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**The Experiences and Needs of Pastoral Counsellors and  
Ministers Regarding Ethical Dilemmas in Performing their  
Pastoral Duties.**

**In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:**

**MA (Theol) Practical Theology**

**Promotor:**

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## **SUMMARY:**

This thesis looks at The Experiences and Needs of Pastoral Counsellors and Ministers Regarding Ethical Dilemmas in Performing their Pastoral Duties. Brief attention was paid to the nature of pastoral counselling and the challenges it faces in the South African context. The problem that arose is that pastoral counsellors have a difficult and ethically and psychologically dangerous task and are not necessarily adequately prepared for or supported in that task.

As such it is a study conducted within the framework of practical theology. A social constructionist paradigm, supported by a narrative approach to research was chosen. Thus the research was of a descriptive, qualitative nature. The empirical research took on the form of unstructured interviews with pastoral counsellors and others who work in related circumstances. Eight themes were identified as playing a role in pastoral counsellors' experiences of ethical dilemmas and ethical decision-making. They are: The role of God and faith in the life of the pastoral counsellor; pastoral identity; evangelisation, prayer and preaching; hermeneutics and the role of the Bible; training and the role of mentors; approach to ethics and ethical dilemmas. Professional ethics was also identified as a contributing factor in the literature review. It was shown that these themes cannot be separated from one another and all contribute toward pastoral counsellors' way of thinking about and dealing with ethics.

A further survey of philosophical issues – such as postmodernism, pluralism, relativism, social constructionism and the South African context – shed light on the challenges pastoral counsellors face in ethical dilemmas, as a result of the postmodern discourses that influence contemporary thinking about ethics in general and Christian ethics in specific. It also showed that thinkers within the church have proposed various useful responses to these challenges.

This study has shown that the emerging profession of pastoral counselling is faced with great challenges in terms of ethics. Pastoral counselling in South Africa is unique, because of the unique nature of South African society. However, the goals and principles of pastoral counselling remain the same. The value of the Judeo-Christian community's history and the legacy of hope that has been built by pastoral counsellors in the recent past cannot be underestimated.

## **KEY TERMS (in alphabetical order):**

Christian Ethics

Ethics

Narrative Approach

Pastoral Care

Pastoral Counselling

Pluralism

Postmodernism

Professional Ethics.Relativism

Social Constructionism

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Paradigmatic and Research Positioning and Concept Clarification.**

Over the past few years, I have become acutely aware of the fact that counsellors and therapists are faced with ethical challenges in their offices on a daily basis. In itself this fact cannot be changed or challenged, without changing the state of the world. The world is faced with many challenges; Recent events in the Middle East and Europe, with regards to Islamic militants, have yet again forced us to think about and question our ideas about religion and faith.

The recent G8 summit has cast the world's eyes on poverty in Africa: What role does South Africa play, considering the fact that we are seen as leaders in Africa? The reactions of different leaders of the world to these events have raised questions about leadership in general. In fact, blogger Andrew Sullivan (2005: 100) has dubbed 2005 "The Year We Questioned Authority" in Time magazine's final issue for 2005. This is also true for leaders in South Africa, including leaders in the church. Who can forget the time that Jacob Zuma has had since 2005? South Africa has, since 1994, changed very rapidly and practitioners of the social sciences are becoming increasingly aware that ours is a pluralistic society. In other words, it is a perfect example of the kind of challenging environment that is not satisfied with pat answers and generalisations. Furthermore, South Africa is facing a variety of problems that compound the issue, such as HIV/AIDS, crime, poverty, unemployment and corruption, to name but a few.

Within the church, the climate has changed too. As an example, one can look at the recent debate within the Dutch Reformed Church, regarding homosexuality and the rights of homosexual ministers. The Annual General Synod of 2007 announced, very recently, that homosexual ministers may be ordained. Yet, the debate is far from over, since the Synod still rejects homosexual relationships and marriages as alternatives to heterosexual marriages (Koornhof 2007: 12).

At the same meeting, the question of violence and crime was raised and congregations were urged to provide care and support for the victims of crime and violence. A special liturgy was organised in remembrance of the victims. This is an indication

of the great numbers of people in South Africa who have had their lives disrupted by violence and crime and can be read as a cry to God for a solution. It is also indicative of the great need for emotional and psychological support in South Africa.

All the circumstances, that have been mentioned, have had a trickle-down effect on the way in which we think about the accepted wisdom, in that the straight-forward answers are not enough. This translates into a growing need for professionals to be able to read situations and make informed ethical decisions.

Looking at the challenges of a pluralistic society within the context of a developing country, combined with the high standards of ethics that should be set for pastoral counsellors as professionals, one immediately sees the need for caution in making ethical decisions. The problem that arises out of this need is multifaceted. (This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.) No amount of training can teach a counsellor exactly how to approach every single ethical dilemma or question. The dual nature of pastoral counselling as both psychology and theology places the counsellor in a unique position where the rules of psychology alone cannot be enough, since the theological aspect of pastoral counselling demands a more comprehensive set of rules, that covers the pastoral aspects of the counsellor's work. Qualified pastoral counsellors in South Africa cannot register with a board, unless they are qualified psychologists as well. Only then may they register with the Professional Board for Psychology, which operates within the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Any counsellor is fallible and needs a support structure that provides both support and supervision. The old-fashioned notion that the pastor knows best has not held water for a long time. Thus, I have elected to ask questions about pastoral counsellors' experiences and needs, regarding ethical dilemmas and training so as to illustrate the necessity for a re-assessment of pastoral counsellors' training in terms of ethics, as well as their need for support and supervision.

## 1.1. Concept clarification.

It is important to define the key concepts that will be dealt with in this research, before the research itself can be discussed, so as to avoid confusion. The two most prominent concepts that come to the fore that must be defined are *pastoral counselling* and *ethics*. It must be noted, however, that what follows is not a detailed discussion of the nature of the two subjects but simply a clarification of terminology. A detailed discussion of both will follow in later chapters.

### 1.1.1. Pastoral Counselling.

It has been briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter that pastoral counselling in fact lies in the space between psychology and theology. The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus states that a pastor is “a clergyman in charge of a congregation” (2002: 553). This implies that it is somebody with a theological and religious background who works within the confines of a religious institution (usually Christian).

Counsel is defined as “advice or guidance” or alternatively as “discussion or consultation” (2002: 166). It then follows that a pastoral counsellor is somebody who works from a theological and religious background but with the express aim of providing advice or guidance. This is a simplified explanation of the concept of pastoral counselling that will be expanded upon in a later chapter. The relationship between psychology and theology within pastoral counselling will also be looked at.

Furthermore, regular pastors and ministers are also often called on to perform similar duties to those of a pastoral counsellor, especially in smaller communities, where the services of a pastoral counsellor or psychologist may not be available.

### 1.1.2. Ethics.

Most people use the terms *ethics*, *morals* and *values* more or less interchangeably. The distinction between the three, however, shows why the focus of this dissertation is *ethics*, rather than morals or values.

On the one hand *morals* are the rules about right and wrong that we have and live by. Birch and Rasmussen (1989: 38) refer to morals as “behaviour according to custom” and explain that morality is the glue that holds a society together. *Values* are our ideas of what is important. In a very general sense, our morals are based on our values.



On the other hand, *ethics* is the process that we use when we assess our morals and values – what David E. Klemm (2002: 97) calls “reflection on moral striving”. This is the most important of the three as it allows us to question our own morality. Nina Rosenstand (1994: 6) explains that “ethics questions and justifies the rules we live by, and if ethics can find no rational justification for these rules, it may ask us to abandon them”.

For example, we *value* life. Therefore it is *moral* to preserve and protect life. That is straight-forward, isn't it? Not really. What if a pregnant woman is in an accident? Her injuries are such that the doctor must choose between saving her and saving her child. Whose life has more value? Whose life do you preserve and protect? This is where ethics comes in. There exist good arguments for both sides of the question. The process of evaluating and weighing the options and coming to a decision is *ethical decision making*. This process is often exceedingly difficult and it is easy to make a decision that may have dire consequences. It is this process of ethical decision making that will be addressed in this research. Pastoral counsellors need tools that will help them to make these decisions.

### 1.2. Theological, paradigmatic and research positioning.

This study is specifically about pastoral counselling, which places it within the broader discipline of practical theology. It only makes sense, then, that I explain the theological model within which I place myself as researcher, before exploring the paradigms for research. Gerkin (1997: 110) espouses one of the models described by Lindbeck as “cultural-linguistic.” This model, he explains “is the most fundamental model by which a community can care for individuals and families. It has the unique ability to provide people with a storied context of ultimate meaning in their lives.” This approach most closely resembles my approach, as it will be discussed in further sections. The reason is that this model teaches us that our ideas about faith and religion (and therefore our practise of theology) are shaped within and because of our community and history. In the case of the Christian community, it means that our understanding of God and faith is not formed within ourselves, or because someone tells us that things are a certain way, but amongst others and in relating with others and the phenomena that shape our culture as Christians, such as our beliefs, rituals and habits. Gerkin (1997: 112) also places the pastor's position in the centre of the “dialogical connection” between the individual's story and the community's story.

Gerkin's approach is supported by Müller (1996: 10) who explains that it also means that the texts that exist about our faith shape our experience of faith. Such texts include the more traditional texts such as the Bible, but also include the stories of our history and our families' histories within the larger history. Further, they include "woorde, gebare, handelinge, historiese en maatskaplike verskynsels." (words, gestures, actions, historical and social phenomena) (Müller 1996: 10) He includes all the above texts as he espouses an eco-hermeneutical approach to pastoral care, which means that one is concerned with looking at the individual within a socially constructed context. This necessarily places the theologian within the social constructionist paradigm. It is from this perspective that I have chosen the social constructionist paradigm for this research. I shall be using qualitative methods in a narrative approach while placing myself in the social constructionist paradigm.

As can be gathered from the title, the research will take on a descriptive nature, focusing on what pastoral counsellors have to say about the topic. Thus, the qualitative method of unstructured interviews will be best suited for the research. As Babbie and Mouton (2001: 270) explain, qualitative research focuses on "the actor's perspective" and "in-depth ("thick") descriptions and understanding of actions and events." Interviews give one the greatest opportunity to allow the interviewee to talk in detail and use as much of their own language as possible. Furthermore, unstructured interviews allow the interviewee more freedom to discuss the questions in their own way and allow the interviewer to follow the line of the conversation and explore ideas as they arise. This places the interviewee and interviewer on equal footing and allows both parties to contribute equally to the construction of meaning in the exchange, rather than the more rigid framework of structured interviews, where the interviewer exercises much more control.

Within this framework, I shall place myself in the social constructionist paradigm. Within this paradigm, the search is not for objective truth, but for shared constructs. According to social constructionist theory, we construct our reality and our identity, through the stories we tell and share (see Gergen: 1999 and Müller 2000: 58). Therefore, the participants and I will be busy building something.

I shall use the metaphor of a cathedral. The paradigm of social constructionism will act as the foundation, upon which everything will be based. The assumption that we construct our world together is what I will rely on. If we construct our world together, then the participants and I can construct an image of what pastoral counsellors' experiences look like. The walls, within which the participants' stories must fit, will be the narrative approach. The narrative approach builds further on social constructionism, by explaining that we construct our reality through the stories we tell about ourselves (Müller 2000: 9).

The stories that the participants and I will share, will form the stained glass windows. As the stained glass of the Gothic ages told stories from the Bible, so our stained glass will tell the stories of pastoral counsellors. The unique colours and composition of each story, in relation to the colours and composition of the other stories, will affect how the finished windows will look. This connects directly with the narrative approach, which supports the constructionist idea that stories shape reality (Müller 2000: 58). To return to Babbie and Mouton's (2001: 272) "thick descriptions" as they quote Geertz (1973), I must add that the intensity of colour is what gives stained glass its beauty. Similarly, the density of the narratives the participants will share will lend brightness to the colour of our stained glass windows.

Another aspect of the research is the literature study. The literature study forms the frames of the windows, which support them and hold them together. Apart from the lead between the different colours, stained glass windows usually also have an extra grid which strengthens them. In later centuries, this grid was designed to follow the shape of the window as far as possible (De La Croix, Tansey & Kirkpatrick 1991: 403). The literature study will strengthen the stories of the participants, by allowing me to explore certain very specific questions about ethics, pastoral counselling and what it means to be a professional. What is important to note is that the literature review, just as the frames of the windows were shaped by the design of the windows, will follow the themes that emerge from the empirical study. It is appropriate at this point to mention that I will be referring to pastoral counsellors as professionals. Once I have explored what it means to be a professional (in chapter four), it will become clearer why I consider them to be professionals.

### 1.3. Qualitative research.

As I mentioned above, I believe that both pastoral counselling and ethics are subjects that lend themselves to qualitative research, because they are concerned with the abstract aspects of human experience, such as emotion (in the case of counselling) and abstract ideas of right and wrong (in the case of ethics). Such issues are not quantifiable. Further, qualitative research is concerned with finding out how people experience their world. It asks “how?”

The narrative approach is especially appealing because it demands "no a priori hypotheses" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998: 10) and is suited to describing people's experiences. In other words, I am entering into the research with an open-ended question. Much of the direction of the study and the entire conclusion relies on what the participants share with me, rather than any presupposed answers I may have. The nature of the question I ask lends itself to this approach. I know that I will find something, but I have very little idea of how it will look.

Social constructionism also does not demand any foregone conclusions, but asks us to come together and build our answers for our context using our own language (Gergen 1999). Rather than trying to determine by means of a survey and literature study that pastoral counsellors do experience ethical dilemmas, I want to collect their stories. Although a quantitative approach and a literature study may show that pastoral counsellors experience dilemmas, it would not be the whole story.

The narrative approach allows us to make connections and place the knowledge we can gain from literature and other sources into an “verstaanbare konteks” (understandable context) (Müller 1996: 20). Therefore, I believe that a qualitative approach is of great value, because a qualitative researcher must not only describe, but also try to understand.

Unlike quantitative researchers, I as qualitative, narrative researcher lay no claim to objectivity. As the late Peter Jennings, the well-known ABC anchorman, said, “I’m not a slave to objectivity, because I’m never quite sure what it means. It means different things to different people.” Babbie and Mouton (2001: 274-278) explain that the closest a qualitative researcher can come to objectivity, is to remain as true to the "constructed realities" of the participants as possible and formulate a new set of

criteria for qualitative research, that emphasises a new definition of objectivity, or the lack thereof. Therefore, I know that the way I look at what the participants give me will influence the outcome of my research.

This study is not about objective knowledge, but about lived experience– both the experiences of the counsellors, as well as mine with them. Of course, as a researcher I must keep the integrity and credibility of the research in mind at all times. Thus it is a fine balance. My role as researcher will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

#### 1.4. Social constructionism.

*“When people talk to each other, the world gets constructed.”* (Burr 1995: 7)

I have mentioned social constructionism many times. Since it will form the foundation upon which I hope to build my ideas, it is only logical that I attempt to explain what I understand when I talk about social constructionism. The quote from Vivien Burr’s *Introduction to Social Construction* sums it up neatly. According to social constructionists, we create our reality, by talking about it together. That is: because we talk about something together, it becomes reality. An example of this can be seen in the way in which people often express the sentiment that an event does not feel real until they have talked about it with a friend. This shared reality is not based on a question of facts, but rather on how we experience and interpret the facts. This means that there are as many ‘realities’ as there are people who experience. Yet, more than that, these ‘realities’ are not created inside of individuals, but in the spaces between individuals. In other words, through language and communication constructs are built, because no one story can stand on its own. All our stories are inseparably intertwined (Müller 2000: 58).

Under the banner of social construction, the focus shifts from objective reality, to the multitude of meanings that we create about our world through the way we interpret what we experience (Burr 1998: 13). Therefore, by bringing different stories into conversation, we can construct an image of how pastoral counsellors experience ethics and ethical dilemmas. Our stained glass windows, at a distance, tell one story, but when one looks closely, each panel is different. Similarly, many of us construct an image of Who God is, based on what we read in the Bible. Yet, each book and even parts of books, represents different people’s experiences of God. Because these

stories were brought together and share common denominators, we see them as a whole. The windows in a cathedral are all made of coloured glass and lead and are all made for the same purpose. They are put together in one church and, as a result, that church acquires a ‘visual Bible’ as well as a unique character and atmosphere. Every window still tells its own story, though.

As the stories in the Bible held a different significance for those who wrote it as for us who read it, so are the ways in which we understand and interpret the world unique to us and relevant to us (Burr 1995: 3-4). Therefore, the knowledge that is relevant for today must be constructed today. We can use knowledge from the past to learn from, but we must build onto it in such a way that it is relevant for who we are today. Similarly, the knowledge we use is culturally bound (Burr 1995: 3-4). This is a reason why we must generate knowledge within our own context.

A large portion of the relevant literature that I have found so far, for instance, is not South African. Although still useful, it is not as relevant as knowledge that was generated locally.

Linked to this is the social constructionist idea that “knowledge is sustained by social processes”. Knowledge is generated in the interactions between people. Obviously the way people interact then has an influence on the knowledge that is constructed. Thus, the cultural background that governs people’s interactions influences the knowledge that is constructed. Burr (1995: 4) states it well, when she says:

Therefore what we regard as ‘truth’ (which of course varies historically and cross-culturally), i.e. our current accepted ways of understanding the world, is a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other.

What follows from this is that the way in which we understand something will determine to a large extent how we deal with it (Burr 1995: 5). That means that the way in which the participants and I describe the problem will decide whether it is a problem and may influence how it will be dealt with. Therefore I must take great care in everything I say and what information I choose to use.

### 1.5. Narrative approach.

*“Die verhale wat onthou word en die verhale wat verwag word, vorm die ervaring in die hede.” (Müller 2000: 9)*

As has been mentioned, the narrative approach is particularly suited to the topic, because it asks the participants to tell their stories. This means that they are not asked to relate factual knowledge, or even opinions, but to talk about something they are familiar with, because they have experience of it. It is exactly that experience that I am interested in. Further, because these experiences form part of their life stories, they form part of an interpretation of the world. How they interpret their experiences is also of interest. What is important to note (it can be seen in the quote at the beginning of this section) is that we are not only dealing with something that can be isolated in the present. Stories start somewhere in the past, move through the present and continue into the future. More importantly, however, how we interpret the ‘now’ of our stories, shapes what follows. This is so, because we shape our identity through the stories we tell. Thus, if our stories change, our identities will change. In the movie *“The Story of Us”* directed by Rob Reiner (Castle Rock Films LLC 1999) Katie, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, tells Ben (Bruce Willis) that they should not get a divorce, because they “are an ‘us’”. She continues to explain, very touchingly, how their life together was created between them, as they lived it and that they should not give it up. What she is actually saying is that people do not become an “us” just because they share the same space or time, but because they share a story.

This approach links with social constructionism in the sense that what we perceive as reality is created in relationship with others. The movie shows how people’s lives are shaped by their story. It starts with Ben and Katie talking to ‘someone’, telling their stories. This is also where the movie finishes, with them together on the same couch, where they started separately. Throughout the movie, the director takes the audience through a series of flashbacks. Each flashback tells a little story and when you put them together, you can see their whole marriage unfolding. It is as a result of these flashbacks, which take place in the minds of Ben and Katie, that Katie tells Ben that she does not want them to get divorced. The director’s comment about this scene supports the idea that the narratives of their life together are essential to who they are, when he says: “...there’s a history that you don’t want to overlook...”

### 1.6. My Position as Researcher.

At his inauguration as vice-chancellor and principal of the University of Pretoria, Professor Carl Pistorius stated the following:

The issue of 'values' was one of the competitiveness issues in which South Africa fared worst of all countries in the international competitiveness rankings. We should therefore pay special attention to the development of a value framework. Human dignity, human rights, respect for the person and property of other people, integrity (and ethics) must be emphasised. (Pistorius 2001)

From this perspective, I see myself as someone who can contribute to the body of knowledge that will make it possible for South Africa and, more specifically, South African pastoral counsellors, to address issues of values and ethics.

As researcher, I shall assume a position of curiosity, or as Müller, Van Deventer and Human (2001) term it "not-knowing". This position allows the respondents' stories to take precedence over my own ideas, because it forces me to listen.

I am passionate about people and their needs and believe that both pastoral counselling and ethics have much to contribute. I originally started studying psychology and, although I found it to be a field rich with knowledge, felt that, as a Christian, I wanted to approach counselling from a faith-perspective. The presence of God in my life has always been a source of hope for me. As I've had to read much about pastoral counselling, I've found a similar hope in the ideals of pastoral counselling: a hope that lives can change and people can be helped to change their life-stories. As a teacher, I have spent much time with teenagers who are faced with incredible difficulties in their lives and relationships. Extreme circumstances such as drug abuse, physical abuse, abandonment, illness and more, that are the stuff of nightmares for many of us, are everyday realities for far too many of my learners. Their despair prompts me to help them to find hope again. They need the help of good sound therapy, as well as the hope that their lives can change. At the same time, the resilience and determination that many of them display is evidence to me both of God's hand in our lives, as well as of the kind of hope that people are capable of. The unique blend of theology and psychology in pastoral counselling appealed to me in this regard.



However, I soon learned that, as an emerging profession, pastoral counselling is very young. One of the gaps in our understanding of pastoral counselling is full insight of the ethical dilemmas and issues that pastoral counsellors are faced with. Pastoral counsellors are expected to care for people even when it is, according to Campbell (1986: 26), "costly, unsettling, even distasteful". Ethics plays an important role in the professional life of a counsellor, because, like psychologists and other professionals, pastoral counsellors have to live up to certain ethical standards. In fact, the success of a counsellor's help may even rely on his/her knowledge and understanding of ethics, because ethics helps us to know how to act in certain circumstances (see Rosenstand 1994)

Further, my aim is to approach this study with a willingness to learn. I view the participants as the experts of their own experiences and expect to learn from them. Babbie and Mouton (2001: 271) explain that it is the role of the qualitative researcher to try and "understand these actions in terms of the actors' own beliefs, history and context." That is exactly what I will attempt to do. By "these actions" I refer to the experiences of pastoral counsellors. Understanding the action is crucial to what I am attempting to do. By describing pastoral counsellors' experiences, I am simply confirming the assumption that they experience dilemmas. Yet, the nature of the assumption forces us to try and understand it, because only by understanding it, can we be affected by it and try to think about responding.

The purpose of stained glass windows was to create a 'visual Bible,' that would, literally and figuratively, illuminate those who entered the church, especially, since such a large number of the population was illiterate. The "mysticism of light" is crucial to the design of stained glass windows, as De La Croix et al (1991: 402) explain, when they quote Hugh of St. Vincent: "Stained-glass windows are the Holy Scriptures... and since their brilliance lets the splendour of the True Light pass into the church, they enlighten those inside."

It is no use trying to read the Bible, when none of it will make sense to you. We can only respond to the Bible, or any other literature for that matter, once we can at least understand the words it uses. Just as many of us rely on translations of the Bible into languages we know, so did the people of the previous centuries rely on the translation

of the Bible into pictures. After all, what is the use of researching a topic, if we do not want to understand it in order to respond to the knowledge we gain? If scientists did not at least try to respond to knowledge that has been gained, we would still be trying to invent the wheel.

More than that, I must also always keep in mind that my understanding is limited. Therefore, I have to be brutally honest about everything I try to say. I say “try”, because it implies that I do not lay claim to complete knowledge of the subject. Though I must make every attempt to get to know as much as possible about my chosen topic and to understand the participants’ responses as well as possible, it simply means that my word on the topic will by no means be the last.

### 1.7. Limitations.

The integrity and credibility of my research will depend on my willingness to ask questions. In terms of the research, that means that I need to look at more than one possible method of collecting information and must ask the participants to look at my preliminary findings, so that they can give feedback, which is another aspect. Credibility also relies on how well I define the parameters of the study. When I say that I am looking at the experiences of pastoral counsellors, I do not mean that pastoral counsellors are the only people that participate in the research. One needs to look at the topic from different angles. For that purpose, I have elected to speak not only to pastoral counsellors, but also to someone who is a minister – but not a pastoral counsellor – and somebody who is a pastoral counsellor – but not a minister and one minister who is studying pastoral counselling. Further, I need to keep a careful record of all my research, interviews, notes and tapes, so that it would be possible to go back and look again. My method of analysis must also be well chosen and carefully monitored. In addition, in terms of my position as a researcher, I should display adaptability and a willingness to admit mistakes. A willingness to question myself is also important.

Because of the nature of the narrative approach, there are certain limitations that must be kept in mind. The primary issue that immediately arises, is the interpretive nature of narrative research. As has been mentioned, narrative research does not ask for a hypothesis (Lieblich et al 1998: 10). That means that the outcome relies on my

interpretation of whatever information I gather. This, coupled with the quantity of information that can be collected cannot only overwhelm a researcher, but also lead the researcher astray. Therefore it is very important that I continually recheck myself against all available information. In other words, I must be sure to bring the information gathered from the empirical study and the literature study, as well as my interpretation of both into dialogue.

A further limitation lies in the kinds of questions I will be asking the participants, in relation to the nature of the topic. When one talks about the experiences of pastoral counsellors, one must always remember that their position as counsellors requires that they keep much information as confidential. Thus, some very valuable information may in fact be inaccessible. It is my aim, as researcher to get as much information as is necessary, to answer my questions. Yet, it is my responsibility as researcher to keep all ethical concerns and consequences in mind at all times. Therefore I must know where to draw the line. It is a fine balance.

#### 1.8. Chapter Outline.

This thesis will be divided into a number of chapters, each of which will deal with a specific aspect of the research. In this chapter, the topic under discussion has been introduced and described. Some questions regarding my approach have been answered. In the second chapter, the problem (or moment of praxis) will be described in more detail. In addition, the boundaries and value of the study will be briefly discussed. The third chapter will contain the essence of the research, as it will describe the method and findings of the empirical study. Thus, it will be the chapter that tells the greatest part of the participants' stories. The fourth chapter will be a response to the third chapter, as it will comprise of a literature study that will be based on the results of the empirical study, looking at the themes that emerge out of the participants' stories. Chapter Five will be a closer look at some of the philosophical issues that are relevant to this thesis. Finally, Chapter Six will contain my discussion of the results, as seen in relationship to the literature study, and concluding remarks.

#### 1.9. Conclusion:

It is true that anyone who attempts any research has a great responsibility. Every aspect of the research must be carefully considered and planned, before it is executed

with the greatest care. It is my intent to take my responsibility seriously and conduct this research to the best of my ability. I view this as an adventure and, like an adventurer; I have a specific destination in mind. I may encounter some obstacles along the way. It is possible that I may never find what I was looking for. That will not make the journey worthless, though. Columbus set out to find India and discovered the Americas. Similarly, I am trying to find out what kind of dilemmas pastoral counsellors experience and what kind of training needs they have. What I will find, though, is not certain, but definitely worth finding.

## **CHAPTER TWO: The Problem**

### 2.1 The Beginning of the Problem.

Pastoral counsellors have always been presumed able to deal with dilemmas and have been almost exempt from any form of control within the course of their work other than what the church offers. Pastors have always been expected to be equipped enough and ethical enough because of their association with the church and their presumed knowledge of scripture. The truth is that, especially in recent years, it has become increasingly clear that it is not enough. As the information age gains momentum, people are more and more exposed to points of view that allow them to see their own ideas in a different light. Recent debates within the church about sexuality, baptism and the historicity of Jesus, to name but a few have shown that those who, traditionally, are supposed to know more than us do not necessarily know as much as we think. We have become aware of the fallibility of our pastors and so too our pastoral counsellors. Pastoral counsellors have a very difficult job and, like other counsellors, such as psychologists, need any kind of support that they can get, starting with a well-developed, comprehensive code of conduct. No code of conduct will ever cover every eventuality but it is a starting point for both pastoral counsellors and the people to whom they are accountable.

