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Pastoral care in Africa – what is it? An ontological approach − definition, demarcation, context, and practice

ABSTRACT

As a sub-focus area of African theology, "Pastoral care in Africa" has been discussed considerably since the beginning of the post-colonial period in the 1960s. However, few scholars have articulated a definitional framework. Therefore, the ontological question: What is pastoral care in Africa? is worth posing to understand its "being". This article locates the discussion of pastoral care in Africa within the rising trend of creative theologies that emerged after colonisation. The article proceeds by framing the context of pastoral care in Africa, followed by describing the undergirding presuppositions to caregiving in Africa. Then the article advances a definition of pastoral care in Africa, which is followed by a discussion about the elements that demarcate it. The article concludes by proposing "relationality, participation, presence, consultation, joint exploration and collective decision-making, cooperation, and contribution" as critical principles that emerge from the conceptual definition of pastoral care in Africa for effective caregiving.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article contributes to the conceptualisation of pastoral care in Africa. In doing so, it provides and delineates pastoral caregiving markers for effective caregiving in African contexts. It is located within practical theology praxis and contributes to pastoral theory formation.

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Theological approaches and perspectives bearing a "geographical" or "people group" category descriptor such as an African, Asian, feminist, Black or White theology, and many others, have taken root as a respectable way of theological reflection. Practical theologians such as Weyel *et al.* (2022:1) observe that this approach to doing theology has increased over the past decade as an indication of the recognition of "plurality and diversity" of people's contexts and positions. Gräb (2022:170) adds that "religion has become synonymous with interpretations of life, related to one's subjectivity". Writing from the context of practical theology, which is the perspective of this article, Miller-McLemore (2012:12) note that

> a range of literature across the academy supports the early 1980s' intuition in practical theology about the need for a more nuanced comprehension of practice.

However, different from theological subjective positioning arising from a post-modern philosophical approach, theologies bearing continental names such as the African and Asian theologies represent decolonisation efforts. Wilfred (2020:73) maintains that

> [c]reative theology in Asia started emerging mostly after decolonisation. The experience of nationalist struggles against colonial rule provided a new impetus, new perspectives, and indigenous resources for original theological enterprises.

Similarly, implicit in African theology is a decolonisation motif to ensure that Christianity and the Bible constructively dialogue with African culture to develop authentic African Christianity. This theological approach "derives from the interplay between Scripture, Christian tradition and African cosmology" (Magezi & Igba 2018:1). Maluleke (2022:113) observes that contemporary African theology tackles several themes that speak to the problems and promises of religion in Africa and the rest of the world.

Thus, if theological reflection is informed by its context, the same applies to pastoral care, which should equally be informed by its context and prevailing situations. Miller-McLemore (2004) observes that, as women and people of colour increasingly started writing about, and contributing to the pastoral care discourse, the discipline horizons widened, sociocultural problems and the role of caregivers started to be more seriously reflected on. This resulted in the view of a public dimension of care. In revisiting the metaphor of the "human living web" in pastoral care after 25 years, Miller-McLemore (2018:306)

highlights the importance of context and the nuances in pastoral care practice between the West and the East during an address in South Korea. Miller-McLemore (2018:306) observed that

> how we understand pastoral care is deeply shaped by our historical and cultural contexts – Americans and Koreans will understand the notion of the web itself in distinct ways.

She added:

> The West has prized the individual, sometimes to the detriment of [the] community, and the East has valued community, sometimes at the cost of the individual. So, the idea of the living human web – that pastoral ministry must attend not only to the individual, the 'human document', but also to wider cultural forces – will have different implications in South Korea than in the United States (Miller-McLemore 2018:306).

Equally emphasising the importance of context in pastoral care but focusing on Africa, Louw (2015) argues that, within an African context, even the notion of spirituality in pastoral care should relate to humanity's struggles for a better life, for justice, and for the greater oneness of all peoples, in order to be relevant and attract African people. This links to the concept of

> African spirituality relates to the unique notion of communality and collective solidarity that the African society exhibits in all spheres of life (Mtetwa 1996:24).

