000:91–93) convincingly argues that epistemological discrepancies tend to show wherever theologians do not retain epistemological consistency. This refers to the anomaly of a postmodern approach in theology as a theological approach cannot effectively be postmodern because of postmodernism's incredulity toward all metanarratives (Piehl 2001:25), which also casts serious doubt on the role of Scripture.

The main argument for contemplating a collaborative pastoral practice is therefore to avoid epistemological incongruence and not to attempt to change the approach of practical theology but rather to employ approaches that developed in the postmodern environment to help facilitate the pastoral process.

Possible models for collaboration

The question that needs to be answered, however, is how collaboration will materialise in practice, especially in view of the danger of blurred boundaries between the disciplines involved in a collaborative effort at pastoral care. Crabb (1978:35) identifies a number of risks associated with collaborative endeavours. For example, it is possible that either Scripture or psychology may be totally excluded, or the pastor can end up with a 'tossed salad' where the overlapping attributes of theology and psychology are merged like putting together a jigsaw puzzle without asking any questions. The obvious danger of an approach like this is the lack of concern for the presuppositions of the disciplines involved, which holds the danger that 'one system will over time "eat up" the other' (Crabb 1978:39). An effort to understand the epistemological frameworks of partners for pastoral conversation is thus paramount.

It therefore makes good sense that collaborative efforts must be conducted with the aid of a theological model which provides a theological frame of reference for entering the pastoral process in partnership with other approaches. An example of such a model is found in Swinton and Mowat's (2006) reflections on practical theology and qualitative research. They theorise about partnerships between practical theology and other disciplines, and they suggest three theological concepts to facilitate collaboration (Swinton & Mowat 2006:91–94), namely hospitality, conversion and critical faithfulness.

In this model, *hospitality* points to the Spirit-enabled Christian virtue of being able to show kindness, acceptance and warmth when welcoming guests or strangers (Heb 13:1–3). Within the

framework of practical theology, this suggests a willingness and openness to take seriously the insights of other disciplines 'but with no a-priori assumption that theology need to merge, follow or fully respect the perspective on the world that is offered to it ...' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:91–94).

Conversion is used to illustrate that other disciplines will need to undergo a process of conversion in order to be employed in a theological framework: 'This recognition means that certain dimensions of the one converted are deeply challenged and changed' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:92). Through this process, contributions of other sciences are now put in the service of God. However, this does not imply that theology remains unchallenged as collaboration will inevitably challenge the assumptions of theology, leading to new insights and even adjustments.

Critical faithfulness is also part of this model, meaning that the divine givenness of Scripture and the working of the Holy Spirit as well as the traditions of faith are respected and upheld in collaborative efforts (Swinton & Mowat 2006:93).

My own preference would be for a slight variation of the model of Swinton and Mowat. Although it may seem like a matter of semantics, I would propose a model where collaboration ensues via a route of self-, partner and strategy identification.

In collaborative ministry, *self-identification* may well be the best starting point. This means that pastoral practitioners contemplating a collaborative pastoral approach should start with reflection on their own craft, that of *cura animarum*. Critical questions that need to be asked should include those pertaining to the essence of pastoral care, that is, what distinguishes pastoral care from other forms of care, so that a clear picture may be obtained of this unique approach to human problems. Here, epistemology, the authority of Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit, prayer, the church and the tradition all come to mind as these are some of the unique building blocks of soul care from a Christian perspective. If the unique identity of pastoral care is in doubt, a real danger exists that the collaboration will end up being something other than pastoral care. In Louw's (2000:372–372) discussion of problems regarding the use of Scripture in pastoral care, he observes that Scripture can become ineffective as a result of cultural contexts. In the light of human autonomy and freedom, the pastor's confidence in Scripture may diminish, resulting in a marginalised application of the main tool of pastoral care (Louw 2000:372). In the same way, pastoral care, as a helping discipline from a Christian perspective, may become marginalised in a postmodern cultural context if the pastor's own confidence in this approach has declined. In the postmodern context of relativism and the alleged demise of truth (McMinn & Hall 2000:251), this should not come as a total surprise. However, knowledge of what pastoral care is and what it has to offer can change this relativism. *Self-identification* may then even have a broader scope than just that of the discipline of pastorate itself and can also include the person of the pastor, who realises that he or she

is the mediator of a certain and specific grace and hope in an uncertain reality.