This is an overly simplified explanation of a very complex problem and it is not the whole problem. In order to understand the problem better, one must look at the nature of pastoral counselling and the demands it makes on the individual counsellor.

### 2.2. The nature of pastoral counselling.

Both Gerkin (1997: 80) and Campbell (1986: 1) start from the age-old image of the shepherd to explain what pastoral counselling is and is not. The authors agree that, as our knowledge of science and psychology has increased and changed, so has our knowledge of the nature of pastoral counselling. The old authority of the pastor is referred to by Campbell (1986: 1) as “unwarranted paternalism and judgementalism”. He continues to say that the desired relationship today is one of mutuality. The image of the shepherd does not have to be cast away, however. Gerkin (1997: 81) explains that the shepherd of today can be perceived as a “mediator and reconciler between

individual believers and the community of Christians” thus giving him the role of empowering the individual.

Pastoral counselling is about being willing to be with somebody when they are in a place where no-one else wants to be. Moreover, it is about having the patience and compassion to stay with them until they have left that place behind, regardless of how long it takes or if they in fact succeed. Most importantly, however, it is about being equipped and willing to do the work that is necessary to help them to effect change.

Being equipped to do the work is equally important to being willing to do it. Campbell (1986: 100) speaks of a “heroic self-image” and explains that there is a danger in the fact that “those people most willing to be care-givers will be the least well prepared for it.”. Counselling is an honour. When somebody comes to a counsellor for help it means that that person is entrusting that which is most broken and painful in their lives into the hands of the counsellor. The only appropriate way for a counsellor to approach this reality is with the utmost humility and integrity. This translates into being acutely aware of one’s own imperfections and doing everything within one’s power to be as well prepared and equipped as possible. The most basic ‘equipment’ that a pastoral counsellor needs is the following:

### *2.2.1. Faith.*

Something that sets a pastoral counsellor apart from other counsellors is their faith. I agree with Gerkin (1984: 22) who states that he is “profoundly desirous that pastoral counselling preserve its Christian orientation.”. Faith places the pastoral counsellor in a place where there is a source of hope in the knowledge that there is a Greater Power involved in people’s lives. This means that no darkness is impenetrable. It is important to remember, however, that this faith is not without substance. It is not just an easy answer to get rid of a difficult problem. The faith of a pastoral counsellor should be an acknowledgement of our dependence upon divine grace.

In addition, one cannot deny that, although psychology provides a sound theoretical base for pastoral counselling, it is in the vastly older (and very narrative) Judeo-Christian tradition that the greatest amount of knowledge and experience can be found. Our understanding of the human psyche was not born in the minds of the likes of Freud and Jung. Furthermore it is still true for many South Africans that we grow

up in a faith community and that the pastor is one of the first people that we turn to in times of crisis. Thus it is crucial to know how to deal with human pain in terms of the faith community and its history. As Christians it should also be more important to follow God's lead in terms of Jesus' example as well as other Biblical accounts of God's interaction with people's pain through the ages. If a pastoral counsellor's work is rooted in the Christian tradition it is implied that the counsellor does not only draw from their own wisdom and academic knowledge but also from the wisdom of an ancient community and the Bible. (see Gerkin 1984: 22-24) After all, the Bible itself reminds the faithful to retell the stories of the past, so that the next generation may remember God's involvement in the human story and know to live according to God's will. (See for example Deut. 6:20-23)

### 2.2.2. *Compassion.*

The nature of the relationship between the counsellor and counselee lies at the heart of pastoral counselling. If that relationship is not one of compassion, of empathy, it might as well not exist. I deliberately do not use the words 'pity' or 'sympathy' as they do not carry with them the same connotations of understanding and mutuality as the words 'compassion' and 'empathy' do.

Social constructionism teaches us that reality is created in the spaces between individuals, where their stories merge together (Müller 2000: 58). It is a reciprocal process. Therefore, the space between counsellor and counselee should be a space where stories can be safely shared. After all, somebody who seeks the help of a counsellor is somebody who is in pain. A person who approaches a counsellor does so because something in their life has become so painful and overwhelming that they feel that they need help to be able to live their life well again. There is a depth of pain and confusion in such a person's life that commands the utmost respect. The pastoral counsellor's job is to be an "interpreter and guide" (Gerkin 1984: 39). He has to listen to and interpret people's stories in such a way that he can help them to change those stories for the better. The only way to do that is to care deeply about their stories and to recognize the authenticity and power of their own voices and their own knowledge of their lives. No counsellor, no matter how qualified, knows more about somebody's life than the person who has lived it. In the end, everything related to being a good counsellor is for the benefit of the counselee and not the counsellor. It is a

relationship that exists for the purpose of seeking change in the life of the individual who asks for the counsellor's help.

### *2.2.3. A strong academic background in both psychology and theology.*

Many people have a great faith and feel great compassion for people in need. However, as has been stated previously, it is dangerous for people who want to help others to be unprepared for the task. If one's faith and compassion provides one with the desire and passion to help others, then a sound knowledge of psychology and theology provides one with the intellectual tools that are necessary for making one's attempts successful.

Although psychology has a relatively short history, it provides a rich source of information and understanding about human behaviours and interactions. Theories of developmental processes and family dynamics, abnormal behaviour and addiction as well as personality disorders, to name but a few, have proven invaluable to pastoral counsellors. Recently, in South Africa, pastoral counsellors have embraced narrative therapy as a powerful tool in helping people to rewrite their stories and find hope again. If, as has been mentioned previously, the pastoral counsellor's role is that of an "interpreter" (Gerkin 1984: 39) then a sound knowledge of psychology provides the counsellor with the background knowledge to interpret people's stories better. After all, the dangers of misinterpretation and miscommunication can never be underestimated.

Similarly, a sound knowledge of theology provides the counsellor with the vast treasury of understanding about human behaviour and how the faith community has supported and helped individuals in the past, not to mention God's role in human problems and relationships. Furthermore, it gives one valuable information about the contemporary faith community and how life within the church can become a source of nurture and support for those who seek it.

### *2.2.4. Listening and looking skills.*

To complete the puzzle, the pastoral counsellor does not only require faith, compassion and an academic background, he must also possess the necessary practical skills and therapeutic tools to be able to bring the process of helping to life. Listening to and looking at somebody in such a way that you can read and understand



their story is a skill that enables the listener to focus entirely on the other person and all that person's signals both verbal and non-verbal. Active listening skills and therapeutic devices can be taught, but the instinctual understanding that springs from it cannot. This is born out of the counsellor's own experience and again his faith and compassion.

Pastoral counselling is often described as being caught in the middle between science and religion, an intellectual tug-of-war if you will. However, in fact, that is where its strength lies. It is in that junction between science and religion that the pastoral counsellor has the most power because he is equipped with a double dose of knowledge and understanding that he can draw from. He has the best of both worlds but only if he has a solid knowledge of both. That is why one can call it 'pastoral counselling.' Quite simply, the term implies knowledge of both. 'Pastoral' implies theology and religion and 'counselling' implies psychology.

### 2.3. The problem.

Inherent in the nature of pastoral counselling is the sense that one should tread very lightly when entering into places in other people's lives where they are at their most vulnerable. People make mistakes. So too can a pastoral counsellor make mistakes. The whole world is full of laws, codes and rules that show people how to avoid mistakes. Pastoral counsellors also need the assistance of a set of rules or a code.

If a brain surgeon makes a mistake that leaves the patient dead or damaged beyond help he has ruined at least one life, whether the damage was done intentionally or not. Thus doctors are trained rigorously and only the most successful can become specialists, such as neurosurgeons. Doctors swear an oath and register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). They can be legally held accountable for their actions. The same council also offers a framework of guidelines in the form of a code of conduct and rules that provide support to medical practitioners in the execution of their duties. Guidelines and rules are what help us to distinguish between what we should or should not do in any situation, because they create boundaries between options. It is true that it is not always as simple as this sounds, but it is simpler than to try and do it without guidelines.

Similarly, an event or action that causes irreparable damage to a person's psyche or spirit should be avoided at all costs. It can be as devastating as physical damage.

That is why psychologists are also required to register with the HPCSA. Therefore pastoral counsellors should be rigorously trained and made to register with a board, so that they can be held accountable for their mistakes and be provided with guidance and support.

The act of caring for and helping other people is a manifestation of the counsellor's desire for them to live the best life that they can. It is the counsellor's response to the fact that he worries about people and wants to help them to effect change in their lives. This should translate into a desire to do your best for them in all aspects of your work and to give them only the best of what you have to offer. This includes ensuring that you are well trained and skilled and that you try and make the best decisions possible at all times. We know that counsellors need to be well trained and skilled in what they do and much time is spent on that. The question that has not been satisfactorily addressed is whether enough time is spent on ethics. Lynch (2002: 1) writes that "ethics ... is one of those disciplines whose relevance to pastoral practice has not been considered in such depth".

The weight of the responsibility that is implied in the pastoral relationship can never be over-emphasized since the fact that one is working with other people's suffering guarantees that one will be faced with ethical dilemmas. Questions of the power inherent in a counselling relationship, confidentiality, honesty, integrity, trust, relationship boundaries and legal grey areas abound. Gerkin (1997: 228) explains that being a pastoral counsellor goes hand-in-hand with an "awareness of the fragility of life". He also says that, "life moves in time and therefore is constantly in a state of flux. That reality itself makes for a fragile, unstable existence for all humankind."

Consider life in South Africa over the course of the past thirteen years. The fibre of South Africa as a nation has changed beyond recognition and this change has permeated all aspects of South African culture. Many people have gained freedom and the economy has coped well with the changes. Yet, as the balance of power shifted, many people lost what they had taken for granted for so long. HIV/AIDS has left countless bereft. Many are still waiting for the effects of the new democracy to

have a direct influence on their lives and are losing faith. The education system is a shambles, which is cause for great frustration and anger among educators especially.

Across the world, the security of the nuclear family has become virtually non-existent. Members of congregations are more and more disillusioned, which results in people church-hopping or abandoning the church entirely. Esoteric and alternative practices have gained in popularity as individuals search for something to hold on to. There are numerous reasons why counsellors could be faced with dilemmas. The truth of the matter is that pastoral counsellors encounter ethical dilemmas on a regular basis. That is indisputable. The problem that arises is that pastoral counsellors carry such a burden on their shoulders, simply making sure that they are sufficiently qualified and that they have enough time and energy to devote to counselees, that the ethical aspect of the counselling relationship is often the last to be considered.

### 2.3.1. Factors that contribute to the problem.

There are many factors that contribute to the problem. The nature of the counselling relationship places the counsellor in a position of power, which opens it up to abuse. The counsellor's own values are always in the background, influencing his decisions. This can turn into a moralist approach. Counsellors place enormous strain on themselves, in terms of role expectations – their own, as well as those of others – which translate into great levels of stress. The social context of postmodern life places immense strain on the counsellor's decisions especially in terms of moral relativism, pluralism and secularisation. Finally the average counsellor's workload does not allow time for ethical reflection.

#### 2.3.1.1. Power.

*“Power is an intrinsic element of all human relationships and the appropriate expression of power is an integral part of healthy communities and relationships.”*

(Lynch 2002: 58)

Pastoral counselling, by nature, places one person in a position of power over another. The counsellor is approached because he is perceived as being able to guide and lead someone through the process that will bring their lives back on track. Although the

desired approach for a counsellor has been identified as that of mutuality, there still is some imbalance in the relationship.

Lynch (2002: 61) explains, “there is often a power imbalance in such relationships with one person offering care (and often holding a particular institutional status) and the other, to at least some degree, needing this support.” It makes sense then to recognise the fact that any position of power can be abused. Counsellors are not immune to temptation. This is why Collins’ (1988: 31-34) guide includes a warning against sexual temptation within the counselling relationship, since a sexual relationship between counsellor and counselee is an abuse of power. As the counsellor is the ‘designated driver’ of the relationship it should be within his power to stop the metamorphosis of the relationship from a caring one to something that could be seen as exploitative.

In other words, a counsellor should acknowledge the imbalance of power and respond to it in such a way that the well-being of the counselee is still respected. Campbell (1986) makes an important point about a pastoral counsellor’s identity – that it should be rooted in humility and a sense of mutual humanity, a desire to share rather than to be in a superior position. Yet, having the desire to maintain a healthy relationship with counselees is not always enough. This is where Lynch’s (2002: 61) words ring true: “Where such power imbalances exist in human relationships, it is useful to think in terms of limits or boundaries that are placed on the actions of the more powerful partner to protect the vulnerability of the weaker one”.

#### 2.3.1.2. The counsellor’s norms and values.

*“All pastoral practice is shaped by the pastoral carer’s values and...there is a need for moral reflection in relation to all forms of pastoral work”* (Lynch 2002: 7)

Ethical decision making should be a process of careful reflection during which all options are weighed and measured against one another. The counsellor should take into consideration the counselee’s well-being, the well-being of other involved parties, the law as well as the social context that the counselee inhabits. His own values should, ideally, not carry much weight but, it is impossible to be value-free. If one tries to remove one’s own values from the equation, one leaves oneself open to be “informed by the dominant culture” rather than to be informed by that which one

knows well. It becomes a case of “better the devil you know, than the one you don’t.”  
(Lynch 2002: 11)

Consider the dominant culture: Contemporary society is under the firm rule of people such as Oprah Winfrey and Phil McGraw. It does not make sense that a pastoral counsellor with a Christian orientation should let himself be lead by them. Yet, if one acknowledges that no ethical decision can be made without taking one’s own values into consideration, it is important to recognise one’s own fallibility. It is presumptuous and dangerous to think otherwise. Therein lies the danger of moralism and becoming overly directive (giving explicit instructions, rather than guidelines or suggestions) in approach.

Another danger lies in the possibility that the counsellor’s values may be in conflict with the counselee’s or even the law. If the counsellor does not know or understand his client’s values, how can he guide that person to a better outcome? Let us assume that all pastoral counsellors base their own values largely on Christian values. Not all people who come to a pastoral counsellor’s office subscribe to the same values. If the counsellor then reverts to so-called universal norms, is he not compromising his integrity?

#### 2.3.1.3. Role expectations.

*“Role expectations have significant power and can influence pastors’ behaviour and choices”*  
(Baston 2005: 45)

Pastoral work is multifaceted and thus people place many different expectations on a pastoral worker. In addition, each pastoral counsellor places many expectations on himself. Each time the pastoral worker fails one of these expectations, it generates guilt. Baston (2005: 47) explains that this guilt opens the pastoral worker to manipulation and to the temptation to compromise his integrity. The question is, if he is open to compromise his integrity, is he not open to compromise his ethics? This question may make more sense, if one considers the social context as well.

#### 2.3.1.4. The social context.

*“the locus of suffering may be the individual but some of the factors that cause the individual to suffer lie far beyond the individual’s control or influence. Poverty and unemployment, for example, are essentially social problems which have severe consequences for individuals, but actually require social and political solutions.”*

(Pattison 1994, cited in Lynch 2002: 47)

The above statement is not only true in terms of the suffering of individuals but also in terms of the work of pastoral counsellors. There are social forces that not only influence our material lives, such as poverty, but also the way we look at the world. Cook (1983: 2-12) identified a number of characteristics of postmodern life that have changed people’s take on life and change the ways in which a pastoral counsellor can respond to people.

- *Alienation:* The world has become depersonalised. Individuals feel lost and alone. An example of alienation in South Africa is the manner in which crime has driven us to hide behind high walls. As a result, fewer and fewer people get to know their neighbours or trust people that they do not know, unless they make a conscious effort to get involved in the faith community or other social arenas. It can also translate into a distrust of the pastoral counsellor or an aversion to allowing someone from outside into your personal life.
- *Futurity:* People start to look for ways in which they can understand their immediate future. If the future looks good then one need not worry about the present. It is a form of escapism. There is an increased interest in the occult, astrology and other similar fields. Traditionally, Christians would shun such ideas entirely. Currently it is not strange for somebody to talk about her child’s Sunday school class and her own astrology course at the same time. If the pastoral counsellor is consulted, it may be because people are searching for a quick fix, which is not always possible.
- *Relativism:* Some thinkers argue that all we know about God is based on human thought and thus imperfect. If our knowledge of God is imperfect, we cannot presume to make absolutist statements about God or his will. This argument is a relativist one. Relativists go on to say that, if we cannot make absolute statements, we cannot make

universal rules. This school of thought has gained much momentum with increasing new knowledge of non-western cultures whose values are vastly different from western values. (Runzo 1986: 3-5)

The argument is that if it is socially acceptable to a specific group, then it cannot be wrong in the context of that group, even though it may be seen as wrong in another context. Consider the following English expression: One man's meat is another man's poison.

Pastoral counsellors have to be very careful about the decisions they make and the advice they give. Relativist Graham Long (2004: 153-155) argues that making moral choices relies on whichever argument makes the most sense. If more than one makes sense, then one must choose the one which is least in conflict with one's own convictions. Keep in mind that people's convictions vary and one realises that almost anything can be found to be right. Consider also that it was mentioned earlier that no decision making can ever be value-free. Thus we return to the question of the counsellor's values. It is no longer necessarily acceptable to stick to universal rules. Not only does the counsellor have to consider his own values and those of his client but also the values of the wider community. After all, the counsellor and counselee do not live in a void. Their decisions and actions do not only influence their relationship it influences those around them. Thus they are to a certain extent accountable not only to themselves but also to those around them.

- *Pluralism:* As we have become aware of the fact that there are vastly different groups in the world, so have we become aware that there are vastly different world-views. In a world of mass media and the internet "the fact of a religiously plural world is one that is readily acknowledged by believers and non-believers alike. For religious believers, however, this fact poses a set of problems" (O'Keeffe 1996: 61). No longer can any religion make absolute truth claims. This has elicited various different reactions within the church, from fundamentalism to tolerance and acceptance. A pastoral counsellor who is seen to a certain extent as a religious leader needs to know where he fits into the picture. The question is if it is at all possible for a pastoral counsellor to take a fundamentalist stance in the course of his work, even if he does in

fact adhere to fundamentalist principles? Whose framework of beliefs and values should govern a counsellor's choices?

- *Liberation:* Since the success of liberation movements across the world and especially South Africa, the focus has been largely on human rights and people's freedom to live in a manner that they choose. It is widely believed that South Africa has the most liberal constitution in the world and South Africans are very aware of their rights. However, many South Africans approach their rights with an attitude of entitlement that ignores the built-in responsibilities that these rights demand. I am reminded of a recent incident at a school, where a girl who had failed grade ten demanded to be enrolled for grade twelve. When the school informed her mother that it would be dishonest and that they do not believe in dishonesty, her mother's response was, "Why not?" Such an indignant response is indicative of the way in which individuals think about their rights without considering the responsibilities or consequences. As a result, pastoral counsellors are expected to respect individuals' rights and choices and be careful not to give direct instructions or advice that could be unwanted.

- *Secularization:* Lastly, Cook defines secularization as "the process by which religious thinking, practice and institutions lose their social significance." (1983: 7) Recently, however, events surrounding the conflict in the middle-east have cast the spotlight on the role of religion in society. In the wake of 9/11 and the bombings in London religious groups across the world have had to re-appraise themselves. After the bombings in London, Tony Blair spoke about "everything we hold dear and value". Immediately, one must ask oneself, "What do I hold dear and value?" Add into the equation the tsunami in Indonesia and hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and one sees many reasons why individuals are once again looking for something to hold on to. In a recent letter to TIME Robert D. Rauch (2006: 6) writes:

I cannot recall another year that brought such human misery. Whether caused by nature or man, the events depicted in your collection reminded me how truly awful 2005 was. May the human family look forward to some small measure of joy in 2006.

His letter speaks of the need that we have to find something that will provide us with hope.



The world in which the pastoral counsellor of today has to work is riddled with challenges. The social forces which affect his work are many and varied. However, this chapter may grow very long if I attempt to address them all. Therefore the above-mentioned must suffice as an illustration.

#### *2.3.1.5. Time.*

Ethical reflection takes time. Yet, Lynch (2002: 87) quite rightly points out that ethics is not pastoral counsellors' main occupation. They are confronted with it in their day-to-day work, but their work encompasses a lot more than ethical reflection. Counsellors have notoriously full schedules, especially if they are full-time pastors. If they are confronted with an ethical question, it is most likely that they will "seek to make use of whatever tool can help their moral reflection."

In conclusion, it is safe to say that pastoral counsellors are confronted with ethical dilemmas. The counselling relationship is such a fragile thing that can so easily be affected by forces from within, such as the precarious balance of power and the demands that each person's values place on the relationship. Role expectations from others as well as from the counsellor himself also affect the relationship. Other forces from outside also play a role, such as the increasingly challenging social context and a lack of time. Lynch (2002: 59) argues that pastoral counsellors' problems with ethics do not lie so much in being confronted with ethical dilemmas (which are an occupational hazard) but in knowing how to reflect on them in such a way that they can help people to make the best possible decisions. This is the crux of the matter. It has been shown (and will be discussed in further chapters) that pastoral counsellors face ethical problems. It is also evident that there are aspects of a pastoral counsellor's life and world that aggravate the problems. None of this can be changed.

What pastoral counsellors in South Africa need, are structures that offer support and supervision, so that they have somewhere to turn to when they need it. They need to belong to a board or council that will be allowed to regulate their work legally in terms of whether they are in fact qualified enough to do the work and in terms of holding them accountable with the help of a code of conduct.

Bayles (1989: 84-85), whose ideas on professional ethics will be discussed in later chapters, makes two very important points. Firstly, he states, “No matter how honest, candid, diligent, loyal, fair and discreet professionals are, if they are incompetent, they are unworthy of trust, for they cannot do well the job for which they are hired.” Secondly he asks, “How do professionals know when a client’s difficulty is beyond the limits of their expertise? (Or what to do in an ethical dilemma that they know nothing about?) This problem is especially acute when specialization is not certified or persons without a specialty or certification are not prohibited from providing services.” (brackets inserted)

#### 2.4. The Boundaries of this study.

When one talks about the professionalization of pastoral counsellors, it would be negligent not to mention those pastors who perform the work of pastoral counsellors in the course of their duties, regardless of the fact that they may not have focussed on counselling in the course of their studies. It is in the nature of ministry. Further, it would be unwise not to remember that pastoral work has existed for as long as there have been pastors and it is only very recently that pastoral counselling has become so specialised. If pastoral counselling becomes fully professionalized, where do these pastors fit into the picture? This question is worthy of research as well. Yet, within the limits of this study, this question will not be addressed in detail. It is noteworthy, however to mention that the empirical study will, for the sake of completeness, include a minister who has not studied pastoral counselling but is often called on to perform such duties.

For the purpose of the study, I shall narrow the field down from counsellors and therapists in general, to pastoral counsellors in Gauteng. It has been mentioned that the focus will not be on ministers. The study will focus on persons who have studied pastoral counselling as a post-graduate degree and these are the people whom I shall be referring to as pastoral counsellors. This group does not include lay counsellors or Christian counsellors. There are two overarching groups of pastoral counsellors: those who are full-time ministers and have included pastoral counselling in their studies and those who work exclusively as counsellors. Among those who work exclusively as counsellors there are people who have come from a background of ministry and

people who have come from various other backgrounds, such as psychology and teaching. Within this study, no distinction will be made between these groups.

The reason that the study focuses on counsellors in Gauteng is simply logistics. It is easier for me to reach the participants and meet with them in a place where they are comfortable, within the borders of Gauteng, as this is where I am based.

### 2.5. The value of this study.

The nature of pastoral counselling has been discussed in relative detail earlier in the chapter. Consider again the “fragility of life” as Gerkin (1997: 227) terms it. Add to this fragile state all the social forces that make life difficult for counsellors. Pastoral counsellors carry a great burden of responsibility that is not much different from that of doctors, psychologists or social workers. It is about protecting that which most people hold most dear in times of great pain. Campbell’s (1986: 26) description of the pastor as shepherd hinges on the word “courage”. No other word better describes the work of a pastoral counsellor. It does take immense courage to wade into the mud of somebody else’s life and help them to come out. Most often, when people see others in pain, it scares them and they would rather not get involved. For example, one Christian can be very concerned about a friend’s destructive behaviour, such as drug abuse, but nobody would blame them if they pleaded an inability to help. The most they may be expected to do would be to try and convince their friend to go and see a counsellor. Then they will have done their duty and are free to stand back and provide nominal support only. Counsellors have to step in where others do not have to. He also describes pastoral care as a “mixture of tenderness and toughness” (1986: 26). Counsellors are always expected to care and empathise with others, but sometimes they are asked to make difficult decisions and confront people with difficult choices.

Campbell (1986: 30) goes on to say that the shepherd’s “leadership is expressed in great compassion, sensitivity to need and a knowledge of what is life-sustaining and wholesome”. That is a tremendous responsibility. This statement encompasses all the requirements of pastoral care and highlights its potential faults. No pastoral counsellor is always this kind of leader. Unfortunately, the consequences of this are most keenly felt by counselees and their families. If a counsellor makes a mistake in his work, he

makes that mistake in somebody else's life. The damage that can result from such a mistake can be far-reaching and devastating.

In addition, if the counsellor is working within a specific church, his mistake will reflect badly on the church. Whether it is reasonable or not, it is true that the church is often blamed for the mistakes of individuals.

It is therefore obvious that pastoral counsellors need all the help that they can get. It is hoped that this study will shed some light on areas where pastoral counsellors need the most help, so that counsellors, counselees and others may benefit from a better understanding of the ethical challenges pastoral counsellors face.

## **CHAPTER THREE: The Empirical Study**

### **3.1. PART ONE: Discussion of Method.**

The research for this thesis is of a qualitative nature. Qualitative research focuses on two primary outcomes: description and understanding. This means that this thesis is meant to look at the ethical dilemmas encountered by pastoral counsellors, so as to describe them and, as a result of the description, to come to a greater understanding of them. It is then hoped that this greater understanding will lead to further questions and even suggestions that will help pastoral counsellors to do their work well. From a qualitative research perspective, the best way to describe and understand whatever is being studied, is to look at it “from the perspective of the social actors themselves.” (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 270)

#### **3.1.1. The actors.**

Obviously, if the study focuses on pastoral counsellors, the actors that were chosen have to know something about pastoral counselling. However, for the sake of getting different perspectives, four people were selected who have four different links with pastoral counselling.

- The first is a very experienced minister who, through the nature of his work, has often been called on to perform the duties of a pastoral counsellor.
- The second is a minister who is now a full-time pastoral counsellor.
- The third is a minister who was completing his Masters in pastoral counselling at the time of the interview.
- The fourth is a full-time pastoral counsellor, who comes from a background that does not include any theological study prior to her degree in pastoral counselling.

All participants were chosen for the fact that they live and work in Gauteng and are therefore easy to reach. This made the practical aspects of the study much easier to manage and reduced costs. It is important to note that the four participants are not related to one another, nor do they work together.

### 3.1.2. The method.

As was mentioned in the first chapter, the research is of a descriptive nature, focusing on what pastoral counsellors have to say about the topic. Thus, the method of unstructured interviews is best suited for the research. As Babbie and Mouton (2001: 270) explain, qualitative research focuses on "the actor's perspective" and "in-depth ("thick") descriptions and understanding of actions and events."