The above discussion indicates the centrality of context in pastoral care, similar to what is found in broader theological reflection. However, the assumption of a nuanced pastoral practice amplified through different contextual realities suggests that there is a common understanding of pastoral care. Therefore, focusing on the African context of this article, the question is: Is there any such thing called pastoral care in Africa? Stated differently: What is African pastoral care or pastoral care in Africa? How should pastoral care be perceived and understood from an African perspective? Thus, a response to the question, What is pastoral care in Africa?, is an ontological one. Ontology refers to:

> [t]he science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects. In simple terms, ontology seeks the classification and explanation of entities. Ontology is about the object of inquiry, what you set to examine. Ontology concerns claims about the nature of being and existence (Warwick Educational Studies 2023:1).

Thus, to address these questions, the article attempts to present an understanding of pastoral care in Africa, by focusing on its nuances within the African context and, in so doing, discussing definition markers, demarcations, and suggesting pastoral practice approaches. The article outlines some presuppositions informing the notion of pastoral care in Africa. This is followed by advancing and discussing the proposed definition of pastoral care in Africa. Finally, the article suggests some responsive pastoral care approaches and interventions.

3. PRESUPPOSITIONS INFORMING PASTORAL CARE IN AFRICA

First, pastoral care in Africa is a Christian enterprise. Pastoral care (*cura animarum* – cure of souls) is care provided from a religious perspective, which, in our case, is from a Christian perspective (Louw 2015; McClure 2012). Pastoral care endeavours to help people cope with life's problems in a manner that enhances their spirituality and fosters meaning. It is provided by people whose motive derives from their Christian convictions. Over the years, pastoral care has been conceived as care provided from a Christian perspective (Louw 2015; McClure 2012). However, in recent years, within the so-called modern movement of pastoral care and counselling, pastoral care has been heavily based on psychological science (Louw 2015). This has resulted in the psychologisation of pastoral care. There has also been an increased fixation on pastoral care as a broad spiritual construct that refers to care from any kind of spirituality. Louw (2015) and Magezi (2020) argue that, within the North American context, it has become accepted that a person has the inner potential to develop self-healing, which should reflect a kind of democratic independence. The principle of the autonomous self has become the ABC for spirituality in caregiving. Spirituality has become a mode of "self-fixation", running the danger to reduce spirituality to mere psychological constructs. This has become a psychologised spirituality, which appears to have eclipsed the salvific dimension as the governing category in spirituality (Sperry 2002:3). Different to these developments, where pastoral care is viewed in broad spiritual terms, within Africa, pastoral care has remained an exclusively Christian practice (Magezi 2023). Writing from the context of broader practical theology under which pastoral care falls, Dreyer (2012:511) advises that "practical theology in South Africa focuses on the Christian religion", which differs from a broader and wider focus of lived religion in other parts of the world, for example, America and Europe.

Secondly, pastoral care in Africa should be positioned to deal with both modern post-colonial African problems, while simultaneusly attending to indigenous and traditional realities. Mucherera and Lartey (2017) note that

pastoral care in Africa has tended to focus on Africa of the past, while it ignored the current African dynamics and realities. This has left a vacuum. Magezi (2010:1) adds that

> theological reflection in Africa tends to be backward looking – focusing on how African people lived many decades ago. This approach leaves a reflection gap on present Africa.

The backward focus and reflection on pastoral care is often championed by intellectuals whose agenda is sometimes to provide an apology for African problems, by defending them via excavating practices from antiquity. This backward focus through history results in preoccupations with problems and approaches that are at a tangent with the current care needs and realities (Bowers 2009:94-100; Tiénou 1990:74-76). Therefore, pastoral care in Africa should be conceived in a way that focuses on contemporary Africa (Magezi 2016a). On the one hand, contemporary Africa entails an integrated understanding that embraces an African people's views, and lifestyles that resemble a Western lifestyle. On the other hand, they uphold deep indigenous, rural, and traditional lifestyles and practices. Knighton (2004:147) observes that the current African context is heterogenous and complex. This has always attracted the question: Who is an African? African pastoral care discussions have generally focused on indigenous Black Africans under the banner of *homo Africanus* (Ma Mpolo 2013), described as

> [s]anctity of life, [the] relation between illness, misfortune and sin, spirits and ancestors in the life of the community, and life experienced as a whole (Magezi 2016a:3).