The *identification of partners* will follow on *self-identification* as a process where pastoral care nurtures a true curiosity about what is happening in the world of helping sciences relevant to pastoral care. This does not involve merely finding the lowest common denominator within which dialogue can take place (Swinton & Mowat 2006:91). It refers to asking the same critical questions the pastor asked about his or her own craft, that is, questions regarding philosophy and epistemology in order to create harmonious partnerships rather than entering into collaborations that put the essence of pastoral care under threat. Gaining knowledge of neighbouring sciences and contemplating compatibility with pastoral care are what this process is all about.

After a preliminary identification of possible partners, *the identification of usable strategies* should receive attention. This aspect is deemed to be the unique contribution of the suggested collaborative approach as it is the employment of *strategies* from other approaches that, to a great extent, safeguards the pastoral process from epistemological discrepancies. This involves an in-depth inquiry into the underlying philosophy and methodologies of neighbouring approaches in order to employ them as strategies in a pastoral framework. Employing approaches like psychology or the narrative approach by no means gives the pastoral practitioner the right to see him or herself as a psychologist or narrative therapist because the pastor would only be employing *strategies* from a neighbouring science. Collaborative approaches are therefore always *qualified* approaches for they respect the identity of all the approaches involved.

This research set out to investigate the narrative approach to therapy and positive psychology in order to establish collaborative possibilities within a pastoral framework. This will be done in the section below.

The narrative approach

Since the early 1990s, the so-called narrative approach (also referred to as 'the narrative') became somewhat of a buzzword in the domain of therapy. Well received and debated, it enjoyed a centre-stage position for quite some time as scholars from different helping disciplines contemplated its virtues within various settings. For the purposes of this article, only a broad outline of this approach is supplied where some of the terminology as well as the philosophical points of departure are discussed.

Narrative as therapeutic method was introduced through the collaborative effort of White and Epston in their book *Narrative means to therapeutic ends* (1990). The message it conveyed was that the lives of people can be interpreted as a story and that this story, or text analogy, can be utilised as a therapeutic tool. According to Morgan (2000:5), narratives develop in the lives of people as a result of events that are linked in sequence across time according to a certain plot.

People's lives are, however, multi-storied (many stories happen at the same time, and many stories can be formed around the same event), consist of different types of stories (individual, family or community-related) and are also influenced by the broader social context in which they find themselves (Morgan 2000:8, 9). Not only do people live their lives according to these narratives, but their future expectations are also based on them.

Thus, it is evident that people's life-stories are a powerful influential force. When the dominant stories of people's lives are problem-saturated (White & Epston 1990:9–10), their lives become problem-saturated as a restricted view governs both the present and the future. The narrative approach can then be instrumental in helping people discover alternative stories and helping them to re-tell the dominant stories in a way which is freeing and liberating (White & Epston 1990:9–15).

Several strategies are employed to facilitate the narrative process of which only a few will be described below.

The therapeutic stance of 'not knowing'

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992:29), a 'not knowing' approach makes people the expert on their own life stories (the client is the 'expert'). It involves a method whereby a voice is given to people to tell their stories without reservation. This implies a hermeneutical listening exercise where the counsellor does not measure people's stories against any given framework as this approach accepts the different perspectives which people may have on life (Parry 1991:42).

The problem is the problem

Within the narrative framework a clear distinction is made between people and the problems that are being dealt with during counselling. According to Morgan (2000:24, 31), it is the *relationship* that one has with a problem that constitutes the real problem. O'Hanlon (1994:24) also contend that 'the person is never the problem; the problem is the problem'.

Externalisation

Externalisation is the process by which people revise their relationship with the problems they are encountering (Morgan 2000:24). Through externalising conversations, a context is usually established where persons can experience themselves as separate from the problem, making it easier to modify their relationship with it. This process can also involve 'naming' problems in order to deal with them more effectively (O'Hanlon 1994:24) or personifying them (Morgan 2000:25).