Interviews give one the greatest opportunity to allow the interviewee to talk in detail and use as much of their own language as possible. Furthermore, unstructured interviews lend themselves to an open-ended question such as the one that is being asked in this research, because they give the participants room to interpret the questions in their own way and to add information that they consider to be important. Such interviews also allow the participants to respond with stories and examples in such a way that they determine how much detail they want to include and which direction their response will take.

From the point of view of the researcher, the participants' freedom is very important. In terms of the social constructionist paradigm and the narrative approach, as discussed in the first chapter, the researcher should come into the interview with a willingness to listen and learn, rather than impose preconceived ideas or theories on the participants' responses. If the interview is too structured, the questions can lead the participants in a specific direction. Thus it becomes easy for the researcher to manipulate the process and the information. In the case of an unstructured interview, the researcher may have some questions ready, to use as a starting point, but would rather ask questions based on the participants' responses. Therefore, the researcher is guided by the participant as to what is important information, rather than by his own ideas. The researcher should, in fact, not do much talking at all.

In this study, the format of an unstructured interview worked very well. Firstly, the idea that I entered into the interaction with an attitude of curiosity worked on two levels. On the one hand it was simply true that the participants, through their years of experience and study, knew a great deal more about the topic than I could ever dream to learn in a few years. The participants all appeared to be at ease. On the other hand it allowed me to go into the process with an open mind. Issues were talked about that were not foreseen in the preparation for the study and participants seemed willing to

share more than expected. Sensitive topics arose and were, on the whole, discussed candidly.

Secondly, although the interviews were largely unstructured, it helped to have a few key questions that focused the attention on pertinent issues. The questions were not necessarily asked in any particular order or phrased in exactly the same way for each participant. Interestingly, it happened often that the participant would answer more than one question, without the questions having been asked, as one thought lead to the next. These questions were also of much use, though, in those moments when both interviewer and interviewee felt at a loss or bogged down.

Interviews were never longer than one hour, as I found that both parties felt tired and drained after that time. All participants were working professionals and their time was limited. Thus, it is doubtful whether interviews of longer than an hour would have been convenient. In addition, all interviews were scheduled during the working day and at a venue that was convenient for each participant.

In keeping with the social constructionist approach, every attempt was made to contact participants for a discussion of the interpretations, before the final report, so that the interpretations do not reflect a one-sided perspective. However, owing mainly to the fact that much time had passed since the start of the study, not all the participants were available again. Only one participant was finally contacted electronically and responded. A report of the findings of the study was e-mailed to this participant, who responded through the same medium. Very little additional information came to light during this second exchange, but the respondent expressed satisfaction with the original findings.

#### 3.1.2.1. *Discussion of interview questions.*

As has been mentioned, I chose to make use of unstructured interviews in order to give participants as much freedom as possible in terms of their interpretation of questions and to give them the space to steer the interview to a certain extent. As Greeff (2002:298) explains, “At the root of unstructured interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of people and the meaning they make of that experience.” For the aforementioned reason, one cannot approach an interview with a

definite set of questions. Furthermore, one's questions should be as open-ended as possible, to allow the respondent to say as much as possible. Greeff (2002:298) continues to state, "interviews are social interactions in which meaning is necessarily negotiated between a number of selves." The approach can be linked with ideas related to social constructionism, in that the data that is generated between interviewer and interviewee is more important than the data that existed previously in the mind of either one.

However, it is still necessary to have a number of questions prepared in order to get the ball rolling and to aid the researcher in maintaining the focus of the conversation. An unstructured interview should not be an unfocussed interview. If the interviewer wants to maintain the focus of the interview, it is necessary to have prepared a set of questions that will help the interviewer to "minimise the drop rate" (Greeff 2002: 299) and keep the conversation on track. Such a set of questions need not be followed rigidly and many questions may even be left out or rephrased, depending on what is constructed in the discussion.

What follows is list of questions that were chosen as possible questions to be used in the interviews - although many were phrased differently or not used at all. Often only one or two questions were enough to spur a respondent into a dense discussion of the topic, so that further questions were unnecessary. The questions listed in the boxes should serve as an indication only of the types of questions that were asked. The questions will also be discussed briefly.

#### 3.1.2.1.1. *Introductory questions.*

The first group of questions mainly relate to the participants' history and the reasons why they are involved in ministry and counselling. These questions were selected, because I believe that one cannot talk about ethics without knowing more about the person that you are talking to, as one's thoughts and beliefs about ethics are not formed in a vacuum. As has been mentioned, ethics relate to morals and values, which are socially constructed – they are constructed as one learns about right and wrong and what is important from one's family and social environment (through socialization). Kemp (2002: 37) teaches that, as an individual's story is intertwined with others' stories, "together we also have a common tradition of ideas about how to



organize our life the best way, or rather we have in common a whole culture of testimonies about human experiences of the good life.”

1. Tell me the story of the experiences and/or events in your life that led you to choose to go into ministry.
2. What events or experiences led you to focus on counselling?
3. What role does your faith play in the choices that you have made?
4. How would you describe your identity as a counsellor?
5. Can you separate your identity as a counsellor from your faith identity? If so/if not, why?

Box 3.1: Introductory questions

#### 3.1.2.1.2. *Questions relating to the pastoral role and professional behaviour.*

The second set of questions was chosen as it is directly related to the role of the pastoral counsellor in relationship with his clients and his profession. As pastoral counselling is a profession, and the relationship between counsellor and counsee therefore a professional one, it would be remiss of me not to look at the relationship as such and acknowledge the role of professional ethics in the pastoral counsellor’s experience of ethical decision-making. Professional ethics deals specifically with the ethical implications of a professional-client relationship and covers questions of competence, confidentiality and so on that are of great importance in a counselling relationship. It deals specifically with ethical issues and questions that are pertinent inside a professional’s office.

1. What role do your personal views on ethics play in your professional life?
2. How do you view your position as counsellor in relationship with your clients?
3. How do you approach your clients when issues of an ethical nature must be discussed?
4. What do you do when you do not feel equipped to help a client?
5. How do you approach the question of confidentiality?

Box 3.2. Questions relating to the pastoral role and professional behaviour.

#### 3.1.2.1.3. *Questions relating to ethical decision-making and ethical dilemmas.*

The third set of questions is most important as it deals most directly with the topic under discussion. Questions are open-ended, to allow participants freedom to respond

as they see fit. It is important to mention, as well, that not all the chosen questions are necessarily asked in an unstructured interview, nor are they phrased in the same manner each time, as the interviewer must respond to the participant.

As Babbie and Mouton (2001: 289) explain, “A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent.” Thus, the questions mentioned here are not all the questions that were asked in this research, but are indicative of the type of questions that were asked. Each question would also typically be followed by probing questions to elicit a more detailed response or to clarify something.

1. What is the most difficult ethical decision that you have had to make as a counsellor? Why was it so difficult?
2. What have you learnt from previous difficult situations that you were faced with?
3. What are the ‘alarm bells’ that go off when you are faced with a potentially challenging ethical decision?
4. What resources do you turn to when making an ethical decision?
5. What is the most important thing that counsellors must keep in mind when thinking about ethics and making decisions?

Box 3.3. Questions relating to ethical decision-making and ethical dilemmas.

#### 3.1.2.1.4. *General questions.*

A further set of general, open-ended questions were asked in order to give respondents the opportunity to add to the discussion from their own experience and possibly address an issue that they feel is important and that may not have been covered in the rest of the discussion. These questions cover a range of topics such as the faith community and wider ethical issues such as abortion.

1. To whom do you feel accountable in your ethical decisions? Give a reason.
2. Could you relate a story of a difficult issue that you have had to deal with?
3. In your experience of dealing with many different people, have you come across an issue or problem that particularly worries you? Explain your answer.
4. How have you dealt with the aforementioned issue or problem in your own life?

Box 3.4. General questions.

#### 3.1.2.1.5. *Participants' recommendations.*

In closing the interview, participants were asked about their recommendations for pastoral counsellors and teachers of pastoral counselling.

#### 3.1.2.2. Recording of the information.

The interviews were recorded on tape and notes were made during the interview, so that there was a duplication of the most important information, for the sake of **reliability**. This duplication also made it easier to return to the tapes at a later stage, especially since one tape was very unclear and much of the information would have been lost, had there not been notes available. In another case, the tape did not work at all. The notes, which were obviously not as complete as a recording would be, were invaluable, as I had tried to stick to the participants' own words as far as possible, when writing them down initially. After the interviews had been concluded, I listened to the tapes again and added more data from the tapes to the original notes, before thinking about analysing any of the information.

#### 3.1.2.3. Analysing the information.

When it came to analysing the information, I found it most useful to look for thematic categories. It was quite surprising to discover how much of what the participants had had to say overlapped, especially considering the fact that, on more than one point, they might have been approaching the questions from opposite ends of the spectrum. In this way, the participants themselves helped to strengthen the **validity** of the research.

It is important to mention at this point that, regardless of the fact that a thematic categorisation may be a very "conventional" (Seidman 1991: 99) method, it does not necessarily stifle the freedom of the actors to speak for themselves. The secret is to be very cautious in choosing categories and to allow the categories to arise from the interviews, rather than to think of a category and then to try and find information in the interview that fits the category (Seidman 1991). It is when one keeps this in mind that ideas arise from the records that one may not have expected. I am reminded of Columbus, mentioned in the first chapter, who set out to find one thing and found another. This is also true for this study. I allowed myself to be guided by the

interviewees' words. This approach falls in with the narrative approach – as it is described in the first chapter – and is probably the closest that a qualitative researcher can come to **objectivity**. Most of what I had expected to find was there, but there were also one or two surprises. These interviews will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

In addition, also for the sake of **reliability**, I found it helpful to return to the notes and tapes many times over an extended period of time. This meant that I would approach them with fresh eyes and ears and discover nuances that I might have missed previously and also that I would not forget what the *participants* had said and say what I *think* they had said. Further attempts were made to contact interviewees again, so that they could give further feedback and input, but owing to logistical problems this proved to be very difficult.

### 3.1.3. Ethical concerns in research methodology.

#### 3.1.3.1. Harm to participants.

In terms of the chosen topic for this research, the major concern was harm to participants' reputations as well as emotional harm. The possibility exists that participants may have shared details that could damage their own or others' professional reputations. Similarly, they may have shared details which, were they to be made public, could cause emotional harm either to themselves or others. Strydom (2002: 64) states that “emotional harm to subjects is often more difficult to predict and to determine than physical discomfort, but often has more far-reaching consequences for respondents.” It is for these reasons that participants' identities be kept confidential.

During the early stages of the research, I had thought that I might see if I could find participants who felt that they had been treated unethically by a pastoral counsellor. I was concerned, though, about the ethical implications of such interviews, especially in terms of emotional harm and confidentiality. However, after having concluded the interviews with the first three participants, it was decided that the information they had made available would be sufficient to answer the original question.

### 3.1.3.2. Anonymity and confidentiality.

Ethics and ethical decision making is most often linked to difficult and sensitive decisions, especially in the context of pastoral counselling. It is for this reason that the participants will remain anonymous. All tapes and notes are numbered, and no names are mentioned unnecessarily. No names will be mentioned in the next chapter, either. All notes and tapes are locked in a cabinet, for which I have the only keys. Electronic data is protected by passwords.

Furthermore, if participants asked me to keep a certain story or piece of information confidential, a line was drawn through that part of the notes and those details will not be mentioned in the discussion that will follow in the next part of this chapter.

### 3.1.3.3. Informed consent.

Prior to each interview, participants were asked to read a short letter describing the nature of the research (Addendum A) and to sign a letter of consent (Addendum B).

In summary, a qualitative method was chosen, so that a depth of information could be gathered that would not be possible otherwise. To this end, it was decided that unstructured, one-on-one interviews would be the best approach. The actors who were chosen are all people who are in some way involved in either ministry or pastoral counselling or both. For logistical reasons, the participants were all chosen from within Gauteng.

The interviews were recorded in two ways and analysed using a method of thematic categorisation. Furthermore, all the participants will remain anonymous so as to protect the confidentiality of the information as well as other persons who may be affected by the publication of the research. Participants took part in the research only after they had given their informed consent.

### 3.2. PART TWO: Discussion of Interviews.

As was stated in the previous section, four people were interviewed during the course of this research. Unstructured interviews were used, which means that the participants were not all asked exactly the same questions. All questions were not phrased in the same way, either. Therefore, it is not possible to discuss the findings of the research in terms of the questions that were asked. The information was analysed in terms of thematic categories, which were identified after the interviews had been concluded, out of the respondents' answers. It is also important to mention that the respondents may not all have had an equal amount to say for each category, since the interviews were unstructured and generally took on the form of fairly informal conversations.

In order to remain true to the participants' own words and ideas, they are often quoted directly in the sections to follow. Where they are quoted in Afrikaans, an English translation will follow in brackets.

Seven categories were identified. Some may not seem to be directly related to pastoral counsellors' experiences and decisions regarding ethical dilemmas, but they play important roles in the counsellors' approach to ethical dilemmas and decisions. They are indicative of what forms the basis of pastoral counsellors' principles and ethical framework:

- The role of God and faith in the life of the pastoral counsellor.
- Pastoral identity.
- Evangelisation, prayer and preaching.
- Hermeneutics and the role of the Bible.
- Training and the role of mentors.
- Approach to ethics.
- Ethical dilemmas.

An eighth category will cover another topic that had only been mentioned by one person, but addresses a significant question about *the role of the faith community*. Considering the fact that pastoral counsellors are role-players within the faith community (and that the respondent was quite passionate about it), it is worth mentioning.

### 3.2.1. The Role of God and Faith in the Life of the Pastoral Counsellor.

All respondents stated that God plays a very important role in their lives and the choices that they make. Two respondents mentioned that God is ever-present in their lives. Responses included such words as, “Die hele lewe is vir my van God deurdronge.” (All of life is drenched with God’s presence.) One respondent tells very poignantly of the manner in which she is able to trace God’s involvement in her life, since birth. She describes it as “’n goue draad deur my lewe.” (...a golden thread woven through my life...)

A third spoke strongly and said, “Al my opleiding wat ek kry in die sielkunde het vir my gesê dat my Christenskap moet heeltemal los staan van my identiteit as terapeut en ek kan nie saamstem daarmee nie.” ( All the training that I have received in psychology told me that I should separate my Christianity from my identity as therapist and I cannot agree with that.) He also added that his identity is inseparable from his Christianity. “Ek is in die eerste plek ‘n Christen.” (I am a Christian first.)

As far as their work in pastoral care and counselling is concerned, the abovementioned is also true. In terms of working with and for people, one said, “Geloof moet my net help om meer menslik te wees.” (Faith should help me to be more human.) Another stressed his integrity as Christian. All respondents stated that they would often pray for and about their counselees, with or without their knowledge. One counsellor states that solutions often present themselves, after she had prayed about her counselees’ questions.

Thus it is evident that God and faith play a very important role in the lives and work of the participants. They cannot separate their identity as Christians from the work that they do.

### 3.2.2. Pastoral Identity.

Being involved in pastoral care means that one has a certain identity, or way of thinking about who you are, that influences your work as a pastoral counsellor. It has already been established that the respondents could not separate their identity as Christians from their work. It follows, then, that their identity as Christians will have a direct influence on their identity as pastors and how they approach people.

The most significant idea that came to the fore is that the respondents all have a great love and respect for people. All respondents expressed a fervent desire to do as much as they can for others. In relating a story about helping a young girl through a very difficult decision, one counsellor admitted that she found the situation very trying but said, “Ek kon haar net nie los nie!” (I could not just leave her!) She also confesses to being very optimistic about the people that she works with, saying, “Ek sien nie mense se donker kant nie.” (I don’t see people’s dark sides.) She would rather look for potential in anyone that she meets. A second respondent said that he believes that, as creations of God, we are all entitled to all the love and happiness that we can possibly find.

In spite of all their experience and qualifications, they do not regard themselves as experts, when it comes to other people’s lives. Instead of walking ahead of the person, in the quest to find healing, they would rather walk next to them. “Loop saam met hom in die bos van sy probleme in”(walk with him into the bush of his problems) is how one respondent put it. Another said. “Ek beskou berading as ‘n onderhandeling...Kom ons hou op wonder oor reg en verkeerd en gaan soek saam die waarheid.” (I see counselling as a negotiation...Let’s stop wondering about right and wrong and look for the truth together.) Yet another stated, “Ek haat dit om voorskriftelik te wees...Ek het kennis, maar hulle ken hulle storie.” (I hate being prescriptive...I have knowledge, but they know their story.)

If one had to say that there are building blocks for a pastoral counsellor’s identity, then honesty and integrity would be the cornerstones. All of the participants stressed the importance of honesty and integrity in the pastoral relationship. One explained that one should not be overconfident, but rather be willing to return to the counselee and ask, “Is ek op die regte spoor?” (Am I on the right track?) Another said that one should lay things on the table and be open about what is going on. All respondents stated that they would rather be honest with people and tell them that they do not have answers for them, than pretend to know the answers.

All the participants who took part in this study confessed to caring a great deal about people and wanting the best for them.



### 3.2.3. Evangelisation, Prayer and Preaching.

When one talks to a pastoral counsellor, who confesses his Christianity, the obvious question that follows is, “What role does evangelisation play in your work?” The answer, from all respondents is that it has no real place in the counselling relationship. On the whole, what came across is that each situation is dealt with on its own merit.

One respondent explained that he would often say to somebody that he would not preach to him, but rather speak as an individual. “Ek kan nie namens die NG Kerk of namens die Here praat nie, maar ek sal jou nie veroordeel nie.” (I cannot speak on behalf of the NG Church or on behalf of God but I will not judge you.) A second said that, “As ek as Christen met iemand werk beteken dit nie dat ek my Christenskap in sy keel afdruk nie.” (If I, as a Christian, work with someone it does not mean that I shove my Christianity down his throat.) Another said, “Ek het ‘n vreeslike hekel aan ‘Bible bashing’” (I hate Bible bashing.) and that people come to her for counselling, not evangelisation.

Interestingly, respondents also made it clear that one should know one’s audience. Not every situation is the same. One responded that he did not expect anybody to share his Christian convictions, but that he would approach a Christian differently from a non-Christian. Another explained that it is often easier in the context of counselling, than on the pulpit. He used the example of divorce. From the pulpit, he would preach that marriage is a binding contract, but in a counselling situation, in an individual case, he might explain that divorce is the lesser evil.

However, one respondent made an important point about their Christian orientation. “Wat dit vir ‘n predikant natuurlik maklik maak (is dat) mense wat na hom toe kom vir terapie, kom na hom toe want hy is ‘n predikant.” (What makes it easy for a minister, of course, is that people, who come to him for counselling, come to him because he is a minister.) It may not always be that people approach the pastor because he is a pastor, but they do know that he is a pastor and should expect that he works from a Christian perspective. He continues, however, by making it clear that he is always honest about his Christian orientation, regardless of this fact. Yet, one respondent explained that people often expressly ask not to be preached to – a request that she finds easy to adhere to.

From this, one can conclude that pastoral counsellors do not see the counselling relationship as an appropriate space within which to attempt to evangelise or preach. The nature of the relationship depends on the counselees' needs.

#### 3.2.4. The Bible and the Role of Hermeneutics.

A second question that arises, when one talks about the Christian nature of pastoral counselling, is of the role of the Bible and hermeneutics. Interestingly, all the respondents expressed concern about how the Bible is used in the counselling relationship and in the church in general.

More than one respondent used exactly the same phrase, when they said that the words, “Die Bybel sê,” (The Bible says...) are dangerous. Similarly, phrases such as “God se wil” (God’s will) and “Die Here sê” (The Lord says...) were cited as phrases that have been abused too many times. One stated that the church is an institution “wat met sy standpunte al die bloed laat loop het.” (...that has caused much blood to flow with its convictions.)

He used homosexuality as an example. If Romans 1 were to be taken literally, according to him, then, not only must we condemn homosexuality, but we must also follow all the other rules literally. Women should wear hats, and so on. He explained that we cannot think in black and white when it comes to ethics and reading the Bible.

One participant explained that pastoral counselling is primarily theology and that pastoral counsellors who do not have a theological background do not always use the Bible with sensitivity.

All respondents are in agreement that the use of the Bible within the counselling relationship should be approached with care. “Mens kan nie die Bybel sommer net so gebruik nie.” (One cannot use the Bible recklessly.) “Heavy handed tactics” are undesirable and should be avoided.

### 3.2.5. Training and the Role of Mentors.

When asked about the importance of academic training and background all respondents were in agreement as well. A counsellor's job is to help others to the best of his abilities. The two respondents, who were most vocal about the topic, both feel that ministers are often asked to perform the duties of a therapist, while they do not necessarily have the necessary skills.

One explained that, during his studies in pastoral counselling, he realised that, “wat ek geweet het van berading is blêddie lewensgevaarlik!” (what I knew of counselling was lethal!) He admits, “Ek was baie stupid!” (I was very stupid!) He stresses, “Jy moet professioneel verder gekwalifiseer word...Predikante is bevoeg om mense geestelik te begelei, maar predikante is nie, mag nie, die rol van ‘n sielkundige of ‘n terapeutiese berader aanneem nie.” (You must be professionally qualified...Ministers are equipped to guide people spiritually but they are not, may not fulfil the role of a psychologist or counsellor.)

The other respondent is afraid that ministers often do more damage than anything else. He says, “Ek glo nie ‘n dominee moet huweliksberading doen nie.” (I do not believe that a minister should do marriage counselling.) He emphasises the importance of knowing your own boundaries and knowing when to refer a person to somebody else.

Similarly, a respondent stressed that a pastoral counsellor who did not study theology is not equipped to deal with the theological aspects of pastoral counselling.

All respondents felt that pastoral counselling is often a ‘sink or swim’ situation, where one does not always know exactly what to do. Time and experience are the only true teachers and one must be very careful not to overstep the boundaries of one's own knowledge. Yet, as one participant explained, “‘n Ou sal dan nou ook nie so versigtig kan raak dat die dominee niks wil doen nie.” (One must not be so careful that the minister is afraid to do anything at all.)

To help overcome such difficult situations, respondents recommended some important steps that need to be taken. Firstly, a respondent spoke about the necessity of in-depth

practical training at university level. Secondly, another added that, “mense moet opgelei word om baie sensitief te wees vir hulle grense.” (people should be trained to be very sensitive to their boundaries.) Thirdly, if one is sensitive to one’s boundaries, one should also be willing to refer one’s client to somebody else, if necessary. Fourthly, one respondent tells that she chose a mentor for herself, an older, more experienced counsellor, to whom she turns when the need arises. She stresses that his input is of inestimable value and adds that the reason why she trusts him is not because he is a friend, but because he is honest and not afraid to tell her what he thinks. Lastly, two respondents spoke about the value of turning to books and articles. Nevertheless, one must be careful about what one reads, because it is easy to select literature that will support one’s own convictions. “Ek kan ook die boeke gaan lees wat my pas, so dis nie genoeg nie.” (I can go and read the books that suit me, so it is not enough.)

In summary, respondents felt that a pastoral counsellor should be well qualified, both in psychology and theology. Training should be practical and also geared towards helping counsellors to know their own boundaries. If a counsellor should be in a difficult situation, there are various avenues that can be followed. Most importantly, however, a counsellor should know that what he does can be dangerous. Therefore he should tread lightly.

### 3.2.6. Approach to Ethics.

The main theme of this study is ethics. What is the underlying principle that guides an ethical decision? Most people approach ethics from one of two perspectives: Either the decision is made from a deontological (virtue-based) or from a teleological (utilitarian) perspective. In other words, decisions are either made from asking, “Would a good person do this?” or from asking, “What would bring about the best outcome?” However, either decision can only be made after the decision-maker has decided what ‘good’ or ‘best’ mean. This is the point, where one has to look for an underlying principle. Thus, this is the question that was asked about the participants’ responses.

It has already been established that all the respondents approach their work from a Christian perspective. However, only one respondent expressly stated that his

decisions are based on the question, “Wat sal Christus in die situasie doen?” (what would Christ do in this situation?) This approach is based on his conviction that he is accountable to God for his actions. Thus, his approach is deontological and the underlying principle that governs his decision making is that, in order to be a good counsellor, he should remain within the will of God.

The other respondents all take a more utilitarian approach. One respondent said that he always asks himself whether he is truly helping. Is what he is doing having a positive effect on the people involved? He explains that his faith helps him to be more human and that this is what his approach is based on – “menslikheid en ‘n aanvoeling vir die menslikheid” (humanity and a sensitivity to humanity). Another participant prefers to try and place herself in the other person’s shoes and asks, “Hoe sal ek voel?” (How would I feel?) In other words, she looks at the outcome and tries to decide whether she would like the outcome, if it were her life. The underlying principle here is that of empathy, respect for the other and what would make their life as good or happy as possible.

Two approaches to ethics were identified within the group of respondents who were involved. Nevertheless, if one looks at the respondents’ motivation, it is the same, and that is the desire to do what is best for the people involved.

### 3.2.7. Ethical Dilemmas.

*Note: For reasons of confidentiality, details from some of the respondents’ stories will be left out.*

Once one has looked at the respondents’ approach to ethics, it is appropriate to identify questions or situations that respondents may have found difficult, or expressed concern about, in terms of ethical decision making.

Firstly, participants named a number of tough questions that they had had to deal with. Marriage, and questions surrounding marriage, is one example that was mentioned more than once. One respondent tells how couples often come to him when their marriage is failing and that he sometimes finds that divorce is not out of the question. Even something such as premarital sex, which is not much of an issue for

some, but still very much of an issue within the Christian community, was mentioned as a question that had been difficult to deal with.

Similarly, homosexual relationships pose some problems for counsellors. The respondent finds it difficult to judge two people who appear to love one another.

Another counsellor recounted a story of great indecision and anguish, when a young counselee decided to go for an abortion and asked for help. In the end, the counsellor's compassion for the girl won out over any objections against abortion. Euthanasia was also mentioned. Pastoral counsellors often find themselves at people's deathbeds and in the presence of very sick people, confronted with the question of euthanasia.

Secondly, and most importantly, there were issues mentioned that affect the counsellor-counselee relationship. The counsellor's level of competence is a factor that was mentioned often. If a counsellor continues the relationship, when he knows that he is no longer helping, participants felt that such a counsellor would be acting unethically. "As jy hulle laat aanhou kom en dit help hulle nie, is dit oneties." (If you let them keep on coming and it does not help them, it is unethical.)

Further, a counsellor should be honest about the limits of his competence and experience. Counsellors should, according to participants, be technically competent and experienced. In other words, counsellors should be as well qualified as possible. "Jy moet professioneel verder gekwalifiseer word." (You must be professionally qualified.) Not only that, but they should also know when to refer counsees to somebody else. "Verwys!" (Refer!)

One participant was struggling, at the time of the interview, with the question of whether a counsellor can terminate the counselling relationship on the basis of personal principles. Is it ethical to say that you will no longer help someone?

Confidentiality is one of those ubiquitous topics that are always mentioned when counselling and ethics are discussed. Unique to pastoral counselling, however, is the level of personal involvement in counsees' lives. The minister is expected to know

everyone and be involved in everybody's lives. If that same minister is also a pastoral counsellor, the lines blur. How does one maintain the confidential nature of the counselling relationship, if one goes to the church council meeting with the man who abused the girl that one was talking to that same afternoon? The participant who raised the topic explained that he tries to avoid situations that will affect him directly and that he tries to be as honest as possible to counselees at the start of the relationship. He explains the confidential nature of the relationship and the implications involved to all counselees. Although it is very difficult not to get involved, especially if one is also the person's minister, participants also warn against getting too personally involved. Furthermore, participants are aware of the question that always follows discussions about confidentiality: "When is it acceptable to break the confidence?" One asked specifically whether the counselee's privacy is a blanket rule. Where does one draw the line between individual freedom and social responsibility?