This focus excludes White, Indian, and other Africans. Hence, Brunsdon (2019) suggest that there is a need to locate the notion of *homo africanus* within the fluidity of changes in Africa. This suggests extending critical reflections to include people, groups, and races that may not be "neatly" categorised under *homo africanus.*

Thirdly, in attempting to engage and deal with both modern and indigenous or traditional African concerns and care challenges, pastoral care in Africa should be positioned and equipped to provide care at a point "in-between" these situations. Pastoral care should deal with the dual or multiple commitments of many African people to their community and extended family expectations, on the one hand, and the Western individual lifestyle with economic limitations in urban contexts, on the other. This suggests, as Magezi (2016b) postulates, that African pastoral care should imaginatively provide care at the "in-between" life spaces. The in-between space is both literal and metaphorical. The space is physical, religious, psychological, emotional, economic, and relational. The individuals must honour their commitments of rural and urban

ethos; individualistic and communal values; shared community resources and individual resources; community and extended family religion, and individual persons' religious preferences. Conceived as a science and art, providing pastoral care at the "in-between" space entails imagination, negotiation, and skilful navigation. This suggests that pastoral care as a science entails taught methods, processes and tools. At the same time, it also calls for creativity, intuition, gutfeel, hunch, wisdom, and imagination, which is art. Eggleston (2017:1) observes that pastoral care

> is an art and a science; it is both at the same time. The minister may be called to shift from one to the other in a seamless manner, as a dancer moves from foot to foot.

Fourthly, pastoral care in Africa should engage and be influenced by a post-colonial and decolonisation stance to offer contextual pastoral care that emphasises community and relational connection. Burgeoning literature on decolonisation and post-colonial studies is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, Dreyer's (2017) and Lartey's (2022) descriptions of decolonisation and post-colonial theology, respectively, will be adopted to guide our discussion. In his article "Practical theology and the call for the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa", Dreyer (2017:3) surveys the decolonisation discussion and summarises that decolonisation and decoloniality point as "a science system developed in which Europe, and the West, took control of what counts as knowledge". Dreyer states that "[t]he knowledge produced within this Western knowledge system is assumed to be 'universal' and far superior to other knowledges". Decolonisation scholars such as Mignolo (2011) made this point. Decolonial scholars agree that:

> this dominant Western knowledge system continues to structure our understanding of what should be regarded as scientific knowledge, and it continues to exclude, marginalise, and even dehumanise those who see the world otherwise or who have a different view of knowledge and expertise … decolonisation of knowledge means to challenge and to unsettle this dominant Western knowledge system with its claim of universality and to expose its legacy of epistemic injustice (Dreyer 2017:3).

Beyond the reference to post-colonial factors as ordering relations regarding what followed after colonialism, post-colonial studies focus on analysing "the various strategies employed by colonisers to construct images of and to exercise dominance over the colonised" (Lartey 2022:664). They also refer to

> [t]he study of the agency of the colonised in making use of and transcending colonial strategies of dominance, subjugation and demeaning in order to articulate and assert their dignity, self-worth and identity, and to empower themselves (Lartey 2022:664).

The link between decolonisation and post-colonial studies is aptly summarised as

> [a]n important aspect of postcolonial criticism with one of its objectives as the 'de-colonising' of the thought, theory, and practice of colonised experience (Lartey 2022:663).

Thus, post-colonial activities seek to "critique, validate, recover, and construct (Lartey 2022:663).

Therefore, the reason for positioning pastoral care in Africa within post-colonial and decolonisation conversation is clear. The way in which pastoral care and counselling have been conceived, taught, and practised has been influenced by the Western individualistic philosophy and mode of doing things, including "one-on-one, fee-for-service, long-term therapy" (McClure 2011:2). McClure (2011:2) further observes that "individualism is the operative ideology in American society". This operative ideology is fed by social and institutional structures, including

> religious, political, economic, and cultural sources [that] shape the way Americans think about themselves and their relationships to one another and to their social institutions (McClure 2011:2).