Deconstruction

Deconstruction refers to the scrutinising of culturally influenced ways of thinking and assumed truths to recognise their implications so that people can decide to distance

themselves from these if they form part of their problem-saturated stories (Payne 2006:84).

Co-construction and unique outcomes

By now it should be clear that the narrative relies heavily on the 'expert-knowledge' of the counsellee as revealed in his or her narrative. This relieves the counsellor from the role of the problem solver who has to supply solutions from a stance of knowing. Instead, the counsellor engages in a process of co-constructing, which, according to Müller (2000), places him or her in the role of a co-traveller who merely journeys with the storyteller in the discovery of new and liberating stories. To co-construct in a positive manner, the counsellor should have a true curiosity in order to identify so-called unique outcomes in the problem-saturated stories. A unique outcome can be anything that does not fit with the problem-saturated story (Morgan 2000:52), including instances where the counsellee actually overcomes the problem. These unique outcomes can serve as clues, gateways or starting points for alternative stories.

Constructing alternative stories

This can be viewed as the outcome of narrative therapy, generating new and liberating stories through which people are reconnected with their hopes and dreams. Whereas problem-saturated stories inhibit life, alternative stories, built on the unique outcomes identified in the problem-saturated ones, nurture and promote life. Hence, White and Epston (1990:31) conclude that 'the desirable outcome of therapy is the generation of alternative stories that incorporate vital and previously neglected aspects of lived experience'.

The philosophical framework of the narrative

In their introductory remarks to the narrative, White and Epston (1990:2) point out that this approach represents a move away from the 'linear notions of causality' reminiscent of modernism. The narrative thus is an interpretive method rather than a mechanistic one, therefore preferring to work with a text analogy. Milner and O'Byrne (2002) observe:

Narrative therapy ... this way of working is more political and social in nature, being based on the sociology of the post-structuralist Foucault and the sociolinguist Halliday concerning the oppressive effects of dominant narratives on people's understanding of the validity of their ways of living. (p. 10)

If the narrative should therefore be positioned philosophically, it can safely be deemed a postmodern approach to human problems. The implications for counselling are amongst others that human problems are no longer diagnosed and solved according to a fixed set of rules, but '[t]he search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:17). Milner and O'Byrne (2002:23) view the goal of narrative therapy as 'the identification, validation and strengthening of clients' inner resources'. In this approach then, people become something of self-redeeming agents as the approach relies heavily on the

micro-narratives of people and their ability to apply new meaning to those narratives.

Positive psychology

Just as narrative became a buzzword of the 1990s, positive psychology has become very popular by the end of the 1990s. It was regarded by some as a 'breakthrough' (Biswas-Diener & Dean 2007:2) and has created a lot of interest in therapeutic circles over the last decade. Seligman is widely regarded as the father of this approach. He captured the imagination of his colleagues with a plea for positive psychology in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 1998. His plea was for a shift in the focus of psychology from studying the worst in human behaviour to studying and promoting the best in human behaviour (Baumgardner & Crothers 2010:3). Effectively this implies a move away from the traditional disease model of psychology where the focus is on the study of mental illness and formulating language to describe it to a wellness model which rather focuses on mental health and the promotion of human well-being. As is evident from the writings of Shlien (2003:17), positive psychology is, however, not an invention of the new millennium as efforts towards positive conceptualisations were already notable in Rogers's 'Fully functioning person' and Maslow's 'Self-realising persons'. Furthermore, as Joseph and Linley (2006:48–49) show, some of the practice of positive psychological still relies and builds on the theories of Rogers.

However, since Seligman's 1998 plea, a prolific amount of research, publications and theorising has been done on the topic. This makes it difficult to formulate a short definition of positive psychology. It seems, though, that positive psychology can be defined in a two-fold sense. In the first instance, it is a scientific-theoretical endeavour, which Baumgardner and Crothers (2010) describe as follows:

Positive psychology is the scientific study of the personal qualities, life choices, life circumstances, and sociocultural conditions that promotes a life well-lived, defined by criteria of happiness, physical and mental health, meaningfulness and virtue. (p. 9)

In the second instance, however, it is also a therapeutic device, which, according to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000:5), attempts to promote well-being, contentment and satisfaction (in the past), hope and optimism (for the future) and flow⁷ and happiness (in the present). Some scholars, like Mullen (2007:1), see the objective of positive psychology very simply as 'happiness'.

In the therapeutic pursuit of happiness, this approach focuses on certain human capacities, which can be therapeutically explored under different circumstances. Amongst them are positive emotions, resilience, positive traits, virtues and strengths of character (e.g. wisdom, spirituality and

7. According to Mullen (2007:36), the term *flow* was coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and is a good example of the unique positive psychology jargon. Flow refers to 'full engagement' with our experiences and enhances our positive experience of work, personal relationships and leisure time.

gratitude) and relationships (see Baumgardner & Crothers 2010).

For the sake of clarity, resilience will be discussed in brief as it seems to be of obvious pastoral importance. Resilience is generally regarded as the human capacity to function optimally in spite of challenges like loss, trauma or illness. Masten (2001:228) defines resilience as good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development whilst Ryff and Singer (2003:20) equate resilience to recovery or improvement after a challenge.

The fields of developmental and clinical psychology concur that resilience is a rather common human capacity in people of all ages. Masten (2001) therefore refers to it as 'common or ordinary magic'. This ability opens up an array of therapeutic possibilities. The exploration of resilience can become an outcome in therapeutic work with disadvantaged youth, people suffering from loss or even the aged (Baumgardner & Crothers 2010:63–65).

One specific promising outcome of the focus on resilience that should be noted, however, is posttraumatic growth. Resilience opens up the possibility that people can spiritually and emotionally grow as a result of trauma. Contrary to the traditional psychological category of posttraumatic stress, positive psychology views posttraumatic growth as the positive outcome of trauma. Seeking posttraumatic growth, therapy will focus on the so-called 'meaning-making' process, which refers to an active process of reinterpreting events in order to find their significance (Baumgardner & Crothers 2010:69). Through this, even the victims of circumstances have some chance of benefitting from the trials of life.

In the same fashion, positive psychology explores a number of human attributes and relationships through which it is suspected that people can attain happiness and flow in life. Amongst these are positive emotions, positive traits, virtues, strengths of character and close relationships (cf. Baumgardner & Crothers 2010).

The philosophical framework of positive psychology

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) describe positive psychology as an empirical science:

Positive psychology does not rely on wishful thinking, faith, self-deception, fads or hand waving; it tries to adapt what is best in the scientific method to the unique problems that human behavior presents to those who wish to understand it in all its complexity. (p. 7)

Although positive psychology focuses on the well-being of postmodern people in the 21st century, its philosophy and methodology are empirically sound. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000:5), the social and behavioural sciences 'can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound'. This means that the positive-psychology movement still relies heavily on modernist

constructs in order to conduct its investigations and formulate its findings.

Buss (2000) and Massimini and Delle Fave (2000) view life and the achievement of happiness against the background of evolution. Evolutionary psychology has shown that people living in contemporary societies continuously have to adapt to new environments that differ radically from that of their ancestors. As living contexts change over time, emotional and interpersonal skills have to develop in order to remain happy or retain a partner (Buss 2000:18). Unfortunately, several 'evolutionary tragedies' – like the so-called 'hedonic treadmill' and the 'asymmetry' of affective experience – make the prediction and achievement of happiness very difficult (Buss 2000:19). However, evolutionary principles are still regarded as a good method to gain insight into how people must adapt to remain content, and it forms part of the positive-psychology paradigm.

It seems safe to assume then that positive psychology views the person holistically and empirically against the past and present, aiming to establish what attributes should be developed in order to achieve sustainable flow. It is a human science in the true sense of the word.

Markers for collaboration between pastoral care, narrative therapy and positive psychology

The markers that are provided for the suggested collaboration between pastoral care, narrative therapy and positive psychology are by no means intended to suggest that only one form of collaboration between these approaches is possible. The markers that are to follow should rather be seen as what I deem important for a collaborative approach in the light of the preceding research.

The process of establishing markers should most probably be informed by the model for collaboration suggested earlier in this research, that is, *self-identification*, *the identification of partners* and *the identification of usable strategies*. In the application of this suggested collaborative model, the following markers emerge.

Constructing a contextual pastoral approach

One of the factors which contributed to this research was the observation that pastoral practice is currently in *limbo*. Due to a rapidly changing environment, pastoral praxis is constantly challenged to critically investigate its methodological appropriateness. From a practical-theological perspective, this implies remaining true to the distinguishing characteristics of *cura animarum*. These include the Word of God, Pneumatology and prayer. Via the process of self-identification, it should be confirmed that pastoral care remains a theological endeavour aiming to align the lives of counselees with the life-goals put forth in the Scriptures. Because of the principle that no theological venture takes place in a vacuum, pastoral engagements must

remain contextual: this means that they must fit the frame of reference of the current time. In a collaborative approach, pastoral care would then be the *foundation* or the carrying partner. At no stage of a collaborative approach should suspicions be warranted that counselees are part of anything other than a *pastoral* process even though the process employs jargon and techniques familiar to neighbouring therapeutic approaches.

Finding suitable partners

This research focused on two possible partners for a collaborative pastoral approach, namely narrative and positive psychology. Although both of these approaches are reconcilable with the pastoral approach to a certain extent, it became clear that different epistemologies are involved. Whereas pastoral care operates from a Biblical paradigm, the narrative functions within a postmodern paradigm and positive psychology within the human sciences, which are empirically and evolutionary driven. It seems then that collaborative efforts should not be undertaken on epistemological grounds but rather in terms of strategies as one epistemology will most probably overshadow the others with the danger that pastoral identity will be forfeited.

Interdisciplinary employment of strategies

The most important marker for a collaborative pastoral approach apparently involves the interdisciplinary employment of strategies. If the practical theological paradigm is regarded as the driving paradigm of a collaborative pastoral approach, the strategies of the narrative and positive psychology can be explored as avenues for assisting the pastoral process to reach the outcome of change.

The story analogy of the narrative, along with the strategy of deconstruction, provides a suitable means of getting the counselee's narrative on the table. In fact, many of narrative's strategies could be explored in the service of uncovering the true state of affairs in the lives of counselees. One of the promising aspects of such an approach is that the narrative is not just interested in problem-saturated stories but also in uncovering the unique outcomes through which new possibilities are identified. In a pastoral approach, however, the process would not merely rely on the counselee's story in order to co-construct an alternative story but also and especially on God's grand narrative as conveyed through Scripture, bringing hope of a transcendent agent of change into the narrative in question.

The contribution of positive psychology would most probably be in terms of the outcomes of the pastoral process. Narrative seeks to uncover the problem-saturated stories of the counselee as well as the unique outcomes, and therefore, strengths can be identified from these unique outcomes on which the pastoral process can capitalise. Growth through trauma and resilience are but some of the terminology of positive psychology that will be of use in a pastoral framework. The empirical findings of positive psychology

can aid the pastor and counselee in understanding these constructs and their importance. Once again, the task of the pastor would be also to fill these constructs theologically as the Bible speaks extensively on each of these (cf. Rm 5:3–4; Ja 1:2). In this regard, resilience, for example, becomes more than a desired outcome but indeed a Spirit-enabled possibility. Viewed in this way, the findings of positive psychology especially shows much promise in terms of the desired outcomes of the pastoral process and are worth further pastoral exploration.

Conclusion

Providing pastoral care in the contemporary period of epistemological changes has become a methodological challenge. The innate challenge of pastoral care to maintain a healthy balance between revelation and experience, makes it important that the components, or partners, of this process should speak to postmodern people. Other approaches to therapy, like the narrative and positive psychology, seem to be promising partners. Although these therapies are embedded in non-Christian philosophical paradigms, this research suggested that they can be employed as *strategies* via the suggested process of collaboration, culminating in a *three-musketeering approach* to pastoral care.

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