When one reviews the topics that are discussed in the preceding paragraphs, one concept stands out above all others. The counsellor-counselee relationship is one of power and control. Only one participant mentioned this aspect, yet it comes to the fore in other aspects of the discussion. When one considers that the counsellor always has a certain measure of power in the relationship – since the counsellor is supposed to be the professional – it follows that the counsellor should have control over himself and the process. The fact that a counsellor presents himself as a professional, means that people come to him (and trust him) because of that fact. So, how often should a counsellor tell someone what to do? A counsellor should always question the impact that his advice will have on people's lives. Furthermore, a counsellor should always be aware of his own level of competence. How much of an expert is he?

Pastoral counsellors are faced with a broad spectrum of ethical dilemmas on a regular basis. Issues of marriage and sexuality and life and death are common. The nature of the counselling relationship itself also poses a number of problems, ranging from questions about the counsellor's personal convictions to competence and confidentiality. The most important question to consider, however, is the amount of power that a counsellor has in the counselling relationship.

### 3.2.8. The Role of the Faith Community.

As was mentioned earlier, another topic was identified that did not fit into the seven main themes that were discussed, and was mentioned only briefly. The main reason that this topic is considered to be significant is that, if one accepts that pastoral counsellors work from a Christian perspective (as was shown), then it is only appropriate to look at the role of the faith community in the lives of its members. After all, social constructionism tells us that we build our stories together. Then it would be negligent not to place the individual stories of the participants in the context of the larger story, as they themselves describe it. It should be stated that the role of the faith community in the lives of pastoral counsellors is a topic that deserves to be dealt with in great detail, but, since it is not the main focus of this research, it will only be dealt with as a supporting idea. Thus, much that should be said about the faith community will be left unsaid.

One topic that was mentioned, as cause for concern, is that the church is no longer a haven. Members of the church are falling by the wayside, lost in the secular world. The participant explained, “Die kerk is nie regtig meer die plek waar jy kan anders as die wêreld dink nie. Ons moet ‘settings’ skep waar mense ‘alternative communities’ kan wees.” (The church is no longer a place where you can think differently to the rest of the world. We must create settings where people can be part of alternative communities.) He used the example of a young accountant who had burnt out, trying to keep up with the rat race, before she realised that her life was unbalanced, ruled by the corporate world. The church should be a safe place, where someone like this woman should be able to find refuge and guidance. It should also be the place from where one can take a stand against materialism and secularism and know that one is supported.

Another participant emphasised this point, unwittingly, when he paused to express his own pain, as a result of the death of his son, and explained that he had come to the conclusion that we live in a broken world: “Die wêreld is ‘n stukkende plek.” (The world is a broken place.) He went on to say that he finds refuge in Christ. My conclusion is thus that, if he finds refuge in Christ, he should find refuge amongst Christians. Again, the faith community should be a safe place, a haven. How often



does this really happen? The previously mentioned participant did not feel that it happened often enough.

It is possible to search through the interview material indefinitely and continue to find themes and commonalities, but the preceding paragraphs describe what I believe to be the most pertinent. Some categories describe those aspects of a pastoral counsellor's work and life that may not have a direct bearing on their ethical decision making, but provide the foundation from which their decisions are formed. These include their ideas about their faith and their identity as pastoral counsellors. Further categories include topics that are important in the daily working life of a pastoral counsellor and may have a direct bearing on the counsellor-counselee relationship. Included amongst these topics are: hermeneutics, evangelisation and preaching and training. The last two topics are directly linked to ethical decision making. They are: the counsellor's approach to ethics and ethical dilemmas that were experienced by them. One other issue was raised and that was the question of the role of the faith community. Together these eight topics form a picture of pastoral counsellors' experiences of ethical dilemmas that clearly illustrates the complexity of the problem that was posed in the second chapter.

Consider again the tremendous responsibility that a pastoral counsellor chose to take on when he decided to become a counsellor. Choosing to be a counsellor means choosing to go into difficult situations, instead of going out. It means that you pronounce yourself willing to try and deal with those most painful parts of people's lives that the rest of us would rather not talk about. More importantly, it means that you believe that you can make a difference, not only because you believe in your own capacity to care, but also because you have some sort of qualification. The question, however, is, 'What if something goes wrong?' This is the problem of pastoral counsellors. They deal with difficult situations, where their decisions can adversely affect people's lives, especially if those decisions are about such difficult ethical questions as abortion or euthanasia, to name but two.

In the next chapter, the eight themes, that were selected out of the contents of the interviews and described in this chapter (in addition to a few other important themes), will be re-examined in terms of the available literature.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Literature Review

While the empirical study was conducted, eight thematic categories were identified as important for the pastoral counsellor, in terms of making ethical decisions. In this chapter, those same categories will be looked at from the perspective of the wisdom of others who have written about the topics. In this way, it will be possible to construct a whole picture of all the themes that are discussed (in the concluding chapter), as they will have been studied from the point of view of lived experience as well as academic knowledge. A further theme that is relevant, namely professional ethics, will also be looked at in this chapter, so that its relationship to the other themes may be examined.

### 4.1. The role of God and faith in the life of the pastoral counsellor.

*“Only your faith in the reality of God makes counselling pastoral.”*

(Joyce 2000: 57)

Pastoral counselling has as one of its most important premises the idea that mental and emotional health is intertwined with spiritual health. Clinebell (1995: 3) writes that “(h)health, or better, wholeness is one’s unique lifelong journey of growth”. He identifies seven aspects of one’s life in which one must grow in order to experience “wholeness”, but states that *spiritual growth* is paramount. He explains:

“Spiritual growth is the key to all human growth”. Since we are innately spiritual, humans are incomplete if they are not successfully connected to the numinous. If we are successfully connected to the “spiritual reality” we will draw growth and healing from God. The aim of “spiritual growth work” is to free this aspect of our lives, so that we can have a successful relationship with God and receive growth and healing (1995: 77).

It follows then that pastoral counsellors work from the same perspective: that they believe that their work is part of the larger life of the faith community and that they are counsellors because they are also members of the faith community. Furthermore, they are not only members of the community, but also hold the desire to advance the health of the community. Vivienne Joyce (2000: 65) tells us how the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and the traditions that grew out of them foster a community that,

through its ritual, liturgy and gatherings, “gives expression to the inarticulate exchange of love in which all participate”. When the members of the community are faced with circumstances that make the aforementioned “exchange” difficult, “pastoral counselling seeks to notice and aims to undo the obstacles to the loving exchange at the heart of faith”.

Seward Hiltner (1949: 187) held similar views about the role of the pastor: “Anything, therefore, which knits the fellowship more closely together around Christian aims makes a Christian contribution. Since the pastor as a leader tries to do this, his total work, including his counselling, performs a Christian growth function, explicitly or not.”

What is important to remember is that it would make no sense for a pastoral counsellor, who is a member of a specific faith community, to call himself such if the faith that the community holds on to is not also his own. Joyce states, (2000: 51) “(a) pastoral counsellor is expected to access religious tradition and deploy it to promote emotional growth in faith and freedom. Access requires deep familiarity, deployment requires skill”. This “deep familiarity” that she refers to, implies not only an academic knowledge of the religious tradition, but a lived experience that draws on the history of the tradition. After all, religious tradition did not become tradition because it was written down. The reverse is true. Knowledge about tradition is written down because the tradition has been lived. Similarly, one cannot have a “deep familiarity” with any tradition, if one does not live within that tradition. Simply put, a pastoral counsellor should have, and desire more of, the faith that he is trying to nurture in others. He should be an active member of the community he works in.

As was stated in chapter two, a pastoral counsellor’s faith is what places him on a different level from other counsellors’ – not because he is a better counsellor, but because he has a source of hope that lies beyond human power and acknowledges that there is a Higher Power. In his description of pastoral care, Alastair Campbell (1986: 26) uses the image of the shepherd’s “courage based on trust in God”, revealing in his stance that pastoral care should be an act of faith.

Thus, the literature about pastoral counselling and care shows that pastoral counsellors are considered to be members of a faith community that live actively in the community and have become pastoral counsellors because they want to contribute to the health of its members, by relying on their faith in God and wisdom from the religious tradition.

#### 4.2. Pastoral identity.

The nature of pastoral counselling has been discussed in a previous chapter. However, it is important to return to that discussion, in the light of the pastoral counsellor's identity. The pastoral counsellor's identity is very closely linked to the nature of pastoral counselling, because it takes a certain kind of person to fulfil the role of a pastoral counsellor.

In chapter two, the nature of pastoral counselling was discussed from the perspective of the most important 'equipment' required, namely: faith, compassion, academic knowledge and listening and looking skills. The pastoral counsellor's *faith* has been discussed in the previous section. His *academic knowledge* and *skills* will be looked at in the fifth section of this chapter, when the training of pastoral counsellors will be discussed. *Compassion* will be the focus of this section, as it lies at the heart of the pastoral counsellor's identity.

Keeping in mind that pastoral counselling is almost always linked to the Christian community, Seward Hiltner's (1949: 15) reminder to us that "(t)he twofold command of Christ was to preach the gospel and heal the sick" is a good starting point to talk about the compassionate identity of a pastoral counsellor. He follows this statement with a long list of difficulties that people are faced with, such as divorce, illness, bereavement and many other social, emotional and spiritual problems. He explains that the role of the pastoral counsellor is not necessarily to solve the aforementioned problems, but to help the people that they have affected (1949: 16). He talks about the role of the pastoral counsellor as an extension of the role of the Church, which is, among other things, helping its members "to live with themselves and their fellow men in brotherhood and love, enabling them to act with faith and confidence instead of the previous doubt and anxiety, bringing peace where discord reigned before"

(1949:19). These are lofty ideals of a level of spiritual and emotional healing that may seem unattainable but these are the ideals of pastoral counselling.

Although the work of pastoral counselling is an extension of the work of the Church, Gary Ahlskog (2000: 5) explains that the work of a pastoral counsellor is unique, especially in relation to the other tasks of pastors and ministers, who “may well try to persuade others to come around to (their) point of view...But when you close your office door and sit as a counsellor, this orientation is reversed. Now your first responsibility is to open yourself to someone else’s way of thinking, enter into the client’s framework, and commit yourself to understanding a different point of view”. The reason that he gives for having this approach is that the counsellor has a responsibility to respect the client’s perspective enough to be willing to listen attentively and come to understand the inner turmoil that is sometimes expressed in seemingly “unrealistic” statements. If the counsellor does not take the time to listen well and try and understand the client’s point of view, he may be able to give a glib response but he will not be able to give the response that will help the client to deal with their problem. He states, “The essence of your ethical quest consists of efforts to make the world a better place – at least the part of it that you can touch in the counselling room – by treating your client’s individuality with the same respect you would want shown to your own individuality” (2000: 6).

Ahlskog’s aforementioned statement holds dual implications for the pastoral counsellor’s approach to his work. First, he mentions that the pastoral counsellor wants to “make the world a better place”. The desire to achieve such a goal is usually born out of concern for the fact that the world is not a good enough place and that people are suffering because of it. It is therefore out of concern for others’ suffering that a pastoral counsellor chooses counselling as an occupation. Secondly, he explains that the pastoral counsellor should treat the client and his unique situation with respect. Thus, the pastoral counsellor is not concerned for others’ suffering out of pity or some noble sense of obligation, but out of empathy, or what Campbell (1986: 15) calls “mutuality”.

Pastoral counselling has at its roots the thought that “the pastor can, if he will, utilize the role of helping or standing by in difficulty of all kinds as his predecessors have

done through all the Christian ages” (Hiltner 1949: 19). However, pastoral counselling is more than “standing by”. The “mutuality” that Campbell describes implies a deep level of involvement that goes far beyond offering support, as the phrase “standing by” suggests. The history of the Christian Church teaches pastors to care very deeply, as Gerkin (1997: 82-83) explains:

The Middle Ages also left us the imagistic legacy of the pastor as the physician of the soul. That image conveys to us that it is not enough for our care simply to express superficial goodwill toward others, it is not enough simply to wish our parishioners well or to express our desire that they ‘have a good day’. No, from some of our medieval priestly ancestors we learn that to be a good pastor is to seek to understand the deepest longings, the secret sins and fears of the people so that the healing unction of our understanding may communicate that we and the God we serve care deeply and intimately for them.

Caring “deeply and intimately” is best expressed in three ways, according to Alastair Campbell:

- He describes the pastoral counsellor as somebody, who firstly possesses the leadership abilities of a shepherd. “Thus leadership is expressed in great compassion, sensitivity to need and a knowledge of what is life-sustaining and wholesome” (1986: 30).
- Secondly, he describes a pastoral counsellor as a “wounded healer” who displays “a caring attitude towards others which comes from our own experience of pain, fear and loss and our own release from their deadening grip” (1986: 37).
- Lastly, his description of pastoral care includes an image of a fool, who relies on “simplicity,” “loyal love” and “laughter” to achieve his goal as counsellor (1986: 59-63). Such a fool does not take himself too seriously or rely too heavily on techniques and learned skills because he knows his own limits as well as the limits of any techniques he might employ. This type of counsellor can focus on the clients’ needs, understand their pain and genuinely attempt to help them.

Therefore, previous thinkers have described the pastoral identity in terms of the pastor's compassion for other people. This type of compassion can be described as a deep concern for the needs and wounds of others as well as a need to do something about their needs and wounds. Moreover, the pastor does not only want to help others, but would do it from a perspective of mutual pain and understanding, rather than a noble sense of pity. It is a compassion born out of a feeling of common humanity and a mutual desire for a better life within the faith community.

#### 4.3. Evangelisation, prayer and preaching.

*“Is prayer consistent with the counselling situation? The answer always lies in looking at the further question: What situation and what prayer?”*

(Hiltner 1949: 197)

As has been mentioned earlier, pastoral counselling has a distinctly spiritual foundation. The literature has revealed that a pastoral counsellor should be an active member of his faith community and share in the faith of that community. The pastoral counsellor is seen as a leader within the faith community. However, within the counselling situation, the spiritual or religious role of the pastor cannot manifest itself in the same way as in the rest of his ministry.

The place and role of preaching and evangelisation is not necessarily within the pastoral counselling relationship. As was mentioned earlier, Ahlskog (2000: 5) explains that, in the context of preaching, one can attempt to bring others around to a certain point of view, but that, in the context of counselling, one is expected to listen and be open to another's point of view.

However, there must be strong connection between one's preaching and one's approach within counselling. Seward Hiltner (1949: 150) describes the pastor's role as “one role” that is made up of “many activities”. The implication for the pastor is that he should have one approach to ministry that is manifested in different forms. “The point is that far from there being a fundamental contradiction between preaching and counselling, these two functions should exhibit the same basic approach; and in so far as they do, each aids the other” (1949: 155).

Hiltner (1949: 155) uses an illustration of two preachers, one whose sermons reveal an authoritarian, coercive approach and another whose sermons reveal an approach that is accepting and understanding. He illustrates that a pastor's approach on the pulpit will have an effect on whether his parishioners will approach him for counselling. Similarly, it will have an effect on the reasons why parishioners will approach him for counselling or not.

Inside the pastor's office, much of the pastor's decision to pray or talk about religious or spiritual matters depends on the counsellee and the situation. Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 339) explain that each individual has a different approach to whose authority they will accept and whose advice they are likely to follow, including the authority of a deity, sacred texts, religious practices or religious figures. They conclude by saying that it would "be wise to have a frank discussion of what they hope to gain from your counselling". In this way the counsellor and counsellee are building a relationship within which both are comfortable. The space between them is constructed on mutually agreed upon terms.

Further, it is important to explore each individual's religious and spiritual background. Clinebell (1995: 104) states that, "some people in churches respond with less anxiety and more willingness to participate when they become aware of the grounding of growth programs in their religious traditions. Secular-minded people are turned off by 'religious' language". In either case, the counsellor should know where the counsellee is coming from, so that he can know how to approach the situation.

Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 327) make it clear that, even when the counsellor already knows the person or knows that the person belongs to his own parish or religious affiliation, it is important that he takes the time to engage in some form of "spiritual assessment". Each person is, according to the authors, "unique" and "complex": a "living human document" (2000: 327-328). Therefore a counsellor cannot make any assumptions about his own understanding of an individual. They further assert: "If you accept as a basic principle the idea of 'being with' the client (as championed by modern pastoral care) and agree that this 'being with' is itself a critical form of spiritual care, it then follows that you have somehow to find out where the person is in order to be 'with' them" (2000: 328). In simple terms, the counsellor's



responsibility in an instance such as this is to make sure that he knows the client's story well enough to be able to gauge the situation well.

Let's return to Seward Hiltner's (1949: 197) statement that was quoted at the beginning of this section. "Is prayer consistent with the counselling situation? The answer always lies in looking at the further question: What situation and what prayer?"

If the pastor does decide that it is appropriate to use prayer or religious language in the counselling session, he must still be very careful. Again, he must start from where the client is. In the case of prayer, for example, Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 343) advise counsellors to redefine prayer in such a way that "(c)lients are freer to talk to and/or listen to God in a way that is most therapeutic for them without being distracted by worries over the form or substance of their communications". If the counsellor prays on behalf of the client, the authors also advise that the prayer should be structured in such a way that it reflects the person's own concerns. They explain that "(p)ersonalizing a prayer deepens the connection between you and clients by letting clients know that you have heard them" (2000: 345).

The pastor must, however, be careful not to use prayer in such a way that he does not address the client's problem, even if the client asks for or consents to it. Hiltner (1949: 196-201) uses the example of Mary, whose problem presents itself as primarily religious. In the first scenario, the pastor responds to the superficial problem only and sends Mary away with a prayer and a book (a similar solution to sticking a plaster on an amputated limb). However, in the second scenario, the pastor takes the time to listen further and identify Mary's problems in her relationship with her mother and the outcome of the conversation is very different. He still prays for her in the end but Mary has a much greater understanding of how she could proceed.

There are countless examples of the different ways in which a counsellor can choose to use religious resources and the ways in which he can misuse them. The crux of the matter is that he must be careful to assess the client's situation first and work from the client's perspective.

Whether the counsellor chooses to speak about religious and spiritual matters or not, should, however, not affect the spiritual foundation of the counsellor's approach. Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 323) warn against relying too heavily on knowledge gained from secular sources, such as psychoanalysis. They explain that many pastors study psychology because "congregants frequently assume that ordination includes the equivalent of a Ph.D in psychology" and expect them to have the skills of a trained counsellor. They continue to say,

We become skilled secular counsellors, happily bringing much new insight into our work while believing that the fact that we are compassionate clergy makes our work pastoral – especially when we include some religious language. But is that enough? Does it do justice to the wealth of our traditions? Does it address fully the depth of a person's suffering or the potential for healing? Does it provide a sacred framework for change? (2000: 324)

Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 324) remind counsellors that they "must first remember to approach each counselling encounter as a holy task rather than a secular relationship". The word that they use to describe this approach is "reverence" (2000: 325). The Collins Dictionary & Thesaurus describes *reverence* as "awe mingled with respect and esteem" (2002: 652). If it is the case that a counsellor realizes that his task is "holy," he will not approach any client without humility. Clinebell (1995: 107) explains that "(a)wareness of the gift quality of growth can be wonderfully freeing. It can help liberate us from the heavy feeling that growth depends entirely on our own efforts, on our own skills and cleverness". Further he concludes that "(i)t's humbling and reassuring to remember that the people with whom we work in counselling, therapy and teaching, sometimes grow in spite of rather than because of what we do" (1995: 107).

In terms of the Judeo-Christian tradition, both Clinebell (1995: 106) and Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 325) refer to the age-old traditional concept that man was created in the image of God and that it would therefore be unwise not to work from that perspective. According to Clinebell (1995: 106), the fact that we were created in the image of God implies that no one can attempt to help somebody else without looking at the whole person. "It is by developing our potentialities for wholeness – physically, psychologically, relationally, spiritually – that the divine image comes into its unique expression in us". Thus, pastoral counsellors have the 'holy' task of helping

others to become what God made them to be. Surely this is a task that cannot be taken on without “awe, mingled with respect and esteem.”

Therefore, there are no set rules for whether a counsellor can use prayer and religious language in counselling. The pastoral counsellor is called to meet his clients where they are and choose his course of action based on their needs rather than his own agenda. He must remember that counselling is a different context from preaching and evangelisation, but this knowledge need not change his fundamental approach. Even if prayer or religious language is not used in the counselling sessions, the counsellor should pray about the client and look to God and his religious tradition for guidance.

#### 4.4. The Bible and the role of hermeneutics.

*“Texts are dangerous (and especially this text), and to read is to be empowered, and therefore to become responsible.”*

David Jasper (2004: 123)

Considering the argument that pastoral counselling is intimately connected with faith and the traditions of the faith community, it would be irresponsible not to look at the role that the Bible and hermeneutics play in pastoral counselling.

The Bible has always been considered to be normative for Christian life, but how normative? Birch and Rasmussen (1989: 142) explain that the authority that the Bible has in the Church is not born out of the Bible itself. “It is the recognition of the Christian community over centuries of experience that the Scripture is a source of empowerment for its life in the world”. This places the authority of the Bible in perspective. Especially when it comes to making ethical decisions or helping others to make decisions, it would be ill advised to rely solely on the Bible. The authors say, “The claim to be Scripture establishes an authority for the Bible that must be taken into account, but its authority is not absolute or exclusive. Many other sources of influence and insight become authoritative in moral deliberation” (1989: 143).

Not only would it be foolish to rely only on the Bible but, if the counsellor is going to use the Bible in counselling, he has to be very careful about how he uses the Bible. Responsible use of the Bible is imperative, yet often difficult, especially when the Bible does not offer a direct answer to our questions.

The more traditional approaches of some groups to the Bible, for example, often require that the Bible be read very literally, since the Bible is seen as coming directly from God – almost akin to automatic writing. Birch and Rasmussen (1989: 144) observed some flaws in this approach. Firstly, they mention, “there has emerged no consensus in the Church on the meaning of inspiration and its applicability to the Bible”. Next, they warn, “Inspiration-based concepts of biblical authority tend to invest undue sacral authority in the text of the Bible itself. Christianity then becomes a Book-centred religion rather than a God-centred one” (1989: 145). Thirdly (and most interestingly) they explain, “views that connect inspiration to authority tend in practice (and in spite of theory) to elevate portions of Scripture to positions of authority that imply they are more inspired than the rest” (1989: 145).

Richard Briggs (2003: 84-85), in a rather humorous discussion on the authority of the Bible, also commented that we must be careful when we say that the Bible has moral authority and how we interpret that authority.

To say that the Bible has this kind of authority would suggest that in moral and ethical matters what the Bible says is right. No object-carrying on the Sabbath, then. Interestingly, many people who take this line end up with the kind of morality which reflects quite well on their own way of living: the Bible turns out to be in favour of an honest day’s work for those putting in the honest hard days, but is in favour of the poor if you ask the poor what it is about. Whether the Bible really has one consistent moral opinion about smoking, or drinking, or dancing, or swearing, or tax returns, or fair trade coffee, or any of the other key social issues in the rural small-town world of two or three thousand years ago is another matter. (It doesn’t always have a consistent opinion on lying, for that matter.)

Fortunately, there are options open to the counsellor, who wants to use the Bible responsibly. David Jasper (2004: 121) lists some of the approaches to the Bible that have come to the fore in recent times. Firstly, he mentions that the Bible can be read and studied on a literary level. “(T)here is wonderful literature in the Bible, in both prose and verse. At the same time, the Bible has permeated Western literature like no other text, so that, even today it is, arguably, one of the most powerful *cultural*, if not religious, texts in our society”. Secondly, he names “feminist hermeneutics” and

“‘liberation’ hermeneutics”, but he warns against the political use of the Bible. “(W)hat has often been brought to our attention when such oppressed groups read a powerful text like the Bible, is that it can work just as easily for ill as for good” (2004: 122). He turns further to inter-textual hermeneutics. “What is quite clear, however, is that texts do not live in isolation from one another and to read one text is a kind of gateway into all other texts that have gone before and that will come after it” (2004: 126). Especially in contemporary life, where different types of text have exploded onto the scene, such as the Internet, CDs, DVDs, MP3s, not to mention the books, films and art that have been around for a while, it would be silly to look at the Bible on its own.

Whichever way one chooses to interpret the Bible, Manfred Oeming (2006: 84) reminds us not only to be careful, but also to be humble. One person who reads the Bible is one in a myriad of interpreters, each with his own agenda and context and each interpretation is imperfect. “A combination of exegesis and church history teaches us the continual lesson: we are not the first, not the only and definitely not the last readers to deal with this text. The Bible is comparable to a glistening diamond, which sparkles with new facets and surprising effects when held to the light of reception history”. He also warns in no uncertain terms, “Incorrect interpretations do exist!” (2006: 84)

What, then, does this say to a pastoral counsellor who wants to use the Bible in his counselling? After all, when used with care and sensitivity, the Bible is a powerful tool. Hiltner states (1949: 202), “There can be no question that the pastor will use the Bible in counselling, as he understands it and as it applies to particular situations with which he is dealing, in the sense of using the truths and doctrines revealed there. But this is not the same thing as saying the words ‘the Bible’ or quoting Scripture or telling Bible stories”. As Hiltner (1949: 207) further illustrates, the pastoral counsellor needs to consider the client when using Scripture, or any other text. He also states, later, that a good counsellor works with the Bible in such a way that “he does not moralize, generalize, coerce, or divert. Instead he understands, accepts, clarifies, and helps to consolidate”.

Essentially, the counsellor cannot use the Bible or other texts as weapons to persuade or coerce. Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 353) explain, “This does not mean that counsellors search the Scriptures to find a text which proves their worldview and disproves the client’s. It means that counsellors look at the specific texts which are sacred and meaningful to clients while trying to find a facet of them which clients have not explored and which may help the clients draw support in dealing with their current problems”.

Gerkin (1997: 123) also states, “The good pastor is thus authoritative but not authoritarian. Rather than seeking to exercise the power of control over the thought and behaviour of the people, she or he utilizes the power of the pastoral office to empower people in their ability to make normative use of biblical themes and images in their lives and in the governance and activity of the church”.

The focus of the pastoral counsellor’s reading of the Bible, when it comes to counselling, should be the client and the client’s needs. Therefore, the counsellor should take the time to find out about and understand the client’s existing knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Christine McSpadden (2003: 127) is careful to note that the contemporary pastor must “(n)ever assume”. She explains that the assumption that people have knowledge of the Bible and Christian tradition “is no longer valid...post-Christendom churchgoers...have a shrinking Biblical literacy” (2003: 127). Even if this statement of McSpadden’s were not always true, the sentiment remains the same. Whether a client has no knowledge of or interest in the Bible or has memorised the entire text and a set of commentaries, the pastor would do well to find this out and work from where the client is. Again, the counsellor has to delve into the client’s story in order know where the client is.

In summary, one can say that the Bible is important in pastoral counselling; yet the counsellor must be careful how he uses it. He should be aware of the different approaches to the Bible and be able to choose the most appropriate one. Thus, he should have a thorough understanding of exegesis and hermeneutics. However, most importantly, he must remember that his use of the Bible and other texts should be aimed at empowering the client. Therefore, he should take the time to find out how much the client knows about, is interested in and uses the Bible.