The leading pastoral theologian Miller-McLemore (2018) makes the call to wrestle pastoral care from the individualistic approach. He expands Gerkin's metaphor of the "living human document" to the "living human web" to denote the interconnectedness of human beings and the importance of social contexts, among other factors. In his publication *Mechanics of the human soul*, Louw (2005) extensively delineated the emphasis on relational connectedness as a crucial dimension of pastoral care (*cura animarum* – cure of souls). Louw (2005) maintains that soulfulness or soul cure is intricately connected to our relationships. Therefore, a decolonised and post-colonial offering of African pastoral care, which should be constructed, must emphasise the deep connection of African people, communal relationships where an individual exists in a community, a systemic structure, and the relational web. Louw (1997) proposed that pastoral care in an African context should focus on a "systemic model and contextual approach" (Louw 1997:392). Magezi (2006, 2016a) describes in detail the healing role of the community.

Fifthly, pastoral care in Africa should take on a public dimension. The negative influence of Christianity on public problems in Africa, caused by its collusion with colonialism, is well documented. Similarly, the positive contribution of Christianity is well noted. The shift of pastoral care from merely focusing on the individual self to public problems is also well documented by pastoral theologians (Louw 2015; McClure 2012; Miller-McLemore 2004, 2005, 2018; Ramsay 2004, 2014). Miller-McLemore (2018:311) identifies three

developments that account for the rise of public pastoral care, namely the interest in congregational studies, the call for public theology, and the rise of liberation movements. Within the South African context, McMaster (2011:125) observes that pastoral care has been instrumental in making theology public. The call for pastoral care to be public has been amplified by the need to engage different social, governance, and economic problems, among other factors. The publication *African public theology* (2020) argues that theology in Africa should contribute towards the Africa we want, as articulated by the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Kunhiyop 2020:xiii).

4. DEFINITION AND CONTEXTUAL DEMARCATION OF PASTORAL CARE IN AFRICA

To restate the guiding question: What is African pastoral care or pastoral care in Africa? Considering the discussed presuppositions, I advance the following operational definition: Pastoral care in Africa refers to the holistic care of individuals, provided from a Christian spiritual perspective to people, who are located on the African continent, where they struggle with diverse life problems, including indigenous spirituality challenges, post-colonial struggles, and persisting after-effects of colonialism, to bring transformation, hope, purpose, and meaning in the lives of people, communities and society (author's definition).

In defining pastoral care, these elements require elucidation, which will be the focus below. First, holism refers to a situation where a human being is viewed as an integrated whole whereby the individual self, the nucleus family, the extended family, spiritual forces, the environment, and social structures are all interconnected. Until recently, African holism has only focused on the balance of spiritual forces, and the network of relationships between the living and the dead, including the cosmic elements. The different forces are supposed to be in balance for one to be in a healthy state (Berinyuu 1988). Health also means maintaining a balance of power within the network of relationships. Long (2000:20) notes that "like the Hebrews' [perspective], the African perspective on health is experiential and holistic". These forces entail having a strong systemic network or relationships.

However, this conception of holism lacks a specific connection to the notion of publics. The publics have been identified as being the "academy, the wider society and the church" (Tracy 1981), or the "academic, economic, religious and political sectors" (Stackhouse 1997). Benne (1995) added law as another public to Tracy and Stackhouse's publics. Smit (2013) identified four publics, namely "political, economic, civil society, and public opinion" (Day & Sebastian 2017:12).

Magezi (2022:11) argue that an important publics in Africa, namely traditional fora, is omitted. He observes that

> a public space that is conspicuous by its absence in African contexts and particularly in South Africa are traditional fora.

The addition of traditional fora as a publics extends the dimension's constituting holism on an individual. This means that pastoral care as holistic care should entail helping a person live a life of balance, even within the traditional fora. There must be a balance within the cosmic and spiritual forces and the human relationship networks, as well as a balance within traditional fora and spaces such as national shrines. A breakdown in relations results in sickness and ill-health. Healing is peace with everything. Turmoil and conflicts with social and spiritual forces result in sickness.