#### 4.5. Training and the role of mentors.

*“Education is a wonderful thing, provided you always remember that nothing worth knowing can ever be taught.”*

Oscar Wilde

So far, the focus of this chapter has been on the pastoral counsellor’s spiritual life and resources. However, many people (ministers and laypeople alike) are faithful, active members of the faith community, who care about the health of the community and its members. Some of them even have a good knowledge of the Bible and other spiritual resources, as well as how to use them responsibly. But that does not make them pastoral counsellors yet. The reason why a pastoral counsellor should be able to refer to himself as a pastoral counsellor, should be the additional training he has received. As has been stated in a previous chapter, it is dangerous for people who want to help others to be unprepared for the task. If one’s faith and compassion provides one with the desire and passion to help others, then a sound knowledge of psychology and theology provides one with the intellectual tools that are necessary for making one’s attempts successful.

Let us return to Oscar Wilde’s statement, quoted at the beginning of this section. “Education is a wonderful thing, provided you always remember that nothing worth knowing can ever be taught.” This sentiment is especially true when it comes to learning or teaching pastoral counselling, firstly, because the bodies of knowledge in both counselling and theology that are open to any student are so vast and, secondly, since there is so much we simply do not understand yet or cannot write down.

Seward Hiltner (1949: 227) opens the window, however, in what appears to be a situation with no doors. He explains that, if one is focussed on learning and training – and does so in different ways – the experience one gains after that “will become an increasingly refined and competent body of knowledge, skill, and approach to counselling instead of being what experience so often is – the crystallization of unexamined prejudice.” Thus he summarises the thrust of this argument: Training, combined with experience is the best way to prepare you for pastoral counselling.

Hiltner (1949: 227) goes one step further to emphasise the importance of “the element which is common to all effective learning of counselling – supervised experience...”

Not only should a counsellor attend to his academic knowledge when he wants to study counselling, but he should focus on getting some practical training as well. Hiltner (1949: 227-250) looks at various sources of learning for counsellors, and of them all, only two do not involve some level of practical supervision or involvement by another counsellor.

By looking at Hiltner's (1949: 232) examples, one can see that supervision and practical help have various functions in the learning process of a pastoral counsellor. Firstly, a supervisor can highlight the counsellor's strengths and successes. "He has a real feeling for other people's feelings". Secondly, the supervisor can notice and comment on the counsellor's shortcomings. "...errors he made in counselling method..." (1949: 232). Thirdly, reporting to a supervisor and listening to recordings of himself at work allows the counsellor to revisit his work and evaluate himself. "Meantime Sunday has passed, and Mrs Tompkins did not come to church. Perhaps it is an indication that I didn't get down to her basic troubles at all" (1949: 231).

Hiltner (1949: 244) clarifies the matter as follows:

It seems that clinical pastoral training (or other forms of practical supervision), in its essence, is a procedure whereby theological students or ministers are brought face to face with individual people in a situation which is susceptible to supervision from the pastoral point of view and in which, through the use of various participative devices – such as interview material and compilation of case histories – both the dynamics of human conduct and the pastoral ways of dealing with it are learned, and learned together.

To me the concept of practical supervision fits well into the social constructionist framework, as it is a tool which brings people together into a space in which they can build their knowledge of the subject together. The beauty of the approach is that it can work reciprocally, as the supervisor can also benefit from the relationship.

Furthermore, he stresses another level of involvement from another counsellor and that is "personal therapy for the pastor" (1949: 248). Hiltner (1949: 249-250) explains that therapy by no means replaces training, nor should it be seen as an element of training,



but it is a growth opportunity and a place where the pastor can learn more about himself, which will automatically benefit his work as a counsellor.

The importance of a counsellor's commitment to his own development is also stressed by Howard Clinebell (1995: 156): "This truth about growth-enabling teaching also applies to any counselling or therapy that is to produce growth. The most difficult, yet potentially the most fulfilling aspect of being in a profession committed to growth, is the fact that we can enable growth in others only to the degree that we are open, vulnerable, caring, risking and growing ourselves".

More than a sign of his willingness to grow, however, the pastoral counsellor's level of training speaks to his competence. Let's look at what Michael Bayles (1989: 85) has to say about competence: "No matter how honest, candid, diligent, loyal, fair and discreet professionals are, if they are incompetent, they are unworthy of trust, for they cannot do well the job for which they are hired".

What is the "job" for which pastoral counsellors are hired and what will make them competent to do the "job"? Let's return briefly to the discussion on the nature of pastoral counselling, as it was discussed in an earlier chapter and as it was discussed in the second section of this chapter.

In the second section of this chapter, Campbell's images of caring were discussed in order to explain the "job" of the pastoral counsellor. He describes the pastoral counsellor as somebody, who firstly possesses the leadership abilities of a shepherd (1986: 30). Secondly, he describes a pastoral counsellor as a "wounded healer" who displays "a caring attitude towards others which comes from our own experience of pain, fear and loss and our own release from their deadening grip" (1986: 37). Lastly, his description of pastoral care includes an image of a fool, who does not take himself too seriously or rely too heavily on techniques and learned skills because he knows his own limits as well as the limits of any techniques he might employ (1986: 59-63). This type of counsellor is compassionate about the clients' needs, understands their pain and genuinely attempts to help them.

If a counsellor genuinely wants to help people, he (as stated in chapter two) should be proficient in both psychology and theology. Seward Hiltner (1949: 247) has much to say about the issue. He reminds readers that a pastoral counsellor's training needs to be balanced and "if a pastor wishes to take courses on counselling and background knowledge of counselling but is unable to find these in a pastoral or theological framework, how much can he get out of secular courses, or courses offered from some professional focus other than that of the pastor?" The result, he explains, is that the pastor will either have to fill in those aspects of his training that are lacking in pastoral content, or he will shift his focus to whatever secular discipline it is that he studied and leave the ministry, or "he will have in his mind two entirely different conceptions of helping people, resting content in the illusion that the Church says he should help people in one way while the other group says something quite different" (1949: 247).

One key element of a professional's competence is the fact that he knows where his competence ends and that he should refer people to other professionals if necessary. However, it is often very difficult to do so. Harry Sands (2000: 362) explains that pastors often take on cases that are beyond their competence for various reasons, ranging from a "desire to avoid making congregants feel rejected" to a desire to take on a challenge or a feeling that "they should be able to help everyone who seeks their counsel" (2000: 362). Sometimes, something as simple as a hefty workload should warn a pastoral counsellor to refer a client (2000: 362). Other reasons usually include the client's unwillingness to go to another for help or the nature of the client's problem (2000: 364-365). Whatever the case may be, the pastor should make a point of being vigilant, so that he can recognise the point where a client's needs fall outside his knowledge and skills soon enough to be able to help his client to find alternative help.

If a counsellor has received training (both practical and academic) and knows enough to know his own boundaries, he cannot however sit back and relax. Bayles (1989: 85) states quite clearly, "A professional's knowledge that was current forty-five years ago is not so now". The responsible pastoral counsellor will not only ensure that he is well qualified, but he will also supplement his training and existing knowledge by reading and referring to the work of fellow counsellors and academics in the course of his work.

Hence, pastoral counsellors should be well trained, both practically and academically. They should be willing to refer their clients to other professionals, if necessary and willing to constantly add to their existing knowledge by reading and staying up to date with developments in their field.

#### 4.6. Approach to Ethics and Ethical Dilemmas.

*Only a vital Christian faith, renewing its youth in its prophetic origin, is capable of dealing adequately with the moral and social problems of our age; only such a faith can affirm the significance of temporal and mundane existence without capitulating unduly to the relativities of the temporal process. Such a faith alone can point to a source of meaning which transcends all the little universes of value and meaning which 'have their day and cease to be' and yet not seek refuge in an eternal world where all history ceases to be significant.*

Reinhold Niebuhr (1956: 38-39)

When one wants to talk about Christians' approach to ethics one must begin with the understanding that anyone who claims to be a Christian will, in one way or another, look at their actions toward others in terms of their relationship with God. The relationships between a Christian and the people around him (whether they be Christian or not) should in fact be a triangular relationship, with God at the apex. According to R. John Elford (2000: 148), "This is because, in the Christian understanding of the relationship of humans to their creator, the human-human encounter is part of the human-divine one".

How does this sentiment translate into ethics, though? E. Hammond Oglesby (2002: 169) uses the image of the "Potter's House" to explain how humans can view ethics. He refers to the biblical story of Jeremiah (Jer. 18:1-4). God sends Jeremiah to the potter's house to see how the potter uses clay from broken pots and reshapes it into something new and useful. Similarly, Christians know that they are "broken vessels"; that "church life can be real *messy* as well as ethically promising" (2002: 38). It is an acknowledgement of the brokenness of our world and a statement of faith, that God is the Potter who will use the broken shards to re-create and make new that which was broken. It is simultaneously reassuring and challenging (2002: 177).

Oglesby (2002: 177-183) comes to seven conclusions that describe the way in which “potter’s house ethics” will affect the way Christians think:

- “First, I suspect that these reflections on potter’s house ethics as a new method of moral discourse offers the readers a special challenge of faith to promote a greater sense of openness, empathy, and understanding for people victimised by the demons of oppression, rejection, exclusion, and sexual discrimination in our society.”
- Secondly, he explains that “potter’s house ethics” shifts the focus away from people’s own problems and dilemmas toward God’s grace, which effectively brings us down from our high horses and helps us to see that all people are in need of His grace.
- If “potter’s house ethics” brings us down from our high horses, it, thirdly, teaches us to treat others more fairly and not to judge.
- “The dusty path of human life mirrors ‘broken vessels;’ it reminds us that we are still in the clutches of moral development on our way to the potter’s house.” Thus, fourthly, this approach to ethics teaches us to get to know ourselves for what we really are and helps us to realise that we are imperfect and dependent on God’s grace.
- “Fifth, the freeing and unfailing power of potter’s house ethics calls Christians and non-Christians alike to move from the experience of alienation and brokenness to the promise of renewal as persons-in-community... This yearning, I believe, is for renewal and connectedness amidst the moral fragmentation and alienation so common in our daily lives.”
- “Sixth, the morally honest person who would dare to follow potter’s house ethics as a new method of moral discourse is invited by the God of the Bible to embrace a closer walk with Jesus.”
- Lastly, he concludes, “Whatever else we may say about potter’s house ethics, it is a mouthful to conclude that God’s sovereignty and grace may lead us to more genuine forms of dialogue, community, and ethical deliberation on difficult and controversial issues in the life and faith of the church in the modern world.”

Oglesby’s final point brings us to the real question of the pastoral counsellor’s approach to ethics. That is: It is wonderful to have ideals, to think differently, but what happens when the counsellor is faced with the difficult questions? Niebuhr (1956: 44),

who uses the concept of God's love to answer this question, states, "The unity of God is not static, but potent and creative. God is, therefore, love". It is that love, which could be the key to approaching ethical dilemmas.

Our heart goes out to our fellow man, when seen through the eyes of faith, not only because we see him thus under a transcendent perspective, but because we see ourselves under it and know that we are sinners just as he is. Awed by the majesty and goodness of God, something of the pretentious self is destroyed and the natural cruelty of our self-righteousness is mitigated by emotions of pity and forgiveness (Niebuhr 1956: 196-197).

As Niebuhr says, love leads to forgiveness. It is forgiveness that gives us the ability to reach toward the impossible ideal of love, because forgiveness is the realisation of "the sin in the self" which makes it impossible to approach others in judgement. Thus, it is in forgiveness that one can move from ideals to reality, from ethical theory to ethical life.

As Albert R. Jonsen (1996: 233) explains, ethics may be related to theology and moral philosophy, but "(e)thics is at work in a quite different setting. It works where persons of decency and integrity attempt to understand how they can live humanly and humanely in a complex world of competing forces and enticements".

Is it not in forgiveness and love that "persons of decency and integrity" can "live humanly and humanely"? Forgiveness and love are what opens people up to one another. If a pastoral counsellor can approach another with love and forgiveness, he is ready to stand next to that person and address whatever ethical dilemma is in front of them.

There is not enough space here to address all the possible ethical obstacles that pastoral counsellors may have to deal with, such as breach of confidentiality, conflicts of interest or even sexual dilemmas, but based on what has already been stated here, it is possible to suggest a point of view from which ethical dilemmas can be approached. The aforementioned point of view is one of creativity, or, as Jonsen (1996: 223) calls it "improvisation". The essence of it is that, as Elford (2000: 137-138) explains, Christian morality in contemporary life is not one of certainty, but of uncertainty.

Thus, the search is not for definite or absolute answers. Jonsen (1996: 225) explains that to “improvise” means that one starts with the situation in hand (this includes the entire situation, social context, history and all other influencing factors) and works from previously gained knowledge towards an answer. (Note the use of the indefinite article ‘an’. No ethical dilemma has ‘the answer’ at the end of the search). “...like the classical soloist, the ethicist must improvise by moving from themes already laid down”.

This search is no easy task, as it takes diligence to truly address all the aspects and arguments present in one ethical dilemma. Jonsen (1996: 226-229), in a case study that he uses as an example, refers to the influencing factors in an argument as “confounding variables”, of which there are usually many.

Consequently, it can be said that a pastoral counsellor’s approach to ethics and ethical dilemmas should, first of all, be grounded in an acknowledgement of man’s brokenness and dependence on God’s grace. This grounding will allow the counsellor to look at others through the eyes of God’s love and forgiveness. Further the counsellor should be willing to stand next to another and go to extra lengths to help that person to deal with an ethical dilemma (or deal with his own dilemma) from a point of view of creativity and openness.

#### 4.7. The role of the Faith Community.

*Released from its cultural baggage, the faith tradition that claims Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour has the opportunity to be heard anew, in a new age. In many ways, Christianity sits poised to recapture the force of its apostolic witness, its original urgency, and to recapture the sense of ‘goodness’ and ‘newness’ of the good news. At this time in history, how we preach the good news, tell the Christian story, and reclaim the biblical witness for the faith community is of utmost importance.*

Christine McSpadden (2003: 126)

McSpadden’s (2003: 126) statement follows a short mention of the fact that the Church is entering a new age, where it has become “disentangled from its host culture”. Rodney Clapp (1997: 23) refers to this postmodern Church as the “pre-Constantinian” Church, in the sense that it is no longer the state-endorsed entity that it

became in most parts of the Western world after Constantine. Rather than seeing this as a bad thing, however, Clapp (1997: 23) emphasises the fact that the Church is finally liberated. He explains that, although Christians often find themselves at a loose end, because the world does not seem to need the Christian Church any more, “the grace is this: Christians feel useless because they are no longer useful for the wrong thing, namely serving as chaplains in a sponsorial religion”.

Many – including me – talk about the influences of pluralism, relativism and postmodernism on the Church in various tones of doom. Clapp (1997: 77), however, reminds us, “Now that the long Constantinian age has all but passed, we Christians find ourselves in a situation much more closely analogous to that of New Testament Christians than to the Christendom for which some nostalgically long. The Bible, it turns out, offers abundant resources for living in a wildly diverse and contested world”. He continues to explain, rather expansively, that the Church can and should become a culture on its own, not set apart from the world, but influencing the world. The climate the church finds itself in urges its members to rethink and reconstruct the church.

In one example, he refers to the use of the word ‘culture’. “So it is not an etymological accident that the root of the word *culture* is *cultus*, or worship” (1997: 94). He dispels the idea that Sunday worship should be an escape from the world and explains that worship should help us to deal with the world. “Christian worship is practice in learning to see through common sense. To the world of John’s day, common sense was that Rome was invulnerable, that Rome’s lord was lord of the earth. But the church in its liturgy recalled itself to a different, and true, lord” (1997: 96).

Finally, he calls the Church to stand out and challenge other cultures through the powerful and simple means of Christian friendship (1997: 204). Firstly, he reminds us that the concept of individuality as we know it is in fact foreign to the way in which the Church is described in the Bible. “Can we really believe that we are not, to the core, who we are because of our kin, our occupations, our political and social situations, our faith or philosophical associations, our friendships?”(1997: 91) I am reminded of the Zulu concept of Ubuntu, which (to me) epitomises the precepts of

social construction. The Zulu expression *Umntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu* means that a person is only a person through interaction with other people.

Clapp (1997: 92) refers to the Pauline image of the Church as “body”. The Church as community has so much potential to be powerful, because it is a community. “Community may be jostled, deprived, squeezed, but it is as persistent and hard to kill as a rattlesnake” (1997: 194-195). There are numerous examples of this in history, which support his argument. Think of the Holocaust, African-American slaves, Apartheid, to mention but a few.

What does this have to do with pastoral counselling? The pastoral counsellor, whether he is a minister or not, is, as has been said, a member of the faith community. Thus, he should help to foster the strength of the community, by recognising his own role in building it. Gerkin (1997: 127) explains the pastor’s role:

By his or her manner of relating within the community, others are encouraged to create and participate in a community where everyone feels cared for and nourished. In addition, the pastor needs to recognise that she or he is not alone in providing pastoral care in the fellowship of the community. Guiding the process of care within the community should mean facilitating and empowering the members of the community in their capacity to care for one another.

The Church may be changing and that change may be daunting, although it appears to hold some promise for the identity of the Church, but the community of Christians should see the changes in the Church as an opportunity to return to its essential character as ‘Body’. Christian fellowship should empower and strengthen Christians to be able to live in the postmodern world, without relinquishing their Christian identity. The role of the pastoral counsellor is to facilitate the building and strengthening of this alternative culture.

#### 4.8 Professional Ethics.

A vital theme that cannot be ignored, when one discusses the ethical aspects of pastoral counselling, is professional ethics. It is a field of study that has contributed much to our understanding of the needs of professionals and their clients, in terms of



ethics and how ethical codes and guidelines can protect both parties. It must be mentioned at this point that the topic of professional ethics is not being explored as a separate entity, but in support of what has already been said about the nature of pastoral care and counselling as an emerging profession and the needs of pastoral counsellors. A statement was made, in section 4.5 of this chapter, regarding the fact that pastoral counsellors should be professionally qualified. This premise is, in fact, one of the key concepts that are mentioned when professional ethics specialists discuss the nature of professions. One such specialist is Michael Bayles (1989: 8), who explains that “extensive training” is one of the “central features” that characterize the professions. Furthermore, such training should be predominantly intellectual: it should include a body of knowledge that is not widely accessible and is employed by the professional in service of the wider community. A professional (according to Bayles) can also only be considered a professional, if the person holds the necessary “credentials” - whether it be a licence from a governing body or the required academic qualifications.

The one feature of the professional that deserves special attention, within the context of this study, is what Bayles (1989: 9) terms the professional’s “autonomy”. He explains that in all examples of the professions “an element of autonomy remains because the professionals are expected to exercise a considerable degree of discretionary judgement within the work context”. In terms of pastoral counselling and ethical questions, this is a very important aspect of the nature of the profession. One needs to look at the nature of the relationship between professional and client and, more specifically, the counselling relationship, in order to place Bayles’s statement in perspective.

Bayles (1989: 75) explains that the relationship between a professional and his client can take a number of different forms. Firstly, the professional can be seen as the client’s “agent” working on behalf of the client. This type of relationship gives the greatest authority and decision-making power to the client. Thus, the professional has very little choice in executing his duties. Secondly, the relationship can be seen as a “contract” between equals where both parties carry an equal amount of responsibility. However, this type of relationship does not acknowledge the fact that professionals are

often employed because they have a greater knowledge about a specific field than the persons who employ them. A third possibility is that the relationship can be seen as a “friendship” in that it is a relationship of mutual co-operation. Arguments against this concept explain that the client-professional relationship is too one-sided to be considered a “friendship” since the professional in question does strive to do what is necessary for the client’s well-being, but the client is not so much concerned with the professional’s well-being. Fourthly, the client-professional relationship could be characterised as “paternalistic.” If the relationship is not one in which the client can make the decisions or in which the two parties are equal, maybe the professional should hold the authority to exercise his judgement on behalf of the client, “regardless of that person’s consent”. The last model is a “fiduciary” model, “in which the professional’s superior knowledge is recognized, but the client retains a significant authority and responsibility in decision-making.” (Bayles 1989: 77). Thus, the client is considered competent enough to make decisions or give consent for the professional to act on their behalf. In this case, however, the client gives consent to the professional, because the client trusts the professional to act correctly on their behalf. (see Bayles 1989: 69-79).

Trust is at the centre of professional ethics, especially in the “fiduciary” model, as described by Bayles. If the client wants the professional to act on their behalf, the professional must earn the client’s trust. Bayles (1989: 79) identifies seven characteristics of a professional’s actions without which the professional cannot be considered trustworthy. They are: honesty, candour, competence, diligence, loyalty, fairness and discretion.

In terms of pastoral counselling, specifically, professional ethics also relies on the nature of the relationship as well as the characteristics of the professional’s actions. Bayles’s ‘fiduciary’ model resembles the counselling relationship as it is described by Müller (1996: 33): “Al is die verhouding noodwendig ongelyk, moet dit elemente van uitnodiging, respek, empatie, aanvaarding, ‘n positiewe houding en bevestiging bevat.” (Although the relationship is necessarily unequal, it should contain elements of invitation, respect, empathy, acceptance, a positive attitude and affirmation.) Müller continues to explain that the client’s right to help construct the relationship and make decisions may not be denied. The onus is still on the counsellor to set the boundaries

of the relationship so as to ensure that the relationship retains its intended character, without denying the client's right to help define the relationship.

Lynch (2002: 59) states, "Indeed there is a growing awareness in the literature on pastoral care that pastoral relationships have the potential to be extremely damaging". Since this is true, according to Lynch (2002: 61), it is important that pastoral counsellors are fully mindful of the fact that they are often the most powerful party in the relationship and that boundaries need to be set. "Boundaries serve an important function in pastoral relationships, precisely because there is often a power imbalance in such relationships with one person offering care (and often holding a particular institutional status) and the other, to at least some degree, needing this support".

Very briefly, the boundaries of the pastoral relationship can be formulated, based on a number of considerations:

- Firstly, the counsellor must be aware of the fact that counselling should take place in an appropriate setting, such as the counsellor's offices as opposed to the client's home or a restaurant. Similarly, the time chosen for counselling should be appropriate. The counsellor should have specific office hours. It is not advisable to offer counselling late at night, as both parties are usually tired, which means that they are more emotionally vulnerable and the counsellor is also not able to function optimally.
- Secondly, the counsellor should make the boundaries of confidentiality clear to the client, especially when the counsellor is helping more than one member of the family, such as in the case of marriage counselling. Further it should be clear to both client and counsellor that confidentiality is not synonymous with secrecy and that the fact of the counselling relationship should not be hidden.
- Thirdly, the counsellor must always be sensitive to his own emotional needs and vulnerability. Although the relationship is a professional one, the two parties do spend much time alone together and at least one of the two shares very intimate and personal details with the other. Counsellors are human and subject to the same temptations as others. Furthermore, counselling is an emotionally volatile endeavour, thus it is important to maintain a certain amount of distance between counsellor and client.
- Fourthly, the counsellor should determine at the start of the relationship what the aims of the counselling are, so that they have a goal to work towards and the

relationship can be terminated at the appropriate time. The counsellor is the ‘designated driver’ of the relationship and should be aware of the dangers of unnecessarily prolonging counselling. In addition, if the counselling is going nowhere, it is the counsellor’s job to notice and realise that it may be necessary to refer the client to someone else.

- Fifthly, the counsellor has to be particularly honest about his ability to do what the client requires. If the counsellor needs assistance or finds himself entirely unable to provide help, he must take the necessary steps to ask for guidance or refer the client to another professional. In the instance of abnormal behaviour, for example schizophrenia, it may be advisable to refer the client to a psychiatrist. It will serve the pastoral counsellor well to make sure that he knows of other reputable counsellors and mental health practitioners in his area. (see Lynch 2002: 64-70)

In addition, as has been mentioned in previous sections, the faith-based nature of pastoral counselling means that the counsellor is responsible for letting the client know of his faith and discuss the role that it may play in the counselling relationship. Furthermore, if the counsellor professes to faith it is the counsellor’s responsibility to look after his own spiritual health as well. Lynch (2002: 69) states that those who provide pastoral care should “(r)ecognize the importance of their own devotional life as the foundation of Christian pastoral care”.

The above-mentioned considerations are not the only considerations for the boundaries of the counselling relationship, but they serve to illustrate the point that boundaries are necessary for the success of the counselling relationship. It is for this reason that authors in the field of professional ethics do not fail to mention that certain measures of control should be in place for professionals. A combination of measures and support structures are necessary to help pastoral counsellors to reflect responsibly on ethical issues, explains Gordon Lynch (2002: 73). Amongst them, he includes a code of conduct, appropriate training, supervision and other methods of developing the counsellor’s skills. “Through such supervision and training, pastoral workers may be able to strengthen their own ‘inner’ supervisor, that is, their own ability to reflect in the midst of pastoral situations about what would constitute good or bad, helpful or unhelpful, practice in that situation”.

In terms of pastoral counselling, professional ethics takes on a unique appearance. Most of the necessary characteristics of professional ethics are the same for pastoral counsellors as for other professionals. The faith-based nature of pastoral counselling adds a dimension, however. Most importantly, like all professionals, pastoral counsellors need to be regulated, so that their behaviour is not detrimental to their clients' well-being.

#### 4.9. Conclusion.

This chapter began with a discussion of the importance of the pastoral counsellor's faith. Based on the counsellor's faith, it was discussed in section 4.2 that the counsellor's identity is founded on this faith and a deep compassion for others. Out of this compassion for others, a pastoral counsellor should use all methods and tools to foster the well-being of their clients, including prayer and the Bible. The counsellors' starting-point should be from where the clients are in their own emotional and spiritual lives. In order to further protect and foster the clients' well-being, pastoral counsellors must be sure that they are well qualified and approach their training as a life-long process.

In addition, they should not be afraid to admit their own shortcomings and be able to refer clients if necessary. Pastoral counsellors' approach to ethics and ethical dilemmas, again, must be based on the clients' interests and an acknowledgment of their own fallibility.

Not only must pastoral counsellors do their best for their clients within the context of counselling, but also in the context of the faith community, so that the faith community also becomes a place where a person's spiritual and emotional health is supported.

Lastly, in conjunction with the counsellor's personal approach to ethics, the ethics of the profession of counselling should be guided by the clients' needs and well-being. In essence, ethical considerations within pastoral counselling should be founded on the counsellor's obligation toward his client to be the best counsellor that he can be – somebody who wants to help others to grow and heal.

Now that the themes that were identified in the empirical study have been looked at from the perspective of other authors and academics, it is possible to look at some of the major philosophical discourses that influence contemporary thinking about ethics. Once that has been done, one can bring the three sets of understanding into dialogue, before any conclusions can be made about the relevance of each theme for the topic under discussion.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Philosophical Issues

One can never ask questions about ethics without looking at the wider philosophical landscape that shapes them. As was mentioned in the second chapter, ethics is the system through which we measure our morals and values. Morals are the ‘rules’ that govern our behaviour and values are what morals are based on. The question we need to ask is: Where do our values come from? And ethics? If ethics is the system that we use to measure our values, what do we base our ethics on? This is the area of philosophy. In laymen’s terms, philosophy is a science that is dedicated to investigating and questioning the underlying forces and patterns of thinking that eventually determine the way in which we respond to our environment in terms of ethics, morals and values among other things.

It is necessary, at this point, to pause and look more closely at the philosophical issues at play in the action as it has been described in Chapter Two. Brief mention was made of pluralism, relativism and the South African context. These are three of the most important aspects of postmodern life that have an influence on ethics today. Each of these topics will also be looked at in terms of their influence on the Christian church and pastoral counselling. Since these aspects all fall under the umbrella of postmodernism, it must also be addressed. In addition it is of the utmost importance that social constructionism, narrative ethics and Christian ethics be looked into. After all, this study has a social constructionist and narrative starting point. Furthermore, pastoral counselling as it is described in this study, has a distinctly Christian character.

### 5.1. Postmodernism.

*“If so-called postmodernity means anything, it means that proportionally more of us than earlier have begun to know that truth, being alive, defies containment.”*  
(Hall 1998: 76)

In this section, postmodernism will be discussed briefly, as an introduction to pluralism, relativism, the South African context and Christian ethics, as it is the uncertainty of postmodern times that colours contemporary thoughts about the

aforementioned topics. The four topics in question will then be discussed in more detail.

Zygmunt Bauman (1993: 2) describes postmodernity as the “self-critical, often self-denigrating and in many ways self-dismantling stage” of modernity. As described by Bauman, modernism was an age during which society searched for definite answers. It attempted to contain truth. Ideals of universal rules and truths were pursued. In contrast, postmodernism accepts that the standards of modernism are simply unachievable. “‘The postmodern perspective’...means above all the tearing off of the mask of illusions; the recognition of certain pretences as false and certain objectives as neither attainable nor, for that matter, desirable” (Bauman 1993: 3). In other words, postmodernism holds that human thinking is fallible and our world is too complex for any of us to presume that we know the answers to the difficult questions, especially in terms of morality and our conceptions of good and bad.

As a consequence of the recognition that universal truths and absolutes are unreachable, postmodern man has been given choices. Previously, people found it easier to know what to do because the rules appeared to be clear. Now that society is able to admit that it does not always have all the answers, people are more free to choose. Bauman (1993: 10) asserts that “humans are morally ambivalent” and that the modern approach to morality “leaves out what is moral in morality” (1993: 11) since it does not allow for personal freedom to think about morality or freedom of choice. Postmodernism acknowledges ambivalence and uncertainty, therefore it embraces humans’ capacity to think about the choices that they make and be able to live in an uncertain world.

As a result of the birth of postmodernism, the realities of pluralism and relativism, although not new ideas, are being looked at and spoken about anew and in different ways. Furthermore, South Africa, as a place of diversity that allows for the questioning of the status quo, cannot be described outside of the paradigm of postmodernism. Similarly, Christian ethics has also been affected by postmodernism.



### 5.1.1. Pluralism.

*One day, the little fairy asked her mother, “Mommy, do humans wear shoes?”*

*“Yes, darling,” her mother replied, while stroking her feathery hair.*

*“But, Mommy, their feet are so big! How can they wear shoes? Where will they find beetle shells that are big enough? It is impossible!”*

*Her mother laughed. “It is quite simple, little one. Their feet are different from ours, so they wear different shoes. Their shoes are made from cow skins. Cows are big enough.”*

*Do you see, young ones? Let this be a lesson to us all. A life that is different from ours is not impossible. It is just different.*

This story illustrates the premise that pluralism is based on. There are different groups of people in the world and they all do things differently. No one can argue with that and we should all accept it. From a moral perspective, however, it is not so simple. How normative is pluralism? The acceptance of the fact of pluralism necessitates the consideration that pluralism might need to affect policies and laws regarding almost all aspects of society. Furthermore, pluralism has a huge impact on the ideas anybody might have about monotheistic religion, Christianity included.

Let us first look at pluralism itself, before addressing the impact of pluralism on Christian ethics.

Gewirth (2000: 180) explains that there are two main approaches to pluralism: “According to one extreme, the fact of cultural pluralism disproves the existence of moral knowledge. According to the other extreme, the existence of moral knowledge disproves the moral relevance of cultural pluralism.” In other words, on the one hand, if each culture has its own set of rules and norms that are applicable only to that culture, it is impossible to say that there exists any “rational knowledge of the normative conception of morality.” This means that it is not possible to come to some sort of general conclusion about normative morality. On the other hand, if there is such a thing as a general conception of morality, independent of cultural norms, then cultural norms should have no impact on normative morality.

Somewhere on the continuum between these two extremes lies an answer. Alan Gewirth (2000: 184) finds the answer in what he calls the “Principle of Generic Consistency”. This principle tells us that morality is only evident in people’s *actions*. Thus, people are *moral agents*. The starting point is that all people have the right to “freedom and well-being”. Therefore, your actions should reflect the fact that you accept that you have that right. Secondly, you should accept that others have the same right and that your actions should also reflect your acceptance of that assumption. (2000: 183-184) So, as long as everybody’s rights are protected, everybody has the right to express their cultural differences freely.

The argument against the idea of human rights asks whether it is possible to find a universally acceptable concept of what a moral agent or moral subject is. Is it the individual, or a group? Some will argue that that depends on what the smallest unit of a specific society is. (Tännsjö 2002: 77)

Some societies are individualistic, such as most Western societies. A moral agent in such a society would then be the individual. One can expand the question. Are there individuals who do not qualify as moral agents? Think of the question of suffrage. Until very recently, only whites were allowed to vote in South Africa. Earlier still, only white men were allowed to vote. Even as recently as the last national election in South Africa much was debated over prisoners’ right to vote as well as the rights of citizens who were outside the national borders at the time of the election.

Not all societies are individualistic, though. Many societies consider the family to be the smallest unit. Others think in terms of clans or tribes. Who is the moral agent in such a society? Is it the individual who performs a moral act or is it the group that that person represents? Let us look at an example: A young boy saves a drowning man. However, his culture sees the family as the smallest unit of the society. The people of the village throw a party to celebrate. Who will be the guest of honour? Is it the boy, his whole family, or his father, who is the head of the family?

In contemporary life, there are few places left on earth where one will find a homogeneous society, if at all. How does one define human rights in a society that will have more than one definition of what a moral agent is? Is it the individual who

has the rights, regardless of the structure of his culture? Or do people who live in non-individualistic cultures have different rights from those who live in individualistic cultures? If the answer to the latter question is in the affirmative, it becomes impossible to make any laws that will apply to all citizens. At the very least, the laws will be so convoluted and riddled with exceptions and conditions that they will be incomprehensible and ridiculous. Gewirth (2000: 188-190) makes the argument for moral universalism. In other words, if there were a universal principle of morality, such as his “Principle of Generic Consistency”, such a principle would protect the rights of all individuals, while tolerating cultural differences. The South African Bill of Rights is based on this idea. As long as an individual protects his own rights, while not infringing on others’ rights, he is acting morally.

The argument against the moral rights theory is that it is too liberal in that it allows the individual a lot of freedom, including the freedom to help or not to help others, but it places no obligation on the individual. It is a “live high and let die” approach. (Tännsjö 2002: 88)

In addition, Terence Turner (2000: 121), in his discussion of the American Anthropological Association’s statement opposing the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1947, says the following:

To say that people have a right to their differences (as the AAA statement does) does not, on the other hand, imply that they have the right to impose them on one another or to force others to accommodate their different values and social practices at the expense of realizing their own. Nor does it imply that the equal realization by everyone of their different values, social forms, and identities should result in an euharmonic society free of conflicting rights claims by different parties. On the contrary, conflict over rights is to be expected as a by-product of social relations of cooperation and competition among parties to social situations in which each acts to achieve differing needs and values, on the basis of differing capacities.

Thus, we have encountered two problems. First of all, a society based on human rights can become a society that instils in its members a selfishness, coupled with an attitude of entitlement, which can become destructive. Secondly, even if the members

of the society do not become selfish, their attempts to realize their own “values and social forms” can come into conflict with others’ similar attempts.

John Rawls (2000: 219) answers as follows:

Gaining this support of reasonable doctrines lays the basis for answering our second fundamental question as to how citizens, who remain deeply divided on religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines, can still maintain a just and stable democratic society. To this end, it is normally desirable that the comprehensive philosophical and moral views we are wont to use in debating fundamental political issues should give way in public life. Public reason – citizens’ reasoning in the public forum about Constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice – is now best guided by a political conception the principles and values of which all citizens can endorse. That political conception is to be, so to speak, political and not metaphysical.

It appears as though all the solutions that are proposed for the challenge of pluralism suggest a level of compromise. Do these solutions ask us to suspend our ideas and beliefs, for the sake of keeping the peace? Is pluralism a threat to Christianity? What should the church’s response be, and by association, pastoral counsellors’?

Let us first look at the impact that the concept of pluralism has on Christian ethics and whether it in fact does pose a threat to Christianity. The first topic that is almost always raised when the relationship between Christianity and pluralism is discussed is the claim of salvation through Christ only. Now that we, at the beginning of the twentieth century and after decades of an unprecedented amount of contact between cultures, are more aware of the plurality of our world, should we give up the idea of salvation through Christ? Stroup (1998: 167) says, “Some Christian theologians appear to think so. Others worry that the price of constructive engagement with pluralism may be the accommodation of the gospel to culture and the surrender of Christian convictions and communal identity.” The debates surrounding Christology that have resulted from these questions have kept many theologians happily busy for many years.

There are many responses to the question of salvation through Christ. Firstly, some theologians will argue that salvation through Christ is, in fact, the only possible way to know God. Secondly, there are those who will say that it is possible to know aspects of God outside of Christianity, but only Christianity has the full answer. A third group has suggested that it is possible to know and experience God, outside of Christianity, but that this knowledge springs from what Stroup (1998: 170) calls “unacknowledged or ‘anonymous’ Christian faith.” Fourthly, many theologians have said that one should differentiate between Christ and Christianity, in the sense that there is only salvation in Christ, but not necessarily within the boundaries of Christianity as a religion or the church. Lastly, many well-known theologians have suggested that one should differentiate between the person of Jesus and the Logos. According to this perspective, the Logos manifested in the person of Jesus, but that this is only one example of the manifestation of the Logos in the world. The question that Stroup (1998: 171-172) raises at this point is, “Why would one pray the prayers, read the scriptures and participate in the worship and life of the Christian community if Christian faith is merely one of many ways to worship ultimate reality? ... Does the particularity of Christian faith – namely Jesus of Nazareth – have any significance if Jesus is but one manifestation of universal reality that includes any other forms?”

Stroup suggests (1998: 171-177), however, that these theologians have been asking the wrong question to begin with and that they should rather be looking at the role of the Holy Spirit and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Son, when looking for an appropriate response to pluralism. If one considers the reciprocal relationship between the Spirit and the Son, Stroup explains, “Christians do not have to find Jesus Christ present in some form in every encounter with vitality, truth and justice in their world. They need there find only the presence and activity of the Spirit of the Triune God, the same spirit to be sure who sends and is sent by Jesus Christ.”.

Walter Breuggemann (1998: 15) suggests another response to pluralism that dates back to the Old Testament. He had a second look at Amos, the book that is said to be the first to connect Israel directly with Yahweh and shows the first definite sign of monotheistic Judaism. What he had found, was that Yahweh was not only involved with Israel, exclusively. Israel is mentioned as one of three nations, along with the Philistines and Arameans, in whose history Yahweh played a role.

Breuggemann (1998: 27) explains:

Thus pluriform Yahwism may be seen as a healthy resituation of Israel's life in the world that affirms that are facets of Yahweh's life not subject to Israel' definition and facets of the life of the world not to be placed under Israel's mono-ideological umbrella. There is a deep, dense otherness to Yahweh in human history, which stands as an invitation and principle of criticism when Israel's faith becomes self-serving ideology.

He warns against holding the idea of "God's elect people" too close and extends this warning also to Christianity, as the descendent of Judaism. (1998: 27)

The author does not ask us to reject our idea of God, but simply urges us to accept that we do not have all the answers and should be very careful to push God into a box of our own making. We should be aware of the mystery of God and know that we neither understand the way that He does things, nor can we claim ownership of Him. He agrees with Barth, when he states, "In thinking, early on, about the relationship between Christian faith and culture, Barth fully affirms that the position of right faith is genuinely open and dialectical." (Breuggemann 1998: 29)

How open should we be, though? Should Christianity go and fetch a pillow of inclusivism and make itself comfortable on the fence between exclusivism and pluralism and throw its hands in the air? Should it climb down from the fence and run back to the hills of exclusivism, as some have done? Or should it climb over the fence and get lost in the marshes of pluralism?

Douglas John Hall (1998: 66) proposes a way in which it could be possible not to get lost in the marshes. It is a suggestion that acknowledges the reality of pluralism and the uniqueness of Christianity. He returns to the life of the early church. After a statement by Czech theologian, Milan Opocensky, that the state of the church behind the iron curtain is the "normal" state of the church, as opposed to the "abnormal" state of the church in the West, he came to the conclusion that Christians should be at home in a post-Christian world, since it is the kind of world into which Christianity was born. This was a world where Christianity was not the normative force that it would later become, endorsed by the state and other large institutions, what Hall calls the "profession" of the church. It should rather re-examine its "confessional" state.

He explains that “(t)he pluralistic situation means not only that alternatives to Christian belief are to be found ‘out there’ in the world but also that those alternatives, including ‘unbelief,’ penetrate the minds and spirits of the faithful. If and insofar as the faithful are enabled to persevere, they must and may do so only through moments of confessional intensity that transcend the merely ‘professional’ mode of belief that may sustain them most of the time.”(1998: 69)

In simple terms, Hall (1998: 75) reiterates the point that Christianity will never be as it had been over the last few centuries, as the world has changed too much. Plurality is a fact, but it should not be a threat. Christians are simply challenged by it to live in a new state, where the answers are not so readily available – it is “*a matter of faith, not sight.*”

Having said all of that, it is possible to say even more about pluralism, but it would serve little purpose. What has been said is enough to show that, although I do not think that it poses a direct threat to the Christian faith, the plural nature of our society is challenging the faith community to think again and to think differently. There are as many responses to this issue as there are people who have given it a thought and that fact, in itself, has created an additional level of plurality within the church.

There are two important things that have come out of this discussion, however. The first is that Christians are thinking about pluralism. As long as we are willing to engage in the discussion, the faith community remains rich with hope. When we give up on the discussion, we give up hope. This hope is not necessarily the hope of finding a definite answer, which we know is unattainable, but of building a place where we can be safe, somewhere amongst the hills and the marshes and the fence. All the authors, whose work was discussed in this section, regardless of whether they would agree with one another, attempted to offer an approach to pluralism that would provide us with a way of making sense of it, without losing our faith.

The second is a question that I would like to ask. While all the debates and discussions are going on, what is the faith community doing for those who feel intimidated by pluralism? How is the faith community making sure that its members are “enabled to persevere”? (Hall 1998: 69)

### 5.1.2. Relativism.

Herodotus wrote the following (quoted in Ladd 1973: 12):

*Darius, after he had got the kingdom, called into his presence certain Greeks who were at hand and asked – “What he should pay them to eat the bodies of their fathers when they died?” To which they answered, that there was no sum that would tempt them to do such a thing. He then sent for certain Indians, of the race called Callatians, men who eat their fathers, and asked them, while the Greeks stood by, and knew by the help of an interpreter all that was said – “What he should give them to burn the bodies of their fathers at their decease?” The Indians exclaimed aloud, and bade him forbear such language. Such is men’s wont herein; and Pindar was right, in my judgment, when he said, “Custom is the king o’er all.”*

As an illustration of moral relativism, Herodotus’s story is a good example to use. However, that is not the reason why it is relevant. The relevance of this little story is that it illustrates how old relativism is. Herodotus lived in the fifth century B.C. Why is it important today? Ladd (1973: 1) explains, “Today, however, the challenge of ethical relativism takes on an urgent practical dimension, for one of the obvious results of modern technology is that now, for the first time, people from varied cultural, religious and social backgrounds must deal with each other on an extensive and continuous basis.” People can no longer ignore the cultures and customs of others, because those others are no longer living on the other side of the ocean – out of reach and unable to influence their lives.

Having said that, let us first look at what ethical relativism is. In simple terms, ethical relativism is the assertion that ideas of right and wrong cannot be applied universally, because such ideas vary from society to society and with the passage of time. The classic example of ethical relativism is the example of some nomadic groups who kill their geriatric members before they can become burdens upon the tribe, or before their great age becomes a burden to themselves (there are various reasons). In such an instance, the act of killing is not considered to be murder. It is honourable – the right thing to do. Both the killer and his ‘victim’ are in agreement and the act is performed with as much reverence as any of the other rituals that mark one’s passage through the various stages of life. This is but one example of ethical relativism.



Friedrich Engels (1973: 21) argues that:

The opposition between good and evil obtains exclusively in the moral sphere – that is, in an area belonging to human history and thus in an area in which ‘conclusively valid and unassailable truths’ are particularly thinly sown. Notions of good and evil have varied so much from society to society and from one time to another that they often directly contradict one another.

According to Engels, different groups each have their own set of ethics, because they each have different needs and different ways of fulfilling those needs. Their ethical systems develop out of their needs.

He continues to explain that, even if one attempts to find some common ground between groups, one will always find a group or society whose ideas of right and wrong will invalidate the argument. As some have said, ‘In an infinite universe there are an infinite number of possibilities.’ For this reason he states, “That is why we repudiate every presumptuous attempt to impose a dogmatic ethics of some kind on us as if there were some law of morality that is eternal, conclusively valid, and immutable.”(1973: 22) He concludes that the only place where one will be able to establish such a universal system of ethics is within a society where there are no differences between people. In other words, a universal system of ethics is a pipe-dream, since, as we all know, the perfect society is an unattainable ideal that is very far removed from the reality.

Of course, since his argument is applied to the class system – an example of what we would come to know as Marxism – he applies his line of reasoning directly to the differences between the classes. Within this discussion, however, it would be reasonable to say that his argument could apply to other differences between human groups as well.

Another proponent of ethical relativism is Karl Duncker. He explains that the traditional explanation of ethical relativism is not enough. To say that differences between ethical systems are born out of cultural differences is not sufficient. He does not refute the argument, but adds some layers.

Instead of looking only at the social or cultural context, he adds what he calls the “pattern of situational meanings” (1973: 45). He argues that the psychological aspect of attaching meanings to actions also plays a role in the development of a system of ethics, both on a cognitive and an emotional level. One example that he uses is that of what is referred to as “denudation” (1973: 54) – the amount of clothing that one is allowed to wear or not to wear. For example: in contemporary Western society, it is acceptable for a man to pose in the nude in an artist’s studio, but that same man would never walk to the shops in the nude. One situation poses no threat of shame, while the second will cause the man to feel self-conscious and possibly ashamed. Others will also frown upon his actions. Thus, within a society, there are layers of meaning that can be attached to a specific action. Duncker (1973: 54) explains that, “custom and necessity are external circumstances which would not have any moral import without giving rise to certain secondary meanings within the psychological make-up of the situation.”

Furthermore, the meanings that are attached to actions can change over time. As the society’s values change (or as the values of different groups within a society vary), so do the meanings attached to certain virtues change. In fact, according to Duncker (1973: 58), some virtues can become vices, depending on the way in which they are perceived by the society. Whereas one group will see liberty as a virtue to strive for and even fight for, the next will see it as licence – permission to go too far.

One point that presents itself in argument against this line of thinking is that it gives people permission to rationalise, and attempt to justify, almost any behaviour. People may go so far as artificially attaching meanings to actions in order to justify their actions. Duncker’s (1973: 51) answer to this argument is sketchy. He does not want to defend rationalisation, which he labels as “intellectual dishonesty”, but he fails to explain what he means by the “sufficiently plastic” (1973: 51) nature of human reasoning.

He also explains that one must not confuse meaning with motive. Motive is another aspect of morality that can also have various situational meanings. In conclusion to his response, he explains that morality is not based on the meanings of individuals,

but on the “*social* pattern of situational meanings” (1973: 52) and that the aim of society is “not to be just, but to instigate and to enforce its standard meanings and conducts” (1973: 52). In my mind, however, this last statement does not answer the question. After all, it is equally possible for a whole society to attempt to justify itself under the guise of Duncker’s form of relativism, as it is for an individual.

A second argument against relativism is that its logical conclusion leads to nihilism. If it is true that, “no one moral code is any truer, any nearer to the apprehension of an objective moral truth, than any other; each is simply the code that is necessitated by the conditions of its time and place...” (Ross 1973: 42), then the concepts of right and wrong cease to exist. All that remains is that actions follow from necessity and that whatever we do is justified by the fact that we need to do it, in order to preserve ourselves and our own way of life. Ross (1973: 42), whose book first appeared in 1930, concludes by stating that “the human mind will not rest content with such a view.”

He believes that there exists a universal morality that equips us with the ability to compare one culture’s morality with that of another and to see one as superior to the other. Thus, according to him, it is that universal morality “which, and whose implications we are interested in discovering; and from the point of view of this, the genuinely ethical problem, the sociological inquiry is simply beside the mark.” (1973: 42). Thus, like many others, he does not refute the fact that there exist many different moral systems, but he argues in favour of an overarching, universal truth.

Melville J. Herskovits (1973: 74) wrote in 1947, in defence of relativism, that one should not see it as a threat to all forms of control. “To hold that values do not exist because they are relative to time and place is to fall prey to a fallacy that results from a failure to take into account the positive contribution of the relativistic position”.

Further, he draws a distinction between what he calls “absolutes” and “universals” (1973: 74). He explains that denying any kind of absolute rules does not deny the existence of universally common values. These common values, however, can take on different “forms” (1973: 74) that are subject to the unique situation of each different society. He acknowledges the individual’s obligation to conform to “the

code of the group” (1973: 76). In addition, he explains that “the very core of cultural relativism is the social discipline that comes of respect for differences – of mutual respect” (1973: 76). Thus, he proposes a universal rule. We are allowed to acknowledge that there are different value systems in the world and we are allowed to live according to our own, but we are not allowed to attempt to impose our own on others and must respect the value systems of others. Considering the notion that we are not allowed to impose our own values upon others, how are we going to convince all others that they should respect other people’s values? Is mutual respect a universal value?

As has been shown, many influential thinkers have contemplated relativism and come to various different conclusions, ranging from total opposition to total support of the theory. However, that is not the main concern of this discussion. Relativism is being discussed here, so as to shed light on the philosophical world within which contemporary pastoral counsellors find themselves. As has been shown, pastoral counselling in South Africa is distinctly Christian. Thus, the focus must shift to the implications for the faith community as well as the Christian response to relativism – if such a thing exists.

The first implication for the faith community has been mentioned in the discussion of pluralism. Christianity (or any other religion) is no longer perceived as the one and only option. “The sense of the irrelevance of religion has been reinforced by the pressures from pluralization and relativism. Christianity has seemed to be simply one option among many.” (Cook 1983: 15)

Secondly, dynamics within the church have also changed. Moral and doctrinal differences are also common within the church. Recent debates about the historicity of Christ are but one example. Similarly, questions about homosexuality and same-sex marriage have been in the foreground, since the legalisation of same-sex marriage in South Africa. The list of controversies and debates is endless.

The list of responses within the church is also endless. Gerkin (1997: 105) mentions that “no one school of theology can be said to be dominant in either Roman Catholic

or mainline Protestant circles”. He continues to list the many different theologies that are represented within the church, ranging from liberation theology and political theology to feminist theology. In addition, he mentions that “evangelical neofundamentalism has enjoyed a resurgence among Protestants, and at least one leading pastoral theologian has called for a return to classical orthodoxy” (1997: 105).

Gerkin’s response to this dilemma is similar to that of Barth, in that he proposes a dialectical approach. He places some responsibility on the shoulders of the church, however. The church, and more specifically “pastoral leadership”, according to Gerkin (1997: 114),

must more clearly and intentionally than in the recent past develop a quality of interpretive guidance... interpreting the conflicts and pressures, the contradictions and pitfalls, the lures and tendencies toward fragmentation of contemporary life. In short, I mean the role of interpretive guidance as it relates to facilitating the dialogical process between life stories and the Christian story of how life should be lived.

The appeal of Gerkin’s approach is that, if correctly understood and applied, it is empowering. Previously, the question was asked as to what the faith community is doing for its members in their uncertainty. What it should be doing is to empower its members to respond to the world in a way that helps them to make sense of the world and to be able to live successfully in the world. The concept of the role of pastoral leadership was dealt with in greater detail in a previous chapter. However, it must be mentioned at this point, that the responsibility of the faith community to empower its members does not exclude pastoral counsellors. They may be seen as the ones who are looking after the rest of the church, but it is as important for the church to do exactly the same for them.

The question remains, though, as to what kind of interpretive guidance the church should offer. Are we not making too much of ethical relativism and plurality, thus turning them into monsters, threats to the Christian way of life? Should it not be the role of the church to be a safe place from whence we can learn from other cultures and religions? Are we really expected to abandon our faith, simply because we

realise that there are others? As was mentioned earlier, these realities should not be seen as threats, but rather as challenges to faith. “With a means of probing deeply into all manner of differing cultural orientations, of reaching into the significance of the ways of living of different peoples, we can turn again to our own culture with fresh perspective, and an objectivity that can be achieved in no other manner” (Herskovits 1973: 77).

### 5.1.3. *Social Constructionism and the narrative approach.*

Social constructionism and the narrative approach have both been explained in earlier chapters. However, it is necessary to address these related paradigms in terms of their ethical implications. Let us first look at why I say that the two are related.

Social constructionism is truly postmodern as it allows us to build our reality in the here and now. It acknowledges that our experience of reality is fluid and alive. Social constructionism both accepts uncertainty and acknowledges people’s own wisdom and knowledge of their lives. The premise of social constructionism is that reality is constructed in the discourses between people and in social groups and not in the mind of the individual. Further, social constructionist thinkers have put forward that people’s identities and ideas about themselves and others are “constructed like stories or narratives” (Burr 1995: 8).

Here the narrative approach takes its position. If people’s manner of relating to their world takes a narrative form, then each person’s own narrative is what needs to be investigated should that person seek change. Demasure and Müller (2006: 415) explain that it makes more sense to use stories because “(p)eople recognise themselves more easily in stories than in concepts.” In addition, the narrative approach recognises people’s own knowledge and understanding of themselves as the primary wisdom. After all, if you are the one living your life story you are the one who knows and understands your story best.

The obvious implication for counsellors and the church in general is that such an approach warrants a shift in power. The relationship between counsellor and counselee for example, changes from a therapist-patient relationship – which places the power in the hands of the counsellor – to one in which the counsellor and

counselee are co-authors of a new narrative – that starts in the old narrative of which the counselee is the expert. The new narrative is then constructed in the relationship between counsellor and counselee.

If it is true, however, that meaning is constructed in the space between people and groups; another important implication for social constructionists is that one must acknowledge the power of language. In their article Demasure and Müller (2006: 414) use the example of a paedophile to illustrate the power of words. They explain that if one refers to such a person as a “criminal” he would be sent to prison. On the other hand, if one refers to him as a “paraphile personality” he would be sent to a psychiatric institution. Changing one word can lead to a radical change in the outcome of a situation. Ethically speaking, counsellors have to be very cautious in the words they choose to use in the counselling relationship. Similarly, the discourses they choose to base their ideas on can influence the outcome of their counselling endeavours. As Demasure and Müller (2006: 416) state, “This puts the importance of the pastoral relation back into the spotlight.”