Secondly, it is imperative to clarify the Christian emphasis of pastoral care. As argued earlier, in some contexts, pastoral care is conceived broadly as care from a broad religious perspective (McClure 2012) or spiritual care (Louw 2017). Referring to pastoral care reflection at the joint conference of the International Council on Pastoral Care and Counselling (ICPCC) and the European Council on Pastoral Care and Counselling (ECPCC) to be held in 2025, the ICPCC described one of the foci in their advert as spirituality, which is "the centre of pastoral care" that will be used as a reflection "searchlight to define the identity of the pastoral education movement" (ICPCC 2024:n.p.). The reference to pastoral care as care provided from a broad religious perspective or spiritual care begs the question: Which religious care and which spirituality? In other contexts such as the USA's Pastoral Education movement, pastoral care refers to care from any religious perspective, while spirituality relates to a broad connection to the sacred. Puchalski and Ferrell (2010:25) explain that

> [s]piriuality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to nature and to the significant or sacred.

The understanding of spirituality to include other religions is divergent to African pastoral care. As indicated earlier, Dreyer (2012) observes that the practical theology discipline (pastoral care) focuses on care from a Christian perspective. Referring to practical theology, Dreyer (2012:511) states that "practical theology in South Africa focuses on Christian religion". Magezi (2020:4) equally maintains that pastoral care in Africa is performed from a Christian spirituality perspective.

The Christian spirituality stance in pastoral care is a commonly held position, despite the extension of its meaning in other contexts to include other religions and spiritualities. Louw (2017:2) maintains that "in the tradition of pastoral caregiving, the connection to healing and salvation is paramount". Insightfully, Firet (1977:25) advises that

> [h]uman activity is not the central focus of the pastoral act and healing. Rather, it is about a spiritual and praxis activity that represents God's salvific presence, which comes to humans through the ministry of an intermediator by means of his Word.

Thus, the pastoral care task in Africa is a Christian task, even though the target may be broader.

Thirdly, the location of pastoral care in Africa is the African continent. The geographical positioning is crucial. The Black and White people who are geographically located and entangled in African context problems have different struggles and care needs to their counterparts in other places such as Europe and the USA. This can be illustrated by movements such as Black theology and feminist theology, where the focus and conversations are clearly nuanced, if not outright different. For instance, Kee (2008) explains that, while Black theology arose as a response to Black consciousness, in South Africa, it is a critique of power; in the UK, it is a political theology of Black culture, and in the USA, it is influenced by Black power and the critique of White racism. Another example is the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, commonly called the Circle, which is a feminist theological movement. These women clearly differentiate themselves and their problems from other women theologians in the West. In their historical survey of the Circle, Fiedler and Hofmeyer (2011:57) report that it is

> inaccurate to suggest that the Circle is Western in its orientation, and that it only tackles problems that are relevant to the West. Mercy Amba Oduyoye was informed by the African context regarding what was possible, as well as what was already being done, in Africa.

Thus, pastoral care in Africa deals with care problems that are particular to people positioned and enmeshed in contextual dynamics on the African continent (geographical location). This includes existential life problems of Black, White, men, women, LGBTIQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual), and others.

Fourthly, pastoral care in Africa is situated to understand the diverse life problems and struggle such as indigenous spirituality challenges, the post-colonial struggle, and remnants of colonialism. African indigenous spiritualty is a major struggle among Black people. Mtetwa (1996:24) aptly explains that

> [o]ne of the most remarkable and tangible dimensions of African spirituality relates to the unique notion of communality and collective solidarity that the African society exhibits in all spheres of life. There is a profound sense of interdependence, from the extended family to the entire community. In a very real sense, everybody is interrelated, including relations between the living and those who have departed.

This connectedness, in some instances, causes problems. Magezi (2006) observes that some African religious and spiritual practices are incompatible with Christianity. The divergence in world views between Christianity and African indigenous religion results in tension and turmoil at a personal, family, and community level. The non-Christian community may expect a Christian individual to participate in rituals that conflict with Christian values; yet, refusing to participate will cause the extended family and community to label the person as a social deviant, and will lead to ostracisation. Post-colonial challenges such as race, economic problems, governance, and others constitute integrated pastoral care praxis challenges. Therefore, pastoral care in Africa should assess these different problems, in order to understand how such social and institutional realities affect an individual, and then intervene appropriately.