The danger of the social constructionist paradigm, as Burr (1998: 12) points out, lays in the risk of allowing such an approach to stop one from wanting to effect change. An extreme interpretation of social constructionism could lead to a level of relativism that negates any attempts to effect change in others. If each is the expert of his story and meaning is constructed within groups, how does one know if one meaning is more valid than another? “(I)f we must abandon any notion of a reality which bears some relation, no matter how this relation is conceived, to our constructions, then we are left with a multiplicity of perspectives which become a bewildering array of alternative (and, it could be argued, equally valid) realities in themselves.” (Burr 1998: 12) This kind of interpretation needs to be guarded against.

Burr (1998: 22), however, concludes by explaining that such an interpretation does not often occur and that social constructionists are very aware of the need for social and political change. I want to return here to Herskovitz’s (1973: 74) distinction between “absolutes” and “universals.” Relativist approaches, such as social constructionism may be called, do not deny that universal values exist and can serve as the barometers for anyone who wants to bring social of political change. They do

deny the right of any individual or group to impose absolute rules on other individuals or groups. It is at this juncture that a social constructivist would ask how the universal value manifests itself in the dominant discourses of the individual or group in question and how it can be re-interpreted within that narrative.

#### 5.1.4. The South African Context.

Knowing about philosophical trends and their possible implications is not sufficient without looking at the South African context, since this study is being conducted within South Africa. Two important aspects of the South African landscape will be discussed: The diversity of the population and the role of the church in such a diverse society and the impact of violence and crime and the church's response. There are many other aspects of South African society today that should be looked at, but the afore-mentioned two should serve as an illustration of the complexity of the South African context.

Contemporary South Africa is a place of diversity. It has eleven official languages and countless other language groups, ranging from Korean to Portuguese, are represented in its population. Considering the fact that each language represents a culture and each culture has its various subcultures, one can imagine that it would be very difficult to quantify the diverse groups that all live within South Africa's borders. In addition, all the major religions of the world as well as secular and anti-religious groups are represented in different proportions. Furthermore, in the spaces between groups, where different groups have started to mingle, there is even more diversity. As a teacher in an inner-city school, I have had many discussions with learners from various cultural groups about the unique relationship between African cultures and Christianity in South Africa. To list the different ways in which the South African population is diversified would take very long. Time and space require that the preceding examples serve as sufficient demonstration.

The Constitution of South Africa, which has often been labelled "one of the most advanced and liberal documents of its kind" (Moosa 2006: 10), is a document that was designed to meet the needs of a nation that is characterised by its diversity. Therefore, one must immediately ask whether the document successfully addresses



the challenges of pluralism and relativism. Are the laws and the Bill of Rights encompassed in the Constitution representative of the ‘Rainbow Nation’?

Ebrahim Moosa looked at the relationship between religion and the Constitution, in an attempt to answer the question. His conclusions should serve as a challenge to the faith community in South Africa. As his starting point, Moosa (2006: 1) stresses that “religion is making an unprecedented appearance on the world stage”. This is contrary to the twentieth century idea that religion has lost its power in the political arena. One only needs to look at recent issues of any good newspaper or TIME magazine to realise that religion does play a major role on the world stage, whether it be as a constructive or as a destructive force.

More importantly, however, religion has always played a pivotal role in South African history. Moosa (2006: 2) states that “(s)ome of the leading work on liberation theology in Christianity and Islam emerged from the South African context”. Of course, he refers here to the role of religious groups in anti-apartheid movements. More specifically, he refers to the work of the World Conference of Religion and Peace (WCRP) that was formed in the last quarter of the twentieth century. He explains that, through the work of the WCRP, “(r)eligion in this sense played the role as both liberator and later as facilitator of the transition from apartheid rule to a democratic order...”(2006: 2).

According to Moosa (2006: 3), the WCRP also drafted the “Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibility” in 1992. The gist of the document was that South Africans should have complete freedom of religion, both on an intellectual and practical level, and, more significantly, that religious groups should have the right to “criticize and challenge all social and political structures” (2006: 3). The hope was that this document would serve as a source for the Bill of Rights that would make up a large part of the Constitution.

Moosa (2006: 7) continues to explain, at length, that the current Bill of Rights does not succeed in providing the level of religious freedom that was envisioned in the 1992 WCRP document. He states that, under the current Constitution, freedom of religion is complete freedom in “abstract and unarticulated dogma”, but that the

*practice* of religion is subject to limits that can be defined by the state. The South African Constitution “gestures an absolute freedom by the invocation of the phrase ‘freedom of religion’ but does not necessarily fulfil that pledge” (2006: 8). Yet, Moosa’s critique of the Constitution should not be the focus of this discussion. His discussion points to something else of equal importance:

Early in his discussion of the work of the WCRP, Moosa explains that the 1992 declaration is indicative of the role that religion envisioned for itself in the future of South Africa. Firstly, it sees itself as the force that will ensure that the practice of religion “take(s) place within the framework of legitimacy set by the state” (2006: 4). Secondly, “the religious sector will at its discretion invite the state to an undefined mode of dialogue about social and political issues” (2006: 4). Thus, religious groups want to play an important political role in South Africa and be the voice of conscience.

Whether it is true that the Bill of Rights does not offer complete freedom of religion, or not, the challenge to the church in South Africa remains the same. The church should remain true to its legacy of the past thirty years and be the voice of conscience in South Africa.

In a recent letter posted on the internet, Paul Baoteng (2006: 2), who was involved with the drafting of the Lusaka Declaration, reiterates Moosa’s point and reminds the church of its legacy, when he states:

What I do believe is that without the faith witness of Christians (such as Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudé), Muslims (such as Dr Fared Esack) and Hindus and Jews involved with them in the World Council of Religion and Peace in this country, not only would the end have not come as it did but the transformation would not have begun as it has.

Baoteng is hopeful about the future, as long as religious groups continue to play a constructive role. However, there is much work to be done. The ‘Rainbow Nation’ is an ideal that is very far from reality and the church itself is not immune to the problems inherent to a multi-cultural society.

One striking example of the problems of our society, considering South Africa's history and the afore-mentioned legacy of the church, is the recent report entitled "Racism and the Catholic Church" that, according to the Sunday Times article entitled *Racism Shock in Catholic Church* (2005), shows many examples of racism within the Catholic Church. Cardinal Napier is quoted to have said that "it is normal that some people would show some sign of racist attitude. After all, we come from 300 years of racist attitude. You don't get over it quickly." (2005: 1) With his statement, the Cardinal reaches into the heart of the challenge the church is facing. It is true that the church has a legacy of fighting against apartheid, but it is also true that, since the first explorers and colonialists arrived in the Cape, South Africa has been divided (and the Christian church is not innocent). It does not take twelve years of optimism to overcome centuries of problems. This reality does not justify the racism that is still alive and well even in the church, but it helps to explain it. It also helps to highlight the importance of the role that religion still has to play, if it wants to be the voice of conscience for South Africans, inside and outside the church. Racism is one example of the challenges that are faced by South Africans on a daily basis.

A second challenge that South Africans are faced with, which has changed the way that South Africans live and think about life, is crime. Victims of crime and their families have many problems to deal with, ranging from practical and financial to psychological and social. Having been the victim of an armed robbery in which my car and money were stolen, I can testify that crime has an influence on where people decide to live, how their houses look, when and where they choose to move around, how they travel and many other aspects of their lives. High walls are the status quo. The poor and elderly are especially vulnerable. The ripple effects of crime are felt in all spheres of society. In many ways, South African society is a society that lives in fear.

It is unnecessary to quote statistics to prove that the above-mentioned is true, since no-one who lives in South Africa is unaware of the impact of crime. However, people do react differently to the situation. Some respond reactively, becoming angry and fearful. They build higher walls and put up thicker bars, suspicious of every stranger who walks past their house. Some even go so far as to emigrate. De Villiers

(2004: 111) sums the situation up neatly, when he explains that many South Africans have been disillusioned by the recent changes and increase in violent crime and have either elected to emigrate or “disassociated themselves from what happens in the public sphere and have withdrawn to their own private sphere...”

Others respond proactively, sensible of the dangers, but ready to help find a solution. They become activists or counsellors, or donate money to anti-crime organisations or other organisations that are working to combat the underlying social problems. Or they simply live their lives as well as they can, so that they can contribute to the general well-being of the country. They are hopeful.

Again, though, the question one needs to ask is of the Christian community’s response. How should the church respond, not only to the general problem of crime, but also to its members’ responses and questions? What happens in a pastoral counsellor’s office when a bereaved mother wants to know about God’s apparent absence when her child was raped and killed?

Etienne de Villiers (2004: 116-121) offers significant advice to the church, for the church to be able to deal more honestly with the challenges of contemporary South Africa. He explains that religion in South Africa should join forces with the social sciences in order to benefit from the knowledge gained by the social sciences. He poses three reasons why it is necessary. Firstly, religion needs the social sciences to provide important information regarding the realities of South African society, so that religious bodies can make informed decisions. Secondly, he explains that no religious group can play a significant role in the transformation of South Africa without necessary research that is often done by social scientists. Lastly, the social sciences can also serve to confront religious groups with views and attitudes that will have a negative influence on people.

In his argument, De Villiers comes to the crux of the solution to the church’s problem in South Africa and that is honesty. The church should display the necessary integrity to be able to admit that it does not possess all the answers. Other sources of knowledge, such as research done within the social sciences, and wisdom, such as research that reveals the flaws in the church’s approach to a problem, should be

sought and embraced by the church. At the recent General Synod of the Dutch reformed Church, for example, a liturgy was organised during which those that attended the meeting could pray and remember those affected by crime in South Africa. It is at once an acknowledgement of the church's inability to always provide answers, a show of empathy with the victims of crime and, most importantly, an honest sign of the church's dependence upon God's grace.

Further, De Villiers' emphasis on the role of the social sciences provides a way for theologians to explore and come to a better understanding of the diverse nature of South African society, with the help of those involved in sociology, anthropology and political science.

#### 5.1.6. Christian Ethics.

Finally, in order to have a complete picture of factors and discourses that influence pastoral counsellors' ethics, one cannot ignore Christian ethics, since pastoral counselling has already been described as having a distinctly Christian character.

As Roger Crook (1995: 41) explains, Christians cannot make ethical decisions outside of the framework of Christianity. "No choice is made without precedent; no one is cut off from the broader human communities, including the community of faith". Starting from his perspective, then, one can say that the doctrines and ideals of Christianity have a significant influence on the thoughts of people who profess to be Christian.

Crook (1995: 42-49) continues to explain that the sources of doctrines and ideals within the community of faith play an important role in the decisions that its members make. Christianity relies on the Bible, the faith community and personal judgement, guided by the Holy Spirit, as sources of wisdom.

Firstly, the Bible is considered a crucial navigational tool for Christians on their journey through life, because it is professed to be inspired by God. Whether this inspiration is to be understood literally or not is not the question, however. Crook (1995: 43) emphasises the fact that the Bible is "a report of God's self-disclosure". In other words, it is one of the primary sources for information about God's

involvement in human life through the ages, as it tells the story of God's people, and serves as a guide for Christians' further relationships with God and, by extension, God's creation.

Secondly, Crook (1995: 45-46) states that Christians' understanding of their relationship with the community of faith helps them to think about ethics, because of the Pauline understanding of Christians as the body of Christ: a concept that unites Christians across cultural and denominational lines. If a Christian thinks of himself as a member of a body, part of a whole, that person's decisions will be strongly influenced by his awareness of their effects on the community.

Crook (1995: 49-50) finally says that Christians rely on their own judgement, in a combination of prayer and reasoned thinking to make choices. The role of prayer is significant; as it acknowledges the Christian's desire to make decisions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "Life in the Spirit entails awareness of the presence of God, a sense of fellowship with other believers, and common commitment to the truth that unites people under the presence of God" (Crook 1995: 50).

The question that arises here is; what do the sources of Christian thinking teach? The Bible is the greatest source of guidelines for Christian ethics. The Old Testament, for example, especially the Law abounds with laws and guidelines for good living. Crook (1995: 57) explains that the laws of the Old Testament "reflect(s) a concern for persons and an interest in protecting the rights of individuals to life, well-being, and to the ownership of property. Attention is (also) given to the protection of certain people..."

In the New Testament, Jesus and Paul are the two most influential thinkers. Jesus taught, in His life and preaching, "principles of moral living" (Crook 1995: 65). His principles were founded on the acknowledgement of God's primary role in the lives and thinking of individuals. "Loyalty to God is what determines our decisions, and these decisions are good or bad, right or wrong, as they relate to God" (Crook 1995: 67). Again, this is not an individualistic approach to ethics, but one that acknowledges the individual's life as part of a community. Paul, in addition, focussed his ideas about right and wrong on love as the centre of Christian life

(Crook 1995: 78). Again, the focus is not on the individual alone, but as a member of a community, who is in relationships with the people around him. After all, love cannot manifest itself outside of a relationship. “For Paul, therefore, a moral life was a consequence of Christian faith and was possible only within the context of the Christian community” (Crook 1995: 80).

The principles of dependence on God and love are a good starting point for Christians and they have manifested in many different ways of thinking about ethics over the years. Liberation ethics is an example of a way of thinking that has influenced the way that Christians have interpreted the principles of Christian love and dependence on God. There are other forms of Christian ethics, but I have chosen to discuss liberation ethics, because it offers an opportunity for the church and pastoral counsellors to address ethics from a point of departure that simultaneously acknowledge our relationship with God, the Bible, the community and the practical realities of life.

Firstly, Tim Gorringer (2001: 135) explains that liberation ethics is strongly rooted in spirituality. “It signifies that a Christian ethic is always pushed back to prayer, and therefore a reliance on grace, and to scripture in the hands of the community”. Grace teaches Christians to give and be willing to do so freely. “...there can be real love only when there is free giving” (2001: 135).

In addition, he teaches that scripture plays a central role in liberation ethics, since it is used to illuminate the deeds of the church. It is used as a measuring rod to show the strengths and weaknesses of the community and to remind the community of what is expected of it, because there is often a discrepancy between the Word of God and the reality of a situation (2001: 131). Central to the precept of the importance of the Bible is the necessity for it to be available to all people, so that the people can read and interpret the scriptures for themselves. This availability of the scriptures empowers people to make moral decisions for themselves, as they are able to compare what they see in life with what they read in the Bible themselves and draw their own conclusions.

When people are able to rely on grace and read the Bible, their relationship with the community changes, according to liberation ethicists. Liberation ethics gives people a “utopian” (Gorringer 2001: 134) outlook that is not necessarily too unrealistic, but makes it possible for them to know the realities of life and strive for something better, since it stands in critique of ideologies and groups that do not fulfil the requirements of love.

The characteristic of liberation theology that most appeals to me, is the priority it places on “praxis” (Gorringer 2001: 128). Knowing that one is dependent on God, reading scripture and hoping for something better is futile if one does not allow one’s ethic to come into practice. This requires that one is cognisant of the social realities of contemporary society.

Liberation theology acknowledges, like Etienne de Villiers, the vital role that the social sciences can, and should, play in the life of the church. “...priests had to lay aside their theology books and study sociology, economics and politics” (Gorringer 2001: 129). Similarly, a pastoral counsellor needs not only theological knowledge, but other academic knowledge as well, from the fields of psychology and sociology, for example. The task of a pastoral counsellor is, after all, one that serves the church in bringing people closer to a life of love, growth and healing.

## 5.2.Conclusion.

This chapter has illustrated some of the aspects of postmodern life, so as to shed additional light on the challenges that the church and pastoral counsellors face. The trends of contemporary life have lead to a large degree of uncertainty.

One such trend is pluralism, which recognizes the fact that contemporary society is not homogeneous. Further, it raises questions regarding religions and the idea that one religion is more right than another. The conclusion that was arrived at here is that pluralism should not be seen as a threat to Christianity but as a challenge to our faith.

Relativism is another trend that was explored. It asks us to think about the possibility that the question of right and wrong does not necessarily have just one answer, but



that it depends on the context of the question. Christian thinking about relativism acknowledges that it has also influenced the church. Gerkin's dialectical approach was discussed as a possible response from the church, as members of the faith community should be empowered not to shy away from relativism, but to be able to talk and think about it critically.

Social constructionism also fits under the umbrella of postmodernism and relativism. This paradigm acknowledges that meaning is created in the space between people and the language that they use. Thus, the power of language must be recognised. Further the role of stories comes to the fore and the narrative approach to relating becomes a useful tool. Like relativism, social constructionism can be perceived to be nihilistic, but need not be.

Within the South African context, Christians are further challenged by an extraordinarily diverse culture that is not always ideal. Crime is one of the many problems in contemporary South Africa that makes living here quite difficult. The church in South Africa needs to respond accordingly, by being honest about its shortcomings and being willing to learn, so that its response to life in South Africa can be of relevance.

Lastly, Christian ethics in general was discussed briefly, to show how one example of a Christian approach to ethics and morality could be of value to the church and the faith community. Liberation ethics was not chosen as the only possible approach to Christian ethics, but as an approach that could be of particular relevance to the South African context as well as the task of pastoral counsellors.

## **CHAPTER SIX: Last Look and Concluding Remarks.**

I started this thesis with the statement that pastoral counsellors face ethical challenges on a regular basis and that the state of contemporary society urges us to re-appraise the relationship between pastoral counselling and ethics. The premise is that, as was stated in the first chapter and reiterated in later chapters, pastoral counsellors are fallible and need support. In this chapter, I shall have a brief look at what was said in the first two chapters. Following that, the bulk of this chapter will consist of my attempt to bring the last three chapters into conversation with one another, so that I can come to a valuable conclusion.

### 6.1. Last look at the beginning.

The need for support and guidance within the confines of pastoral counselling is urgent, because pastoral counsellors are entrusted with people's most fragile emotions. Furthermore, the work and decisions of pastoral counsellors have ethical implications for both the counsellors and their clients. Making ethical decisions is never easy, when one considers the fluid nature of morality. The example that was used in Chapter One was of a pregnant woman in a car accident. The nature of her injuries forced the doctors to choose between saving her and saving her unborn child. The question of the value of life seems simple, until one needs to weigh the life of one person against that of another. Similarly, the choices facing pastoral counsellors are often difficult. A certainty that the right choice was made is most often absent.

It is for the above reasons that the matter of ethics and pastoral counselling fascinated me. Therefore, I decided to research the question further. For the purpose of the research – which is qualitative and descriptive in nature – I chose the social constructionist paradigm. The paradigm in question places the researcher in a unique position, because it operates from the perspective that reality is constructed between people, in the communication that takes place between them. Thus, reality does not exist independent of our interpretation of facts. Reality is built out of our experience and interpretation of reality (Burr 1995: 7). Similarly, my final understanding of the topic under investigation is built out of the stories of the research participants and my discussions with them, as well as the involvement of a number of authors, through

their writing, and those who have read what I had to say and contributed to it with remarks and criticism.

The narrative approach to research lends itself very well to the social constructionist paradigm, because it relies on our understanding of our own and others' stories, as social constructionism teaches that reality is built between people, when they share and experience their stories together. The example that was used in the first chapter comes from a Rob Reiner film, entitled "*The Story of Us*" (Castle Rock Films LLC 1999). The two main characters are about to be divorced, when the woman reminds her husband that they have become who they are because they have shared a story.

My approach to this thesis can be described as one of openness and curiosity, since I do not consider myself to be an expert on the topic. My interest in pastoral counselling and the hope that it offers guided me to want to learn more about it. What bothered me, however, is that, considering the exceedingly difficult job of pastoral counsellors, there are not enough structures in place to support and guide pastoral counsellors in South Africa. Thus, I set out to find out more about pastoral counsellors and their experience of ethical dilemmas.

In the second chapter, I attempted to give a more detailed description of the problem that pastoral counsellors face, in that they need a greater amount of support. In their work, pastoral counsellors are accountable to their clients for the choices that they make in the course of the counselling process, since their decisions affect their clients.

The aforementioned accountability of pastoral counsellors is crucial, owing to the nature and aims of pastoral counselling. Chapter Two sheds some light on the fact that pastoral counselling should be empowering and able to effect change in the lives of the people who seek the help of a pastoral counsellor. I wish to repeat a statement made in the aforementioned chapter: When somebody comes to a counsellor for help it means that that person is entrusting that which is most broken and painful in their lives into the hands of the counsellor. This means that the counsellor has an incalculable responsibility, which insists that the counsellor always remain humble and honest. This will prevent the counsellor from being presumptuous about his own abilities and remind him of his need for the necessary 'equipment' to do his job well.

The most important ‘equipment’ that a pastoral counsellor needs, that was discussed in Chapter Two, includes a faith that acknowledges the counsellor’s dependence on God’s grace and a compassion that recognizes people’s pain as well as their own understanding of their problems. This compassion enables the counsellor to listen to the counselees’ own voices and stay focussed on those people’s needs. Furthermore, a counsellor has to have a strong academic background that balances knowledge from different fields. The most important two fields are theology and psychology. Finally, the counsellor must be equipped with the necessary skills of perception, such as active listening skills, that will enable him to put his academic knowledge into practice. These and other necessities for pastoral counselling will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Most importantly, however, as has been pointed out, regardless of how well equipped a counsellor is, it does not change the fact that all people are fallible. It is for this reason, coupled with the realisation that counsellors’ work is often very difficult and even emotionally and spiritually dangerous, that there is a need for pastoral counsellors to be supported by instruments of government such as a professional code.

## 6.2. Bringing the themes into conversation.

If it is true that pastoral counsellors need additional support in their daily work, in terms of ethics and ethical decision-making, then this section will serve to illustrate and illuminate the point.

### 6.2.1. *The Role of God and Faith in the Life of the Pastoral Counsellor.*

God plays a central role in the life of a pastoral counsellor, who works under the banner of Christianity. The participants in this study were all in agreement that they cannot separate their identity as pastoral counsellors from their identity as Christians. It is Gerkin (1984: 22) who states that he is “profoundly desirous that pastoral counselling preserve its Christian orientation.” So too are other authors, such as Clinebell (1995: 77), in agreement that mental and emotional health are inseparable from spiritual health. He emphasises, “Spiritual growth is the key to all human growth.”

In Chapter Four, it became clear that authors agree with the participants that the Christian orientation of pastoral counselling is what sets it apart from other forms of counselling, as it relies heavily on the love and hope that Christians hold dear. Joyce (2000: 5) reminds pastoral counsellors that one cannot work within the framework of Christianity if one does not possess a “deep familiarity” with the faith. One is only able to help others within a community if one is also involved in that community. The counsellor must base his work with others on his own lived experience of being a member of a community of love and hope.

Participants explained that their faith helps them to approach others with more humanity. The faith community, as discussed in the fourth chapter, is a space, which, through its customs and practices, “gives expression to the inarticulate exchange of love in which all participate” (Joyce 2000: 65). When the members of the community are faced with circumstances that make the aforementioned “exchange” difficult, “pastoral counselling seeks to notice and aims to undo the obstacles to the loving exchange at the heart of faith” (2000: 65).

Another aspect of faith that the participants highlighted is their trust in the grace of God, which they acknowledge through prayer. One counsellor stated that solutions often presented themselves, after she had prayed about her counselees’ questions. Similarly, as was stated in chapter four, a pastoral counsellor’s faith gives him a source of hope that lies beyond human power and acknowledges that there is a Higher Power. In his description of pastoral care, Alastair Campbell (1986: 26) uses the image of the shepherd’s “courage based on trust in God”, revealing in his stance that pastoral care should be an act of faith.

The pastoral counsellor’s faith should also enable him to know that the challenges of contemporary postmodern society are just that – challenges and not threats. Hall (1998: 69) explains that the current position of the Christian faith in the world closely resembles that of the early church and that this urges Christians to re-establish their faith in a “confessional” form. Thus, Christians can no longer be Christians in name only. “If and insofar as the faithful are enabled to persevere, they must and may do so only through moments of confessional intensity that transcend the merely ‘professional’ mode of belief that may sustain them most of the time.”

The pastoral counsellor's membership of a community of love and hope should take on such a "confessional" form, so that he is able to enable others to "persevere," as Hall insists. This "confessional" form of faith was also evident in the participants' responses, as they all confessed that their Christianity is what defines them and lends integrity to their approach to others.

It has, therefore become evident that contemporary pastoral counsellors in South Africa feel that their faith is essential to their work as counsellors. Through this study, it has been shown that pastoral counsellors' faith is what enables them to work with others from a perspective of love and hope. It is also their faith that allows them to realise their need for God's grace and makes their job an act of faith. The uncertainties of postmodern life also beg an approach to life and other people that confesses faith. Through this confession of faith and their work from a faith perspective, counsellors are able to "undo the obstacles to the loving exchange at the heart of faith" (Joyce 2000: 65).

#### 6.2.2. Pastoral Identity.

As has been established, the identity of the pastoral counsellor in South Africa is distinctly Christian. The implications for the identity of the pastoral counsellor and his approach to people are far-reaching.

The participants in this study explained that their Christian orientation infuses their interaction with others with love and respect. One explicitly stated that his approach to people is that they are the creations of God and therefore deserving of all the love and happiness that they can get. At the same time did I find in the literature that pastoral counsellors' work is an extension of the work of the church, in that it fosters the health of the Christian community. Hiltner (1949: 15) speaks of the role of the pastoral counsellor in terms of his statement that "(t)he two-fold command of Christ was to preach the Gospel and heal the sick."

*Compassion* is the key-word that was used in Chapter Four to describe the pastoral counsellor's identity, as it is compassion that colours all pastoral counsellors' approaches to people with a desire to empower them to live their lives well. A participant explained that he looks for the potential in people, while another explained that she finds it difficult to see people's dark sides. According to the

literature, pastoral counsellors attempt to listen to others and understand them in such a way that they can walk next to them on their journey towards healing. This approach shows a deep-seated respect for others as well as a humility that allows pastoral counsellors to look at others without presuming that they know everything. Campbell (1986: 15) named this brand of compassion “mutuality”.

Again, the values of honesty and integrity come to the fore. Participants stressed that it is only with integrity that one can genuinely attempt to go into the darkness of another’s problems with him. One participant described himself as a negotiator. He enters into the counselling relationship with honesty and places all the cards on the table at the start, so that he and the counselee can negotiate the way forward together.

Ahlskog (2000: 6) states that one can only be truly together with another if one treats the other person’s “individuality with the same respect you would want shown to your own individuality”. Therefore, you are required to be honest about your own pain and faults, so that you can better understand the pain and faults of others. Campbell’s “shepherd” (1986: 30), who is a “wounded healer” (1986: 37) and a “fool” (1986: 59), is such a person. He is not only compassionate and understanding but also knows his own limits and are honest about them.

If one wants to apply what has been stated here to postmodern South Africa, it would be helpful to refer again to Gerkin’s (1997: 114) description of pastoral counselling as “interpretive guidance”. Then the identity of the pastoral counsellor is strongly associated with the church’s role in facilitating a dialogue between people’s broken “life stories and the Christian story of how life should be lived” (1997: 114). This dialectical approach is of particular value in South Africa, as has been shown, since the contemporary South African story is burdened with great challenges. However, as was also shown in the NG Church’s Synod meeting of 2007, where a liturgy was held in memory of the victims of crime, some situations are more challenging than others and answers are unattainable. It is in these situations that the pastoral counsellor’s Christian orientation will strengthen the counsellor’s offer of support to others, as he acknowledges his, and others’, dependence on the love and grace of God.

To summarise, this study has shown that the pastoral counsellor's distinctively Christian approach to helping others serves as a foundation for their ways of thinking about their dependence on God's grace and their relationships with individuals. As Christians, pastoral counsellors treat their clients with the love and respect they need to be empowered to live their lives well. Within the Christian community, counsellors must know that their work is a function of the faith community that allows people to experience the love and security to be found there. Because pastoral counsellors have compassion for others, they want to walk next to them and work with them towards the better life they are looking for. This compassion also enables pastoral counsellors to be honest about their own mistakes and problems as well as their limitations.