Fifthly, pastoral care in Africa, like any other pastoral care task, aims to bring transformation, hope, purpose, and meaning in the lives of people, communities, and society. As discussed earlier, Louw (2017:2) sums this up, by stating that

> [t]he problems confronting humans are not limited to merely physical, economic, and material. Because people are also spiritual beings, the cure that they seek must also enable them to deal meaningfully with those problems that affect their daily lives.

Therefore, faith and hope are critical dimensions of the pastoral caregiving task. Louw (2015:30) concludes that,

> [w]ithout hope, there is no real spiritual healing and humane modes of helping people in their quest for meaning in suffering. Hope establishes human dignity as the dynamics between the quest for acknowledgement (identity) and purposeful living (teleology).

From these definitions and conceptions of pastoral care in Africa, it is important to discern some principles to guide pastoral care practice.

5. TOWARDS PASTORAL CARE PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The understanding of pastoral care as care for the person as a whole and a "wholism" or holistic world view suggests a pastoral practice that employs a systemic approach. The model should draw from the natural potential of African people, namely communality and interrelationships (Metz 2007). Skhakhane (1995:106) proposes that community and relationships are "not a pious behaviour but rather a commitment and involvement in a manner that gives meaning to life". In view of this perspective and the above discussion, the following principles are identified and proposed: relationality, participation, presence, consultation, joint exploration and collective decision-making, cooperation, and contribution.

5.1 Relationality and relationship

Relationality is a vector towards other people and vice versa. It is more than a social gathering or solidarity. It relates to one's connection or being knitted together with other people. Relatedness entails the acceptance of other people. Relationality provides a window or lenses through which people can perceive an individual as "concerned with" and "about" other people and their problems or not. Thus, relationality is intertwined with feeling and showing respect for the other, a community obedience, and conformance to the community's social norms, and embracing other people within the family or community in life's situations.

Practically, relationality entails respecting, valuing, and embracing other people's advice. This advice is often provided by *ibandla* (isiZulu), which refers to a community of people gathered or meeting to discuss or address a problem. When a good or bad situation occurs, people gather as an expression of relationality. The gathering is an indicative sign that "people care" and "are concerned" "for you" or "about you". In return, the person or family whose problem is under consideration reciprocates this relationship vector by embracing, respecting, and valuing the meeting's advice and decision. At surface value, it appears to be merely an expression of an extended family relationship or solidarity. However, at a deeper level, it demonstrates a directional vector to the person or family desiring support in a difficult situation. This phenomenon or practice can be illustrated by the following real-life story.

A specific women used not to attend other people's funerals and, in the few cases which she did attend, she never participated in the funeral's chores allocated to women. Sadly, one of her nuclear family members passed on. Some people boycotted the funeral, while those who attended refused to participate in the cooking chores at the funeral. The crisis was resolved through the chief's intervention not to repay an "act of bad deeds" with "bad deeds".

At the funeral, the chief addressed the people, emphasising the importance of "good", relating and acting (relational vector) with other people. The "bad" acts of this lady related to her disregard of the community and group-relating virtues. Often, a bereavement process is either eased or worsened by one's relational dynamics. One's acts of "bad" relating and co-existence with other people generate a similar response. Care for the person is a function of one's relating with other people. In view of this, pastoral care practitioners need to empower people to navigate the relational dynamics between Christian values and the art of virtuous community living. Metz (2007) theorises that group identity and solidarity are key defining features of African philosophy and existence.

5.2 Participation

Participation entails active involvement in discussions or tasks relating to the problem affecting the person or community. It is about being genuinely and wholeheartedly present in participating in tasks, offering unselfish engagement, and the absence of superficiality in helping. Participation is important in times of crises or challenge such as death, sickness, and loss of employment. Participation includes attending consultation meetings, being present at the person's location, contributing material resources, and accompanying the person, among other actions. Care in this instance entails being present in a person's location and environment because one cares, providing practical support such as material resources where needed, showing sensitively and wisely providing counsel in group conversations. The pastoral practitioner, and especially pastors, are expected to participate. Failure to do so would mean to alienate oneself from the community where it exists.

5.3 Presence

Presence relates to being aware of, and attending to other people's problems and activities, such as joyous celebrations and during life's challenges. Currently, an individual is expected to be not only physically present, but to also be meaningfully "there" through "giving of oneself". It means prioritising the individual and their family in situations that require accompaniment. Being present includes being actively involved in the activities related to the problems at hand, offering and providing time to be available for the other, giving of oneself to others for their good, and connecting with other people. Presence communicates that one values other people. Presence is related and connected to participation in that an individual is expected to meaningfully participate in finding solutions to other people's problems by contributing resources, thoughts, and ideas, rather than being present in body (physical presence) only.

5.4 Consultation

African consultation is a group or community meeting, which is different from the Western notion of consultation, where an individual visits a psychologist for counselling in a consultation room. Consultation involves collective inquiry and being vulnerable through subjecting oneself to the group (family and community). By participating in a consultative process, one is inviting other people (community or extended family) to advise, make proposals, and then make a group decision. In turn, the group decision will be binding. An individual is expected to conform, otherwise s/he becomes a community deviant. Human beings are not considered to be whole on their own; hence, to overcome this limitation, one needs a group to make a sound decision and judgement. Consultation is both recognition and acknowledgement of other human beings and that we exist in the same space. My problems or challenges today will also be your challenges tomorrow. Hence, a solution to one's challenge is explored and negotiated as a group. Thus, a group decision is binding. The decision should be accepted, respected, and upheld. One's individuality is surrendered to the community or group.

5.5 Joint exploration and collective decision-making

Joint exploration entails individuals combining efforts and "putting heads together" to seek a way to address a problem or avoid pitfalls in decision-making processes. By working together as a group during a crisis, or when facing threats or risks, healing blockages are identified, and ways and approaches of addressing the situation are proposed. This helps mitigate, avert, sidestep, brainstorm, and pool resources when a crisis occurs. Joint exploration is both an approach to solving a problem, and a space for soliciting help and guidance. Robust discussion and critical evaluation of options is done during the joint exploration process. Joint exploration is also a space for acknowledging the community and family's support. Once a decision is jointly made, there is a shared responsibility for its outcome.

5.6 Cooperation and contribution

Cooperation is a space or forum created by the family or community to discuss and provide an opportunity to an individual to solicit group help in times of challenges. As such, both affected and unaffected individuals cooperate to address the problem. The cooperation includes contributing resources and obtaining expert advice from experienced and knowledgeable community people.

These principles are closely related. They could be viewed as saying the same thing by using different words. Indeed, a pastoral caregiver seeks to understand the simplicity and complexity in deciphering African communality

and interrelationships. A caregiver is meant to hermeneutically discern the nuances. Understanding the nuances and fabric of the problems at play requires one to understand African people's world view. Magezi's (2007:664) advice in the article *Pastoral counselling: Towards a diagnostic and interpretational approach in Africa* is guiding. He observes that the role of world view in African pastoral diagnosis is under-emphasised. He states that the "centrality of the African worldview in diagnosis is under-emphasised, and yet, stories are analysed based on the worldview" (Magezi 2007:664). In his article, Mclure (2011:2) criticises the role of the individualism approach, which is an operative ideology in the West that has tended to influence pastoral care. This operative ideology constitutes a world view in performing pastoral care.

Thus, in Africa, and especially among Black Africans, life with its pains and problems is lived together in a community of others. This living and existing together is connected by complex threads and features that define one's personhood and solidarity with others. A person cannot deny who she or he is. Pastoral care practitioners need to listen, observe, and empower people to live as an authentic African Christian. Living authentically is characterised by tensions, negotiations, adaptations, rejections, reconciliations, and co-existence of Christian and African indigenous world views. For this reason, the art of pastoral care should be amplified over its science. Much as taught methods and procedures are important (science), incarnational imagination, creativity, and wisdom (art) are more vital.

6. CONCLUSION

This discussion reflects that pastoral care in Africa in its "being" (ontology) is a Christian endeavour that intends to bring hope and meaning holisticslly to individuals on the African continent, where a complex web of problems conspire to cause ill-health and sickness. The role of the community is pivotal to bringing care and healing. Therefore, in practice, pastoral care in Africa should function as a science and art of guiding people to live life in the community in a manner that brings fulfilment, peace, hope, and meaning.

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