### 6.2.3. *Evangelisation, Prayer and Preaching.*

As logical extension of the discussion on the Christian identity of a pastoral counsellor, I also looked into the role of evangelisation, prayer and preaching within the confines of the pastoral counselling relationship. My suspicion was that it is one thing to have a Christian identity and base one's approach to people on it, but it does not automatically mean that the pastoral counsellor will pray or preach in the course of counselling.

All who participated in the study confirmed the suspicion. During the course of their conversations with me, the participants made it very clear that there is no real place for preaching inside the counsellor's office. Seward Hiltner's (1949: 150) depiction of the activity of counselling as one of many within the role of a pastor leads me to the conclusion that, although the counsellor has a faith-based approach, that faith will manifest itself uniquely in the counsellor-counselee relationship.

The research participants explained that it is important to address each situation on its own merit, when one decides whether one can pray or preach in the course of counselling. Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 339) suggest that the counsellor open the topic for discussion at the start of counselling, in order to ascertain what the counselee hopes to get from the relationship. The central idea is that the counsellor must take the time to get to know the client and see where the person is coming from.



Knowing the client and being sensitive to their needs is very important, according to the participants. The context of the relationship and the client's story must determine whether the counsellor will use prayer in counselling. Further, if the counsellor decides to pray or preach, the context will also determine how the counsellor will approach the circumstances. Counsellors must be very careful.

Consider also the fact that the church and its people have changed much in recent times. In our pluralistic milieu, people are exposed to many different influences and cultures, which affects the way they look at the religion and religious language. This factor underlines the pastoral counsellor's obligation to know where his client is coming from. There is a risk that the client will be closed off and wary, if the counsellor chooses an inappropriate stance. Clinebell (1995: 104) warns against this.

However, neither the participants, nor the literature advocate the abandonment of a faith-based approach. Davidowitz-Farkas and Handzo (2000: 324) remind their readers that the task of the pastoral counsellor is "holy" and that counsellors would be remiss if they neglected the rich history of healing and growth that is found within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Further, Clinebell (1995: 107) teaches that it is, after all, the Christian faith that teaches counsellors to care about others in such a singular manner.

Thus, the research has revealed that prayer, preaching and evangelisation do not have a real place in the counselling relationship. The counsellor's faith should manifest itself differently in the counselling relationship than in other ministries, because the client's needs are paramount. Therefore, the counsellor must measure each circumstance on its own and be honest with the client so that the client can express his needs for the outcomes of the relationship. It is a responsibility of the counsellor to take the time to ascertain exactly where the counselee is coming from.

The crux of the matter is that the counsellor should not discard his religious orientation or his spiritual tools. Moreover, the counsellor must be very sensitive to the spiritual needs of the client, but be in tune with the client's own approach at the same time.

#### 6.2.4. *The Role of the Bible and Hermeneutics.*

As an extension of the exploration of the role of prayer and preaching in pastoral counselling, I also elected to have a brief look at the role of the Bible and hermeneutics in counselling.

David Jasper (2004: 123) warns that the Bible is a “dangerous” text and must be read responsibly. Similar sentiments were expressed by the participants, who all urged extreme caution in the use of the Bible in the counselling relationship. The phrases “The Bible says,” “God’s will” and “The Lord says” were all referred to by the participants as being especially perilous, when readers use them to dictate to one another.

From the literature it also emerged that the authority of the Bible is not necessarily inherent in the text itself, but attributed to the text by its readers, the faith community. Further, the literature revealed that it is exactly this attribution of authority to the Bible that is cause for concern, because of the way in which some groups have done it. Richard Briggs (2003: 84-85) warns against a mechanistic, literal reading of the text, as the text is not always clear and is often even self-contradictory.

Some participants cited this reason as the motive for their suggestion that pastoral counsellors should not use the Bible, if they are not sufficiently trained in the responsible reading of the Bible. There exist many theories on the conscientious reading of the Bible, such as David Jasper’s. He supports a multi-faceted reading of the text that acknowledges its unique attributes and its relationship with other texts (2004: 121-126).

In order to avoid the “heavy-handed tactics” that one participant warns against, Manfred Oeming (2006: 84) suggests that users of the Bible should do so humbly. When one reads the Bible in this manner, one does so knowing that it is a very old and complex text. In addition, one concedes to the history of interpretation that already exists and admits that anyone who reads the Bible can make mistakes.

A humble attitude will also serve the pastoral counsellor well in reminding him to determine if and how he is going to use the Bible, depending on the requirements of the counselee. Christine McSpadden (2003: 127) states that the pastor must remember that “post-Christendom churchgoers” are not always as familiar with the Bible as earlier generations.

However, it would serve the counsellor well to remember the plural nature of our society. Why should a counsellor not make use of other sources of wisdom in the counselling relationship? After all, liberation theology (as explored in the fifth chapter) proposes that theologians must look to other social sciences and sources of learning to supplement their existing knowledge.

Here, I have come to realise that the Bible, although a very powerful source of wisdom to many, can be abused and misused. This is especially true when readers read it literally. The participants espouse a responsible reading of the text, based on a sound knowledge of exegesis and hermeneutics. Oeming (2006: 84) supplies useful advice when he suggests that all reading of the Bible should be done from a standpoint of humility. In support of Oeming’s view, I added McSpadden’s view that pastoral counsellors cannot use the Bible if they have not determined their clients’ relationship with it. Again, humility is the key, since the counsellor’s consideration of the client’s point of view forces him to place his own point of view in second place. Lastly, one must remember that the Bible is but one of many sources of learning and wisdom and it might be wise to rely on other sources as well.

#### *6.2.5. Training and the Role of Mentors.*

The sentiment that pastoral counsellors will always need to be comprehensively trained and given additional support in making decisions was expressed early in this thesis. When asked about it, participants were in full agreement. One man, in particular, stressed that ministers are not qualified to offer counselling and that counsellors who do not have a background in theology are not equipped to offer spiritual guidance. He went so far as to say that his own limited knowledge, prior to receiving further education in counselling, was lethally inadequate.

As long ago as 1949, the literature has stressed the value of further training for pastoral counsellors. In a definitive book on pastoral counselling, Seward Hiltner (1949: 227) expresses concern that experience, not tempered by training, is not enough of a teacher itself. Thus, he championed the value of “supervised experience,” in addition to the very necessary academic training.

One point that was made repeatedly by the participants is that counsellors should know their own boundaries and limitations. Hiltner’s (1949: 232) advice is of value in this regard, as he explains that supervision is a tool through which a counsellor can come to know his own strengths and weaknesses. This learning device can also teach a counsellor to know and recognise the risks involved in counselling.

One participant highlighted a further consideration; that a mentor or supervisor should not be chosen simply as a crutch for the counsellor, but as someone who can offer honest and constructive criticism and advice. Reciprocally, the counsellor under supervision must be open to learning. Howard Clinebell (1995: 156) also stresses the importance of a counsellor’s commitment to his own development: “This truth about growth-enabling teaching also applies to any counselling or therapy that is to produce growth. The most difficult, yet potentially the most fulfilling aspect of being in a profession committed to growth, is the fact that we can enable growth in others only to the degree that we are open, vulnerable, caring, risking and growing ourselves”.

If the supervisor cannot serve as a crutch, it may be necessary, also in the spirit of Clinebell’s openness, that counsellors seek therapy as well. This will open another avenue for the counsellor to learn and grow, as Hiltner (1949: 248) explains.

Finally, a participant was adamant that one of the counsellor’s greatest assets could be his ability to recognise the need to refer clients to other professionals. Harry Sands supports his view and explains that, although there may be many reasons why the counsellor would not want to refer a client, the counsellor should not hesitate to do so, if the situation calls for it.

To finish, the participants recommend that counsellors should further enhance their knowledge by reading and keeping abreast of new developments in their field in this

way. Bayles's (1989: 85) point in this regard is valid here: "A professional's knowledge that was current forty-five years ago is not so now".

Upon looking back at this section, the word that comes to mind is 'vigilance.' The pastoral counsellor's competence relies entirely on his vigilance. Firstly, he must recognise the need for adequate academic learning. Practical training is also of absolute necessity, as it hones the skills taught in academic training and helps the counsellor to be more watchful and aware of his own shortcomings. If the counsellor is vigilant, he will also be open to the criticism and support offered by a supervisor. Further, he will be open to learning through personal therapy as well. In this way, the counsellor will be aware of his own limits and be more ready to refer clients, if the necessity presents itself. Lastly, a vigilant counsellor will attempt to stay up to date with advancements in his field, by reading and interacting with new knowledge.

#### 6.2.6. Approach to Ethics and Ethical Dilemmas.

The aim of this thesis is to provide a description of pastoral counsellors' experience of ethical dilemmas and ethical decision-making. Thus, the participants' contribution to this section of the discussion is of the utmost importance.

All participants placed emphasis on the Christian orientation of their approach to ethics as well as their accountability to God and the people that they work with. The underlying principles that were identified are respect, empathy and a desire to look for the best possible outcome for the counselees.

Under the above heading in Chapter Four, Elford's (2000: 148) explication of the pastoral relationship as a triangular one emphasises the approach of Christians to ethics as one that acknowledges the involvement of God in ethical decision-making as well. Oglesby's (2002: 177-183) "Potter's house ethics" sheds light on the topic. He explains that a shift in focus towards God's grace will allow Christians to treat others with forgiveness and understanding, rather than judgement. His approach further fosters a sense of community and mutuality that is much needed in the postmodern South Africa, that is still riddled with prejudice and uncertainty. We are still subject to the evils of racism and crime, despite the successes of the democratic regime (as discussed in Chapter Five).

Openness and forgiveness paves the way for love, which is the ultimate Christian ideal. Reinhold Niebuhr (1956: 44) states that love, a gift from God, is “potent and creative”. Love enables us to look at otherwise impossible situations, realise that there is not one right answer and accept the fluidity of ethical decision-making, because we no longer stand in judgement of others and want to fit them into a world of black and white rules. We have forgiven them and know that there exist different possible answers to one problem that should be explored.

The participants revealed similar sentiments when they expressed their wish to be of service to others. One particular example of this is a counsellor’s recount of her inner struggle when asked by a client to be with her during an abortion. She is opposed to abortion, but was able to recognise that the girl’s need for love and support is greater than her own prejudices. She was able to forgive the girl enough to realise that she does not have the authority to force her to make a decision to keep the child and to offer the support that she so needed.

Other important examples of ethical dilemmas that the participants mentioned also revealed their desire to be of help and to respect the needs of their clients. Two participants told of their struggle with knowing when to terminate a counselling relationship. One asked the question with regard to the fact that the client was not co-operating and thus not making progress. The other said that he considers it unethical to maintain the relationship when he thinks that the client’s problem is beyond his capabilities. Another participant stressed that the confidentiality of the counselling relationship can pose problems, if it is not discussed in full at the outset. He wanted to know what to do in a situation where it becomes necessary to break confidentiality. This reminds us that confidentiality is always limited and that the counsellor must know when it may be necessary for the well-being of the client or others to break the confidentiality.

In conclusion, the preceding discussion has made it clear that pastoral counsellors’ approach to ethics is rooted in their faith. It is in their faith that they find reasons to care deeply about others. The reason for this phenomenon is that Christian’s faith in God as a God of love teaches them to love others and forgive them. It shows them that they must look at others’ problems creatively, so that they can help them to find

solutions that will benefit them. The key to pastoral counsellors' approach to ethics must be forgiveness in practice. One participant's story serves as a powerful example of this practical forgiveness, when we see how it enabled the counsellor to aid a young girl who went through the very painful experience of abortion. Other examples of ethical dilemmas experienced by the participants also demonstrated that counsellors approach dilemmas thoughtfully and with the good of the counselees in mind, but that they have questions about ethical decision-making.

#### *6.2.7. The Role of the Faith Community.*

One participant mentioned his wish that the faith community becomes the refuge that it often professes to be. The pastoral counsellor should not be alone in trying to offer solace to those who are in emotional and spiritual need. He should be a member of a community that does so.

Rodney Clapp (1997: 194-195) reminds his readers that there is strength in numbers: "Community may be jostled, deprived, squeezed, but it is as persistent and hard to kill as a rattlesnake". Moreover, the community of Christians, according to Clapp, has the advantage that our faith enables us to see through worldly logic and to deal with living in a world that is so unsure of itself, as this postmodern world is.

At this point, it has become necessary to return to a statement that was made in Chapter Two: Pastoral counsellors have a very difficult job and, like other counsellors, such as psychologists, need any kind of support that they can get, starting with a well-developed, comprehensive code of conduct. No code of conduct will ever cover every eventuality but it is a starting point for both pastoral counsellors and the people to whom they are accountable. It is the responsibility of the community of faith to also support pastoral counsellors in their occupation of empowering and strengthening the members of the community.

Thus, the faith community has an important role to play, not only in providing a refuge for its members, where they can be taught to deal with the world in general, but also in providing help and guidance to pastoral counsellors.

### 6.3. Professional Ethics.

The penultimate section of Chapter Four dealt with professional ethics. If a pastoral counsellor wants to be the best possible counsellor and be of service to others, his conduct must be professional. Thus, Bayles's theories on professional ethics were explored.

A professional, according to Bayles (1989: 8), is one who has undergone much training and offers a service to the public that is not otherwise accessible, because the training involved is extensive and of an intellectual nature. The professional's obligation to be able to work autonomously and be equipped to make decisions within his work was highlighted (1989: 9).

The central feature of the relationship between professional and client was identified as trust. The client must be able to trust the counsellor to do only what is necessary and for the benefit of the client.

Pastoral counsellors, who wish to behave professionally, must realise that the greatest amount of power in the counselling relationship lies with them. As Lynch (2002: 61) explains, "there is often a power imbalance in such relationships with one person offering care (and often holding a particular institutional status) and the other, to at least some degree, needing this support". The responsibility to lay boundaries for the relationship, that will limit the amount of power that the counsellor has, rests on the shoulders of the counsellor. A number of considerations were listed that illustrated how a counsellor can create boundaries in the relationship and pointed towards the fact that the counselling relationship can cause damage, if it is not regulated well.

The conclusion that was arrived at is that a combination of measures and support structures are necessary to help pastoral counsellors to reflect responsibly on ethical issues, as Gordon Lynch (2002: 73) explains. Amongst them, he includes a code of conduct, appropriate training, supervision and other methods of developing the counsellor's skills. "Through such supervision and training, pastoral workers may be able to strengthen their own 'inner' supervisor, that is, their own ability to reflect in the midst of pastoral situations about what would constitute good or bad, helpful or unhelpful, practice in that situation".



#### 6.4. Concluding Remarks.

Early in this thesis, I explained that I see myself as Columbus, in that I had set out on a journey, the destination of which may in the end not be the one originally aimed for. The aim of this research was to describe the experiences of pastoral counsellors in terms of ethical decision-making and ethical dilemmas and possibly to show that pastoral counselling in South Africa could benefit from tools such as a code of conduct and regulating body that will help counsellors in their decision-making.

I soon realized that pastoral counselling is such a unique profession, that I needed to look not only at the participants' experiences of ethical dilemmas and decisions, but that I had to start at the place from whence their ethical decision-making comes. Thus, I went on a detour on my journey and much time was spent on describing the foundations and principles pastoral counselling is built on.

The starting point, then, became the role of God and faith in pastoral counselling. Soon it became clear that pastoral counsellors cannot and do not want to separate their work as pastoral counsellors from their relationship with God and the faith community as it gives them the hope and love that they need to be able to assist others. Pastoral counsellors build their identity as counsellors on their identity as Christians. The love that Christians and the church preach takes on the form of compassion in pastoral counselling. Thus, a pastoral counsellor bases his choices on an outlook of mutuality; mutuality that allows the counsellor to look at another person as worthy of love and respect and the right to determine the direction of their own journey.

Since pastoral counselling has a Christian orientation, I felt it necessary to talk to the participants about the role of prayer, preaching, the Bible and other religious tools in pastoral counselling. Their responses, as well as the knowledge I gained from the literature showed that any religious tool could only be used by one who is competent to do so. Pastoral counsellors cannot only rely on knowledge about psychology and counselling, but must have a strong theological background as well. Irresponsible use of spiritual tools can cause harm and is unethical. Further, although pastoral counselling finds its home within the faith community, and pastoral counsellors rely on the aforementioned tools in their personal walk through their careers, counsellors

have to determine when and how to use such tools based on the fact that they have taken the time to get to know their counselees' needs.

Being a Christian, compassionate, willing to help others and competent in using religious tools is only the starting point for counsellors, however. Most importantly (and this cannot be stressed enough), pastoral counsellors must be academically and practically trained in the theory and practice of counselling. One of the cornerstones of professional ethics is the competence of the professional (Bayles 1989: 85). If the counsellor is not adequately qualified and equipped to do the job, he is nothing but well intentioned and his attempts to offer counselling may not have the desired outcome. On the other hand, however, a counsellor who is open and conscientious about his training and knows to be vigilant with regards to his own limits is a better counsellor.

At last, I was able to address the participants' approach to ethics and ethical dilemmas. Having established that pastoral counsellors base their thinking about pastoral counselling on their faith, it came as no surprise to learn that counsellors also rely on their faith to show them how to approach people ethically. Christian thinking teaches counsellors to approach ethics and ethical dilemmas from a perspective of humans' dependence on grace. Acknowledging that all people are fallible, including the pastoral counsellors themselves, allows them to base their choices on forgiveness. People, looked at through the eyes of forgiveness, deserve love and respect. Further, a counsellor who admits his own brokenness will not judge others so easily and be able to support them instead. Based on the aforesaid values of forgiveness and love, pastoral counsellors approach ethical dilemmas mindfully. They want to do what is best for their clients, but are not always able to do so. The participants raised questions and related stories of uncertainty and inner turmoil. The only logical conclusion is that pastoral counsellors need support.

A research participant raised an important issue. The faith community should be one that provides its members with the support and guidance that they need to deal with the difficult questions of life.

Herein lays the hope. This thesis has shown that pastoral counselling is distinctly Christian and counsellors base their choices on their Christian identity. It has also

shown, however, that pastoral counsellors' work is exceedingly challenging. The ideals of pastoral counselling to heal and strengthen and empower those who are suffering spiritually and emotionally are lofty and wonderful. Simultaneously, the realities of life make those ideals seem unattainable. Yet, pastoral counsellors do all that is in their power to attain those ideals.

As a result, pastoral counselling has emerged as a growing profession. Yet, as has been mentioned, being a professional places high standards on the conduct of an individual; of competence, honesty, integrity and ethical behaviour. It should be the responsibility of the faith community to also help pastoral counsellors by doing all that is in its power to develop tools – such as a code of conduct and supervised training – that will help pastoral counsellors to do their job better and find it easier to make good ethical decisions.

#### 6.5. Reflection on the Process.

This research was initiated out of my fascination for people and their responses to situations that push them out of their comfort zones. As was stated in the first chapter, my interest was piqued by the realization that pastoral counsellors' work has become increasingly challenging and that the extremely sensitive nature of their work has great ethical implications. It must be stated, though, that although I was greatly fascinated by the topic under discussion and honestly attempted to come to grips with it, I often found it difficult to find my own place in the research as I have no direct experience of pastoral counselling, except for having gone to a pastoral counsellor for help very briefly once. It meant that I found it difficult to pinpoint the focus of the research. The truth about my inexperience may have worked to my advantage, however, in my attitude towards the participants, as will be discussed later in this reflection.

In the first chapter, I explained that my approach would be based on the social constructionist paradigm and take on a narrative slant. It is for this reason that I chose a qualitative research design that utilises unstructured interviews as its primary tool for gathering information.

The social constructionist paradigm is formed around the concept of mutually constructed reality. Thus, I thought it appropriate to use unstructured interviews as

primary tool, as it is an approach that allows the participants the most freedom to express their views and tell their stories as they see fit. It is also a method that allows space for a narrative slant, in that respondents are asked to relate their stories and experiences. In this, I feel that success was achieved, as I found during the course of the interviews that the participants responded quite freely and often took the conversation to new levels that I had not anticipated. More than once, I found it unnecessary to ask any questions at all, as respondents inadvertently answered many of my later questions with their responses to one of the first few questions that were asked.

The narrative approach also worked in the interviews as, I found, people naturally answer a more open-ended question about their experiences with a story. It seems easier for people to tell about what happened and what they did (and make sense of a situation or idea in that way) than to aim directly for the ideas and thought-processes behind a situation.

Another aspect of the narrative approach that I feel worked well is the attitude of the researcher towards the respondents as the most knowledgeable about their own lives. Considering the fact that I have not worked as a pastoral counsellor myself, I found it easy to adopt an approach of curiosity. Further, since participants were asked to relate their own experiences and ideas, their responses came quite spontaneously and I found them to be comfortable with the topic under discussion.

An area, where I know not much success was achieved was in involving the participants in later stages of the study. The problem was two-fold, in that forethought and time both played a role in this shortcoming. Firstly, in the initial planning, I had not really allowed for returning to the participants more than once. Secondly, the time-frame within which the study took place was overly long. This meant that, when I did decide to return to participants with later conclusions and questions, I was literally able only to contact one participant, for a very brief exchange, as his situation had changed since the previous time that we had met and his time was limited. The other participants had all either moved or changed their contact details and were unreachable. If I were to conduct similar research again, I will allow more time for interviews and exchanges with participants and rely more heavily on these exchanges.

From the beginning of the research, however, I often found it challenging to find willing participants. I saw that the first contact with a prospective participant can be fraught with obstacles. Most possible respondents are very busy people, who cherish their time and are loath to spend time on something that may not be of direct benefit to them. The researcher needs to think about strategies that would make this easier to deal with. Approaching a larger number of prospective participants may help as it would matter less if some do not agree to participate. If it were possible to offer some incentive, it may also help. It must be stressed, though, that those who were forthcoming with their time were all generous and helpful to a fault.

Overall, I was most challenged by the empirical section of the research, as it is my first experience with such research and, mostly, since it involves the willing participation of other people who may have no real reason to help a student. In the same breath, however, I was most captivated by this section of the research, as I started to see the way in which participants unknowingly supported one another's views and ideas and often expressed similar sentiments. Even more fascinating was the incredibly dynamic relationship that establishes itself very quickly between interviewer and interviewee. As both parties become engrossed in the conversation, new ideas are generated and concepts shift and change. Much of this dynamic, however, is very difficult to document and there would not have been space within the confines of this study to attempt to do so. Furthermore, once I started to turn to the literature I was surprised again by how well the participant's views and ideas were reiterated and born out in the literature.

On the whole, the fact that the research took much longer than previously anticipated had one great advantage. I was able to return to the interview notes and literature repeatedly. This meant that I could delve deeply into all the material and get as much out of each available source as possible. I feel that the process of returning to material afforded me a deeper understanding of the material. Although this would have been further enriched had I had more contact with the participants. The old advice about letting something lie in the back of your mind to allow your subconscious to make sense of it appears to hold some water.

The literature study posed a different challenge to me. The frighteningly vast amount of knowledge that is available often threatened to intimidate me. However, unlike the empirical section of the research, I am more comfortable with the process of wading through a large number of texts and sifting what is most relevant. What I felt I needed to guard against was falling into the trap of only looking for literature that would corroborate my perspective. Herein lays the advantage of having so much to choose from. I was able to select literature from different disciplines, countries, schools of thought, different points in history and different media or types of texts. Interestingly, though, much of the literature did support my initial thoughts in one way or another. Most worrying, however, is that literature that deals specifically with the topic in question, namely ethics in pastoral counselling, appears to be in very short supply. So too is relevant literature that was generated locally. On the other hand, the literature generated in South Africa is often very recent and therefore very relevant.

The literature proved most valuable to me in terms of understanding the nature of pastoral counselling, ethics and the world in which thoughts about counselling are generated. This part of the study was most successful, as far as I can tell, although it was not the aim of the study. I have come to a much greater understanding of pastoral counselling as a profession. Similarly I have come to see the complex interplay of forces that influence ethical decision-making in pastoral counselling. Does one focus on pastoral counselling, ethical decision-making, professional ethics or ethical questions of life and death? It is difficult to draw boundaries between these factors, as each plays an important role. I would like to refer to the example of Christopher Columbus again, in this instance. He went on a journey to find a new route to India and show that the earth is round. He never arrived in India, and instead discovered the Americas and added a part of the puzzle that would eventually reveal that the earth is in fact round. I would like to think that my journey has a similar ring to it. I am not at all certain whether I answered the initial questions of this study, but I hope that my attempt might pave the way for further journeys.

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## **ADDENDUM A.**

### **The Aims of the Research.**

Over the past months, I have become acutely aware of the fact that counsellors and therapists are faced with ethical challenges on a daily basis. In itself this fact cannot be changed or challenged, without changing the state of the world. South Africa is, since 1994, changing very rapidly and practitioners of the social sciences are becoming increasingly aware that ours is a pluralistic society. In other words, a perfect example of the kind of challenging environment that is not satisfied with pat answers and generalisations. Further is South Africa facing a variety of problems that compound the issue, such as HIV/AIDS, crime, poverty, unemployment and corruption, to name but a few. At his inauguration as vice-chancellor and principal of the University of Pretoria, Professor Carl Pistorius stated the following:

The issue of 'values' was one of the competitiveness issues in which South Africa fared worst of all countries in the international competitiveness rankings. We should therefore pay special attention to the development of a value framework. Human dignity, human rights, respect for the person and property of other people, integrity (and ethics) must be emphasised. (Pistorius:2001)

This translates into a growing need for professionals to be able to read situations and make informed ethical decisions.

Looking at the challenges of a pluralistic society within a third world context, such as South Africa, combined with the high standards of ethics that are set for pastoral counsellors as professionals, one immediately sees the need for caution in making ethical decisions. Pastoral counsellors are especially challenged by religious pluralism and ethical relativism. Thus, they need training in ethical decision making.

Training in ethical decision making is especially important for pastoral counsellors, because of the delicate nature of their work. Pastors who counsel have not only the responsibility of thinking of the welfare of the individuals they deal with, but also of the community within which they work. Those who specialise in pastoral counselling,

like other counsellors and therapists, are constantly dealing with the most intimate aspects of other people's lives, such as marital problems, sexual issues and addictions (Collins: 1998). Should a pastoral counsellor violate confidentiality as a result of concern for a third party? What if a teenager addicted to a dangerous drug refuses to consult a doctor? It is questions like these that challenged me to investigate the needs and experiences of pastoral counsellors with regard to ethics, ethical dilemmas and ethics training. As a result, I have decided to interview pastoral counsellors, as well as those who make use of their services. It is my aim to find out how the participants experience ethical dilemmas and ethical decision making. I also believe that the way people relate to ethics is linked to their identity and life story– especially the 'professional identity' of pastoral counsellors. Thus, I wish to look at those aspects of their life stories, which will be of relevance to the issue.

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## **ADDENDUM B.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the participant, give consent for any information that I share with the researcher, to be used for academic and research purposes. I acknowledge that the information may be published and that any consequences resulting indirectly from the publication of said information are not the responsibility of the researcher.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the researcher, realise the value of any information that is shared with me by the participant. As such, I will not use any information for any purpose other than that, which is stated. In addition, I shall keep the identity of the participant anonymous and treat all information as confidential. Where possible, I shall consult with the participant, regarding any information that will be used for publication, prior to publication. If the participant does not want the information to be published, it will be withheld from publication.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher