Pastoral counselling and the healing potential of nature: An exploratory study

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PREFACE

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ABSTRACT

The research contributes to the field of pastoral counselling by exploring the notion of a collaborative approach between pastoral counselling and ecotherapy. Ecotherapy denotes a field in psychology interested in the healing potential of nature. A collaborative pastoral approach revolves around three movements that entail self-identification, partner identification, and the identification of usable strategies which can then be deployed in a collaborative approach.

The investigation is driven by four main questions, namely:

- What is the nature and scope of pastoral counselling?
- How are the emotional and spiritual healing effects of nature described in ecotherapy?
- How does Scripture view the relationship between humans and nature?
- How does the possible emotional and spiritual healing potential of nature as suggested by ecotherapy and the Scriptures, relate hermeneutically to pastoral counselling in order to inform a possible eco-pastoral approach?

The study includes an investigation of Scriptural passages that point to a symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature (Ps. 104; 1 Ki. 19:9-18; Mk. 4:35-41; Rom. 8:18-30) that reminds us of the wholeness of the Trinity. It concludes that ecotherapy indeed offers insights that can be incorporated in what can be best described as an eco-pastoral counselling approach.

Key words:

pastoral counselling, nature, healing, ecotherapy, eco-pastoral counselling

OPSOMMING

Die navorsing dra by tot die veld van pastorale berading deur die idee van samewerking tussen pastorale berading en ekoterapie te ondersoek. Ekoterapie dui op 'n veld in sielkunde wat die genesende potensiaal van die natuur ondersoek. Die samewerking tussen pastoraat en ander benaderings tot hulpverlening wentel om drie bewegings wat selfidentifikasie, vennootidentifikasie en die identifisering van bruikbare strategieë behels wat dan in ’n samewerkende benadering ontplooi kan word.

Die ondersoek ontvou aan die hand van die vier hoofdoelwitte, naamlik:

• Wat is die aard en omvang van pastorale berading?

• Hoe word die emosionele en geestelike genesende potensiaal van die natuur in ekoterapie beskryf?

• Hoe beskou die Skrif die verhouding tussen die mense en die natuur?

• Hoe hou die moontlike emosionele en geestelike genesingspotensiaal van die natuur, soos voorgestel deur ekoterapie en vanuit die perspektief van die Skrif, hermeneuties verband met pastorale berading, en hoe kan dit 'n moontlike eko-pastorale benadering ondersteun?

Die studie bestudeer Skrifgedeeltes wat dui op 'n simbiotiese verhouding tussen mense en die natuur (Ps 104; Rom 8:18-30) wat herinner aan die heelheid van die Drie-eenheid. Dit kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat ekoterapie inderdaad insigte bied wat geïnkorporeer kan word in wat die beste beskryf kan word as 'n eko-pastorale beradingsbenadering.

Sleutelwoorde:

pastorale berading, natuur, genesing, ekoterapie, eko-pastorale berading

GLOSSARY

Pastoral counselling: As a unique Christian approach to counselling, based on the love of God, it wants to build faith, empower people to overcome challenges, establish healing and growth, and live an abundant life (Brunsdon, 2017:111). In this study, the notion of counselling both includes and transcends pastoral care in the generic sense of the word in so far as pastoral counselling denotes a planned and strategic form of pastoral care, in this case, integrating the healing potential of nature.

Nature: Theological references to 'nature' like winds, seas, fire, plants, animals, water, droughts, and mountains, involves the beauty and threats as well as ethical demands of nature (Conradie, 2020:1, 7). The Collins Dictionary (2022) uses concepts like "the whole system of existence, forces and events of the physical world" that are not "controlled or caused by people" to describe nature. In this study, *nature* is perceived as 'all' non-human existence in the whole cosmos and the earth that are created and sustained through the order and wisdom of the Creator God.

Healing: Healing means to overcome impairment and restore wholeness, to advance beyond previous challenges and situations. It involves change, for instance, change in perception, insight and attitude, and meaningful interpretation (Clinebell & McKeever, 2011:4; Louw, 2010:80). Spiritual healing is found in the presence of God; He is the source of peace (*shalom*), healing (*habitus*), and wholeness (*telos*, meaning) (Louw, 2013: 2, 7).

Ecotherapy: A key feature of ecopsychology and an umbrella term for methods where nature forms a central part of physical and psychological healing (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009:18). The main objective is to develop a "reciprocal relationship with nature to ensure both psychological and environmental well-being" (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1).

Eco-pastoral counselling: In this study, pastoral counselling constitutes a collaboration between ecotherapy and the traditional pastoral counselling approach.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AAT	Animal Assisted Therapy
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus
AMP	Amplified Bible
ART	Attention Restoration Theory
CPE	Clinical Pastoral Education
EEG	Electro Encephalograph Apparatus
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity
KJV	King James Version
LENS	Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NIRS	Near-Infrared Spectroscopy
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRF	National Research Foundation
RTF	Return to Freedom’
NWU	North-West University
WHO	World Health Organisation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study aims to contribute to the field of practical theology and pastoral care. It is embedded in a practical theological paradigm from which the notion of eco-counselling will be explored with a view on its deployment in a pastoral context. It aligns with Louw's (2017:1) notion that practical theology should be viewed as a "life science". According to Louw, Friedrich Schleiermacher was responsible for the initial paradigm shifts in practical theology which saw the discipline move from a hierarchical and clerical paradigm "to the empirical dimension of human experience and religious experiences", hence transforming practical theology to "the art of overcoming the distance between human life and what it is meant to be" (Louw, 2017:2).

The practical theological paradigm shifts from *fides quaerens actum* (faith seeking actions) and *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) towards *fides quaerens vivendi* (faith seeking lifestyles), were caused by a number of reasons, *inter alia*, "the complexity of life within 'practical realism', the digitalisation of life and the notion of psycho-social well-being in positive psychology with the focus on resilience in survival life strategies" (Louw 2017:3).

Embedded in the paradigm of *fides quaerens vivendi*, the notion of ecotherapy is explored in the sub-field of pastoral care and counselling. At its core, pastoral care and counselling are concerned with life, more specifically, abundant life (Jn. 10:10) as made possible through the salvatory work of Christ (cf. Brunsdon 2017:111). The classic summation of pastoral care as "life care" (*Glaubenshilfe als Lebenshilfe)*[1] is expressive of pastoral care's orientation towards life and the enhancement of its quality via spiritual healing.

1.1.1 Pastoral care and counselling

In the Christian tradition, pastoral care is the most familiar form of intervention towards spiritual and emotional healing – and eventually physical well-being. Pastoral care can be defined as:

> [T]he expression and representation of the sensitivity and compassion of the Scripture's understanding and portrayal of God's encounter, intervention, interaction and involvement in our being human (Louw, 2010:73).

To add to the above, McClure (2012:270) defines pastoral care as:

[1] The idea that pastoral care, or soul care, involves and influences our total being, hence also our social dimension, was advocated strongly by Tacke (1975) and Josuttis (1980).

> [A] form of practical theology specified as an intentional enacting and embodying of a theology of presence, particularly in response to suffering or need, as a way to increase among people the love of God and neighbour.

Pastoral counselling, as a longer term and systematic form of pastoral care, believes that growth towards mature faith enables positive responses to existential life challenges. As such, it offers a unique Christian approach to helping and care. Pastoral counselling utilises unique resources such as the Word of God, and prayer, and it relies on the work of the Holy Spirit during the pastoral encounter (Brunsdon, 2019:3-4).

This study is interested in broadening the scope of traditional resources for pastoral counselling by investigating the role of nature in pastoral counselling, and establishing the extent to which the notion of ecotherapy can contribute to what is imagined as eco-pastoral counselling. The broadening of the scope of traditional resources for pastoral counselling will entail what Osmer (2008:163) refers to as "cross-disciplinary dialogue". In this study, the cross-disciplinary dialogue will happen between pastoral theology and ecotherapy. One of the more recent models for cross-disciplinary dialogue is found in the notion of *transversality* which makes dialogue between different disciplines possible (Osmer, 2008:173). The study will align with the meaning of transversality as "lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting and converging without achieving coincidence" (Osmer, 2008:170). In this way, the study hopes to remain true to the theological character of pastoral theology in conversation with ecotherapy.

1.1.2 Ecotherapy

Humans and nature were created together, and as a species, humans have spent millennia living in intimate relation with nature. We are biologically programmed to seek connection with nature (Greenleaf *et al.,* 2014:166). The *biophilia hypothesis* affirms the "inherent human need to affiliate deeply and closely with the natural environment" (Clinebell, 2013). Unfortunately, today more than half of the 8 billion people on earth are living in urban surroundings. More than 80% of many nations' populations are compressed in large towns or cities. In North America, people spend 90% of their time indoors (Harper *et al.,* 2019:45-46). Due to industrialisation and technological growth, people have become disconnected from the natural world. In this regard, Clinebell (2013) refers to "eco-alienation" and calls it a Western society epidemic. Others like Louw (cited in Clinebell) call it a "nature deficit disorder" (Clinebell, 2013). Corazon *et al.* (2010) affirm that time spent in nature improves mental and physical well-being as well as spiritual health. Nature, invited into the therapeutic environment, can rekindle the relationship that was evident during most of human evolution (Sundaram, 2014:52).

Ecotherapy, which was introduced during the mid-90s, is the umbrella term for physical and psychological healing and growth that is nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth (Clinebell, 2013; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009:18). Ecotherapy activities range from horticultural therapy and animal-assisted therapy to eco-dreamwork and wilderness therapy. There are several ecotherapy practices like the Gothenburg Botanical Garden in Sweden and the Healing Forest Garden in Nacadia, Denmark, to mention a few examples (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1,5; Corazon *et al*., 2010:33).

Literature shows a positive relation between nature and pastoral counselling. Louw (1998:112,116-117) states that healing cannot be separated from nature. Humanity and creation are inseparable concepts. God is in creation. The earth is seen as a symbol of God's presence and glory (Louw, 1998:112). According to the ecological theologian, Sallie McFague (cited by Clinebell, 1994:210), alienation from the body of God's creation is not only linked with alienation from our bodies, but also from our minds, souls, and relationships.[2] The Forest Church movement has a fundamental belief that time spent in nature can facilitate a meeting with God. Their focus is on restoring the relationship between God, human beings, and nature (identified by Brueggemann), instead of the view of secular movements which aim to restore only the two-way relationship between humans and nature (Williams, 2018:463). There is a need to guide people to rethink and renew their relationship with the biosphere through ecological awareness, communion, and caring (Clinebell, 2013).

In the Scriptures, nature is referred to in many ways and contexts. The Old Testament was written from a perspective where humans enjoyed creation in God's presence (Louw, 1998:117). When God made covenants with His people, He used elements of nature. He used the rainbow with Noah (Gen. 9:11) and Mount Sinai with Moses and the Israelites (Ex.19).

Romans 1:20 confirms that nature speaks of who God is: "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse". In the New Testament, Jesus uses nature in His spiritual teachings as well as when healing the sick, for example, He mixed saliva with sand and put it on the blind man's eyes (Jn. 9:6).

In this study, the potential of ecotherapy will be explored within the framework of pastoral counselling as it appears to support and promote healing and strengthen spiritual wellness, through the relationship between God, humans and nature. Clinebell (1994) calls for an

2 Rooted in the Christian tradition of nature engagement, the Forest Church movement wants to strengthen their relationship with God in nature and through their connection with nature.

enlivenment of pastoral theology by integrating a green theology, moving away from the traditional Western hyper-individualistic, non-organic orientation, towards a focus on an organic, systemic approach (1994:210). Personal as well as social and structural components form an integral part of healing, and well-being is seen holistically and corporately (McClure, 2012:276-277).

1.1.3 Eco-theology

The previous paragraphs discussed the applicability of nature in consideration of healing. The implication was a renewed perspective with regard to health in the light of Scriptural revelation and reflections from eco-theologians like Sally McFague (1990) and Louw (1998). As a theological discipline involved with growing ecological concerns, eco-theology could potentially interface with the focus on nature in a pastoral paradigm. In line with this mindset, a short exposition of key concepts within eco-theology follows.

Eco-theology emerged during the early 1970s in response to growing ecological concerns. During the first two decades, eco-theology mainly focussed on the relationship between humankind and nature, giving renewed attention to the doctrine of creation, anthropology, and environmental ethics. Since 1990, a plethora of themes and underlying problems regarding diverse geographical contexts, expressed in multiple languages, have been addressed (Conradie, 2020:1-2).

One of the themes addressed in eco-theology is ecological hermeneutics, a Scriptural interpretation of constructive discourse on Christian eco-theology, sustainability, environmental ethics, and climate justice (Conradie, 2020: 9). Well known scholars in this field include Terence Fretheim, an eco-theological scholar interested in the Old Testament's views of nature, and Barbara Rossing, an ecological interpreter of the Book of Revelations (Phikala, 2016:38).

Liturgy, worship, and the environment in particular, is another theme addressed by many, including David Rhoads and Paul Santmire (Phikala, 2016:138). Worship enables people to see the world in the 'Light of the world', to see God's beloved creation through His eyes (Conradie, 2020:9).

Lutheran theologians refer to "eco-reformation" to describe the work they do to promote environmental responsibility (Phikala, 2016:137). In the same way as with the Protestant Reformation, a deep change of mind is needed with regard to ecology. David Rhoads, an influential scholar in eco-theology, wrote a framework for eco-theology in which he built a Lutheran theological basis for a "paradigm shift" from a "human-centred" worldview to a

"creation-centred", and ultimately, theocentric one (Phikala, 2016:136). Lutheran eco-reformation values Luther's theological views about the cross as a reminder that God is present in times of suffering and despair in ecology (Phikala, 2016:140).

Organisations like the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (that equip churches to care for creation and encourage members to become more theologically grounded in teachings on human dignity, and their relationship with the land), the Lutherans Restoring Creation website, the Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods (LENS) and the Climate Programme of the Lutheran Church of Finland are actively involved with eco-reformation (Phikala, 2016:135, 138).

Today, eco-theology still faces many challenges, such as the persistent thinking that humans and nature are separate; tensions between religion and science, i.e. the distrust of science for knowledge and problemsolving; the connection of nature with threats, darkness, and irrationality, as opposed to the romanticisation of nature (Kearns, 2004:181-182).

1.2 State of the current research

A literature search on the integration of ecotherapy and pastoral counselling was conducted using North-West University's NWU library facilities. This included the NWU Library Catalogue as well as the following databases: EBSCOhost (Elite Database for Academic Search), SACat (the national catalogue of books and journals in South Africa), SAePublications (South African journal articles), NEXUS (the database of the National Research Foundation [NRF] providing current and completed research dissertations and theses), and ProQUEST (international theses and dissertations).

Consequently, the search yielded a paucity of literature on such integration, apart from the references cited in the introduction. Available literature, however, suggests that humans and nature function in a reciprocal relationship where both the well-being of people and the environment can enhance one another (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1). Furthermore, most current studies emphasise human's responsibility towards ecology, specifically regarding issues like climate change and other natural disasters (Eaton, 2003; Seo, 2020). While few studies address the healing potential of nature towards humans, especially in a pastoral framework (Magalhães, 2010).

This points to a *lacuna* in pastoral studies which focus on nature as an integral component of pastoral counselling (Magalhães, 2010:14, 108; Seo, 2020:119-220). Considering this dearth of information, this study set out to explore the notion of ecotherapy from a practical theological perspective to probe its use in what is imagined as eco-pastoral counselling.

1.3 Research questions

The main research question of this study was formulated as follows:

> How does the notion that nature can contribute to emotional and spiritual healing as applied in ecotherapy relate to pastoral counselling?

The subsidiary research questions were:

- What is the nature and scope of pastoral counselling?
- How is the emotional and spiritual healing potential of nature described in ecotherapy?
- How does Scripture view nature as a space for God's involvement with humans?
- How does the possible emotional and spiritual healing potential of nature (as suggested by ecotherapy and the Scriptures) relate to pastoral counselling in order to inform a possible eco-pastoral approach?

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study was to determine whether the notion that 'nature can contribute to emotional and spiritual healing', as applied in ecotherapy, relates positively to pastoral counselling.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Describe the nature and scope of pastoral counselling.
- Determine the healing potential of nature as described in ecotherapy on emotional and spiritual healing.
- Investigate selected passages from Scripture on nature as a space for God's involvement with humans.
- Evaluate how the possible emotional and spiritual healing potential of nature (as suggested by ecotherapy and the Scriptures) can relate to pastoral counselling in order to inform a possible eco-pastoral approach.

1.5 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study was that nature, as applied in ecotherapy, can contribute positively to pastoral counselling and thereby inform a possible eco-pastoral approach.

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 A practical theological approach

The research intends to contribute to the field of pastoral care. In the excerpt below, Brunsdon (2017:111) summarises the intention and unique character of pastoral care:

> Pastoral care denotes a unique Christian approach to helping, that involves both informal and specialised acts of care. These acts are based upon the love of God, aimed at building faith that empowers the fellow human being to conquer challenges and embrace a life abundant.

In her definition of pastoral care, McClure (2014:270) indicates that pastoral care emanates from practical theology:

> Pastoral care is a form of practical theology, specified as an intentional enacting and embodying of a theology of presence, particularly in response to suffering or need, as a way to increase among people the love of God and of a neighbour.

Pastoral care and counselling thus function within the epistemological paradigm of practical theology. Practical theology acts as the "theoretical engine room" from where theory for pastoral care and counselling is generated (Brunsdon, 2017:107). Practical theology reflects critically on current faith practices in the light of the Scriptures in order to promote growth in the praxis of the faith community (Müller, 2005:73). It is concerned with questions about human actions and intentions as well as norms and values that direct actions (Louw, 2010:74). In practical theology, the Scriptures function as the 'lens' that guide people to a better experience and understanding of the work of God in the world (Ward, 2017:48).

Scriptural engagement requires consideration of the relationship between the reader of the Bible, the text, and the Holy Spirit (Bennett, 2013:17). The Holy Spirit was an active participant in the writing of the Scriptures; hence, the Spirit, as an immanent Author, assumes an authoritative role in the interpretation and revelation of the text (Bennett, 2013:17). Context shapes the way the text is seen and understood (Bennett, 2013:21). It would include concepts like the tradition of the church, interaction with other disciplines, and social paradigms (Rowland & Bennett, 2006:14). Rowland and Bennett (2006:10) describe context as

“interweaving threads of tradition within the web of own life experiences and structures of life”. Bennett (2013:29) employs the expression “playing with” the text to demonstrate an open, actively involved approach to reading text. Organic use and contemplation of Scripture cannot end with reflection, but requires internalisation and intentional response that comprises action that works towards transformation to the image of the incarnated Divine Word (Rowland & Bennett, 2006:29).

Swinton and Mowat (2016:73) describe practical theology as a hermeneutical, correlational, critical, and theological discipline. It wants to interpret human beings from a critical hermeneutic of suspicion, in the way they encounter their world. It utilises different perspectives, including the current situation, Christian tradition, and one or more sources of knowledge. Since it is concerned with practice and context, it involves and integrates academic disciplinary areas of the social sciences e.g. sociology, psychology, and political theories (Ward, 2017:176).

During the last three decades, new developments in practical theology benefitted the character and broadened the scope of pastoral counselling (Miller-McLemore, 2014:4). New developments that contribute towards the theological framework of this study include the systems- and eco-theological approaches, and the concept of ‘the critical stance of the covenantal relationship in healing’.

1.6.1.1 Healing and the systems- and eco-theological approaches

The pastoral encounter is a contextual event that takes place within a systemic setting, involving both spiritual and existential life (Louw, 1998:74). Earlier, interventions in pastoral counselling primarily displayed an intra-psychic dynamic that included autonomy and self-realisation (Louw, 1998:18). Currently, pastoral theology pursues a more holistic approach towards wellness, accommodating more dimensions, including the environment (Herholdt, 2008:184). A *systemic approach* in a postmodern society recognises the nurturing quality of creation which creates room for an *ecological approach* (Louw, 1998:110-112). Eco theologians like Conradie (2005:1) emphasise the need for an eco-theological approach to address the challenges of our time. He believes it offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation to rediscover the place of humanity in creation. Other exponents like Gebara, Ruether and Berry propose a theocentric theology where the presence of God and His sustaining wisdom and creativity can be grasped through the “evolution and dynamics of the universe and the earth” (Eaton, 2003:126).

1.6.1.2 Healing and the covenantal relationship

Healing and growth in pastoral counselling takes place within a covenantal relationship with God. Theologians have different ways of referring to this concept. Fowler (cited in Louw,1998:97) mentions a “calling from God to people for a partnership”. Louw (2010:73) refers to “God in an encounter, intervention, interaction or involvement with the human being”; and Ward (2017:6) talks about a “relational engagement” in an ongoing and regular encounter with God through prayer and worship. In an enriching fellowship with God, in His divine presence, humans can experience His grace and His identification with their suffering. God reveals meaning that can turn into hope and generate faith (Ward, 2017:45, 49). Clinebell (1994:46) suggests that healing involves the opening of oneself to the living presence of a loving God that is available in the here and now, including experiences of nurturing bonding with God’s creation. According to Groom (cited in Bennett *et al.,* 2018:30), God discloses Himself to us through the ‘whole created order’. The covenantal relationship of God with His people is a critical component of healing in pastoral counselling. In this study where the contribution of nature towards healing in pastoral counselling is researched, the covenantal relationship between God and His people is a pivotal part of the theoretical foundation.

1.6.2 Research context

An exploratory literature study was employed as the methodology for data gathering. The focus was thus not on a specific context or culture, but directed towards nature and God’s creation in particular as described from the vantage point of different disciplines.

1.6.3 Data collection

An exploratory literature research approach investigates new ideas or phenomena that can potentially lead to the formulation of presuppositions or theories. It is often involved with under-researched topics and can pave the way for further research (Jaison, 2018:123-124). An exploratory literature approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the philosophy and epistemology of healing in nature (ecotherapy) in a pastoral framework. Academic books, academic journals, postgraduate dissertations, and other reliable media resources were consulted to obtain relevant data.

Selected Scriptural references were employed to gain insight into the relationship between humans and nature, as well as how God intends nature to support emotional and spiritual healing. The texts investigated in this study included 1 Kings 19:8-19, Psalm 104, Mark. 4:35-41 and Romans 8:18-30. The selected Scriptural passages are concerned with God’s presence in nature and the way His people experience His presence in creation. The passages

describe the relationship of God with both His people and nature, specifically during challenging times of pain and suffering that involved natural elements such as wind and storm.

A socio-cultural historical analysis was applied to investigate the historical significance of the pericope, since God reveals Himself and His will progressively throughout history and in all the books of the Bible (Van Rensburg *et al*., 2014:208). The study seeks to understand God's revelation about a specific topic (relationship between nature and humans) throughout the history of the Bible.

1.6.4 Data analysis

Data analysis in exploratory literature or document research denotes the process where numerous documents are critically examined. It represents a hermeneutical process without statistical outcomes in mind (Bennett *et al.,* 2018:144). Specific themes, identified beforehand, guide the process of interpreting information gained from the literature study. Themes include basic epistemologies, philosophy, and current strategies in practice (Dillen & Mager, 2014:19). In the context of the study, the philosophy and strategies applied in ecotherapy, was considered in a critical way in order to determine whether it could possibly be integrated with the epistemologies of pastoral counselling as foundational partner.

1.6.5 Application of findings: Towards a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling

Data were collected with a view of integrating some of the principles of ecotherapy within a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling. In light of the findings of the cross-disciplinary dialogue between ecotherapy and pastoral counselling, the study endeavoured to identify some preliminary markers for a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling.

In this regard, the study was mindful of Brunsdon's (2014) notion of "collaborative pastoral care". This integration approach denotes a form of interdisciplinary conversation interested in the strategies, and not necessarily the epistemologies, of other disciplines (Brunsdon, 2014:4). The approach to collaboration is cognisant of safeguarding the character and spiritual nature of pastoral counselling. It rests on the thinking of Mowat and Swinton (2006:91-94) on collaborative work in practical theology, namely *hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness* (Mowat & Swinton, 2006:9). *Hospitality* encompasses one of the fruits of the Spirit that involves 'kindness and acceptance' towards the collaborative partner, implicating an openness, yet primary concern to preserve theology (Mowat & Swinton, 2006:91–94). C*onversion* points towards submittance of the other discipline, whereby it is "deeply challenged and changed" to fit into the theological perspective (Mowat & Swinton, 2006:92). *Critical faithfulness* implicates

the essence of the divine potential of Scripture and the working of the Holy Spirit in the process of a collaborative endeavour (Mowat & Swinton, 2006:93).

This study is interested in the possible integration of approaches from ecotherapy in the practice of pastoral counselling. Brunsdon's (2014) notion of collaborative pastoral care comprises three movements, namely: self-, partner-, and strategy identification.

(i) *Self-identification,* or 'reflection on own craft', describes a way of seeking the essence of pastoral care (*cura animarum*) (Brunsdon, 2014:6). Pastoral care consists of 'unique building blocks' of soul care which include the church and tradition, the work of the Holy Spirit, authority of Scripture, and epistemology that would form the essence of consideration (Brunsdon, 2014:6).

(ii) The process proceeds to *identification of partners,* where the intent is to consider the philosophical framework of the neighbouring discipline, mindful of possible strategies that could be employed in pastoral counselling. In respect to ecotherapy as a possible partner, aspects like research and theories underlying the notion of the healing support of nature, as well as current methodologies and techniques in the practice of ecotherapy, will be explored.

(iii) After the initial exploration of potential partners, the interdisciplinary dialogue proceeds to *the identification of usable strategies.* The aim is to integrate strategies in a way that both protects the pastoral process from epistemological discrepancies, and respects the identity of ecotherapy as a science (respect the specific requirements to be recognised as a practitioner in the other discipline) (Brunsdon, 2014:6).

The collaboration approach correlates with the objectives of the study outlined in section 1.4. Self-identification links with Objective 1 which encompasses the investigation of the nature and scope of pastoral counselling. The identification of the partner discipline links with Objective 2 which seeks to determine the healing effect of nature on emotional and spiritual healing as described in ecotherapy. The identification of strategies correlates with Objective 4 which encompasses evaluating how the possible emotional and spiritual healing potential of nature can be related hermeneutically to pastoral counselling in order to shape an eco-pastoral counselling approach.

Although the study follows the broad framework of the collaborative approach of Brunsdon, the approach is adaptable to accommodate the needs of the study. In this matter, the process of strategy identification is extended to the contemplation of Scriptural passages to inform the process. A Scriptural analysis is interested in determining God's intention with the relation

between humans and nature, specifically concerning healing within the context of nature. Scriptural analysis aligns with Objective 3 of the study.

1.7 Ethical considerations and estimated risk level of the study

As this research is a literature study and does not involve human participants, the ethical level of the research is anticipated to be a low-risk study.

1.8 Benefits of the study

The study will contribute towards the field of practical theology and pastoral counselling by probing the use of principles of ecotherapy in pastoral counselling. The aim was to explore the healing potential of nature in a pastoral framework as well as to identify usable strategies towards eco-pastoral counselling. As it is presented as an exploratory study, it will possibly serve as a theoretical basis for further study on the topic.

1.9 Chapter outline

This study consisted of the following six chapters: Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study.

Chapter 2 explores the nature and scope of pastoral counselling with a view to find a clear outline of the foundational partner as point of reference in the development of the integrative process.

Chapter 3 probes both the possible contribution of nature towards healing as well as the philosophical principles and praxeology of ecotherapy. This chapter relates to the partner identification process of the collaboration model.

Chapter 4 addresses Objective 3 through its investigation of Scriptural passages to gain insight into the connection and relation between humans and nature as the creation of God. The Scriptural analysis involves four selected texts that relate to the involvement of God in human healing in the context of nature. The Scriptural analysis is approached from a socio-cultural historical perspective.

Chapter 5 details the third movement of the collaborative approach, namely ‘strategy identification’. Certain eco-therapeutic strategies are contemplated from a critical stance in the light of Scriptural guidance and epistemologies of pastoral counselling towards a suggested theological framework. Markers towards a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling is proposed in an introductory fashion.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, summarises the study's findings and provides a conclusion and recommendations based on the insights of the research. Additionally, the limitations of the study are acknowledged and suggestions for further research are made.

1.10 Summary

The main purpose of this initial chapter was to provide an outline of the aim and objectives, as well as approach of the study. The study is interested in nature, as space of God's involvement with human beings, and the ways it could potentially contribute to spiritual and emotional healing. It wants to explore ecotherapy as a field in psychology, in the light of Scripture and other theological resources towards a possible eco-pastoral counselling approach. In accordance with the chapter outline above, attention now shifts in the following chapter to a review of literature on the nature and scope of pastoral counselling, to shed light on the research topic.

CHAPTER 2 THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF PASTORAL COUNSELLING

2.1 Introduction

In following the notion of a *collaborative pastoral approach*, it is important that the essence of pastoral counselling is understood in order to preserve its unique character. Consequently, the objective in this chapter is to investigate the nature and scope of pastoral counselling. The investigation will include four broad themes, namely: Specific notions that define the character of pastoral care, historical developments, the place of pastoral counselling within practical theology, as well as pastoral anthropology. The second part of the chapter probes the scope of pastoral counselling which involves the emotional and spiritual domains of health that relate to pastoral counselling. The aim is to present a working definition of pastoral counselling that can be used in further deliberation with regard to a collaborative approach between pastoral counselling and ecotherapy.

2.2 The nature of pastoral counselling

2.2.1 Some notions of pastoral care and counselling

Pastoral care is rooted in the Christian paradigm from where it aims to promote holistic healing through spiritual restoration. It is denoted by the Latin word *pastorem,* meaning *shepherding*, which refers to "tending to the needs of the vulnerable" (McClure, 2012:267). Reference to the *shepherd* motif is found in both the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament, God reveals Himself based on His covenant love, as shepherd to the weak and vulnerable. Jesus personified the shepherd metaphor in the New Testament; He is the shepherd, and the church is His flock (McClure, 2012:267).

The classic term used to denote pastoral care is c*ura animarum* (care of souls). The word *care* outlines the heart of pastoring, it denotes "religious attention towards each other", motivated by God's love for one another expressed through different responses (McClure, 2012:269). *Soul* (*nephesh)* refers to the quality of being, a totality of life in the presence of God (Louw, 2008:79). The use of the term 'soul' in Scripture refers to human wholeness (1 Thess. 5:23). In this sense, Louw (2008:83) refers to the totality of soul (mind, will, emotion, body) as "an embodiment of soul and ensoulment of body".

An earlier definition by Clebsch and Jaekle (1975:4) interpreted pastoral care as: "The ministry of the cure of souls, that consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons,

directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns".

Henri Nouwen relates pastoral care to spiritual formation which includes three movements: (1) "inward" movement towards finding the inner personal being; (2) "upward" movement or moving "beyond" to realising the immanent presence of God; and (3) "outward" movement from where God is found in other people (Van der Merwe, 2016:596). Nouwen introduced the concept of the 'wounded healer' to describe the inward journey towards personal limitations and pain (Nouwen, 1979:88). Personal limitations or 'personal imperfections' confirm a theology of weakness, that is, choosing to be vulnerable and broken in order to find wholeness and power only in God (Hernandez, 2006:14). The upward movement is a spiritual journey, the essence of pastoral counselling (Dreyer, 2003:715). Humans find "authentic existence before and with God", from where healing can take place in the presence of God (Nouwen, 1979:20). "Human wounds and suffering are intimately connected to the suffering of God" (Nouwen, 1977:24-25). Outward movement entails 'compassionate living, self-sacrificing outreach' and care towards 'wounded' people; the counsellor should acknowledge personal 'vulnerability and powerlessness' (Hernandez, 2006:14).

More recently, Brunsdon (2017) points to the essence of mature faith that provides strength in the midst of difficult circumstances as well as love as the motivating force behind pastoral care: "Pastoral care denotes a unique Christian approach to helping, that involves both informal and specialised acts of care. These acts are based upon the love of God, aimed at building faith that empowers the fellow human being to conquer challenges and embrace a life abundant" (Brunsdon, 2017:111).

God's involvement with people forms the essence of the pastoral encounter, He is able to renew and change lives (McClure, 2012:270). Hence, mature faith is one of the main goals of pastoral care through which counselees are empowered to negotiate and overcome existential challenges (Louw, 2000:37; 2008:217).

The practice of healing in the context of Christian pastoral counselling has biblical roots. The healing wonders of Jesus were rooted in both His actions and teachings about the "good news of the kingdom of God" (cf. Wilkinson, 1998:94). In the same way, pastoral counselling wants to situate suffering and pain within the wider narrative of the work of God on earth (Redding, 2020:210; Nouwen, 1977:26).

Pastoral counselling has a theological nature, which McClure emphasises in her definition of pastoral care. "Pastoral care is a form of practical theology, specified as an intentional enacting

and embodying of a theology of presence, particularly in response to suffering or need, as a way to increase among people the love of God and of a neighbour" (McClure, 2012:270).

People are spiritual and social beings, with an innate longing to be part of a shared communal identity (Louw, 2008:41). People have relationships with others and live in cultural contexts, where they are strongly influenced and are continually confronted with challenges as part of a dynamic meaning-generating process (Louw, 2008:41). Since counselling takes place in specific contexts, the pastoral process needs to determine the frame of reference of the relevant context by considering constant evolving individuals and communal identities (Brunsdon, 2019:16).

A contextual hermeneutical paradigm acknowledges the interconnectedness of life within a culture (Du Plessis, 2021:9). A culture sensitive pastoral paradigm observes personal distress in the context of social oppression, exploitation, and alienation, and takes into account aspects like "race, gender, power and morality" (Patton, 1993:39). It considers all dimensions of life, including the environment (Herholdt, 2008:184). Hence, a holistic approach where creation is considered a part of the systemic context, provides space for an *ecological approach* (Dayringer & Farris, 2002).

The notion of 'care of the soul' (*cura animarum*) illustrates the heart of pastoral counselling. A biblical understanding of soul corresponds with the idea of wholeness; the human soul denotes the quality of 'being', and includes mind, will, body and soul. Reflecting on the latter, Nouwen describes pastoral care (care of the soul) as spiritual formation that transpires through a continuous journey of spiritual formation or growth in faith. It is only possible to build mature faith in a close relationship with God. Mature faith makes it possible for people to conquer life's challenges and live a fulfilled life.

2.2.2 The historic development of pastoral care and counselling

Similar to streams that contribute to the larger river, the history of pastoral counselling has developed through 'streams' of events that contributed to where pastoral counselling is today. Pivotal events and turning points in the history of pastoral counselling provide some understanding of the current position, as well as the essence of pastoral care and counselling.

Pastoral care has been part of the Christian narrative since early faith communities, and many contemporary pastoral practices and issues have historical roots that could be traced and contemplated to gain better understanding of their significance in the present time (Gerkin, 1997:28).

Several resources about the history of pastoral care exist. G.R. Evans (2000) compiled a book, *History of pastoral care,* with narratives from different scholars on specific themes that could be identified from specific time periods in history. Emmanuel Lartey (2003) published *In living colour: An intercultural approach to pastoral care and counselling,* in which he places the history of pastoral care within a wider context of counselling models and spirituality that include different religious denominations. Additionally, another book compiled by Holifield (2005), *A history of pastoral care in America,* explains historical developments in the time frame prior to 1960 as a form of reference to emerging developments in pastoral care.

The historical narratives chosen to convey the history of pastoral care in this study are those of Clebsch and Jaekle, and Charles Gerkin, as they remain some of the more comprehensive historical resources on the matter. Religious historian, William Clebsch, and pastoral clinician, Charles Jaekle, published their book *Pastoral care in historical perspective* in 1975. They divided the history of pastoral care into eight epochs as well as four basic pastoral functions that relate to the practice of care, namely: healing, sustaining, reconciling, and guidance (McClure, 2014:270).

In *An introduction to pastoral care*, Charles Gerkin (1997) highlights analogies between history and current challenges in pastoral care. It is beyond the scope of this study to present an in-depth exploration of pastoral history; therefore, analogies between history and current pastoral care found in Gerkin's historical narrative, together with the brief, yet comprehensive overview of history provided by Clebsch and Jaekle will suffice to elucidate the nature of pastoral counselling.

The following is a combined adaptation of historical contours and insights of the history of pastoral care compiled from historical narratives by Gerkin (1997) and Clebsch and Jaekle (1975).

2.2.2.1 Early Christianity and the primitive church

The need for care has been a constant part of the church since the early Christian communities (McClure, 2012:270). During this period, people viewed and confronted their problems in the light of the *Parousia*, a common expectation among the primitive church referring to the imminent return of the Lord (Gerkin, 1997:28). This expectation transpired in the spirit of early Christianity in the familiar phrase: "time is short and the end near" (McClure, 2012:270). A main concern was to preserve pure faith in the midst of a non-Christian culture (Gerkin, 1997:28). Although expectations of the second coming of Jesus are less evident in Christian communities today, believers still long for the second coming of Jesus. Similar to leaders in

the primitive church, pastoral caregivers have a responsibility to keep the story of faith alive and maintain hopeful anticipation of God's kingdom. In a predominantly secular world, pastoral care has a pivotal role to keep the 'Christian story' relevant (Gerkin, 1997:28-29).

2.2.2.2 Age of Persecutions

Expectations of the return of Christ diminished during the second and third era of the Christian faith (Gerkin, 1997:30). The imperial Roman culture became increasingly hostile towards the Christian community, and they were pressured to conform to pagan religions. When refusing to do so, they had to endure intense persecution, often resulting in death (Gerkin, 1997:30). Pressure to conform also resulted in temporary lapses into pagan uses, while the church failed to remain true to the expectations of worship and expected Christian behaviours (Gerkin, 1997:30). Pastoral care services were aimed towards protection and care for communities, and to promote emotional healing and reconciliation. A seemingly opposite purpose involved enforced discipline and behavioural boundaries. Pastoral caregivers had to reconcile those who remained steadfast in faith with people that lapsed under the pressure of Roman persecution.

2.2.2.3 The Imperial Church after Augustine

The status of the Christian church changed radically in the fourth century when Roman Emperor, Constantine, ended the persecution of Christians. He gave favour to the Christian religion, and the church took primary responsibility for establishing unified values and expanding care to the whole of society. The church gained responsibility of state welfare funds (Gerkin, 1997:33).

Christian practices were affected by systemised rituals, namely liturgical worship, healing through anointment, reconciliation, and care for the sick and bereaved (Gerkin, 1997:34). As a result of the diminished attention to the uniqueness of the Christian tradition, monasticism emerged and true believers fled to deserted areas (Gerkin, 1997:34). Hence, it became a priority for pastoral care to preserve purity within congregations and protect it from influences from non-Christian cultures (Gerkin, 1997:28).

Augustine of Hippo provided an outline of the roles of pastoral caregivers and encouraged them to support people, teach the unskilled, and arouse the lazy (McClure, 2012:271). He believed the Scriptures to be the authoritative source of God that was inspired by the Spirit, and therefore a source of the truth with ample knowledge, whereby people have access to insight into God's design for the life of believers (Ford, 2019:242, 244).

John Chrysostom was involved in the transformation of the church to an imperial church, and also became the Bishop of Constantinople. He describes the role of the Christian leader as authoritative, with responsibilities to “exercise concentration, perseverance and patience” (Gerkin, 1997:31).

The notion of care with regard to “concentration, perseverance and patience” from Chrysostom is still relevant to sustain the faithful participation of believers (Gerkin, 1997:32). Influences from other traditions have been evident since the New Testament times, during the Age of Persecutions, and during the twentieth century integration of psychology in theology, it remains a critical threat that needs consideration (Gerkin, 1997:32).

2.2.2.4 Fall of the Roman Empire

As soon as the Christian church started to show success in their endeavour towards a unified Roman culture, the Roman Empire started to crumble. The responsibility of the church then shifted towards reconciliation (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1975:23). At this time there was much controversy regarding appropriate care and the understanding of the Christian tradition (Gerkin, 1997:39). As a result of believers that moved away to establish monasteries elsewhere, for instance, in Rome and Sicily, Christian communities were deconstructed. These difficulties gave rise to new developments, for instance the care of souls became a subdiscipline, and the concepts of ‘spiritual health’ and ‘spiritual illnesses’ were introduced into practices (Gerkin, 1997:37). Gregory the Great developed theological points of departure for post-patristic Christian communities. He wrote the well-known *Pastoral care* wherein he provided patterns for pastoral practice (Gerkin, 1997:39).

Two themes that emerged were: (1) the preference of pastoral care for individual guidance and direction through the daily practices of prayer, meditation, and spiritual discipline (Gerkin, 1997:40); (2) the analogy between ‘care for the soul and care of the body’ that became evident in the concern of Gregory the Great and his Benediction followers for the care of the poor, opposed to spiritual care (Gerkin, 1997:40).

Unfortunately, Gregory modelled and introduced the role of the priest in an authoritarian, prescriptive manner. A further negative is that they did not contest the social systems of victimised poor. Until today, the propensity of unjust social systems remains a challenge (Gerkin, 1997:40).

2.2.2.5 The medieval period

At the end of the eleventh century, religious leaders depended mainly on the power of divine grace for the cure of souls (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1975:23-24). Cure of souls was directed to deep-rooted, but also unintended sin and evil. Priests were primarily concerned with ways through which Christians could build the right relationship with God in the matter of their Christian lifestyles and sacramental participation (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1975:23; McClure, 2012:271). Performing sacramental rituals like baptism, the Eucharist, and confessions contributed to religious conformity being implemented as the foundation for the social context and social cohesion (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1975:23). Sacramental practices were implemented with several purposes in mind e.g., healings performed by pastors; anointments to diagnose and heal illnesses; and baptism to renew people from their sinful nature (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1975:23,24).

In this way, sacramental practices thrived in an excessive manner, with pastoral permissiveness becoming part of ritual practices (Gerkin, 1997:40). The Celtic penitential manuals with listed sins and penalties were specifically provided to poorly educated priests (Gerkin, 1997:40). At the same time, Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan monks, provided humble services to the poor and dispossessed and modelled a life of care among people in their daily existence (Gerkin, 1997:41). This period illustrated the important task of pastoral caregivers to communicate and portray the way in which the care and grace of God should be received and embodied (Gerkin, 1997:41).

2.2.2.6 Reformation period

A fundamental turn happened when the sacramental system became decentralised and Christian care shifted the focus to the salvation of individual souls through faith alone (forgiveness through grace) (Gerkin, 1997:41). The Reformers worked to reintroduce the idea of salvation through faith and to restore the relationship between human beings and God (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1975:26).

Prominent Reformers of this time include Martin Luther who illuminated the excessive mechanical character and corruption of sacramentalism in medieval Catholic practices (Gerkin, 1997:41). Instead, he proclaimed individual confession and facilitated healthy individual relationships with God (Gerkin, 1997:41). He wanted to promote the individual soul in relation to God, but also provide spiritual guidance to members in the faith communities (Gerkin, 1997:42). Another concern was care and protection of vulnerable poor people as a result of uncaring societies (Gerkin, 1997:42).

The Reformation period required liturgy, ministry, pastorate, and church developments to be revisited and revised. Leading Reformer, John Calvin, provided valuable contributions with regard to connecting the grace of God and salvation with existential realities in meaningful ways (Van der Watt, 2018:769). He believed disobedience to be the core of human distress, and instead people needed reconciliation through salvation and healing (McClure, 2012:271). He approached reconciliation in a more institutionally prescriptive fashion (Gerkin, 1997:43).

The Reformation period initiated the emphasis on individual salvation and the spirit of humanism which remains a point of conflict and tension in the priorities towards the individual or communal care of souls (Gerkin, 1997:43).

2.2.2.7 The Enlightenment

At the start of the Enlightenment era, Christian leaders were committed to encourage values and morality as the primary function of religion (Gerkin, 1997:51). In 1856 Richard Baxter published *The Reformed Pastor,* and introduced the three main focus areas of ministry: knowledge of the spiritual health of people, revealing the true source of happiness, and equipping people to find happiness. Baxter showed concern for the spiritual wellness of people, and assistance to endure and maintain good moral values in difficult circumstances (Gerkin, 1997:46). John Watson published *Cure of souls* (1896) where he provides models for productive conversations and confidentiality during visitations (McClure, 2010:272).

Strong disciplining practices were relaxed towards the beginning of the twentieth century when pastoral functions leaned more towards guidance and care through private conversations and visitations (McClure, 2012:272). The interpretive lens of theology was threatened with the rise of secularism, and pastoral caregivers turned towards non-religious resources like psychology and other human sciences for understanding human experience without taking note of the words of God (McClure, 2012:272; Gerkin, 1997:44). Human rationality emphasised the possibilities of the human being, in other words, self-mastery and self-transcendence (Gerkin, 1997:45).

At a time of changing social environments and experimentation in pastoral practice, Friedreich Schleiermacher became an influential person in the establishment of the recognition of practical theology as an academic field involved with human experience (Gerkin, 1997:47). Together with secularism and individualism in psychology, pastoral care became more interested in psychological strategies to ensure healthy lifestyles and congregations (Gerkin, 1997:53).

In the last part of the nineteenth century when Freud began his work in Vienna, the Emmanuel movement and psychologists of religion supported his psychoanalysis theory (Gerkin, 1997:55). Both the Emmanuel movement and the Social Gospel movement depended on theories from human sciences, but while the Emmanuel Movement was more interested in individual psychology, the Social Gospel movement wanted to conform to Christian social ethics of scientific cure of ills in societies (Gerkin, 1997:57).

After World War II ministers who were affiliated to care facilities were challenged with in-depth mental issues in their work with traumatised war veterans, turned to psychology in search of ways to assist them. Against this backdrop, Anton Boisen and his colleagues unified with the Emmanuel movement and the Social Gospel movement in 1960 to constitute the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (Gerkin, 1997:58, 63). The purpose of the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) was to train ministers in counselling and therapy (McClure, 2010:83).

2.2.2.8 The twentieth century

Significant changes occurred in the beginning of the twentieth century when Anton Boisen initiated the CPE movement in the 1930s, and unified the Emmanuel movement and the Social Gospel movement in 1960 to constitute the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (Gerkin, 1997:58, 63). Pastoral counselling became a professional body, it was accredited, and the role of the pastoral counsellor was clarified (McClure, 2010:83). Thereafter, pastoral care gained recognition as a specialised ministry, and was included in the curriculum of Practical Theology at Protestant seminaries in America (Gerkin, 1997:65).

Some practitioners moved away from affiliations with the church when pastoral counselling became a separate entity in the 1960s. Out of concern for their professional credibility, they turned to secular professions in the human sciences to define their approaches towards caregiving (McClure, 2010:83).

Wayne Oates, a professor in theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, adopted a more conservative approach when he emphasised the essence of theology in pastoral care. He modified social theories to fit into the pastoral context (Gerkin, 1997:69). Despite the strong support towards individual psychology, there was increased concern for care within the communal context with regard to oppressed people, injustices, and inequities in 1970. A holistic pastoral care approach of social transformation required an established network of care within the church community and pastoral leadership.

During the middle of the twentieth century, the fast-evolving field of pastoral counselling continued to develop paradigmatic changes with the objective to accommodate contextual

pastoral counselling based on the Word of God (Du Plessis, 2021:1). During this time, religious traditions were contested in the matter of human health, and ethical and moral issues related to the postmodern world (Du Plessis, 2021:3). Gerkin refers to this period as a “climate of confusion and uncertainty” about the acceptability of previous known normative guidelines (De Jong van Arkel, 2000:174).

A holistic pastoral approach articulated the gospel demand for care to the “dispossessed, the homeless, and victims of political and economic injustices” (Gerkin, 1997:127-128). Previous oppressed people were allowed to enter into the theological field (Du Plessis, 2021:4). Influx of persons of colour and women affected by previous injustices contributed to new literature wherein feminists, womanists, Asian, and Black liberative perspectives often published edited collections that are widely employed for educational purposes (Ramsay, 2020:145). Publications continued to evolve towards 2020, attending to themes such as the dehumanising consequences of racism, abuse, and intimate violence (Ramsay, 2020:145). Specifically, the work of ‘feminist and womanist scientific’ scholars have rendered strong well-respected messages (De Jong van Arkel, 2000:147). In line with this notion, the four basic functions of pastoral care – healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling – were extended to eight, with the addition of resisting, empowering, nurturing, and liberating being added (Miller-McLemore 2018:355).

At the end of the twentieth century, changes in pastoral theology paradigms showed three main focus areas, namely: (i) an interest in congregational studies, (ii) a call for a new public theology, and (iii) the rise of liberation movements (Miller-McLemore, 2018:348). Public theology was a core interest of practical theology in the first years of the twenty-first century. Bonnie Miller-McLemore, who edited the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* introduced new developments in different fields of practical theology (Ramsay, 2020:146). She acknowledged the shift towards a communal contextual paradigm aimed towards a wider engagement with culture and society, and described it as the transition from person-centred care to public theology (Ramsay, 2020:142). Pastoral theology as field of theological education published many new developments, for instance, the introduction of poetics to portray theological wisdom, lived religion, ethnography, and trauma theory (Ramsay, 2020:150).

One example of a more recent development involves the so-called “narrative” turn. The narrative approach as a method with potential to touch human hearts was already mentioned during the thirteenth century by the theologian Bonaventure (Ganzevoort, 2012:215). Many years later in the second half of the twentieth century the ‘turn of the narrative’ unfolded when the narrative was formally introduced and integrated into most human and social sciences, including the field of theology (Ganzevoort, 2012:215). The essence of a theological narrative

approach is the contemplation of the connection between 'what is given' (reality, tradition) and the intended receivers of the narrative (God, significant others) (Ganzevoort, 2012:217). The 'classical narrative' derives from Scriptural tradition, while modern practical theology acknowledges the interrelatedness between form and content, and appreciates the changed view of knowledge and truth. Practical theologians developed different narrative models according to their own needs within specific disciplines in the field (Ganzevoort, 2012:221).

From the above discussion, it seems that pastoral care and counselling developed according to the needs of different historical contexts. Each period with its own cultural context presented its own challenges, needs and approaches to which pastoral care had to adapt. It is therefore essential to remain conscious of the changing contexts and needs, in order to provide appropriate support and guidance to the contemporary human being and society. Examples of two new insights gained from the historical overview of narratives compiled by Clebsch and Jaekle (1975) and Gerkin (1997), include:

- An awareness and longing for the Second Coming of Christ should always be kept alive and relevant in the Christian narrative. Apart from inciting courage during difficult times, it creates eschatological hope that invigorates a positive attitude in the face of adversities.

- The unconditional love of God surpasses human shortcomings and sin. Although repentance is an important component of the relationship with God, salvation is only possible as a result of the redemption received through the salvific deeds of Christ.

In search of insight into the nature of pastoral counselling, it is also important to be mindful of the different levels of pastoral care as it evolved in practice.

2.2.3 Different levels of pastoral counselling

The inference to informal and specialised acts of care alluded to earlier, suggests that not all forms of pastoral care entail mere gestures of pastoral support or guidance, but that basic forms of care are sometimes elevated to forms of longer term and specialised care that need academic discernment.

In this regard, the fourfold distinction of De Jongh Van Arkel (2000) is useful for further discussion in this section. His fourfold distinction illustrates four levels or forms of pastoral action in order to provide a better understanding of the different contexts in which pastoral care can be expressed, namely: mutual care, pastoral care, pastoral counselling, and pastoral therapy (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:174).

Mutual care, as a foundational form of pastoral care, unfolds as spontaneous acts motivated by the love of God, and transpires through gestures of caring support towards each other within faith communities (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:175).

Pastoral care relates to mutual care in the sense that both are expressed as forms of Christian care with the intent to uplift members of the faith community (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:176). It is qualitatively different from mutual care, as it denotes a formal expression of Christian care directed towards the strengthening and caring of believers (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:176). Pastoral care requires a specific Christian ethos since it involves visitations by elders of the congregation, visiting the sick, and praying and ministering through Scripture, while the process of caring is rooted in trust in the work of the Holy Spirit (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:176).

Pastoral counselling indicates a structured form of care in the context of the Christian community as a component of the ministerial functions of the faith community (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:176,177). Pastoral counselling is distinguished from pastoral care in the sense that it requires a form of contract between the counsellor and counselee (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:176). It usually takes place over a longer period of time, and the counsellor needs a certain level of training. The pastoral counsellor employs specific therapeutic methods, often related to social- and other behavioural sciences (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:177).

Pastoral therapy is typically performed by a qualified professional who has been trained to facilitate therapy from a pastoral perspective. Furthermore, it combines therapeutic activities with spiritual resources rooted in practical theology (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:179). Moreover, pastoral therapy suggests specialised knowledge applied systematically over a longer period to provide therapeutical intervention for someone experiencing a specific problem (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:179). The pastoral therapist is qualified to assist people on a deeper spiritual and emotional level (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:180). Although it is not a prerequisite, the preference is for the therapist to be affiliated with a faith community such as a congregation (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:181).

The type of pastoral care envisaged in this study relates to pastoral counselling. It is imagined that the caregiver would need a certain level of training in order to remain true to the unique nature of pastoral care as an expression of faith care. Additionally, he/she will need some knowledge of the field of ecotherapy and eco-therapeutic techniques.

2.2.4 The position of pastoral counselling within the field of practical theology

With the emergence of the academic study of pastoral care at institutions of higher learning, pastoral care found an epistemological home in the field of practical theology. Initially, practical theology was regarded as practical pastoral training aimed to equip ministers for their duties (Du Plessis, 2021:3). Schleiermacher, widely regarded as the father of modern practical theology, took the 'human field of experience' as the departure point for the study of practical theology (Louw, 2015:59). He valued the intra-disciplinary nature of practical theology (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:9). He divided theology into three interrelated parts, which he explained with the analogy of a tree. The roots represent philosophical theology; the trunk represents historical theology; and the crown or top resembles practical theology (Baker, 2013:213). The metaphor provides insight into the role of practical theology as a practice that applies theological insights and tradition. Schleiermacher believed practical theology to be the "art of overcoming the distance between human life and what it is meant to be" (Louw, 2015:63). His work has greatly influenced the status of practical theology, which evolved from an applied theology to an acknowledged academic sub-discipline of theology (Gräb, 2005:181).

Practical theology is interested in the spiritual practice of the intimate encounter between humans and God; it explores the "where of Jesus Christ in our experiences of the now" (Root, cited in Ward, 2017:46). The gospel is the 'lens' that guides people to a better experience and understanding of the work of God in the world (Ward, 2017:48). To understand believers in the light of the Bible, practical theology needs to first understand and interpret the way human beings encounter their world. Hence, practical theology is concerned with practice and context; it needs to understand human actions, intentions, norms, and values. In the quest towards an understanding of human experience, academic social sciences like sociology, psychology and political theories are consulted in practical theology. The integration should be done from a critical hermeneutic of suspicion (Ward, 2017:176; Louw, 2010:74). It is important to note that although human experience is taken seriously, it does not have primacy over the gospel as the source of the revelation of God (Dames & Louw, 2020:113).

According to Mowat and Swinton (2006:24), practical theology wants to "promote faithful participation in God's ongoing mission in the church and the world through ongoing search for better understanding of human beings as part of a constant evolving world". They explain that "practical theology involves critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world" (Mowat & Swinton, 2006:6). Thus, theological reflection should be performed in a faithful manner with the aim of aligning public faith performances with the true nature and actions of the triune God (Dames & Louw,

2020:113). In the face of discrepancies within the social context, the task of practical theology would be to seek and examine underlying theories of the current practice and to reshape and offer new and challenging insights into the Christian tradition (Mowat & Swinton, 2006:25; Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:6).

2.2.5 Pastoral anthropology

As explicated above, practical theology departs from the notion of human experience in their encounters with the world. As human experience is a pivotal aspect of practical theology and pastoral care, pastoral anthropology assumes an important role. Pastoral anthropology denotes a Christian understanding of another person within the pastoral context. Put differently, it seeks understanding in the Christian text with regard to who and what a person is (living human document), in the light of God's covenant love, through the redemption of Christ and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit (Brunsdon, 2019:16; Guthrie, 1979:3). A clear understanding of theological anthropology in the pastoral context alleviates the risk of becoming "docetic", or "alien to life"' (Louw, 2000:123). The following paragraphs will hence probe the nature of human beings, through a Scriptural lens.

God created human beings in His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-2) with the ultimate purpose to honour and glorify His name through their existence (Ecc. 12:13; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 43:7; Eph. 1:11-12) (Chapman, 2000:77; Woldemichael, 2013:8). The true nature of God is love, hence human beings, created in the image of God, find their purpose in love (Scheib, 2018:117). God willed humans to live in intimate relationships with Him and others (Redding, 2020:220). God granted human beings the opportunity to make their own decisions, to think, plan, live purposeful and consider the consequences of their actions (Guthrie, 1979:5). Unfortunately, human choices led to disobedience and sin, and ultimately, the human fall in the Garden of Eden. Humans became spiritually dead, sinners longing for the consummation of creation (Eph. 2:3; 1 Jn. 1:8; Rom. 3:23; Jer. 17:9) (Redding, 2020:194). Although sin did not destroy the image of God in them, their wholeness and holiness (spiritual-, physical-, and emotional health) has been transformed in every way imaginable (Stephens, 2018:67).

God's love and covenant faithfulness towards humankind was expressed through the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, thereby allowing us to find spiritual healing in Him (Anderson, 2010:16). Through the crucified and resurrected humanity of Christ, He disclosed the true nature of humanity and restored the wholeness and holiness of believers (Anderson, 2010:19; Redding, 2020:194).

The current period in Christian history plays out in the dynamic tension between the promise already received from the victory of the resurrected Christ, and the anticipation of the coming of Christ, who will return with the final liberation (Redding, 2020:261). We are prone to experience both love and suffering with, in, and because of the suffering world (Redding, 2020:220). Regardless, we are reminded of the God who willed to love and be loved, with whom He suffers and has suffered for us (Redding, 2020:223). As new eschatologically determined beings, humans are able to live freely in loving communion with Him and others.

Pastoral anthropology hence reminds us that, through Christ, it is possible for humans to endure sufferings, live in hope, and find peace and joy in our eschatological destiny (Chapman, 2000:75). Pastoral counselling is centred on being mindful of God's future, enabling humans to show resilience in the face of life, danger, and ultimately, death (Woldemichael, 2013:9).

Pneumatology distinguishes pastoral anthropology from other anthropologies based in the social sciences. As spiritual beings, people have an interconnectedness with the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:23), Who enables them to experience His presence (Dreyer, 2003:719; Dames & Louw, 2020:113). The Spirit transforms humans to new beings in Christ, transcending and renewing all levels of their being (Dames & Louw, 2020:115). Although the nature of religious experiences in practical theology encourages interrelatedness with the social sciences and psychology (Müller, 2013:3), the vital contribution of spirituality and soul care distinguishes pastoral care as a unique helping profession (Louw, 2014:66).

The creation and human fall narratives in Genesis 1 and 3, respectively, present a pastoral anthropology that relates to the interconnected relation between human beings and nature. Genesis 1 explains that both humans and nature were created from dust. The Spirit of God breathed life into the nostrils of Adam, and in the same way He gives life to all of creation (Bauckham, 1984:232, McCann, 2012:69). In this way, everything, including the human body, comes into existence from the same elements (Coetsee, 2008:131). Both humanity and nature are dependent on God, He is the Giver of life. No one can exist without His provision (Johnson, 2019:267). During the fall in the Garden of Eden, the interrelatedness between humans and nature caused 'the ground' to be cursed on account of humans (Gen. 3:17-19) (Lategan, 2009:73). Humans and nature are in symbiotic relationship, in that humans take care of the earth and the earth in turn provides sustenance for people (Gen. 2:15-16).

At the end of the first section, a few key principles can be formulated. Pastoral counselling is a sub-discipline of practical theology, rooted in the Christian paradigm. Practical theology acts as theoretical engine room for pastoral counselling, from where it works to ensure faithful

participation in God's ongoing mission in the world (Brunsdon, 2017:107). The task of practical theology is to bring current realities into critical dialogue with insights from the Christian tradition and other human sciences (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:73). Motivated by the love of God, it wants to strengthen spiritual restoration and promote mature faith, through which people are empowered to negotiate, overcome, and even thrive in the midst of existential challenges (Brunsdon, 2017:111).

Pastoral counselling wants to connect the grace and salvation of God with the person experiencing anxiety, grief, despair, and hopelessness. It wants to restore the relationship between the suffering person and loving God through Jesus who brought wholeness through reconciliation. Jesus disclosed the true nature of humanity through His incarnate life, crucifixion, and resurrection. The true image of God, within every human being, is fulfilled and restored in His humanity. The soul reflects the quality of our being within the presence of God. Therefore, soul care can be seen as the heart of pastoral counselling. In the presence of God, the soul finds healing and wholeness (Louw, 2013:4). Pastoral counselling wants to restore the soul to become whole within the "complex system of becoming and imaginative creativity" and network of interactive relationships (Louw, 2017:3).

2.3 The scope of pastoral counselling

Pastoral counselling is interested in human beings created in the image of God, the revelation of God in the Scriptures, and how these converge meaningfully in the experience of life in the face of adversity. Pastoral counselling recognises existential challenges, pain, and suffering, as well as people's susceptibility to constant evolving external influences and contexts (Louw, 2000:122). As a result of dynamic flux in the environment, pastoral counselling continues to seek understanding from the Christian text and suitable resources. As such, it is important to discuss what falls within the scope of pastoral counselling. Put differently, what are the aims of pastoral counselling?

2.3.1 Healing life in a post-Fall world

Pastoral counselling departs from the notion of the post-Fall world. Within the Christian tradition, it is believed that the peaceful creation of God and harmony between humans and God were derailed by the fall (Gen. 3). As a result of their own decisions, humanity entered into a period of "not able not to sin" (*non posse non peccare)* (Doubell, 2006:86; Saler, 2018:279). Augustine explains that before the fall, the primeval couple was able to sin or able not to sin (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*) (Saler, 2009:279; Doubell, 2006:86). Humanity succumbed to temptation and used their rational power over their trust in God, which resulted

in chaos. The chaos that entered the world after the fall affected all aspects of life, causing disharmony between man and woman; between people (Gen. 3:8), humans, and animals (Gen. 3:14-15); and within nature (Gen. 3:17-18). The consequences of the fall are evident in broken realities like murder, hate, war, natural disasters, illness, and trauma (Doubell, 2006:84).

A familiar question during painful events and suffering raises the issue: “How can these evils be witnessed in the face of the God of the Bible?” (Stander, 2018:12). This question, also known as the theodicy question, seeks answers about the provenance of God, and the relationship between humans and God (Du Randt, 2011:531). No easy explanation is possible, and different models propose different answers to the question, for instance:

- The ‘Free will theodicy’ wants to vindicate God and separate Him from the evil in the world. Swinburne (cited in Stander, 2018:20) asserts that humans choose their destiny and attract evil through their own choices.

- The ‘Perfect plan theodicy’ contends that God is always at work in everything. They describe the mindset of their model with the phrase: ’*Deus Vilt’* or ‘God willed it' (Stander, 2018:12-13).

- The ‘Cosmic conflict theodicy’ maintains that Satan is the only source of evil, arguing that God cannot be involved in the origins of pain and suffering (Stander, 2018:11).

In the light of not being able to provide a clear answer to the theodicy question, the apocrypha, Wisdom of Solomon 3:18-19, states: “[S]ickness and suffering of the righteous on earth, does not make sense yet, but people will be compensated in the aftermath”. Du Randt (2011:537) suggests a possible connection between theodicy and eschatology, that the suffering believer finds hope in the promise of eternal life, the cross, and resurrection of Jesus (Van Wyk, 2002:534).

Subsequently, the postmodern world is submerged in the disaster and distress of its people; hence, societies and the environment can benefit from pastoral intervention. A few of the prevalent challenges in the current South African context are briefly discussed.

2.3.2 Current pastoral challenges

2.3.2.1 Historic existential crises

Certain challenges have historically been part of societies and religious communities. Serious illnesses, death, and traumatic incidents like accidents or violent events, are examples of

existential crises. In the case of serious illnesses, loved ones who witness suffering and a slow deterioration of health often endure intense emotional pain and uncertainty. In times of crisis, people often search for meaning and ways to transcend anxiety into hope in the face of overwhelming adversity (Massey, 2008:261). Life-threatening diseases include cancer, HIV/AIDS, congestive heart failure, cerebrovascular disease, neurodegenerative disorders, and chronic respiratory diseases, to name a few (World Health Organisation [WHO] 2007:5). In many instances, serious illnesses remove patients from their ordinary 'being function' and the familiar circumstances of people, and they are compelled to revisit the meaning of life and death (Brunsdon, 2019:4). Their overwhelming circumstances present the opportunity to assist them by means of palliative pastoral counselling (Brunsdon, 2019:4). Pastoral counsellors want to imitate the love of God and guide people to the presence of God and His caring compassion (Massey, 2008:269, 271).

2.3.2.2 Socio-economic ills

At the end of 2021, a total unemployment rate of 34,9% was reported in South Africa (Stoddard, 2021). Many people live in poverty with no access to basic resources like food and shelter, clean running water, or health care and medicine (Janse van Rensburg & Breed, 2011:8). Poverty attracts social challenges, for instance, high crime volumes. South Africa is said to have the highest number of violent crimes per capita compared to the rest of the world (Govender, 2020). The country bears a culture of violence, and community members live in constant fear, powerlessness, and hopelessness (Hulme, 2009:63).

2.3.2.3 The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

The 4IR introduces rapid technological growth in a digital era of technologies with no equal proportions. While the previous revolutions presented single agents of change, for example electricity or steam, the 4IR combines various shifts resulting in a redefined "society, culture, biology and ethics" (Fourie, 2020:13). Examples of these shifts in the 4IR involves artificial intelligence (AI), also known as 'smart' machines that imitate human intelligence and perform difficult human tasks (Fourie, 2020:12). The bio-engineering parallel entails human 'genome editing', aimed at emulating human DNA with the purpose to design new life or remove illnesses and even death (Fourie, 2020:13).

The Internet denotes a system of connected instruments and detectors including phones, vehicles, and home appliances operating together in immediate time (Fourie, 2020:13). The world of the Internet denotes social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. People often develop a level of dependence that has recently been acknowledged with the

term, "*nomophobia"* (fear of being without your mobile phone) (Broughton, 2015:14). Addictions like pornography offer an escape from reality and negative emotions (Waters, 2005:6). The Internet poses dangers like physical and emotional abuse to children, and exposes them to cyberbullying, cyber-stalking, harassment, exclusion, photographs, video clips, and unpleasant comments (Cowie & Colliety, 2010:262).

Other consequences of the 4IR include people being merely perceived as products rooted in algorithms and not as the creation of God (Fourie, 2020:19-20). The false notion of independence, not being able to recognise the importance of interaction with others and nature, extend to religion and spirituality, causing believers to overlook the significance of the communion of believers (Fourie, 2020:20). The church offers an antidote to the impersonal world of technology in a world where human dignity is dismissed in the interest of soulless technologies, with the unconditional love of God and His passion for His creation (Joubert, 2020:6). It offers the world the wisdom of the Scriptures with a view to endure in the midst of all-consuming technological information (Joubert, 2020:6).

2.3.2.4 Ecological issues

In the context of this study, the global ecological crisis is especially relevant. Abuse of nature conflated into an almost uncontrollable reality with threats of climate change, pollution, and the eradication of natural resources are already visible and tangible in the lives of people. In tandem with this, humans have become disconnected from their inherent relationship with the earth, separating themselves from the healing potential of nature. Today, more than half of the 8 billion people on earth live in urban surroundings and spend 90% of their time indoors (Harper *et al.,* 2019:45-46).

Human activity has inescapably harmed the environment and became evident in annual phenomena like earth warming, droughts, melting icebergs, and plastic contamination (McCarroll, 2020:30). Creation is groaning under the consumption of the rich, and the poor are forced to endure the impact of the crisis. The effects of climate change are evident in the mental health field among conditions like eco-anxiety[3] and solastalgia[4], an emerging diagnosis resulting from existential distress 'homesickness' (McCarroll, 2020:32). Together with people,

[3] Human ability to be resilient is undermined as 'stress inducing chemicals' are regularly excreted in the body resulting, for instance, in depression.
[4] Existential distress caused by an environmental crisis (homesickness), i.e. being home, but the environment has changed.

the earth is suffering, “pushing herself into our awareness in unprecedented ways” (Calder & Morgan, 2016:16).

Tim Middleton (2021) acknowledged the incognisance of the “cries of the earth”. He advises practical theology to encourage an attempt to ‘bear witness’ to the trauma of the earth as a means to recover broken channels of communication with the natural creation, instead of merely searching for explanations concerning the origin of the ecological crisis (Middleton, 2021). Louw (1998:112, 116-117) connects the cries of the earth with healing: individual healing cannot be separated from the earth as a symbol of God’s presence and glory. Similar to Louw, Calder and Morgan (2016:17) suggest pastoral care and counselling should consider the connectedness of individual pain within a complex web of relations. In this regard, Dayringer and Farris (2002) agree pastoral counselling has the potential to contribute to the ecological crisis through restored relationships between God and humanity, and between human beings and the rest of creation. Hence, there are increasing appeals on practical theology to reconsider human relations with the natural world (McCarroll, 2020). In a similar manner to Job, the postmodern person with his/her self-evident consumption has to revisit the paradigm of human-centred de-creational stance, and consider human position within a larger web of life (Calder & Morgan, 2016:17).

The reflection on some of the pastoral challenges above resembles a small portion of the large number of existential challenges in the postmodern world. It reflects a dark picture of a world wherein the challenge of pastoral counselling remains to offer hope through rekindled awareness of the loving presence of God and His merciful grace.

From a Christian perspective, the death and resurrection of Christ make healing in the world possible. Pastoral counselling encourages hope through eschatological expectation that nurtures the being of a person (Louw, 2008:74). The pastoral counsellor as a vessel for the Holy Spirit must strive to embody Christian hope and entrust counselees to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit as the only true facilitator of spiritual growth and meaning (Brunsdon, 2019:7). It offers ‘shalomic’ presence committed to reconciliation and holistic peace within individuals, between persons, in communities and societies (Redding, 2020:234).

Eventually, pastoral counselling wants to bring hope and offer care and support to people in need and guide them toward faith and healing in a world full of difficult circumstances and suffering. It can thus be argued that the core focus for pastoral counselling is *cura animarum,* or soul care (Louw, 2010:80) in the true sense of the word. The Hebrew word for s*oul* can be translated as *nēfēsh*, or breath, and points to the whole person, including both the physical and spiritual dimensions (Benner, 2003:14). An equivalent for *nēfēsh, Habitus*, refers to the

“stance of a human being before God” (Louw, 2010:72). The soul reflects the quality of our being within the presence of God (*coram Deo*) (Louw, 2012:3). Soul forms part of a web of social contexts that determine the qualitive stance in life (Louw, 2008:83). The ‘status of our being human’ through the lens of the cross and resurrection of Jesus is confirmed by a theology of affirmation (Louw, 2008:30). Salvation received through Christ affirms reconciliation with God; through a restored relationship with God, we are able to have a meaningful life in the presence of God in the context of everyday living (Louw, 2008:88; Ward, 2017:6). To be healthy means for the being of a person to be in a position of peace in a relationship with God and the rest of life (including other people [family] and the whole of creation) (Louw, 2008:48).

Soul care or *cura animarum* is care of humans created in the image of God, who depend on Him, because of His salvific deeds through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Louw, 2014:58). The aim is to facilitate transformation from an intention of ‘doing and knowing’ (taking action, planning, setting goals), to a position of strength in being (Louw, 2008:11). From a Christian perspective ‘to be’ implies a growth process by virtue of anticipation and transformation, from an “ethics of performance to unconditional love” (Louw, 2008:11).

A prominent paradox in soul care emanates from the distance between the human and divine worlds. The human soul longs to find healing and wholeness in God, thus the need to build a bridge (connect) between the human and the divine (Anderson, 2001:39, 41). In this regard, the pastor and counselee work together to build a co-constructed story where the story of the counselee fits into the story of God as it is revealed through Scripture (Brunsdon, 2014:9). An eschatological paradigm makes it possible to connect existential realities with relevant God-images; in this process hope becomes an ‘agent of change’ (Louw, 2008:11).

By virtue of the reconciliation made possible through salvation received from Christ, a person is affirmed as a new being before God; this position before Him, strengthens the person with the fruits of the Spirit in order to live with courage and wisdom.

Heidegger describes our new being in Christ with the term ‘*Dasein’,* or in the words of Nouwen, “a new way of being in the world”, as opposed to ‘*Sein’*, referring to “our being in the world” (Dreyer, 2003:718). *Sein* pertains to objectified and empirical data related to psychology while *Dasein* is about our experience of the presence of God, or what Gerben Heitink has termed ‘transendentiebesef’ – a sense of transcendence (spiritual dimension of being) (Dreyer, 2003:720). *Dasein* could also be described as a “new way of being in the world without being of it” (Dreyer, 2003:720).

Spiritual restoration transforms and restores other spheres of life, a notion known as 'faith care' (*cura animarum*) as 'life care' (*cura vitae*) (Louw, 2008:11). From a holistic Christian approach to the healing of life (*cura vitae)*, renewed relationships with other human beings, with God, and the whole of creation, constitute *shalom* (peace) and fullness of life (Louw, 2013:7). Mature faith (wisdom) is a key factor in the negotiation of existential life challenges (faith care as life care) (Louw 2008:217; Brunsdon 2015). Wisdom narratives in Scripture inform and enrich the counselee's experience of being human and finding ways of living wisely (Brunsdon, 2015:6-7).

A positive pastoral approach to pastoral counselling relies on the involvement of God in the lives of His children; through His involvement, they receive His wisdom that empowers them to conquer challenging existential realties in order to live an abundant life (Brunsdon, 2015:3). God is present through His Spirit – the Agent of life – who enriches and confirms our fellowship with Him, and comforts us during difficult life experiences (Guthrie, 1979:5). Inhabitation theology confirms the transformational power of the Holy Spirit in settings where the Christian message is conveyed (Louw, 2008:188).

The risen Christ and immanent Spirit, give rise to new life, hope, and meaning (Louw, 2008:11). A new relationship in Christ, rooted in faith and the transcendent realm encourages hope ('attitude of future anticipation') (Louw, 2015:28, 47). The term '*epangelia*', or eschatological hope, describes the shepherding of God through His mercy, comfort, and compassion (Louw, 2015:46; Viljoen & Lotter, 2018:2). Eschatological hope allows the re-creative power of the Spirit to bring forth new redemptive possibilities to existential realities and to reframe life expectations and direction (Viljoen & Lotter, 2018:2; Redding, 2020:261). Hope of promise and fulfilment regardless of hardships (eschatological hope) stems from trust in God (Louw, 2015:47). It infiltrates negative feelings like anxiety, guilt, shame, and doubt, and replaces it with positive future visions, reconciliation, and freedom (Louw, 2015:246).

In the context of the study, it is relevant to note the correlation between hope and beauty or aesthetics. Aesthetics is significant with regards to the notion of rekindled hope, patience, and agape love (Louw, 2015:46). Beauty endorses the value of aesthetics in the search for meaning in the face of existential despair and pain (Louw, 2015:73). Moltmann described an example of the "enfacement of God and the icon of hope" that presented itself through an unexpected encounter with a blossoming cherry tree in the midst of war and despair. Beauty and aesthetics offer a different lens through which a person can find divine transcendence and hope (Louw, 2014:74). In this sense, pastoral care can add value through a reawakened awareness with regards to possibilities to offer hope by means of aesthetics and beauty as an antidote for 'existential viruses'.

2.4 Summary

The objective of this chapter was to describe the nature and scope of pastoral counselling. It yielded the following insights.

Pastoral counselling resides in the general field of pastoral care, a form of Christian practice that is motivated by the love of God, and seeks to attend to the needs of fellow human beings. The core interest of pastoral counselling denotes care for souls (*cura animarum*) through spiritual guidance aimed at strengthening faith that empowers people to endure hardships and enable meaningful living.

The history of pastoral care and counselling portrays the ways in which it has been a part of the Christian life since the early faith communities. Pastoral history contributed to the evolvement of the practice, and unique challenges required specific approaches to care for congregations, communities, and the faith of individuals. In this way, each period in history provides important insights for future practice. An exposition of the history of pastoral care was compiled from two known academic sources with regard to the history of pastoral counselling, namely Clebsch and Jaekle, and Charles Gerkin. It showed that the pastorate should remain mindful of changing contexts in order to provide appropriate support and guidance to contemporary human beings and societies.

Towards a better understanding of the application of pastoral care, the study presented a short outline of the fourfold distinction of De Jong van Arkel (2000). The context of care as well as intention of care determined the approach towards caregiving. The first level of care, *mutual care,* unfolds in a spontaneous manner through gestures of support towards each other. *Pastoral care* is a more formal expression of care by way of visitations to the sick, grieving, or troubled person. *Pastoral counselling* has similarities with pastoral care, since both indicate a more formalised and structured approach to care, but is discerned from each other by the longer time period of care, formally agreed time and place of meeting, as well as the certain level of qualification in consideration of pastoral counselling. The last of the four forms of care is *pastoral therapy,* which will typically be performed by a specialised person that incorporates the spiritual resources of pastoral theology with therapeutic sources. The therapist does not have to be affiliated with a specific church community, although it remains a preferred option in many congregations.

Pastoral counselling has an epistemological home in the theological sub-discipline of practical theology. Practical theology critically reflects on practices of the church within the practice of the world to ensure faithful participation in the work of God.

In the framework of practical theology, pastoral anthropology works towards a better understanding of the living human document. Human beings were created in the image of God with the purpose of having communion with Him and to imitate His divine nature. As a consequence of human sin, relationships between humans, between humans and God, as well as humans and nature, were fractured and chaos now reigns in the world. In His grace God sent His Son to bring reconciliation through His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus healed broken relationships; in the presence of God, humans are able to find healing, wholeness, peace, and hope.

The scope of pastoral counselling denotes appropriate ways of meaningful engagement in the lives of people. The chaos caused by the Fall prevails and is evident in a myriad of examples throughout the world. Poverty, illnesses, trauma, violence, influences of the 4IR as well as the ecological crises are only a few of the difficult situations people, societies, and the environment have to endure.

Pastoral counselling wants to offer hope, healing, and guidance amidst the suffering of the world. It wants to care for human souls in order for them to persist through suffering and pain. The risen Christ and immanent Spirit give rise to new life; it is the source and reason for the hope that pastoral counselling wants to establish in the lives of those in pain and suffering. The aim is to guide people to an understanding of the character of God, revealed through Scriptures and the incarnated Christ with a view to find spiritual restoration and growth towards mature faith in the presence of God.

An outline and understanding of pastoral counselling provide a theological framework for reflection on the subject of a possible integrated eco-pastoral approach. In this way the unique character of pastoral counselling remains preserved in the collaboration process.

The next objective is to explore the healing potential of nature from the perspective of ecotherapy as partner in an imagined eco-pastoral approach.

CHAPTER 3 THE HEALING POTENTIAL OF NATURE

3.1 Introduction

This study considers the possible contribution of nature to healing as described in the field of ecotherapy and how it can be integrated in pastoral care. In line with this objective, this chapter unfolds in two sections. The first section explores the possible contribution of nature to healing in different domains of human health. The second part focuses on the concept of ecotherapy and the praxeology within the field of ecotherapy, specifically regarding different modalities that are employed as well as techniques and approaches to therapy in nature.

3.2 The contribution of nature towards healing and spiritual health

The intent in this section is to explore the possible contribution of nature to healing. A study of theories and research that supports the notion of healing in nature is considered in connection with physical and emotional healing. In view of the significant position of spiritual healing in the context of pastoral counselling, it is discussed in a separate section.

The long-held belief in the positive influence of nature in support of health has made the transition from theory to evidence, and from evidence to action (Louv, 2012:46). Research suggests that nature can have a positive influence on self-esteem, mental concentration, positive social integration, and an enhanced sense of community. Furthermore, nature can support increased mental and physical vitality, improved affect and cognition, as well as decreased stress levels (Chalquist, 2009:72; Sundaram, 2014:53; Greenleaf *et al.,* 2014:165; Reese & Lewis, 2019:54).

Numerous studies about nature and healing have been conducted within various environments to investigate different components of healing. Three of many other examples include the role of nature in psychospiritual palliative care (Kelly, 2016:87), awe in nature and healing in the context of military veterans (Anderson *et al.*, 2018:1196); and the contribution of ecotherapy during the coronavirus pandemic (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020).

The next paragraphs explore research studies specifically concerned with the influence of nature on physical and emotional healing. This study follows the notion of holistic health suggested by Louw (2008:43-44): therefore, the human being is perceived as a moral, spiritual and social being, operating within a dynamic structure that involves dynamic relationships with fellow humans, nature, and the environment (Louw, 2008:43-44). There seems to be an interconnectedness between the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of health; thus,

physical reactions like the secretion of hormones such as serotonin, dopamine, and cortisol occur in mutual reaction to emotional and spiritual health.

3.2.1 Research studies involved with the healing potential of nature

3.2.1.1 Nature and physical health

A few examples of research studies related to physical health are briefly explained below. A study conducted to determine the influence of rooms with outside nature views on post-surgical recovery, reported improved recovery and less pain medication (Chalquist, 2009:73; Summers & Vivian, 2018:2). A similar study reported improved post-operative recovery and less fatigue with women recovering from breast cancer (Chalquist, 2009:73; Summers & Vivian, 2018:2).

Yoshifumi Miyazaki reported that 20-minute forest walks (known as 'forest bathing' in Japan) increased antiviral bodies, strengthened immune systems, and increased cancer proteins (Sundaram, 2014:54). Miyazaki and his team conducted further clinical trials involving more than 1 000 participants, where results indicated a significant decline in cortisol levels (12.7%) and 10,3% increase in parasympathetic nervous system activities (the area in the brain involved with relaxation). Miyazaki explains that "when we are exposed to nature, our bodies go back to how they should be" (cited in Louv, 2012:51).

3.2.1.2 Nature and emotional health

Research interested in the influence of nature on emotional illnesses has been conducted from different approaches and directed to several emotional challenges, ranging from more severe illnesses like psychiatric patients, to emotional challenges like depression and stress-related illnesses. The next paragraphs illustrate a few examples of such studies.

Pieters *et al.* (2019:57) from the University of California conducted qualitative research to explore the healing effects of human interaction with nature in the context of gardening. They concluded that 84% of participants reported one or more sensory experience of which smell was predominant, while other feedback included relief from isolation, and having space to reflect (Pieters *et al.,* 2019:61-63).

The British Medical Journal accounts research where patients with mild to moderate symptoms of depression took part in an adventure therapy programme that involved swimming with dolphins; a number of participants were able to reduce medication and psychotherapy after a two-week period (Louv, 2012:61). The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences managed the Alnarp healing forest garden, where horticultural therapy programmes are

presented to people diagnosed with burnout and stress-related illnesses. Positive feedback from the programme confirms improved social functioning, self-mastery, and increased sense of coherence (Corazon *et al.,* 2010).

Studies have shown regular contact with nature improves symptoms related to attention-deficit disorder (Louv, 2012:29). A similar study conducted by Michael Ungar, a social work professor at Dalhousie University, indicated that unstructured play within natural spaces not only improved concentration but also resiliency (Harper *et al.,* 2019:25).

3.2.1.3 Nature and the human brain

Researchers have been able to measure activity in different areas of the human brain. Behavioural scientist, Roger Ulrich, measured brain activity in students with stress related symptoms using an electro encephalograph apparatus (EEG). Higher alpha wave amplitudes associated with increased serotonin production resulted from observing nature scenes. Serotonin denotes a chemical that operates within the nervous system and acts as an anti-depressant, resulting in positive thoughts and lower levels of anger and aggression (Selhub & Logan, 2016: 62-63; Louv, 2012:14; Summers & Vivian, 2018:2). In another study, Japanese researchers brought a Near-Infrared spectroscopy[5] (NIRS) device into forest settings. According to their results, a 20-minute forest walk (shinrin-yoku) decreased the total haemoglobin (as found in red blood cells) in the prefrontal cortex, indicating a state of relaxation (Louv, 2012:20). Selhub and Logan (2016:61) explain that views of nature provide access to a part of the brain rich in opioid receptors. Opioid receptors connect brain cells with the dopamine reward system where feelings of wellness are triggered; thus, nature can be viewed as a 'drop of morphine' for the brain (Selhub & Logan, 2016:61).

The studies discussed in this section indicate a positive relation between the influence of nature within the physical-, emotional- and spiritual dimensions of human health and could therefore indicate a holistic influence of nature on healing and health.

3.2.2 Spiritual healing from a Christian perspective

As this research considers spiritual healing and wellness from a Christian perspective, three concepts will be discussed to provide more clarity on the notion of spiritual healing within the

[5] Near infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) measure changes in haemoglobin associated with brain activity by utilising difference in infrared absorption. Sensors are attached to subject by double sided tape. Equipment is portable and durable in the field

context of this study, namely: a pastoral perspective on spirituality; a pastoral perspective on healing; and a pastoral perspective on spiritual healing.

3.2.2.1 A pastoral perspective on spirituality

The concept 'spirituality' is often employed in different religions as well as non-religious traditions. Connotations and perspectives related to the concept of 'spirituality' vary to a large degree. The original understanding of spirituality was rooted in the Greek word '*pneumatikos*' (Sheldrake, 2013:3), meaning 'the Spirit that dwells within'. The word 'spirit' originated from the Latin word 'spiritus', meaning breath and life force (Van Straten, 2019:153). Nouwen (cited in Dreyer, 2003:718) defines spirituality as the experience of God's presence which leads to a "new way of being in the world without being of it" (*Dasein*). Origen recounted God as the only source of 'true knowledge', received through "a mystical dialogue of encounter" with Him (Ward, 2017:30). Personal experiences with God are palpable and lead to a transformed life (Ward, 2017:35). Accordingly, a theological understanding of Christian spirituality involves both "experiential and operational dimensions of faith" (Louw, 2008:57). Biblical spiritual practice includes continuous movement or a pilgrimage towards spiritual maturity, in other words, an experience of God's presence and awareness of transcendence within existential and social conflicts (Ward, 2017:30; Louw, 2008:50). Waaijman (2006:13-14) explains spirituality as a 'relational process' between God and humans. The process transitions between the divine pole (Holy Infinite God) to the human pole (application, dedication). The relation originated in wholeness and the human soul longs to be culminated in coalescence with the Spirit of God (Waaijman, 2006:14).

3.2.2.2 A pastoral perspective on healing

A pastoral perspective on healings by Jesus in the Gospel narratives emphasises His primary concern for spiritual renewal and return to community (O'Connor & Meakes, 2005:13). The pastoral approach to healing embodies this example of Jesus with its essential interest in the care for souls (O'Connor & Meakes, 2005:13). Healing is not possible without salvation through Christ; He fulfilled and restored the true image of God within every human being through His incarnated life (Redding, 2020:194). Since the character of God is relational, a significant part of human beings, created in His image, is displayed in their relation to one another and to the whole of creation (Cavedon, 2015:12). Reconciliation through Christ allows believers to experience peace, or *shalom,* in their relationship with God, other people, and the environment (Louw, 2008:48).

3.2.2.3 A pastoral perspective on spiritual healing

A Christian perspective on healing stems from a rekindled awareness of God's presence and grace. From this awareness, God leads people to an understanding of His character and involvement with His people (Louw, 2008:72). Spiritual healing becomes possible when one can relate existential realities with an appropriate understanding of the work of God (Barry, 2004:80). Nouwen (1979:20) describes this notion as an "upward spiritual journey" towards 'authentic existence' in the presence of God from where "human wounds and suffering are intimately connected to the suffering of God" (Nouwen, 1979:24-25). The intimate encounter with God encourages spiritual growth, and consequently mature faith that empowers human beings to overcome difficult life circumstances and experience a full earthly life (Brunsdon, 2017:111). In relation to the notion of a spiritual journey to healing, Horsthuis (2016) recounts the Perichoretic participative approach to suffering as a way of moving beyond the theodicy, or what could be perceived as a pastoral pathological approach to healing. His work relies on the book *Beyond Theodicy: moving toward a Trinitarian and participative spirituality of care* by Paul Fiddes (2000).

Perichoretic spiritual participation refers to the loving heart of the Triune God present in the suffering of the world (Horsthuis, 2016:93). A theology of perichoretic participation understands the being of God amid an unfolding relational space wherein the Triune God wants to respond to His creation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each in a way that reflects their distinctive relations (Horsthuis, 2016:98). The Father relates *with* His children, and suffers with creation; the Son suffers *as* humans do; and the Spirit suffers *in* creation (crying out in the birth pains of creation – Rom. 8:22-3) (Horsthuis, 2016:98). The presence of God who understands the suffering of believers strengthens faith, awakens hope, and promotes love (Horsthuis, 2016:100).

3.2.3 Theoretical assumptions underlying the healing potential of nature

Although it falls beyond the scope of this study to provide an extensive description of eco-psychological theories, a few remarks in terms of theoretical assumptions underlying this notion will be discussed in order to provide further context.

According to Jordan (2016:65), nature provides a space within the therapeutic dyad in psychotherapy that can be utilised as a backdrop or foreground in therapy (Jordan, 2016:66). It allows the therapist to engage with the counselee in a non-threatening way. As 'co-therapist', nature could assist in guiding the therapeutic process, providing a secure space to where both

therapist and counselee can regulate emotional responses and experience security (Jordan, 2016:67).

3.2.3.1 Interconnected relation between humans and nature

People have an interrelated interdependent relationship with ecosystems on earth: green plants transmute carbon dioxide to oxygen, food comes from soil, our waste is purified by micro-organisms for reuse, and so on (Robinson, 2009:29). Cahalan (cited in Clinebell, 2013) explains human interconnectedness with nature as follows:

> There seems to be a deep, genetically based need in all people for such rootedness or sense of place, in which our very nervous system requires this face to face, balanced giving and taking, a self-corrective interchange within the human and nonhuman life community.

Unfortunately, earlier human relationships with the natural world, that had a profound impact on grounded sense of identity (Clinebell, 2013), has been affected by urbanisation and technological advances, as well as the primary focus on individual's deficiency and pathology in contemporary health care systems and mental wellness approaches (Barrow, 2019:27-29). The postmodern world has resulted in an egocentric positioning towards the world, and separation from our planet (Barrow, 2019:27-29). Together with eco-therapists who have stressed the need for renewed perspectives of well-being, through recognising human interconnectedness with the world (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009:15, 45-46; Barrow, 2019:29), pastoral care practitioners call for a reconceptualised "living web of humanity…within the larger living web of creation" (McCarroll, 2020:36).

3.2.3.2 Biophilia hypothesis

North American biologist, Edward Wilson, introduced the biophilia hypothesis in 1984. Wilson distinguishes between 'biophobia' and 'biophilia'. The former, *biophobia,* refers to spontaneous human reactions directed towards survival, for instance, strong fear of snakes, heights, and closed spaces. The latter, *'biophilia',* refers to a genetically based human need to affiliate with the natural environment, particularly living organisms, possibly related to natural elements needed to survive (Clinebell, 2013; McGeeney, 2016). The human subconscious urge to affiliate with the rest of life and the environment is still very evident in human genetic predispositions (Greenleaf *et al.,* 2014:166-167). This manifests in the following ways: pictures of mountains, landscapes, and weather conditions on computer screen savers; love for pets and parks; bird watching and numerous documentary films of nature (Jordan, 2009:26; Clinebell, 2013), to mention a few examples. Following decades of

studies on the biophilia hypothesis, research remains interested in this deep human inclination towards nature (Jordan, 2009:26).

3.2.3.3 Attention restoration theory (ART)

In the late 1800s, Harvard psychologist William James became the first person to observe the notion of voluntary attention (intentional focus) in contrast with involuntary attention (sparked by a degree of fascination and captivation) (Selhub & Logan, 2012:64). Years later, in 1899, Witte, a superintendent who practiced for many years at the Iowa hospital for mental health, proposed the theory that involuntary attention could be enhanced by "delving in soil". Again, many years later in the late 1980s, Kaplan reaffirmed nature's cognitive restorative potential as an antidote to fatigue caused by too much direct attention (Louv, 2012:28; Selhub & Logan, 2012:58). The modern technology with its mind-oriented culture demands constant decision-making and self-regulation in stressful environments; in other words, it requires restrictive direct attention (Greenleaf *et al.,* 2014:167). Opposed to modern environments, captivating surroundings in nature hold attention involuntarily without requiring too much energy (Louv, 2012:28; Selhub & Logan, 2012:58). ART acknowledges the 'restorative quality' of natural environments that do not demand cognitive or emotional focused attention, but rather calms and focuses the mind to a position where it regains the ability to detect patterns overseen in similar conditions (Louv, 2012:28; Greenleaf *et al.,* 2014:167). Hence, ART denotes the ability of nature to restore cognition, an important component to combat anxiety, depression, and burnout (Selhub & Logan, 2012:71-72).

3.2.3.4 Eudemonia and nature

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, defined *eudemonia* as well-being found within "living true to oneself" (Hinds, 2016:45). It acknowledges a purposeful life achieved through virtues like courage and honesty (Hinds, 2016:45). Evidence suggests that experiences during nature engagements generate responses aligned to the concept of eudemonia, for instance, feelings of awe and inspiration (Hinds, 2016:48). The natural world acts as source of inspiration and meaning, for instance the stars, universe and cosmic liturgy evoke mystery and awe (Louv, 2012:246). Wonder found in nature is a powerful response within times of trauma and anxiety. Crises tend to turn people inward towards their own needs, while wonder motivates attention to move outwards and open up to a circle of care to others and the environment (Copeland, 2021:4). This impulse can realign theological anthropology within the web of the whole creation (Copeland, 2021:5).

This part of the chapter probed research and theories that underly the notion of nature offering support to human health. Literature offers examples from research studies and theories to confirm nature's healing potential for emotional and physical health. The following section looks at the practice of ecotherapy.

3.3 The practice of ecotherapy

During the last decade of the twentieth century, the connection between humans and nature became a discrete undertaking within ecological initiatives in counselling and psychotherapy. Increased specialisation in ecotherapy has been met with tension between initial innovations wanting to present creative new ideas, on the one hand, and institutional facilities that want to provide research-based approaches as well as systemise ecotherapy to be acknowledged as a unified scientific-based field in psychology, on the other hand (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:16). The tension, however, need not be seen as a negative influence in ecotherapy but rather as an aspect that promotes creativity within different growing advances in the field of ecotherapy (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:15). The following section explores this evolving field of ecotherapy with the aim of outlining the meaning of the concept of ecotherapy. This will be done by exploring familiar modalities and techniques in ecotherapy.

3.3.1 Definition of ecotherapy

In exploring the potential of ecotherapy for pastoral counselling, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the concept of 'ecotherapy'. The term has been employed by different scholars involved in many ecological related therapeutic approaches, often associated with different intentions and perceptions. The next part of this section probes the meaning and nature of the concept of 'ecotherapy' as described in academic sources.

Howard Clinebell was the first to use the term 'ecotherapy' in reference to the reciprocal relationship of healthy interaction and mutual care and nurturing between humans and nature (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009:19).

Thomas Doherty, founding editor of the journal 'Ecopsychology', and director of the Ecopsychology certificate programme presented at Lewis and Clark Graduate School (United States) depicts ecotherapy as an umbrella term to include all methods involved with nature-based therapy. Doherty (2016:15) compiled what seems to be the most comprehensive framework to describe the practice of ecotherapy:

> Ecotherapy is psychotherapeutic activities (counselling, psychotherapy, social work, self-help, prevention, public health activities), undertaken with an ecological consciousness or intent. It

> utilizes natural settings, activities or processes as an integral part of the therapeutic process and focus on ecological aspects of self, identity and behaviour at various scales, from personal to planetary.

In their draft, the University of Essex (United Kingdom) supplies an evaluation report wherein ecotherapy is referred to as a nature-based intervention practiced within a variety of natural settings, to provide an ecosystem service with treatment modalities where the natural world is involved in mutual healing and growth (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020).

Each of the above definitions portray nature as a therapeutic setting. Another commonality involves the reciprocal relationship within which nurturing and healing take place. Mindful interaction with nature is cognisant of the needs of both humans and nature; it denotes commitment to environmental awareness and affinity (Selhub & Logan, 2012:145). Contact with nature cultivates depth and concern for environmental challenges (Buzzell, 2009:70).

The terms ‘ecotherapy’ and ‘ecopsychology' present many similar ideas but also have foundational differences. An understanding of the difference between the two concepts contributes to a better understanding of ecotherapy. The term ‘ecopsychology’, coined by Theodore Roszak in 1992 (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1), has strong connotations with ecotherapy. Both terms encompass the intricate human relationship with nature and the reciprocal healing ability within the relationship (Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1). Ecopsychology, however, encompasses the synthesis of ecology and psychology through skilful application of ecological insights in the practice of psychotherapy (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020). It works towards the greening of the psyche and psychology, while ecotherapy works towards a holistic relationship with nature primarily aimed at healing of the person (Clinebell, 2013). While some practitioners see ecotherapy as applied ecopsychology, Doherty (2016:20) prefers to view ecopsychology as a theoretical contributor to ecotherapy.

The purpose of the following section is to explore the praxeology of ecotherapy, specifically in the matter of the modalities and techniques applied in eco-therapeutic practice.

3.3.2 Different modalities within eco-therapeutic practices

Direct contact with nature or elements of nature promotes sensory awareness and enables a person to connect his/her inner world with the outer landscape. This outward movement, together with a slower life pace, encourages a wider and deeper framework from where personal challenges can be observed, and ultimately the transformation of personal perspectives (Hasbach, 2016:143). A number of nature-based modalities invites the potential

value of nature into their practices. A short discussion of well-established eco-therapeutic modalities follows next.

3.3.2.1 Horticultural therapy

The healing impact of gardens has been recognised since the times of ancient Egypt, when therapeutic gardening was rendered as one of the oldest therapeutic approaches to mental health. During World War II, volunteers were mobilised to support war veterans struggling with psychological and physical trauma related challenges in horticultural garden clubs. Healing gardens is a well-documented phenomenon in response to crises. Rebecca Copeland (2021) believes the practice of gardening provides psychological and theological resources that promote resilience, as well as a place to connect with the divine in times of crises and anxiety (for instance, during war, or the pandemic in 2021). Despite challenges, nature provokes a sense of wonder and shifts attention outwards from self-concern towards care for the other (Copeland, 2021).

Horticultural therapies have been successfully employed to attend to different mental illnesses (Corazon *et al.,* 2010), it has proven to increase productivity, self-esteem, and responsibility, and decrease levels of anger and aggressiveness (Clinebell, 2013). Therapeutic horticulture can be applied either as a passive appreciation of gardens, or active gardening and the producing of vegetables (McGeeney, 2016). Metaphors as important therapeutic tools can be applied in horticultural therapy e.g., inability to control the growth of seeds, as a metaphor for personal challenges that could not always be controlled but need to be accepted (Corazon *et al.,* 2012:340). One example of horticultural therapy is found in Ontario, Canada, where an eco-therapeutic programme assists people with eating disorders. Participants are encouraged to find a connection between health and plants through their interaction with plants (Diehl, 2009:127).

3.3.2.2 Adventure-based therapy

Adventure therapy denotes a facilitated process of explored and participated activities within a natural setting (Harper *et al.,* 2019:106). Activities can contain potential risk and fear, leading to disruptions or discomfort that could add value and motivate growth (Harper *et al.,* 2019:106). Adventure-based activities e.g., backpacking, rock climbing, and river rafting, entail both physical ability and technical expertise. There has been a recent shift to formalised regulation and accredited bodies to encourage a professional approach to adventure-based therapy (Hafford, 2014:54). Gass *et al.* (2012:1) define adventure-based therapy as the “prescriptive use of adventure experiences provided by mental health professionals, often conducted in

natural settings that kinaesthetically engage clients on cognitive, affective, and behavioural levels". Benefits acquired through physical activity and challenges are further elevated by sensory experiences like beautiful views, natural sounds (or silence), scents, natural light and darkness, and animals (Selhub & Logan, 2012:163).

3.3.2.3 Wilderness therapy

Wilderness therapy entails an immersion or stepping into the world of the wild. An example of a project that involves wilderness therapy, is the wilderness programme in Tegami, Canada, facilitated by clinical social worker and pastoral counsellor, Richard Voss (Clinebell, 2013). Participants embark on a week-long therapeutic canoe trip, aimed to renew balance by "reconnecting and recommitting to self, neighbour, and earth" (Clinebell, 2013). Metaphorically, the wilderness compares to an emotional, spiritual, and physical 'container', enabling people to travel within their own wilderness, while stretching boundaries, sharing personal metaphors, and reflecting on life (Clinebell, 2013). Challenging physical demands like carrying essential equipment and movement through difficult terrain, contribute towards a strengthened connection between humans and nature (Greenway, 2009:136). It provides an environment that allows the mind to become deeply engaged and fascinated, in order to develop mindfulness and present momentary awareness (Greenway, 2009:136). Group dynamics like shared duties improve mutual caring and trust, as well as tribal consciousness. In contrast to group dynamics, the process is further complemented by critical features like individual solitude, reflection, and contemplation (Selhub & Logan, 2012:161; Greenway, 2009:137).

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, ecotherapy entails both a relationship with the natural environment as well as with animals, wherein nurturing care of the non-human world supports health. The following sub-sections explore therapeutic techniques where the human-animal relationship is invited into therapy.

3.3.2.4 Animal assisted therapy (AAT)

Animal-based interventions mostly involve animals like horses, dolphins, and dogs. Practitioners in the field of AAT discern between AAT involved with the therapeutic value of psychological companionship between humans and animals, as opposed to animal-based interventions aimed at deeper psychological trauma and healing (Hinds & Ranger, 2016:187). Examples of psychological companionship within therapeutic practices entails a therapy dog that provides physical engagement and interaction by comforting emotionally distressed individuals during therapeutic sessions. Some therapists allow clients to bring their own pets into therapy (Kamitsis & Simmonds, 2017:242). The Return to Freedom (RTF) American wild

horse sanctuary situated close to Lompoc, California, presents activities that engage with traumatised animals and species taking part in social bonding therapeutic activities. The farm provides a safe haven where nearly 200 wild horses, threatened with extermination, are allowed to run free. Individuals and groups visit the sanctuary, engage in retreats, attend horse-care clinics, or join in “walking meditations” through herds. Eco-therapist and owner, Nada DeMayo, describes the participants’ experiences and connection with the horses as awe-inspiring (2009:151). Herds run free, and have the choice to leave, but curious young horses occasionally approach humans, creating a place of “presence”. Horses carry a well-developed sensitivity and responsiveness about humans and body language that encourage consistent actions, thoughts, and feelings (Hinds & Ranger 2016:190). Physical immersion in a wild herd has healing potential; improves self-esteem; and increases trust in intuition and instinct, as well as a sense of awakened spirituality (DeMayo, 2009:151-153).

3.3.2.5 Eco-therapeutic services within communities

Although ecotherapy practices most often unfold by means of personal and group therapy, it has been organised with success in social and environmental contexts. Educational institutions like ‘Forest schools’ in Scandinavia have a long tradition of learning in natural settings and has gained popularity in the United States (Robbins, 2020). Schools with ‘greened grounds’ report reduced absenteeism, and improved learning abilities (Louv, 2012:29). Universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Israel, Sweden, and Japan established healing centres, with nature activities as preventative medicine, and certain universities present post-graduate nature-based therapy programmes (McGeeney, 2016).

Churches from different affiliations joined the ‘Forest Church” movement where the core spiritual practice involves active engagement with the natural world as part of creation. Worship takes place in outdoor environments, acknowledging a theological foundation in the dual nature of Christ as well as in God’s presence within nature (Williams, 2018:2, 4).

3.3.3 Eco-therapeutic processes and techniques

Similar to most psychotherapeutic practices, each eco-therapist has their own unique approach to therapy. Approaches vary in terms of flexibility in movement between indoor and outdoor locations or with regard to levels of risk and physicality (Harper *et al.,* 2019:67; Jordan & Hinds, 2016:1). Certain prominent eco-therapeutic processes and techniques will be discussed below. The eco-therapeutic processes from two programmes in the field of ecotherapy are discussed next, along with a short exposition of strategies and techniques.

The Alnarp forest garden in Sweden presents a rehabilitation programme that consists of three main phases:

- Prelude: The objective is to establish a sense of awareness and presence within a natural surrounding (Corazon *et al.,* 2010:40).

- Recuperating or Grounding and strength: The objective in this phase works towards diffused stressful events, and a resilient frame of mind through active engagement with nature (Pálsdótter, 2016:117).

- Empowerment or Growth and new paths: The objective is to find meaning, and define personal values and future action (Pálsdótter, 2016:117; Corazon *et al.,* 2010:40).

Joseph Cornell, environmental educator, developed the Flow learning model from a pattern he observed during his many years of work in ecotherapy (Harper *et al.,* 2019:128). The main aim of his model is directed towards increased engagement and receptiveness in nature. It has four stages and follows no specific linear process, but rather adapts according to each unique situation. The four stages include:

1) Awaken enthusiasm: The objective signifies an invitation to connect with one's surroundings and be present

2) Focus Attention: To sharpen awareness

3) Direct Experience: Active engagement through nature activities

4) Focus and share inspiration (Harper *et al.,* 2019:129).

In principle, the two models correlate in terms of process and strategies.

A discussion of eco-therapeutic strategies and activities unfolds in accordance with the two processes mentioned above.

3.3.3.1 Prelude/awaken enthusiasm

This initial phase wants to establish a sense of place and presence through techniques like sensual stimulation and becoming silent.

Sensual awareness means to become aware of rhythms, stimuli, and nurturing elements in nature. It can be encouraged with the aid of relaxation exercises, serenity or 'social quietness', and breathing exercises (Harper *et al.,* 2019:128; Pálsdótter, 2016:117-118; Clinebell, 2013:).

Shifting winds, a cacophony of birdsong, insect noises and unfolding seasonal changes, provide a means of engaging with the elements of nature (McGeeney, 2016). Engagement with nature gives rise to ego transcendence and a shift to eco- or creation-centredness (McGeeney, 2016). Harper *et al.* (2019:137-138) provide the example of the 'Nature Detective' activity, whereby children explore landscapes and develop a selective attention focus. Initial instructions include finding a leaf bigger than your hand, or something prickly. In the course of time, tasks evolve into deeper exploration, for instance, finding objects in nature that create certain sensations when touched, or four trees that look like important people in your life. The aim of the 'nature detective activity' is to help the counselee, it could be a child, teenager or adult, to become involved in the landscape of the natural environment from where attention is moved to the 'inner landscape' (Harper *et al.,* 2019:137).

3.3.3.2 Recuperating/creating direct human-nature experiences

Once initial awareness and connection has been established, the process advances towards active engagement. Eco-therapeutic techniques and activities typically include metaphors focused on creative activities and physical engagement.

- The use of metaphors

Metaphors are applied at the hand of meaning-making objects in nature with the purpose of enhancing direct sensory experiences, creating opportunities for reflection, or transforming perspectives (Harper *et al.,* 2019:147). Nature presents a variety of rich metaphors, for example: "swimming upstream, feeling bright and sunny or feeling dark, sinking in quicksand" (Hasbach, 2016:140). Guided imaging is a technique closely related to metaphors. For example, facilitating a relived encounter with the Creator, reconnecting with place, and sensory images that accompanied the encounter. The technique could offer support to let go of challenges, while spending time with God.

An example of an employed nature metaphor in an indoor setting could comprise a compiled box with nature objects like shells, rocks, seeds, and feathers. Objects assist clients with regards to self-expression (Hasbach, 2016:140).

- Creative activities in nature

Objects built from elements obtained either from nature or previously collected (paper, string or objects with personal meaning) allow participants to observe or notice feelings and experiences without judgement (Harper *et al.,* 2019:133). An example suggests creating three

facial expressions representing different emotions, and then positioning oneself physically according to one's own emotions and circumstances (Harper *et al.,* 2019:133).

Opposed to traditional indoor therapy rooms with limited movement, textures, and colours, nature offers a space with abundant dynamic processes of diverse motion and vitality (Marshall, 2016:151). Movement in nature creates a sense of space and intentional direction; it encourages somatosensory awareness, for instance, becoming aware of one's own breathing, muscle tone, mucous membranes and style of movement, and enhances access to non-conscious layers (Marshall, 2016:151-155).

- Bonding places in nature

'Place bonding' or 'Sit spots' invite people to identify, connect with, and visit a selected place in an ongoing process (Harper *et al.,* 2019:143). The technique serves as homework between sessions. It allows for interaction throughout different weather conditions and times of the day, with the purpose of evoking a deeper sense of perception and belonging over a longer period of time (Hasbach, 2016:141).

3.3.3.3 Future empowerment/share inspiration with others

The purpose of the final phase of the programme is concerned with internalised transformed perspectives and future goals to ensure successful readjustment after completion of the programme.

- Narratives and rituals

Participants' share meaningful stories or narratives of their experiences in nature (Harper *et al.,* 2019:167). Projective methods like storytelling, narratives, imaging, and rituals contribute towards personal healing and healing with regard to earth alienation (Clinebell, 2013). Christian hymns, which are a powerful part of worship that confirms the beauty of God's creation, comprise many rich metaphors related to nature (Clinebell, 2013).

Rituals honour and celebrate successes and milestones and can be successfully applied during the opening or closure of nature sessions (Harper *et al.,* 2019:164). Rituals restore control associated with loss (Harper *et al.,* 2019:167). Earth-related rituals encourage care and compassion for all living things (Clinebell, 2013).

3.4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the potential contribution of nature towards emotional and spiritual healing, as well as to gain a better understanding of ecotherapy as the partner in the integrative process towards possible collaboration. The chapter evolved by virtue of two sections. In order to gain knowledge of the role of nature in supporting and promoting healing, the first section explored literature related to research studies and theories in support of this notion. Research affirms positive relations between the influence of nature and human health. Movement and interaction with nature increase serotonin production, strengthen anti-viral bodies, decrease symptoms related to stress and depression, and improve concentration. Literature confirms the deep, genetically based human need for rootedness or sense of place, and emotional affiliation with the earth and other living organisms. The ART acknowledges nature's ability to calm and focus the mind, and to provide inspiration, meaning, awe and mystery.

The second part of the chapter considered the practice of ecotherapy, a modality aimed towards healing within the mutual relationship between human beings and nature. The chapter concluded with a discussion on existing modalities and strategies prominent in the field of ecotherapy. Processes and techniques were studied at the hand of two practices: The Alnarp forest garden and the Flow model of Joseph Cornell. Three specific phases or themes became evident from the programmes, namely: there is an initial aim to establish awareness and sense of presence, thereafter active engagement with nature involves techniques like art in and through nature, physical activities, and place bonding. The final phase prepares and equips participants for termination and readjustment after the completion of therapy. Typical activities would be sharing narratives that relate to experiences in nature and performing rituals and set goals.

In conclusion, the practice and scope of ecotherapy, together with eco-therapeutic perspectives concerning the potential contributions of nature to healing, seems to hold potential for eco-pastoral counselling. Since the secular field of ecotherapy presents opportunities for different religions to apply related techniques, collaboration from a theological pastoral perspective seeks to find Scriptural insight in the light of divine revelations concerning the influence of nature within pastoral counselling. The objective of the following chapter will be to analyse Scriptural texts to obtain a better understanding of divine intention with the relation between humans and nature, specifically regarding healing in nature.

CHAPTER 4 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NATURE AS A SPACE FOR GOD'S INVOLVEMENT WITH HUMANS

4.1 Introduction

In line with the exploratory nature and practical theological framework of this study, this chapter explores some biblical perspectives on nature as a particular space where God is present, and subsequently, a potential sphere where humans can experience His presence as part of a pastoral healing process.

Thus far, the study has served as a reminder that practical theological thinking is about critical reflection on practices of faith communities in light of the Word with a view on more appropriate responses. In this case, reflecting on pastoral practices to include strategies of ecotherapy in a possible eco-pastoral approach. In order to attain this goal, the objective of this chapter involves an investigation of selected passages from the Scriptures with regards to the relationship between humans and nature in order to uncover theological principles for use in a possible eco-pastoral praxeology.

A number of texts in Scripture relates in different contexts to the natural creation of God. In certain passages the intent might be to declare God's provenance and creative acts in nature (Ps. 8; 95:3-5), while others apply nature metaphors to endorse life values (Prov. 6:6-8) and the narrative in Jonah 2:10 affirms the authority and kinship of God in nature. The New Testament includes narratives where Jesus used water to demonstrate His sovereignty and power (Jn. 2:1-11; Matt. 14:24-33), or of His work as a Teacher that occurred on the mountain (Matt. 5-6). Jesus applied examples from nature in His teachings (Matt. 9:37-38) and parables (Mk. 4:1-20); and during His crucifixion and death, nature responded with darkness and an earthquake (Lk. 23:44-47; Matt. 27:50-54). Revelations in Scripture confirm that creation is interrelated with the history of God, and will be there to proclaim the second coming of Jesus (Matt. 24:29-31; 2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Reformed theology is especially mindful of the notion that God reveals Himself through nature as part of what is known as His general revelation (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:7). While God specifically reveals Himself through Christ who is revealed through the salvation history narrated in the Holy Scriptures, Paul reminds us that God can also be known in God's creation (Rom. 1:20). According to Heyns and Pieterse (1990:8), creation or nature can thus be viewed as part of God's covenantal involvement with humans created in His image. When the eyes of humans are opened in faith, they develop an awareness of God and His majesty as reflected by nature. Scriptures are rich in texts such as Psalms 8, 19, 29, 93 and others where believers

stood in awe about the wonder of God as experienced in nature. This principle is of pivotal importance from a pastoral perspective as it alludes to the pastoral potential of creation as a space for greater awareness of God and eventually finding healing in His presence as experienced in creation.

Mindful of this, four texts will be explored to come to some theological understanding of God's pastoral presence in creation, namely: 1 Kings 19:9-18, Psalm 104, Mark 4:35-41 and Romans 8:18-30. These texts were chosen as an initial reading suggesting God's involvement with humans with reference to the context of creation.

- 1 Kings 19:9-18

First Kings 19:9-18 recounts a theophanic encounter between God and Elijah on Mount Sinai. Elijah believes he might die; he is overwhelmed with physical and emotional exhaustion. God provides food, water and rest, He takes care of Elijah's physical needs, and provides spiritual restoration through His divine presence (Tonstad, 2005:259). New understanding with regard to Elijah's experience of the presence of God in the context of nature could provide guidance in the consideration of the notion of finding healing in the context of nature.

- Psalm 104

Psalm 104 presents a psalm of praise to God – the Creator and Sustainer of all (Barker, 1986:57). The writer recognises that contemplating how God sustains creation opens himself to recognise God as such, and trusting upon the Lord as a source of his own joy and well-being. Psalm 104 presents important theological principles about the identity of God from where His loving involvement with humans flow.

- Mark 4:35-41

Mark 4:35-41 recounts an occurrence in nature where Jesus demonstrates His divine authority. The disciples respected Jesus as their Teacher, but could not yet grasp the full implication of His kingship. He was with them in the storm, but they did not recognise and trust Him as their Redeemer and Saviour. Jesus displayed His true character through His authority over creation in order to guide the disciples to a true understanding of His character. Pastoral counselling wants to follow the example of Jesus, our Teacher, in the way He guided people to a true understanding of His identity, and therefore could learn from this text where Jesus guided His disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

- Romans 8:18-30

The intimate relationship between creation, believers, and the Spirit, displayed through the notion of a threefold "groaning" in Romans 8:18-30, confirms the connected interrelatedness between nature (creation) and humans in the eschatological process towards future liberation and glorification (Breytenbach, 2013:9). The text shed light on the involvement of the Spirit, Giver of life and Intercessor, within the process of transformation (Kruse, 2012:349). The passage appears to hold potential value for the pastoral notion of eschatological hope to the suffering world, in a contemplated notion of healing that involves humans and nature.

The following passages note key assumptions in the approach to biblical analyses of the four texts.

4.2 Analysis of texts

Scriptural engagement involves a complex relationship between the reader of the Bible, the text, and the Holy Spirit (Bennett, 2013:17). Analysis of the four Scriptural texts in this study is done by means of a socio-cultural historical approach. A socio-cultural historical analysis is aimed at gaining insight into the social, religious and historical context, as well as the dynamic interplay between the context and events in the passage (Bennett, 2013:25; Van Rensburg *et al.,* 2014:139). God reveals His character and involvement progressively throughout Scripture (Van Rensburg *et al.,* 2014:208).

Context shapes the way the text is seen and understood (Bennett, 2013:21). Textual analysis from a practical theological stance is concerned with human experience of the involvement of God in their lives, particularly in response to suffering or need as a way to increase the love of God (McClure, 2012:270). As a sub-discipline of practical theology, pastoral counselling considers the context of existential realities as the subject of theological reflection (Rowland & Bennett, 2006:8-9). Rowland and Bennett (2006:10) perceive context as "interweaving threads of tradition within the web of own life experiences and structures of life". It could be compared with a metaphor of a web wherein a complex network of voices from tradition and experience should be heard and considered. The socio-cultural context would include concepts like the tradition of the church, interaction with other disciplines, and social paradigms (Briggs, 2015:214; Rowland & Bennett, 2006:14). Although the departure point involves the context of people, the implication is not that it takes primary importance, or determines the context of the Scriptural text (Dames & Louw, 2020:113).

The text should be critically contemplated, without sacrificing imaginative, cooperative, and relational interpretation (Bennett, 2013:30). An exploration of gospel narratives of change,

healing and growth, in the context of unfolding personal experiences, illustrates organic use of Scripture. *Listening* and self-reflection create opportunities to resonate personal and existential challenges with Scriptural narratives, promises, and guidelines (Bennett, 2013:20; Rowland & Bennett, 2006:120).

Organic use and contemplation of Scripture could not end with reflection, but requires internalisation and intentional response, that comprises action towards transformation to the image of the incarnated Divine Word (Rowland & Bennett, 2006:12). Ward (2017:139) confirms the importance of action in Scriptural use, noting that "[d]oing theology involves a reflective engagement with action".

The following section presents the textual analysis of each pericope with the help of exegetic sources and commentaries. An initial introduction of the pericope provides an outline of the pericope with regards to genre, authorship, as well as time of origin. Genre entails the framework within which communication in a pericope takes place (Slusser, 2018:24). Thereafter, a short exposition of the contents follows, as well as an intertextual relationship with other texts. Textual analysis of each pericope is concluded with a theological consideration of the text.

4.3 First Kings 19:9-18

Elijah fled from His prophetic task in an effort to escape Beersheba and Jezebel's threats on his life. Elijah feels hopeless and is convinced he has failed his divine task. He travels 40 days to Mount Horeb where he expects to encounter a powerful display of nature from God. The pericope surprises with an unexpected theophany when God show Elijah intimate grace in a still quiet voice.

4.3.1 Context of 1 Kings 19:9-18

Genre

First and 2 Kings form part of the prophetic historical narratives, which encompasses 40% of the Old Testament historical narratives (Waltke, 2007:93). The original Book of Kings had to be divided, since it could not fit onto the ancient scrolls due to its exceptional length (Waltke, 2007:93).

Author

First and 2 Kings want to reinforce covenantal renewal from the theology of Deuteronomy. The implied author is believed to be the Deuteronomist (Waltke, 2007:703), although some

scholars believe an anonymous person from 6 BC compiled the book from contributions of different authors (Hill & Walton, 2009:285).

Time of origin

First and 2 Kings documents circumstances and events stretching from the reign of King Solomon, to the decline in Israel's faith, 'covenant failure', and the consistent sovereignty and engagement of God through His prophets (Hill & Walton, 2009:279, 285; Waltke, 2007:702). The book encompasses the remnant theme of the Old Testament, which describes the small number of people who always remained faithful to God (Hays & Duvall, 2011:200).

Place of the pericope in the Book of 1 Kings

First Kings 17-19 constitutes a narrative unit, with three acts combined into a structured sequence of events. A short overview of the preceding events in 1 Kings 17-18 sets the background for the pericope that follows. Elijah has shown great spiritual accomplishments, he had faith in God's providence, was fed by ravens, showed courage against sin, and did great works in God's name (Ryken, 2011:519). In the conflict between Elijah and the Baal prophets at Mount Carmel, the Lord answers Elijah's prayers and sent fire to light and burn the sacrifice to ashes. He defeated the Baal prophets, and people were in awe of the Lord: "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God" (1 Ki. 18:39) (Tonstad, 2005:253). Surprisingly, a few days later, Elijah flees from Beersheba and his prophetic calling in reaction to queen Jezebel's threat to his life (Epp-Tiesen, 2006:36). He left his servant behind and sat down under a broom tree in the wilderness. Discouraged, and depressed, he believed he failed God's cause, just like his fathers did on their way to Canaan (Epp-Tiesen, 2006:36; Maier, 2016:76). He pleaded that God would end His life (1 Ki. 19:4). Two consecutive times, God provided him with food and water whereafter Elijah commenced on a journey of 40 days to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, the same mountain of theophany and revelation where Moses and the Israelites met God many years before (Exod. 24:11) (Tonstad, 2005:256; Maier, 2016:77). It is imagined that Elijah was aware of the significance of the place and could have anticipated an explosive encounter with God (Martin, 2018:256).

4.3.2 Contents and short exposition of 1 Kings 19:8-19

The Lord spoke to Elijah in the cave on Mount Horeb where he was spending the night. He wanted to know what Elijah was doing there, and Elijah explained in a discouraged manner he was the only faithful person left, while his life was also threatened. God commanded Elijah to wait for Him to 'pass' by (cf. Exod. 33:22). A mighty display of power followed: a great wind that broke rocks and parted mountains passed him, but God was not present in the wind.

Neither was He to be accounted for in the earthquake and fire that followed. God then came to Elijah in a still quiet voice. The term '*qôl*' refers to sound and '*dem am â'* to silence. These seemingly contradictive concepts, describes a minimised sound (Sweeney, 2007). Elijah covers his face with his mantle and goes to the entrance of the cave to protect himself from witnessing God (cf. Exod. 33:20). The Lord repeated the same question He was asking the previous time, and Elijah replies with the same answer (verse 13-14). God then commands Elijah: "Go! Return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus". He did not respond with the same self-directedness of Elijah who believes he is the 'only one left', but reminded Elijah that the word of God cannot be silenced. There were 7,000 people who remained faithful and did not bow before Baal (the numbers seven and thousand are symbolic numbers that describe completeness). The presence and intimate grace of God renewed and encouraged his servant to continue his prophetic work (Maier, 2016:78).

4.3.3 Theological considerations

4.3.3.1 God strengthens a hopeless Elijah with His gentle whisper

Despite previous successes as a prophet of YHWH, Elijah was overwhelmed with hopeless feelings; he believed he failed God, and felt left alone (Martin, 2018:256). He showed symptoms of burnout, pessimism and self-absorption, and his trust was limited to his own strengths (Martin, 2018:256).

Historic Old Testament theophanic events describe different manifestations of God's presence and omnipotence, and include natural elements like earthquakes (Exod. 19:18) and fire (Exod. 3:2), as well as mysterious manifestations like clouds (Exod. 13:21). In a different encounter, Moses and the Israelites witnessed a display of divine power in the Exodus encounter on the same mountain Elijah was expecting the Lord. In 1 Kings 18, God used 'natural forces' to communicate His divine authority in the conflict between YAHWEH and the prophets of Baal. With this in mind, Elijah was possibly expecting an awe-inspiring display of power to counteract his exhaustion and disappointment. Instead, God finally speaks in a 'gentle whisper' (NIV), a still, small voice (KJV), 'gentle breeze', a sound of gentle stillness (AMP). The Hebrew translation speaks of a 'tiny, silent sound'. The focus has shifted to an 'internal matter', where the character of God and the way humans perceive the 'unseen' God, comes to play (Tonstad, 2005:260). In the stillness that follows the loud storm, Elijah experiences the 'divine presence' of God. God believed Elijah could still perform his calling, regardless of his lack of strength and resources (House, 1995 :224). He renews his purpose, and orders him to complete his work. God encountered Elijah in nature, but healed him through His Word, regardless of natural wonders (House, 1995:224).

The passage suggests that God reach out to His children in unexpected ways. He does not always present Himself according to preconceived expectations (Berković, 2009:64). The essence of theophany lies in the divine character of God (Tonstad, 2005:266). His silent approach to Elijah could have been an expression of an intimate friendship (Ryken, 2011:540), an intimate moment of spiritual presence with the divine God (Tonstad, 2005:259). God strengthened a discouraged and depressed man through His presence in a 'gentle whisper', to the extent that he became a renewed person willing to fulfil his task, (Brueggemann, 2000:236). His divine character cannot be equated to the wind (Sweeney, 2007). God was not present in the traditional theophanic elements, because the glory of God cannot be defined through substantial entities (Sweeney, 2007). The divine majesty of God can also not be expressed in human language. Therefore, texts often use metaphors in an attempt to demonstrate God's character. It is possible that God wanted to illustrate to Elijah that His earthly kingdom does not depend on the "destroying zeal of wrath" (Tonstad, 2005:260; House, 1995:223). The Horeb narrative ultimately suggests Yahweh's way is not the way of power (Tonstad, 2005:242). God speaks in a gentle voice to wounded people, He invites them to find peace and rest in Him (Ryken, 2011:540).

It is noteworthy to mention, although Elijah prayed that God would end his life, he was the only person in the Old Testament who did not die, but ascended to heaven in a "chariot and horses of fire" (2 Ki. 2:11). A confirmation that God acts in unexpected ways.

4.3.4 Intertextual references between Moses and Elijah

Moses and Elijah were both 'zealous' prophets of God that performed miracles in His name (Maier, 2016:64). Both men experienced a revelation of God on a mountain, while acting as intercessors for Israel (Maier, 2016:65). It is significant that both Elijah and Moses were with Jesus in Luke's account of the transfiguration on the mountain; the two main figures of the Old Testament met face to face with the divine Jesus on the same mountain where they met God before (Tonstad, 2005:264). The narrator in this pericope implicates a parallel between Moses and Elijah who is portrayed as a second Moses, on a pilgrimage to Sinai, the same mountain where Moses received his initial call from God (Exod. 3:1). Elijah travels 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb, the same amount of days Moses had to wait on God on the mountain (cf. Exod. 24:18; 34:28) (Brueggemann, 2000:235). Elijah could have made the conscious decision to return to the mountain of God (1 Ki. 19:8), wanting to follow in the steps of Israel to 'where it all began' from where he could hopefully find peace and new vision (De Vries, 1985). Brueggemann (2000:235) notes an intentional parallel between Israel's experience of the overwhelming presence of Yahweh and Elijah's encounter with God. Hence, the sharp contrast between loud and soft, the cataclysmic interruption of wind,

earthquake and fire opposed to the ‘still, small voice’, accentuates the significance of the intimate encounter and impossibility to equate His divine character (Throntveit, 2016:133).

The pericope of 1 Kings 19:9-18 has illustrated that although God is present in nature, His divine character cannot be limited to nature. The essence of His encounters with human beings prevails in communion with intimate grace.

4.4 Psalm 104

Psalm 104 is a “majestic hymn of praise”. The psalm celebrates Yahweh as Creator and Provider of creation (Barker, 1986:57). The whole psalm exudes artistic freedom and expression wherein the poet reflects and rejoices in the creation of God. Inspired by the wisdom and goodness of God as the origin of all creation, the poet invites readers to “look at the world”, through a “wide-angle lens”, in the same way God saw “everything” (KJV) or “all” (NIV) in Genesis 1:31 (De Klerk, 2014:5; McCann, 2012:67). He invites the readers to join creation in joyful worship as a gift to the Creator in celebration of His glory (De Klerk, 2014:5).

4.4.1 Context of Psalm 104

Genre

Psalm 104 presents a poetry genre, written as a hymn of praise (Buys, 2019:126). It is the only creation psalm, of which the whole content is directed towards celebrating nature as the creative art of God (Berlin, 2005; Brown, 2021:4).

Author

The first and last verses of Psalm 104 correlate with the first and last verses in Psalm 103: “Praise the Lord, o my soul”. This could indicate a formal relation and shared author between Psalm 103 and 104 (Lategan, 2009:28). Since David is the confirmed author of Psalm 103, he is also believed to be the author of Psalm 104 (Barker, 1986:61).

Time of origin

Many scholars believe the poem originated during or after the exilic period. Although it seems to have an earlier origin, most argues for a pre-exilic date (Lategan, 2009:58).

Place of psalm 104 in the Book of Psalms

The assumption is that Psalm 101-106 constitutes a unit with the prominent theme of repentance. The theme of Psalm 104 differs from this unit, as it is a song of praise. It has

theological significance since it is an affirmation of the universal sovereignty of YHWH in the midst of repentance. Scholars believe Psalm 104 could be an elaboration of the kingship of God, proclaimed in Psalm 103:19-22. Psalm 104:35bb exhibits a formal link with Psalm 105aa with the phrase “give praise” (Lategan, 2009:29). While the theme and content of Psalm 104 is described as a creation psalm, Psalm 105 and Psalm 106 are twin historical psalms. The distinction in the themes of neighbouring psalms and Psalm 104, confirms Psalm 104 as a separate literary and theological unit (Lategan, 2009:35).

4.4.2 Contents and short exposition of Psalm 104

Psalm 104 presents correlations with the creation narrative in Genesis 1 (Harman, 2011:743; Davidson, 2000:154). The parallel lies between the first three days of creation and verses 2-16 in Psalm 104. Progression then veers away from the logic sequence, and gradual creation of the diverse cosmic ecosystem in Genesis 1 (Brown, 2021:2,4; Barker, 1986:67). Further progression moves into an “exuberant, rich free style, with mythic elements, that connects ‘all’ to the wisdom of divine creation” (Lategan, 2009:63; Barker, 1986:62).

The psalm is framed with the theme of praise, beginning with: “Praise the Lord, my soul” and finally repeating the same phrase twice at the end of the psalm. The content within the frame consists of descriptive praise (De Klerk, 2014:5). The progress in structure is neither linear or logical, it moves freely between repeating or returning to specific ideas (Miller, 2000). The poet paints a picture wherein he establishes the divine status of God, he delineates the ‘royal abode’ of God in verses 2-4, using natural elements like light, heavens, clouds, winds and fire (Lategan, 2009:37). He then moves from heaven to earth in verses 5-9. God lays the permanent, stable foundation of earth; He divides land and water. The mighty waters obey the spoken word of God, moving into ‘mountains’ and ‘valleys’ from where it preserve God’s creation (Davidson, 2000:163). Verses 10-18 encompass a rich explication of the providence of God, aligning water as a prominent feature in the sustenance of life (Buys, 2019:127). Fertility “constitutes a chain of consecutive purposes in creation” (Lategan, 2009:44). God’s providence includes habitation (‘space’ to ‘thrive’) for all creatures (Lategan, 2009:45). Verse 15 includes humans in God’s creational providence; He makes human cultures (wine, oil, bread) and people have to ‘cultivate’ it (Lategan, 2009:45). Verses 10-23 expand on the concept of time within the perfect order of God. A rhythmic flow of sun, moon and stars, marks day, season and year – connecting all to an order set according to God’s design. Humans are only mentioned twice in the psalm (v 23) (Harman, 2011:747).

Verse 24 marks an unexpected exclamation in praise: “O Lord, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures”. The wisdom of God is

visible in the “fullness, playfulness and creativeness” of His work (Goldingay, 2008:119). Advancing on God’s wisdom is a portrayal of the sea, home of many, and ‘leviathan’ (also known as icon of chaos) (Lategan, 2009:50). Verses 27-30 denote creation’s dependence on God and His life-giving presence. He responds to their waiting, looks with favour upon His creation and gives bountifully to sustain both people and animals (Harman, 2011:749). God gives life (breath) to all, and He takes life away (Lategan, 2009:51-53). The Spirit is present in creation (cf. Gen. 1:2), shaping and renewing new life out of chaos.

4.4.3 Theological considerations

4.4.3.1 The Wisdom of God in creation

Psalm 104 presents God as a divine architect (Lategan, 2009:39). He keeps the earth in permanent stability, which is a testimony of His omnipotence (De Klerk, 2014:5). Everything is under His divine kinship; He is intimately involved in providing and renewing the manifold works of creation, including representatives of chaos, like water and leviathan (Lategan 2009:68-69). The wisdom of God is reflected in His creative work in nature (Berlin, 2005). Goldingay (2008:119) explicates the implication of God’s wisdom in nature in Psalm 104:

> [W]isdom is perhaps the interwoven ecology described in this psalm, the world is a magnificent quilt wherein every thread contributes to a whole, woven by a supremely skilled craft worker.

4.4.3.2 Relationship between God, nature and human beings

Psalm 104 portrays the continuing covenantal relationship between God, nature and human beings, affirmed in His continuous involvement through gentle care and constant renewal. The relationship between God and His creation denotes a close, intimate involvement with each unique creature (Coetsee, 2008:300). His immanent presence in creation, is evident in His divine creativity and continual care:

> The Creator makes and keeps all things in existence from moment to moment; not like a sculptor who makes a statue and leaves it alone, but like a singer who keeps her song in existence at all times (Johnson, 2019:276).

Deductions from Psalm 104 with regard to the relationship between God and His creation, include:

1. Nature obeys and responds to the authority of God: water flees when He rebukes in a voice of thunder (verse 7), the earth trembles when God looks at it and mountains smoke at His touch (verse 32).

2. Scripture often recounts creation rejoicing in the Creator (Ps. 19:1; Ps. 96:11,12). In this instance, verse 31 mentions the Creator rejoicing in His creation. God finds pleasure in His relationship with nature. The call is for human beings to "joyfully join" God and the poet in rejoicing and appreciating nature, and to praise and give thanks to God the Creator for the richness and abundance of His creative work (McCann, 2012:69). Appreciation of aesthetics in nature leads to communion with nature, which could enhance spiritual togetherness with God (Coetsee, 2008:131). It further gives rise to 'resting' in creation (De Klerk, 2014:6). In this regard Thomas Berry (1999: 55) stated when humans experience the enchantments of the earth, like the mighty ocean or the graceful raptures in the sky, they are able to connect with their deeper spiritual qualities.

3. The human being, made in the image of God, should imitate the relationship of God with His creation. God does not abuse or manipulate creation for personal gain; He acts in love and for the good of His creatures (Bauckman, 1984:234). People should follow His example by acting as responsible stewards who recognise goodness in creation and give praise to God (Cavedon, 2015:4-5).

Bauckman (1984:242) identified three ways in which humans could experience the divine kingdom of God in nature. Each experience relates to a stance of God in nature.

Table 1. The three relationships of God with nature

Divine Experience with nature	Relationship with nature
1. Awe and wonder in the richness of God's self-expression as divine artist in nature	1 Transcendent God beyond nature
2 Sensing the creative and sustaining presence of the omnipotent Spirit God	2. Immanent God within nature
3 Recognising the universe in God	3. God who fills and contains nature

The three relationships of God with nature, presented by Bauckman in the above table, suggest humans can enjoy the richness of the expression of God's divine character in creation.

Nature presents a context where people can spend time with Him and seek His presence where He reveals small parts of His unfathomable majesty.

4.4.4 Intertextual relationship between Psalm 104 and Job 38

Frevel (2012:157) observes an interrelatedness between Psalm 104 and Job 38 that could contribute towards a better understanding of the narrative of Job. While Job is searching for meaning in the midst of suffering and extreme pain, God takes him into the wild where He presents him with unique habitats like dens, nests and mountain lairs, the miraculous vastness of life, and the strength and beauty of animals. This revelation fills Job with wonder and humility, instead of terror. God guided him to a transformed perspective from being consumed with his own hopelessness, to a decentred position of being part of a whole cosmos artfully composed by God (Brown, 2021:7-10).

The author of Psalm 104 was probably aware of difficult circumstances like “chaos, evil and destruction” in the lives of people at the time of the Babylonian exile. The purpose of the creation psalm could have been to guide them towards an appreciation of the enduring qualities of the beauty, life and goodness of God’s creation. The continued presence and providence of God in creation, regardless of chaos, death, and individual limitations, provide a source of hope (Lategan, 2009:77, 79).

4.5 Mark 4:35-41

The reincarnation of Jesus embodies the central narrative of the eschatological revelation of God; it also presents the main difference between the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God revealed His covenantal plan through people like Moses and Elijah who communicated His messages to the Israelites. In the Gospels, Jesus personally guides people gradually towards an understanding of who He is and what the Kingdom of God entails. The author of Mark wants to guide readers to a better understanding of the identity of Jesus (‘Who is Jesus?”); He wants to connect the identity of Jesus with the disciples’ response to His character (Slusser, 2018:28). Put differently, he wants to connect ‘who’ Jesus is, to ‘what’ it means to follow Jesus (Hays & Duvall, 2011:560). The disciples must have been familiar with Old Testament narratives of Moses and Elijah, and the powerful displays through which God revealed His covenantal work. The miracle that transpired when Jesus commanded the storm to seize, presented the disciples with an epiphany of Divine authority, that led them to realise that Jesus was an unusual messenger of God.

4.5.1 Context of Mark 4:35-41

Genre

The Book of Mark comprises the second of three New Testament Gospels, wherein narrative descriptions of the life, work, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus are portrayed.

Author

Similar to other Gospels, the author remains anonymous, but is indicated in the title of the Book: The "Gospel according to Mark' (Carson & Moo, 2008:172). Early Christian writers from the first three centuries, like Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, Asia – A.D.130) recorded Mark as the author of the Gospel. 'Mark' is understood to be John Mark, who accompanied his cousin, Barnabas, on the first missionary journey with Paul, and whom Peter referred to as 'my son' (Hays & Duvall, 2011: 558). References in New Testament texts like Acts 12:12 and 13:5, and Colossians 4:10, strongly implicate John Mark as the person referred to in the title of the book (Hays & Duvall, 2011:558). While Christian writers have not yet reached consensus on whether Mark is the author of the second Gospel, there has been no other evidence to the contrary (Carson & Moo, 2008:175). The strong relationship between Peter and Mark, as well as the lack in order of narratives that present correlations with Peter's style of ministry, points towards the possibility that Mark relied on narratives and memories of Peter as the source of knowledge concerning the incarnation and ministry of Jesus.

Time of origin

The Gospel of Mark was written during the years 67 – 72 C.E., at a time when Christians were brutally persecuted by the Romans (Bailey, 2017:27). Persecuted Christians would have been able to identify with the fear of the disciples in the midst of an enormous storm (Bailey, 2017:27). The narrative is set in the second part of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. In the first part of the Galilean ministry, Mark recounts events like the calling of the disciples, Jesus's teachings and parables, and His miracle healings. The stilling of the storm in Mark 4 acts as a bridge between the parables of the kingdom and the miracles of Jesus in Chapter 5 (Wilson, 2021:3). It connects the theme of God's kingdom, as Jesus presented it in the parables, with the identity of Jesus described in the miracle events that follow (Wilson, 2021:3). The narrative in Mark 4:35 transitions from Jesus's words (teachings) to His deeds. The text fits into the main purpose of Mark, which is to appreciate Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Slusser, 2018:30). The pericope in Mark 4:35-41 is the first of four miracles that illustrate the characteristics of Jesus. The three other miracles include the woman with blood flow (authority

over healing), raising Jaïrus' daughter (authority over death), and the demoniac (authority over exorcism) (Bock, 2015:184).

4.5.2 Contents and short exposition of Mark 4:35-41

After a busy day of teaching by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus leaves the crowd behind to spend time with his disciples (Osborne, 2014:81). He makes an intentional decision to cross the lake towards the 'other side', known as Gentile territory, during the night. The Sea of Galilee is a deep lake set in a 'bowl', surrounded by hills that often direct high winds and waves of up to ten feet, leading to storms 'whipped up' in a very short amount of time (Bock, 2015:185). Many of the disciples were fishermen, and would have been aware of possible dangers, especially when crossing the lake during night-time, but did not voice any concern (Brower, 2009:296).

Slusser (2018:39) divides the pericope into three events. In the first event, the sea turns violent. Mark describes a furious storm (37a), with waves beating into the ship, filling it with water (v. 37b). The Greek translation provides a true description of their experience: "suddenly, there just was . . . a magnificent squall of wind, a howling of nature . . . waves threw themselves like possessed phantoms against the boat" (Blount, 2016:185). The lives of everyone on-board were at serious risk, they were scared and helpless (Brower, 2009:296; Slusser, 2018:44). Violent seas are a Jewish symbol of evil, which could have added to the fear of the disciples (Hays & Duvall, 2011:573).

The second event portrays Jesus asleep 'on a pillow' (v. 38a). He was probably exhausted after a full day of teaching. In contrast with the great furious storm (v. 37a) and fearful disciples, Jesus remained calm; He trusted in the power of God (Bock, 2015:185). Terrified, the disciples woke Jesus and asked: "Teacher, are we to drown for all you care?" They address Him as 'Teacher', a reflection on His authority in the relationship. The question imposes a note of panic and accusation (Slusser 2018:44; Bailey, 2017:26).

In the third and last event, Jesus responds to the agonised calls of the disciples (v. 39b); He "rebukes" (*epitimaö*) the wind, using the same words he would use to rebuke a "demonic force" (Bailey, 2017:26). Jesus challenges the face of evil and tells it to calm down; He acts directly against nature, without having to act through prayer or another person (Brower, 2009:296). The wind immediately stopped, there was "great calm". He then responds to the disciples and rebukes them for having fear and not faith. "Why are you scared? Do you still have no faith? The question could be rephrased as: 'Why do you not have the faith in God that I do?' (Slusser, 2018:44). The pericope ends with a question left unanswered: "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him?" (NIV). The authority of Jesus over nature raised a more intense

fear than the fear of drowning, described in the Greek translation as being ‘awestruck’. They could not yet grasp the full meaning of His identity, but were in awe of His ‘divine authority’ over nature (Brower, 2009:296).

4.5.3 Theological considerations

4.5.3.1 The disciples could not recognise Jesus as the One with divine authority over nature

Mark accentuates the disparity between the calm collectedness of Jesus and the fearful, helpless disciples. Jesus was confident to cross the sea at night. The same would have been expected from the disciples who have accompanied their Teacher on His Galilean ministry and should have shown complete trust in Him. Instead, they could only focus on their own vulnerability, and could not see beyond the view of their physical eyes. They were not able to see and recognise Jesus and His authority over nature (Osborne, 2014:80).

4.5.3.2 Nature and cosmic forces recognise and obey Jesus

Jesus addressed the wind and storm: "Stop making noise and be muzzled” (*siöpaö and phimoö*) (4:39). According to the Greek translation, the same words were used when Jesus commanded the evil spirit in Mark 1:25 (Bailey, 2017:27). The wind immediately ceased and there was a ‘great calm’. The angry disturbed sea turned into smooth water. Although the disciples did not trust or recognise the divine power of Jesus over nature and evil, nature immediately recognised the Teacher’s voice and obeyed His commands (4:41) (Blount, 2016:188). Jesus confirmed His power and authority over the powers of nature and evil when he stilled the storm (Osborne, 2014:80). The narrative moves from a ‘great storm’, to Jesus transforming it to water with ‘great calmness’, whereafter the disciples who experienced it all were filled with a ‘great fear’ (they were terrified) – also described as ‘great awe’ (Slusser, 2018:44; Bailey, 2017:27).

4.5.3.3 Jesus, the Teacher, gradually guides people towards His true identity

The disciples address Jesus as ‘Teacher’ in verse 38b. Mark uses the term ‘teacher’ (*didaskalos)* twelve times in his book (Blount, 2016:185). Jesus gradually teaches or guides people step by step to understand His identity and the true characteristics of His divine character and kingdom, until they can testify in the words of the doubtful Thomas: “My Lord and My God” (John. 20:28).

The pericope portrays the example set by Jesus as Teacher with regard to the way He guides people to recognise the true nature of the kingdom of God. He prefers to teach through His actions, and through personal experiences of His teachings, rather than performing sermons

Jesus therefore connects His teachings and demonstrations of His identity, with the earthly dilemmas of His learners, and also with nature. In this passage, He quiets a storm to demonstrate His authority. Jesus "confronts, engages, challenges and provokes" His learners to be transformed into new beings (Blount, 2016:185). In other instances, He applied examples of nature in parables or narratives as 'pointers' to show people the way towards the Kingdom of God (Blount, 2016:186).

In a similar way, pastoral counselling wants to lead people to recognise the identity of Jesus, and can therefore learn from the example of Jesus as teacher.

4.5.4 Intertextual relations

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus teaches people in nature – on the mountain; He teaches them to trust God with their earthly concerns, and to seek the kingdom of God in the midst of uncertainties and concerns. There is a connection to be drawn with Mark 4:35-41, since both messages relate to trusting God in the midst of uncertainties and helplessness. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus uses metaphors from nature to explain the providence and care of God (flowers 6:28, grass of the field 6:30). The Kingship of God is visible in nature. He provides and cares, therefore, people should not be concerned (Osborne, 2014). In Mark 4:35 He applies nature in a miracle to demonstrate His authority over nature, but also His authority over life-threatening natural forces.

4.6 Romans 8:18-30

4.6.1 Context of Romans 8:18-30

Genre

The Book of Romans constitutes the first of the Pauline letters in the New Testament; it was addressed to the Early Church in Rome.

Author

There is a general agreement that Paul is the author of the book; he introduces himself as Paul, an apostle of God (Hays & Duvall, 2011:742). It is believed that Tertius was Paul's secretary or scribe who assisted him in compiling the letter (Hays & Duvall, 2011:742-743). Paul had not visited the church at the time of the compilation of the letter. The purpose of the letter was to provide the congregation with pastoral input and promote unity, since there seemed to be division between two social cultures, namely the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (Hays & Duvall, 2011:742-743).

Time of Origin

References in the Corinthian letters, Romans and Acts, indicate that Paul wrote the letter to the church in Romans during his third missionary journey when he was in Corinth. A fellow believer, Phoebe, is presumed to have delivered the letter which had been written in the fall of AD 57 (NKJV).

Place of the pericope in the Book of Romans

The Book of Romans commences with an introduction to the sinful nature of humans, whereafter Paul discloses the good news of salvation granted by God to those who accept the message of justification through faith (NKJV). Jesus became the ultimate reason and motivation for the continuous spiritual transformation of creation (Tofana, 2010:127). Romans 8:17-30 is compiled within the larger theme of Romans 5:1-8:30: "[T]he future hope of sharing in God's glory". The frame of the pericope emerges as: "Sharing in the suffering of Christ is the pathway to sharing in His glory" (Berry, 2020:284). In verse 17, Paul declares the "power of Grace over the power of the law", thereby securing the foundation for Romans 8:18-30, where the concern is no longer for the past, but rather to guarantee future hope (Osborne, 2004:209). Paul assures believers their present suffering will lead to final glory (Osborne, 2004:210; Braaten, 2006:161).

4.6.2 Contents and short exposition of Romans 8:18-30

The first and last verses of the pericope: verses 18 and 30, both denote an assurance of future glorification. It frames the essence of the message: the pain and suffering endured by God's children cannot compare to the promised glory that awaits them (1 Cor. 15:43; Phil. 3:21).

In Romans 8:19-22, the concern of Paul is set towards creation; he employs personification metaphors to illustrate the suffering and longing for renewal in creation (Kruse, 2012:342). Creation is "eagerly waiting for the revelation of believers" (verse 19), a stance that literally refers to "watch out with an outstretched neck", or "stretching the head, straining the neck" to see what is coming (Osborne, 2004:210). It indicates a "forward leaning expectancy of creation", longing for the final transformation to pass (Osborne, 2004:210). The "eager expectation" of nature (verse 19) exists as a consequence of subjection to "purposelessness" (8:20). God subjected creation to ineffectiveness with the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:17-18). The loving relationship He nurtures with creation (evident in His creative care) has been rendered into decay as a result of human sin (Tofana, 2010:117). Although God has subjected nature to futility, He also rejected it in the hope and anticipation of future freedom and restoration (Breytenbach, 2013:5). God wants His nature and character to be reflected in all

creation; therefore, He promised to restore the relationship and release nature of its futility with the final liberation (Berry, 2020:282; Tofana, 2010:117). Verse 21 accounts another personification of nature when Paul compares nature to a “slave looking forward to freedom” (Breytenbach, 2013:6). Following in verse 22, he compares the groaning of nature with childbirth. The word ‘groaning’ expresses agony and relates to the pain of decay, while the idea of childbirth relates to ‘new life’ (cf. Gen. 3:17) (Osborne, 2004:212).

The groaning of believers while awaiting ‘adoption of sonship’ corresponds with the concept of childbirth in the previous verses, where the reference was concerned with creation. Although ’groaning’ in this context is associated with pain, it progresses towards new life, new creation, and final redemption when creation will also be set free from decay and futility (Berry, 2020:293). The concepts of childbirth (v 22) and adoption (v 23) could reflect on promised expectations of creation. Hence, both humans and nature received the promise of being fully liberated with the final redemption when mortal bodies will be transformed and not affected by sin anymore (Kruse, 2012:350; Breytenbach, 2013:6). It should not be overlooked that Paul uses the same expressions in the context of both humans and creation. It is believed that the “inward groaning” of believers (verse 23), the people who already possess the ‘first fruits’ of the Spirit, refers to ‘non-verbal signs’ of eschatological tension (Kruse, 2012:349-350). It should not be overlooked that Paul uses the same expressions in the context of both humans and creation (Kruse, 2012:349).

In verses 24-25, the direction changes, when the focus shifts towards eschatological hope. Eschatological hope assumes a stance of ‘confidently looking forward to promises’ that we are not able to see yet (Breytenbach, 2013:6). It promotes patient anticipation of ‘full status’ as children of God (Osborne, 2004:214).

Paul introduces the Spirit as Intercessor and Agent of renewal of life (v 26-27). The groaning of the Spirit displays an ‘intent yearning’ to continuously assure believers of their hope in future glory, thus enabling them to persevere (Berry, 2020:295). In His concern for God’s children, the Spirit is aware of their inability to fully comprehend God’s will (Osborne, 2004:219). The Spirit intercedes for believers in their weakness with ‘wordless groans’: more ‘deeply’ than people themselves could groan (Kruse, 2012:352; Osborne, 2004:219). The Spirit actively endeavours ‘thrusting’ the weak into hope, motivating them to ‘lean into hope’ (Balabanski, 2018:16).

Paul concludes in verses 28-30 by assuring readers that God transforms everything for the good. His covenantal love is faithful; He will fulfil His promises for His children to be

transformed into the image of Christ (His firstborn) with the final liberation and new creation (Berry, 2020:294).

4.6.3 Theological considerations

4.6.3.1 The relationship between God, nature, and human beings in the light of eschatological tension

As a result of the fractured relationship, the earth, just like human beings, groans in its longing to be freed from decay – many wounds have been inflicted on the earth through the ages (Balabanski, 2018:18). A recent report released by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity (IPBES) (2019, n.d.), an independent body supported by the United Nations, has warned that "nature is deteriorating faster than ever". Statistics confirm the rate at which the planet is losing its species:

- More than one million of the eight million species on earth are currently facing extinction.
- One third of sea mammals and other species on coral reefs face immediate danger as a result of climate change.
- The African continent with its diverse richness of plant and animal life, could see half of its birds and animals extinct by the year 2100 (McGrath, 2019:n.d.).

Human activities are the driving force behind degradation in ecosystems, depletion of resources at sea, pollution, foreign invasive species in natural systems, and deterioration of life on land and in the sea. Sandra Diaz in McGrath (2019, n.d.) advised a re-evaluation of the definition of "good life", and explains that "a fulfilling life should be aligned with [a] good relationship with nature, and with other people". In this regard, McCarroll (2020:34) clarifies that the modern 'religion of consumption' belief that natural resources should be "used, owned, mined and depleted", reflects a distorted perspective with regard to human dominion over the earth (McCarroll, 2020:34). Christian believers have neglected God's involvement with other created beings (McCarroll, 2020:39). Romans 8:18-30 therefore offers significant insight concerning the intention of God; He does not confine salvation to human beings, but rather implies all creation (Kruse, 2012:341). The threefold 'groaning' indicates Divine intention with the relationship between the Spirit, nature, and humans (Berry, 2020:291). The following section investigates each of the three groanings, implicated in Romans 8:18-30.

4.6.3.2 The groaning of humans

The spoken words of God preceding each new act of creation: “let there be...”, changes before God creates human beings, when He said: “let us make human beings” (Gen. 1:26). Berry (2016:91) suggests this exception could indicate God’s relational intention with His people. Amid his rejoicing in the creation of God, the poet of Psalm 104 calls on all to join in praising God. In a mutual way, God finds joy in His creation; He enjoys the playful wonder and interwoven order of His creation (Ps. 104:26, 31). God wants to be in a loving relationship with His people (Gen. 1). He wants them to know Him, follow Him, and become more like Him. Regardless of human rebellion, the Creator wants to redeem His children and restore their original status as His image bearers. Jesus endured many sufferings that culminated in His crucifixion in order to present humankind with the gift of salvation. Believers follow the footsteps of Jesus (the firstborn): they endure hardships, while being transformed to new beings in Him (Berry, 2020:96). This process fits into the tension of the already and the not yet – a strong theme in the letter to the Romans (Breytenbach, 2013:7).

4.6.3.2 The groaning of creation

God created the earth with the purpose to fulfil its potential, and to enjoy healthy relations with human beings (Tofana, 2010:125). Humans inflicted the same futility that was inflicted onto them through their disobedience, onto creation, who is now longing for transformation (Tofana, 2010:125), the “garden was turned into desert” (cf. Rev. 11:18).

4.6.3.3 The groaning of the Holy Spirit

The letter to the Romans delineates 31 accounts of references to the Holy Spirit, of which 20 occur in Romans 8 (Berry, 2020:283). First Peter 4:14 confirms the pivotal role of transformation and the renewal of life with its allusion to the ‘Spirit of glory’ (Berry, 2020:283). This insight into the role of the Spirit sheds light on the reason for the groaning of the Spirit in Romans 8:26-27 (Berry, 2020:284).

The Holy Spirit is already present in the lives of believers (8:24), endorsing their status as adopted children of God (Berry, 2020:286). In their suffering, the Spirit did not abandon believers, but instead He groaned with them and encouraged yearning towards a fulfilled and renewed future (Berry, 2020:294; Balabanski, 2018:24). As spiritual beings, people share an interconnectedness with the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:23), hence they are able to experience His immanent presence in their lives (Dreyer, 2003:719; Dames & Louw, 2020:113). Within an intimate connection with the Spirit, the mindset of believers is converted to the ‘mindset’ of the

Spirit, from where they gain access to peace and life abundant (Romans 9:6b) ('eschatological blessings'), even during trials and hardships (Berry, 2020:293).

The Spirit is aware of human weakness and their inability to respond according to God's will (Rom. 7:4-25; cf. 8:6-7), therefore He expresses the groaning of humans in a congruent language to the Father (Braaten, 2006:164; Breytenbach, 2013:9). He intercedes for human sins that inflict God's judgement upon them (Braaten, 2006:164). According to Joel, God was the first to join in the groaning of nature through His Spirit; He encouraged believers to join in the mourning of creation (Braaten, 2006:164).

4.6.3.4 The eschatological theme in Romans 8:18-30 extended towards creation

Paul explicates human suffering and hope to be interrelated with decay and longing for liberation in nature (Rom. 8:18, 20, 24) (Breytenbach, 2013:9; Braaten, 2006:164). Creation is an intrinsic element of the family of God; He values creation in the same way He values the poor and oppressed (Balabanski, 2018:20). The instruction of God was for humans to take responsibility, sustain, and protect creation (Gen. 1:26-28) (Braaten, 2006:160). Therefore, children of God are responsible for nature (they could either present hope or chaos to creation) and should kindle a sentimental approach toward the process of redemption. They should follow the example set by God in His approach towards nature (Tofana, 2010:131). The 'breaking in of God's future' (eschatological hope), holds relevance for *cura vitae*, expanding the scope of pastoral counselling from the present to eternity in Christ (Woldemichael, 2013:9).

4.6.3.5 Lacuna in previous theological reflections on Romans 8:18-30

David Horrell (2010:12) identifies a *lacuna* in academic reflections on the passage of Romans 8:18-30. Research has been mainly concerned with relationships between God and humanity, or within humanity itself. According to Horrell (2010:9), the connection between the Spirit, people and nature has been neglected, hence he argues for an approach from a perspective of reconciliation, instead of justification (Horrell, 2010:9). From a similar position, Pamela McCarroll (2020:36) and Dayringer and Farris (2002) recognise the need for increased awareness of transformed anthropocentrism; in other words, to extend the 'living document' towards "the larger living web of creation". McCarroll (2020:46) proposes a "creation-centred or creation-serving" theological paradigm wherein the divine gift of interconnectedness with the earth are taken into account. A creation-serving paradigm offers an opportunity to restore the deeply wounded sacred body of God's creation (McCarroll, 2020:43).

4.6.4 Intertextual relations

Joel 1 and 2 describes the suffering voice and restoration of the earth in the context of the relationship between God, humans, and nature (Braaten, 2006:113). Joel 1 recounts Divine mourning of the earth in the face of destruction (verse 10) due to a locust plague that caused famine (NIV). Joel employs personifications like “cattle moan” (1:18) and “wild animals pant” (1:20) to describe the futility of the earth. Reference to “mourning” (Joel 1:8) could implicate the same notion as ‘groan’ and ‘sigh’ (Rom. 8:22-23) (Braaten, 2006:140). Other Old Testament texts that relate to suffering of the earth, include “land being stripped" (of vegetation) (Hos. 4:1-3); the prophetic vision of divine judgement, resulting in chaos like “mountains shaking”, “birds fleeing” and “dry desert”, “cattle confused”, “beasts of the field long” (Isa 4:23-28) (Braaten, 2006:147). Regardless of human sin being the cause of nature’s suffering, and futility, only God and faithful people like Jeremiah join creation in its mourning (Braaten, 2006:149). According to Braaten (2006:156), creation’s futility and decay depends on laments and repentance of God’s people, the origin of the pain. Braaten (2006:114) uses the term: ‘earth community’ in reference to the web of life. This could pertain to the notion of interconnectedness and mutual dependence between humans and creation, encapsulated in a symbiotic relationship comprising the “entire eco-system” (Braaten, 2006:116).

4.7 Divine intent with the human/creation relation according to Scriptural analysis

A Scriptural analysis of the four selected texts revealed valuable insights in respect of God’s involvement with humans through nature as well as His intention with the relation between humans and nature. In this section, an attempt is made to present some preliminary eco-pastoral perspectives from the passages analysed in the preceding section. They are referred to as eco-pastoral perspectives as they are deemed of use as theological perspectives that can be considered in the contemplation of a possible eco-pastoral counselling approach.

4.7.1 Eco-pastoral perspectives: 1 Kings 19:9-18

It appears that Elijah might have expected, considering the deep despair he experienced, a powerful display of natural wonders to relieve him from his current circumstances. Instead, God presents Himself to him through a still quiet presence. Elijah responds by covering his face with his mantle and moving towards the entrance of the cave to protect himself from witnessing God. This suggests that he is overwhelmed by the presence of God. Elijah thus experiences the ‘divine presence’ of God in the quiet that follows the loud storm. He recognises the unseen God, who strengthens him through His divine presence. The renewal

of Elijah was an ‘internal matter’, where the character of God comes into play (Tonstad, 2005:260).

God reaffirmed Elijah’s purpose so that he can complete his work. Although God met Elijah in nature, Elijah was healed through the Word of God, regardless of natural wonders (House, 1995:224). The essence of theophany therefore lies in the divine character of God (Tonstad, 2005:266). His silent approach to Elijah could have been an expression of intimate friendship (Ryken, 2011:540), an intimate moment of spiritual presence with the divine God (Tonstad, 2005:259). God strengthens a discouraged and depressed man through His presence in a ‘gentle whisper’, to the extent that he becomes a renewed person willing to fulfil his task (Brueggemann, 2000:2). The divine majesty of God could not be confined to natural displays or constricted to preconceived expectations like a powerful display of natural forces (1 Ki. 19:18) (Sweeney, 2007). It can also not be expressed in human language. Therefore, texts often use metaphors in an attempt to demonstrate God’s character. The Horeb narrative ultimately suggests Yahweh’s way is not the way of power (Tonstad, 2005:242). God speaks in a gentle voice to wounded people, He invites them to find peace and rest in Him (Ryken, 2011:540). In the context of nature, Elijah found peace, but he was ultimately renewed by the spiritual presence of God.

The peace and meaning that came to Elijah in the presence of God supports the theological principle that healing is only possible through a spiritual encounter with God. Nature holds potential to enhance spiritual awareness, but healing in this context also depends upon God. This is supported by Elijah’s encounter with God. The healing moment was not in any special task performed by the prophet, but by being in the presence of God.

4.7.2 Psalm 104

Psalm 104 portrays a clear image of God’s intention with His creation, as well as His intention with the relation between human and non-human beings. The poet illustrates the richness of God’s creation; all beings are in an interwoven connectedness of mutual dependence, moving together in perfect order. God is immanently present and lovingly involved with each unique creature (Coetsee, 2008:300). Through the creative and sustaining presence of the omnipotent Spirit, He gently cares and renews the manifold works of creation (Lategan, 2009:68-69). His design for creation is for each creature to fulfil its unique purpose; to glorify His name through its existence; and for all of creation to be united in peaceful relationships.

Human beings created in the image of God should imitate the relationship of God with His creation. God does not abuse or manipulate creation for personal gain; He acts in love and for the good of His creatures (Bauckham, 1984:234). According to His example, people have to

act as responsible stewards who recognise the goodness in creation and give praise to God. Verse 31 mention the Creator rejoicing in His creation, thereby exhibiting the pleasure that God finds in His relationship with nature. The call is for human beings to 'joyfully join' God and the poet in rejoicing and appreciating nature, and to praise and give thanks to God the Creator for the richness and abundance of His creative work (McCann, 2012:69).

The psalm offers further insight into the position of human beings within the wholeness of creation. In Psalm 104, the poet mentions human beings twice, once in reference to the order of time, and the second when commenting that humans, as part of the providence of God, share mutual dependence with nature in the matter of food. The encounter between God and Job resembles a similar account of the position of humans in nature. God illustrates the unique habitats, vastness of life, and strength and beauty of animals to Job, who is 'overwhelmed' with wonder and humility (Job 42). God guides Job to a transformed perspective from where humanity takes a decentred position within a whole cosmos artfully composed by God, instead of believing to be in the centre of hopelessness (Brown, 2021:7-10).

The suggestion is that the author of Psalm 104 composed the psalm during difficult circumstances, when "chaos, evil and destruction" reigned at the time of the Babylonian exile. The poet probably presented the illustration of creation as a way to guide them to recognise the enduring qualities of beauty, life, and goodness, despite hardships. This notion epitomises the comforting truth that regardless of the chaos, death, and individual limitations, the continued presence and providence of God in creation, provide a source of hope (Lategan, 2009:77, 79). It further underlies the notion of finding healing, peace, and wholeness within creation. The unfathomable characteristics of nature could lead people away from self-concern and vulnerability towards an awareness of being part of a whole cosmos, infinitely bigger than they could have ever comprehended. Their suffering is conjoined within a larger network and will be liberated when the promises of God are finally fulfilled (Rom. 8:23) (Breytenbach, 2013:6).

God is present in all beings through the Spirit of life. In the pastoral context, the transformational power of the Holy Spirit guides the healing process (Du Plessis, 2016:3, 5). Both caregiver and the other person depend on the Spirit to provide insight and meaning (Louw, 2008:257).

Nature reflects many characteristics of the divine God through which awareness can be encouraged through experiential activities that involve the senses and the body. Nature further offers ways of connecting the human world with the work of God in the world. This concept

relates to the notion of embodied spirituality. Brief illustrations of possible characteristics of God portrayed in nature follows.

Wisdom of God

Psalm 104 presents God as the divine Architect (Lategan, 2009:39). He keeps the earth in permanent stability, which is a testimony of His omnipotence (De Klerk, 2014:5). Everything is under His divine kinship (Lategan 2009:68,69). The creative work of God in nature reflects His divine wisdom (Goldingay, 2008:119).

The awe and wonder of God

Aesthetics and beauty, together with stillness in nature, give rise to 'resting' in creation (De Klerk, 2014:6). Nature offers a space that encourages communion with nature, and spiritual togetherness with God (Coetsee, 2008:131). It presents a context where people can spend time with Him and seek His presence, where He reveals small parts of His unfathomable majesty. Witnessing the rich self-expression of God as divine artist and transcendent God in nature, fills us with awe and wonder.

Wholeness and communion of the Trinity of God

Recognising the universe and all beings in symbiotic relation, filled with the glory and presence of God and flourishing in abundance, exemplifies the unity and wholeness of the Triune God, working together in perfect order.

Hope in the midst of difficult circumstances

A correlation between hope and beauty or aesthetics shows opportunities to rekindle hope (Louw, 2015:46). It presents a different lens through which a person could find divine transcendence and hope (Louw, 2014:74). Beauty in nature offers an antidote for 'existential viruses' that rob the human soul from meaningful experiences (Louw, 2015:246).

Nature transpires physical evidence of waiting, longing, hope, new life, suffering, and decay (transformation process through the work of the Spirit) in manifestations like the changing of the seasons – leaves change colour, die, and fall off trees – new plants that long for water and sunshine, and also the transformation process of insects like butterflies.

4.7.3 Mark 4:35-41

The author of Mark refers to Jesus as 'Teacher' (*didaskalos)* on twelve accounts (Blount, 2016:185). In Mark 4:38b, the disciples also address Him as their teacher (Blount, 2016:185).

There is a significance in the way Jesus was often addressed as ‘Teacher’, in times of despair, for instance on a boat, in the midst of a storm (4:38), and when Jaïrus’ daughter died (5:35) (Blount, 2016:188). As teacher, Jesus gradually guided his disciples step by step to understand His identity. He “confronted, engaged, challenged and provoked” His learners to be transformed into new beings (Blount, 2016:185).

The pericope in Mark portrays the disciples to accompany their teacher on His Galilean ministry. Although they have witnessed His teachings, they were not yet able to understand and comprehend His authority in order to trust Him in the midst of the storm. The disciples could only focus on their own vulnerability, and could not see beyond the view of their physical eyes (Osborne, 2014:8). In contrast to the disciples, the wind immediately ceased when Jesus rebuked it, there was a ‘great calm’. The angry, disturbed sea turned into smooth water. Nature immediately recognised the Teacher’s voice and obeyed His commands (4:41). The authority of Jesus over nature raised a more intense fear than the fear of drowning, described in the Greek translation as being “awestruck” as a result of His ‘divine authority’ (Brower, 2009:296).

In most instances, the teachings of Jesus through His healings and wonders always involved both the spiritual and physical dimensions of human life. In Mark, Jesus teaches His disciples during a ‘storm’ in their lives. He connects the spiritual dimension (sovereignty of God) with the human dimension (earthly life and hardships). Jesus displayed His unique characteristics and led them to an understanding of who He is. The narrative in Mark 4:35-41 correlates with the theological principle: of faith care as life care, and the aim of pastoral counselling to connect the life of people with the work of God in order for them to recognise His love, sovereignty and provision in their lives. Pastoral counselling supposes that healing takes place in the presence of God where people are able to perceive their existential challenges in the light of the work of God in the world.

In this passage, Jesus’s revelation of His identity reminds us of the pastoral counselling task of introducing people to Jesus as the Saviour and to living in communion with Him from where new life, hope, and meaning can be found. A new relationship with Christ, rooted in faith and the transcendent realm, encourages hope (‘attitude of future anticipation’) (Louw, 2015:28, 47). Since the scope of pastoral counselling is similarly concerned with spiritual guidance towards the identity of Jesus, His example as teacher provides theological principles to pastoral counselling.

The incarnated Jesus illustrated the true nature of God and demonstrated the way to new life in Him. The example of Jesus, as Teacher and Healer, in the context of nature, could offer plausible significance to this study. Illustrations that emerged from the Scriptural analysis

encompass the following events in the life of Jesus. Jesus preferred to teach through experience, rather than long sermons (Blount, 2016:188). The settings of His ministry often occurred in nature, for instance, at the Sea of Galilee (Mk. 4) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus applied metaphors of 'flowers' (verse 28) and 'grass of the field' (verse 30) to demonstrate His provision and care in nature, and even more to His people therefore, they should not be concerned (Osborne, 2014). He often implied nature in the parables of the kingdom of God, for instance, the parable of the mustard seed (Matt.13:31-32), and the parable of the Sower (Lk. 8:5-15) (Brower, 2009:296). He illustrated His sovereignty through water (Jn. 2:1-11; Matt. 14:24-33).

4.7.4 Romans 8:18-30

The sequence of the pericope in Romans 8:18-30 resembles similar theological principles pertaining to the eschatological revelation of the covenantal promises of God. However, in Romans 8, eschatology is portrayed within the 'threefold groaning', which includes the Spirit, humans, and nature. The pericope highlights the influence and transformational work of the Spirit of Life intimately present in creation.

Both humans and nature were rejected into futility and are groaning together in decay and suffering as a result of human sin and disobedience. The decline of nature and humans is evident within current life circumstances. Both long for transformation to be set free and to be able to fulfil their divine purpose. The Spirit is immanently present in the lives of believers and in creation, groaning with them with "intent yearning", continuously assuring and encouraging believers of hope in future glory, thus enabling them to endure. The pivotal role of the Spirit is the transformation and renewal of life. Through their hardships, He transforms people to new beings.

God entrusted human beings with the responsibility to take care of nature (creation) in the same way He performs loving acts of care to the goodness of His creatures (Braaten, 2006:160). Humans have to repent their sins that caused the suffering and chaos in creation and mourn with nature.

Although the symbiotic relationship with nature has been fractured, the divine purpose of God is for humans and nature to flourish in an interconnected web of mutual care. His concern is for the relationship to be healed and to become whole. In the same way, He longs to share intimate loving relations with people (Gen. 1:26). He wants to restore relationships within the three 'groaning' entities, and to heal brokenness in order for all beings to be able to fulfil their divine purpose which is to glorify Him. He wants people to know Him and become more like

Him. God rejoice in His creation; He enjoy the wonders of the earth and wants humans to join Him in rejoicing in the earth.

David Horrell (2010:12) observes a *lacuna* in academic reflections on the passage in Romans 8:18-30. Previous studies have been mainly concerned with the relationship between God and His people, while the interconnectedness between the Spirit of God, humans, and nature has been neglected. The concerns of Pamela McCarroll (2020:36) and Dayringer and Farris (2002) for increased awareness of transformed anthropocentrism, by ways of a mitigated paradigm from the "living document" towards "the larger living web of creation', coincide with calls made by Horrell (2010). The notion of concern for the 'threefold' relationship to be healed, resonates with the holistic Christian approach of healing: *cura animarum* of *cura vitae*, which suggests that healing in the relationship with God leads to renewed relationships with others and the whole creation – to *shalom* (peace) and fullness of life (Louw, 2013:7).

In light of the above-mentioned, it can be argued that creation can be seen as the space where all created beings can cohabit in a symbiotic relationship of mutual caring, peace, and love. Creation thereby imitates the loving relationship of God with creation as expressed by the Trinity. Romans 8 confirms this divine purpose of creation as it alludes to this symbiotic relation to be part of the eschatological revelation of God's covenant with creation. The 'threefold groaning' is intimately involved in the longing for redemption to be able to fulfil its divine purpose. The connection between healing and wholeness portrayed in the two texts, correlates with the pastoral counselling epistemology of "wholeness in health" (Louw, 2013:7).

God is present in creation through the Holy Spirit who renews and transforms all to glorify His name (Ps. 104; Rom. 8:23). The work of the Spirit constitutes the core of healing. The Spirit has authority to inspire and facilitate change, and speaks directly to the counselee (Miller, 2017).

4.8 Summary

The objective of the chapter was to seek biblical perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature. It rested on the premise that creation is seen as part of God's general revelation, making it possible for humans to experience and know Him in a special way in creation. Four passages were studied: 1 Kings 19:9-18, Psalm 104, Mark 4:35-41, and Romans 8:18-30. The relevant passages were analysed by means of a socio-cultural historical analysis.

Insights and theological principles gained from the biblical perspective supported the notion that God is present and involved in His creation. The Creator God is a divine Architect who

keeps all creation in complete stability through His intimate involvement and providence. He is present during the hardships and pain of their existential realities. Psalm 104 revealed theological principles with regard to the divine intent for all beings to enjoy peace and healthy relationships with each other. The poet calls on human beings to follow the example of God in nature, portrayed as loving God who is intimately present, providing in abundance, and rejoicing in the beauty and wonder of creation.

Natural elements imitate some of the rich characteristics of the kingdom of God. Examples of possible ways in which nature could imitate the richness of God, could include the wisdom of God, beauty and wonder of God, the eschatological hope, and the wholeness of God in the Trinity. Some elements like the wind, a sunset, small insects, plants and rocks present opportunities for tangible experience of His identity through sensory exploration.

It could further present a means of connecting the world of the human with the work of God in the world. In the New Testament, the incarnated Jesus personally made His identity known through His teachings. He incorporated nature parables and metaphors of nature within His parables, as well as demonstrated His wonders and sovereignty through nature. Although God used nature in various ways in Scripture to make Himself known, neither nature nor human language could comprehend the full character of God.

The encounter with Elijah on Mount Horeb explains how God renews and strengthens a prophet in deep despair. Elijah is renewed through the presence of God. This notion coincides with the theological pastoral principle that healing is only possible through a spiritual encounter with God. Nature holds potential to enhance spiritual awareness, but healing in nature would only be possible through an intimate encounter with God. In the same way that Jesus meets the disciples in the midst of their ‘storm’ (human dimension), God meets an emotional distressed Elijah and strengthens Him through His divine power. Elijah did not have to perform special tasks, but only had to be in the presence of God. Similar to the text in Mark 4, it correlates with the theological principle: of faith care as life care.

Romans 8:18-30 pertains to the eschatological revelation of the covenantal promises of God. In this text, however, the eschatology is portrayed within the ‘threefold groaning’, which includes the Spirit, humans, and nature. Both humans and nature long for the final redemption, while the Spirit groans with them, ensuring them of the promises of God and transforming them to His glory.

Human beings and the earth (creation) are connected within a closely knit interwoven system, sharing a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence. Human beings are entrusted with a responsibility to sustain and protect creation as an intrinsic element of God’s family, but have

failed in their responsibility, and nature was subjected to futility through human sin and disobedience. Paul extends human suffering to the suffering of creation, but indicates that humans and nature also share the hope and promises of future glorification. The Spirit is involved with transformation and renewal of all beings; He is present in the lives of believers and in creation.

Although the wounds of futility have been multiplying since the Fall, nature portrays evidence of God's love, sovereignty, and wisdom. Natural displays of His creational work provide guidance towards a holistic perspective of being part of a systemic entity, together with creation (nature).

The wonder of God is revealed in the beauty of nature and could support spiritual connectedness with God, a central value in the epistemological framework of pastoral counselling. Intimate encounters with God bring spiritual restoration and promote spiritual maturity, providing strength during difficult circumstances.

The following chapter will review the insights gained from previous chapters about the nature and scope of pastoral counselling as well as ecotherapy, together with the Scriptural analysis presented here in order to offer a possible theological framework for eco-pastoral counselling.

CHAPTER 5 PRELIMINARY MARKERS FOR AN ECO-PASTORAL COUNSELLING APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters unfolded with an awareness of the notion of a collaborative pastoral approach where ecotherapy was considered as partner in what can be termed an "eco-pastoral counselling approach". As such, this chapter will mainly rely on a critical integration of the findings of these chapters to identify preliminary markers for an imagined eco-pastoral counselling approach. In the process, it will denote a form of "cross-disciplinary" dialogue with a view to broadening the scope of traditional resources in pastoral counselling (Osmer, 2008:163).

Thus far, the broad strokes of Brunsdon's (2014) notion of collaborative pastoral care were followed. This entailed an in-depth exploration of the nature and scope of pastoral counselling (Chapter 2) as well as the notion of ecotherapy (Chapter 3). In line with the assumption that pastoral counselling resembles spiritual care as life-care and the healing potential of ecotherapy, several Scriptural passages were investigated in light of suggestions that nature can be understood as space where God expresses His covenantal care towards humans (Chapter 4).

The findings of these chapters showed that nature as space for healing indeed holds potential to be harnessed in an eco-pastoral counselling approach. An eco-pastoral counselling approach will supposedly be rooted in theological points of departure.

Consequently, suggested theological points of departure will be put forward, an exposition of possible markers to provide guidance in the process of an imagined eco-pastoral counselling follows.

5.2 Theological points of departure for an eco-pastoral counselling approach

The closer study of several passages from Scripture in Chapter 4 rested on the broader assumption that creation is understood as general revelation where humans can witness the nature of God. This alluded to the possibility that God's presence can be experienced in nature in a profound way. An investigation of 1 Kings 19:9-18, Psalm 104, Mark 4:35-41 and Romans 8:18-30 indicated that the current world bears evidence of the chaos and decay that cause pain and suffering, and consequently the eager longing of humans and nature while awaiting the freedom of redemption when the covenant promises of God will be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit,

as the Source of life and renewal, unites with humans and nature in expectation of final liberation. In their despair, the Spirit provides hope to endure and transform all beings to become whole and enjoy healthy relationships with God and each other (Rom. 8:18-30). The household of God includes both humans and nature, therefore His promises hold relevance for all living beings.

The creation of God bears witness to His nature, activity, and wisdom (Ps. 104). It offers a serene space where the presence of God becomes more palpable, and the troubled person can deepen his/her knowledge of God and strengthen their relationship with Him. Elijah (1 Kings 19:9-18) experienced healing on Mount Horeb, and the disciples (Mk. 4:35-41) received insight to strengthen their knowledge and relationship with Jesus on the Sea of Galilea. Hence, the essence of health transpires in an intimate encounter with God where He strengthens the discouraged and provides peace and meaning to those in pain. In the New Testament, Jesus often gathered with His people in natural surroundings where He employed metaphors and narratives of nature, and performed wonders through natural elements like water to illustrate His divine nature.

This raises the question: What theological points of departure for an eco-pastoral counselling approach will transpire when these principles are interpreted through the lens of ecotherapy with a view on an eco-pastoral approach? In light of this question, the following points of departure were formulated:

These points of departure are not offered as definitive or final but serve as starting points to initiate further exploration and dialogue.

5.2.1 The human fall and a fragmented world

The human fall that occurred shortly after the creation (Gen. 3) represented a turning point that had implications for the whole of creation and rendered humankind in a futile state of being (Berry, 2020:282). Futility indicates broken relationships among people, people and creation, and people and God. This notion also holds true in the current postmodern culture where self-worth, individual materialism and destruction of ecology are of primary concern (Palmer, 2017:64).

The destruction of ecology is evident in polluted water, air and land, depleted natural resources, extinct species and rainforests, and increased temperatures (Nolte & Dreyer, 2010:6). People have forgotten their interrelatedness with the rest of creation and have lost their connection with past values or future hope. In this regard, Nouwen (1979:9-12) refers to a ‘fragmented ideology’. The Christian church can offer answers to the ‘fragmented society’

through God's encompassing master narrative that relates to the wholeness of the earth. In the world where people 'suffer from inner wounds' caused by existential challenges like physical and emotional abuse, HIV/AIDS, job losses or critical illnesses, pastoral counselling wants to provide guidance to restore relations and re-establish wholeness (Nolte & Dreyer, 2010:1).

The self-claimed Western 'power to think analytically' and bias to deconstruct knowledge (think the world apart) resulted in a loss of ability to recognise the wonder of the wholeness of life (Palmer, 2017:64). There is a need for a theological hermeneutic that thinks the world together.

Theological discussions concerning the 'two books of revelation', refer to general revelation through the *book of nature* and revelation through the Word of God*,* and suggests that it should be 'read' together. The 'book of nature' needs to be interpreted through the lens of Scripture, but Scriptures should also be understood in the light of nature (Moltmann, cited in Conradie, 2012:300). In order for nature to be 'read' or understood in the light of Scripture, it has to be perceived as a world of intentions and significance. Instead of merely being a world of atoms and neurons, it conveys messages through illustrations of the divine Word, interconnectedness between all beings, and the way in which all beings develop toward the expectation of wholeness (that which is not yet but is still to come) (Conradie, 2012:300). In a similar way, Christ is revealed in the Scriptures, but He also revealed Himself in nature (Langer, 2019:439). Therefore, the created order has to be read through the spectacles of Scripture (Calvin, cited in Langer, 2019:439).

5.2.2 Divine wholeness imitated in nature (creation)

The Christian faith is embedded in one Triune God, and believes God works and moves together from a threefold communion (Webster, 2010:8; Murphy, 2013:167) in a 'creative dance of Trinity' (Barry, 2004:43; Baker-Fletcher, 2006:55). Everything originates from the Father; find their form from the Word; and are activated and transformed by the Spirit (Webster, 2010:18). During His life on earth, Jesus Christ lovingly showed the way to a fulfilled life in unity with others, including the earth (McGann, 2012:51). The Spirit – the Source of all life – is actively involved in the continuous renewal of creation (McGann, 2012:51). God holds land and people together in a symbiotic web of communion (Webster, 2010:15), where He expresses His love for creation through the uniqueness and beauty of the world that is filled with His glory (Baker-Fletcher, 2006:55).

This unity in wholeness of the Trinity is reflected in many ways in nature (creation) (Webster, 2010:15). The notion of unity in nature as a paradigm for wholeness – and implicitly – healing and health, holds much potential for human understanding of holistic health and wellness.

From a theological perspective, all earthly creatures present a part of God, 'a revelation of divine goodness and beauty' (McGann, 2012:52). All creation rejoices in God's dominion and in the way He 'infuses' all with His goodness. The world ('household of God') moves with Him in a 'perichoretic dance or composition' (Conradie, 2013:9), each associated with a world where nutrition, sensory input, or other needs to survive and thrive are available (Cavedon, 2015:13). The poet of Psalm 104 proclaims: "When you hide your face, [creatures] are dismayed… When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground" (Cavedon, 2015:4).

Since God is a relational God, an essential part of being human and created in the image of the Triune God comprises relating to one another and to all of creation (Cavedon, 2015:12), which can be regarded as a central motive on the journey of healing. Human beings have a specific role in God's interdependent system of energy between all earthly beings, that provides a "sense of sacramentality of the whole earth and cosmos" (McGann, 2012:51). The ultimate purpose of human beings, created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-2), is to live in His presence and glorify His name (Ecc. 12:13; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 43:7) (Chapman, 2000:77; Woldemichael, 2013:8). In order to attain this purpose, a re-evaluation of nature and its place in healing is paramount. It presents a likely space where humans can imitate the connectedness between the Father, Son, and Spirit (Pembroke, 2017:172-187). A recognition of the connection with each creature in the web encourages people to recognise the notion of interrelatedness. Knowledge of the systems of life in creation which is experienced in nature can inspire and nurture an inquisitive mindset that motivates people to know the Creator of the universe more deeply (McGann, 2012:51).

God illustrates His intended purpose with human dominion over creation through His example of love as the foundation of His caregiving, instead of ruling with 'power' (Cavedon, 2015:4). Although God could enforce His power at any moment, He chooses for creation to flourish in its own way; He chooses to witness and appreciate the beauty of nature (Cavedon, 2015:4). The dominion of God in creation transpires through His goodness, delight, fruitfulness and promises of harmony (Cavedon, 2015:12).

5.2.3 Divine healing through nature

Being able to recognise the intricately interwoven connectedness between our existential realities and suffering, and the bigger narrative of God and His own suffering, makes spiritual healing possible (Nouwen, 1977:24-25). Through God's revealed miracles in nature, for instance, unique habitats and mysterious life of animals, He guided Job to a transformed perspective (Job 38) from where he could perceive his own story in the light of an artfully composed cosmos, hence finding spiritual healing. Through witnessing the work of God in creation, Job became aware of his position within a larger world that reflects God's glory (Job 38-41) (Calder & Morgan, 2016:17).

Salvation and new life cannot be restricted to humans, but includes the natural creation (Baker-Fletcher, 2006:61). Interrelatedness between humans and nature hold significance for spiritual healing; as a result of their inseparable entities, human health cannot be separated from nature (Louw, 2013:112). Therefore, healing implies restored relationships with God (s*halom*), with one another, with the environment, and the whole of creation (Louw, 2013:7). In this context of interactive relations, soul implies a 'systems approach' (Janse van Rensburg, 2010:3).

Within a pastoral framework, suffering and pain is perceived as part of a larger network of co-joined suffering in the narrative of God's work on earth (Breytenbach, 2013:6; Redding, 2020:210; Nouwen, 1977:26). The collective 'groaning' and suffering of creation and believers outlined in Romans 8:18-30 presented an ecological perspective from which the suffering of people is perceived within a larger context of futility together with the cosmic realm and creation (Woldemichael, 2013:9). Eco-theologians like Conradie (2005:1) opine that ecological theology offers Christianity an opportunity to rediscover and renew the place of humanity in creation, and to rediscover the place of healing in creation. Conradie (2014) recounts metaphors with biblical roots that can assist us to rediscover the relationship between God and the earth. One example entails the metaphor of the world as a 'fountain of life' that originates from God. In the New Testament, Jesus became the 'fountain of life flowing from God' (Jn. 4:14). The world is further portrayed as a 'clay pot of God', which He is 'remoulding' patiently, to develop according to His will (2 Cor. 4:7) (Conradie, 2014:448). Another well-known metaphor is the world as the 'household' of God, connecting all (e.g., political, economy, animal, infrastructure) through the 'root of *oikos*', living together, 'belonging', participating', each with a right and responsibility on earth (Eph. 2:18) (Conradie, 2014:448).

5.2.4 Nature and a pastoral anthropology of embodied spirituality

In the latter part of the 1990s, the field of neuro- and cognitive sciences suggested a connection between physical- and spiritual experiences (Van den Berg, 2008:129). It was noted that daily experiences affect blood flow, hormone production, cells and synapses (Van den Berg, 2008:123). The body gives physical expression to spiritual experiences and rituals like prayer and meditation (Van den Berg, 2008:124). This notion relates to human beings understood as “an embodied soul and a spirited body” (Louw, 2005:16).

Within eco-pastoral thinking, it should thus be considered that engagement through the senses can have the potential for change and healing in the framework of embodied spirituality (Van den Berg, 2008:120, 124; Louw, 2005:16). In nature, embodied spirituality is expressed through physical connection with the elements of God’s creation like the sea, sky, plants and air. His presence could not be found in intellectual capacities, but in the whole embodied spiritual experience of human beings – “body and soul” (Van den Berg, 2008:124). The poet in Psalm 104 calls on human beings to ‘joyfully join’ God in rejoicing and appreciating nature, to praise and give thanks to the Creator for the richness and abundance of His creative work (McCann, 2012:69). Appreciation of aesthetics in nature leads to communion with nature that could enhance spiritual togetherness with God (Coetsee, 2008:131). Engagement with the beauty of nature gives rise to ‘rest’ in creation (De Klerk, 2014:6).

5.3 An eco-pastoral counselling approach

This section presents markers for an eco-pastoral approach based on the theological and theoretical deliberations of the preceding chapters.

It was indicated that ecotherapy shows potential for deployment within a pastoral approach that can broaden traditional expressions of pastoral counselling. While there seems to be some common ground between ecotherapy and pastoral care, a Christian perspective of nature holds first and foremost that nature points to the Creator God which can be experienced in nature in a special way. While the praxis in ecotherapy is mainly concerned with renewing the mutual bond between humans and nature, the primary interest of a Christian approach is to renew the bond between humans and the Creator as nature stimulates an awareness of God. It is anticipated that renewal and healing will occur in the pastoral window of opportunity created by leading counselees into natural spaces of quietness and to stimulate raised levels of awareness of the Divine that are prone to happen in a nature setting.

5.3.1 A theological embracement of the healing potential of nature

An eco-pastoral approach first and foremost calls for a theological reappraisal of the healing potential of nature. While “green theology” has been accentuated together with a greater awareness of nature conservation in light of global warming issues (Copeland, 2021; Middleton, 2021; Martin, 2015:168), the healing potential of nature within a pastoral perspective seems to deserve due attention. Conradie (2017:186) acknowledges the work of Howard Clinebell (2013) with the introduction of the notion of ‘ecotherapy’ and confirms the need for further development of therapy and counselling. In this study, a few exploratory arguments were proposed which can be expanded on in service of a comprehensive eco-pastoral counselling approach. It is argued here that eventual pastoral strategies should be grounded in sound theological reflection of how nature stands in service of healing and restoration.

5.3.2 Widening traditional pastoral horizons

Eco-pastoral counselling calls for a widening of traditional notions of pastoral care that were mainly restricted to congregational settings, or other indoor localities e.g., the homes of parishioners or hospitals where pastoral care was usually dispensed. The unique setting of an eco-pastoral approach relates to natural spaces which can include open spaces such as gardens, farmland or nature-reserve settings, depending on areas counsellors have access to.

In this regard, retreat centres have become familiar in some church environments and are often designed to help persons focus on certain aspects within secluded surroundings. In essence, the purpose of a retreat is to find solitude from where a deeper experience of God’s presence opens possibilities for reflection and healing (Schutte & Dreyer, 2006). Retreats are a familiar concept in church and other religious practices in South Africa, where numerous opportunities and locations are available for believers to engage with nature and themselves. The ‘Beulah retreat’ outside Wellington, for instance, offers activities that involve personal retreats, or facilitated programmes like ‘Return to the Father’s heart’ and ‘Love is a choice’. The ‘4musa movement’ wants to “inspire men’s hearts through adventure, brotherhood, faith and justice” (www.4musa.com). It presents programmes with an adventurous nature in wilderness areas. They believe that physical and emotional challenges foster deep spiritual experiences and help men to find their roles in the Kingdom of God.

Subscribers to eco-pastoral counselling will, however, need to think creatively in terms of spaces that are conducive to the ideals of harnessing nature in a pastoral approach. The

widening of pastoral horizons includes the shift from purely individual one-on-one encounters between pastoral counsellor and counselee, as this approach also holds the potential of accommodating groups of people, depending on the chosen setting.

5.3.3 Training and resources for eco-pastoral counselling

Pertaining to the level of qualification, it is imagined that the eco-pastoral counsellor will need a certain level of knowledge pertaining to pastoral theology and counselling, with the purpose of preserving the core nature of pastoral theology. The caregiver will need to have knowledge to apply the building blocks of counselling in an appropriate manner in a nature setting.

Despite considerable research, there has not yet been sufficient information available with regard to specific challenges presented by ecotherapy (Sundaram, 2014:63). The most recent published work that includes discussions on limitations of outdoor therapy has been done by Stein (California) and Ronan Berger (2008) (Sundaram, 2014:63).

An important consideration in a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling is the setting and location in nature where counselling will take place. Important considerations involve the resources needed e.g., chairs, or objects to be employed in activities. In the matter of security, the safety of the environment and surroundings are applicable. The needs, physical and emotional abilities of the counselee, as well as purpose of the session or programme should correspond with the ecological environment (Berger, 2008:211).

Further considerations involve issues like budget, as well as the possibility to exit the environment at any given moment if the counselee would choose to do so (Berger, 2008:226-227). The time of the session would not only depend on the availability of the persons involved in counselling but also on the purpose of the session (Berger, 2008:211).

A formal discussion preceding outdoor counselling could provide sufficient information on what to expect, for instance, the environment, setting, and methods should be conveyed. It would be advisable to obtain formal consent (Berger, 2008:226-227). The counsellor should be mindful of certain levels of anxiety that could be evoked from uncertainty of being in a new environment (Jordan & Marshall, 2010:347).

Ethical considerations include confidentiality – since the meeting takes place in an open space, there is the possibility of encountering other people, thus personal and professional boundaries would need to be respected (Sundaram, 2014:61-62). Additionally, the pastoral counsellor should be equipped with a certain level of knowledge of the specific environment

e.g., in reference to natural elements and care to protect the ecology (Sundaram, 2014:61-62).

5.3.4 Employment of traditional pastoral resources in an eco-pastoral counselling approach

Uncertain life conditions like fluctuating economic and political systems, threats of war, and relationship challenges conceal our ability to recognise the incarnated Jesus, who has promised to return, and to remain conscious of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Nouwen, 2003:120). A space of silence, or "a healing space of solitude", can support renewed spiritual awareness ('waiting upon') (Louw, 2008:34). The French philosopher, Derrida, describes space or *chora* as a "container of meaning" (Louw, 2008:34). In the context of pastoral care, 'space' for healing denotes the acts of care and nurturing that want to promote healing and a full life (Louw, 2008:26-28).

Nature does not only provide a space for spiritual renewal, but the preliminary indications in this study are that pastoral counselling as a distinct caring profession could potentially find expression in natural environments as a space for healing. In line with this notion, this last section of the chapter explores how the essential components that contribute to the uniqueness of pastoral counselling can unfold in nature as a space for eco-pastoral counselling. The unique components of pastoral counselling that will be considered in the following section, includes prayer, Scriptural use in pastoral counselling, and the work of the Holy Spirit in counselling. A short reflection on the potential use of metaphors and rituals as additional resources is also considered.

5.3.4.1 Prayer and communion with the Holy Spirit within the eco-pastoral space

Christian spirituality is embedded in the person and work of the Holy Spirit (Dames & Louw, 2020:115). The Spirit mediates the tension between current existential challenges and future expectation, and transforms all life to conform to the image of God and fulfil their divine purpose (Redding, 2021:53).

Scripture reveals the character of the Holy Spirit as counsellor, comforter, helper and advocate (Jn. 14:16–17; 16:8, 13; Ac. 9:31; Rom. 8:26–27). The Spirit was sent by Christ to set forth His work of salvation on earth. Psalm 104.30: "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth". The Holy Spirit guides people in prayer and heals broken relationships (Du Plessis, 2016:5). A pneumatological perspective with nature in mind points to the "encircling, indwelling" work of the Holy Spirit who draws ('weaves') humans into communion with other created beings of God (Gabriel, 2007:199).

At the beginning of the pastoral encounter, the pastor and the counselee would typically invite the Holy Spirit to guide the healing process and declare their dependence and trust in Him (Du Plessis, 2016:3,5). They acknowledge their expectance of the Holy Spirit to provide meaning (Brunsdon, 2019:7). Throughout the encounter, they remain in "indirect prayerful sigh", anticipating His revelation and guidance (Louw, 2008:257). In this way, spiritual insight can resound and be integrated in the heart of the counselee (Louw, 2008:257). Instead of "acting and doing", the caregiver remains "vulnerable and broken" and stays close in compassion to the other (Nouwen, 1979:71-72).

The palpable work of the Sprit in nature holds potential to reinforce awareness of His presence and encourage people to surrender to His transformational work in their lives. A possible technique at the beginning of the encounter during the process of abiding by the guidance of the Spirit is to find an element in nature that holds proof of the creative work of the Spirit in nature, and feel, hold, smell or see it while inviting and becoming aware of His presence. An example of a metaphor of the Spirit that could be experienced in nature, is the wind. Ezekiel 3:1-14 makes reference to the Spirit as the wind (*ruah)* that blows through the valley of dry bones to bring life; Acts 2:1-4 refers to the Spirit (wind) that fills the house where the believers were gathered at Pentecost (Gabriel, 2007:199-200).

A similar technique is called 'centring prayer'. *Centring prayer* was introduced by Meninger, Pennington, and Keating in 1975 with the intent to integrate secular methods of meditation into the Christian tradition of reflection; it portrays a modern embodiment of the early practices of the Desert Fathers (Blanton, 2011:135). It has two purposes: (i) to settle into a relaxed open frame of mind, and (ii) to become sensitive to and enjoy the presence of God (Johnson, 2017:68). The process of centring prayer starts with being quiet, distancing oneself from thoughts of tasks and responsibilities, and becoming aware of surroundings and the work and presence of the Spirit, His movement and rhythm in nature.

Biblical examples that illustrate this notion are found in the Books of Psalms and Habakkuk in the Old Testament, where the word 'selah' is mentioned on 74 accounts. 'Selah' can be explained as pauses put forward to allow the listener "to ponder or consider" (reflect) on what has been said (Johnson, 2017:17). Other Scriptural passages that implicate the idea of 'being with or pondering' the Word of God, is found in narratives where God is described to 'walk' in Eden with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8) and where Noah "walked faithfully with God" (Gen. 5:22, 24) (Johnson, 2017:22).

The work of the Holy Spirit and prayer unfolds in tandem in the process of pastoral counselling. Prayer does not only implicate a conversation with God, but it postulates a deed of faith in

God that derives from a relationship of trust and reconciliation (Louw, 2000:429). The task of the pastoral counsellor thus includes an understanding of the position of the counselee's personal relationship with God, and elucidating the foundational structure of the biblical covenant of each relation with the divine God (Du Plessis, 2016:5). During the pastoral encounter, prayer can potentially unfold in three ways: the pastor intercedes for the counselee in prayer, the counselee is empowered and guided to engage in prayer, or prayer directed to the process of healing (Towns, 2011:142). In an eco-pastoral milieu, personal prayer will present the opportunity to reflect in silence and connect with God. An option is for the caregiver to select Scriptural passages, or ask the counselee to choose texts to communicate in prayer.

In counselling where the Spirit directs the healing process, the practice of prayer performs a central role in transformation (Decker *et al.,* 2021:16). Johnson (2017:24) suggests the image of a 'listening heart' or 'listening prayer' that indicates an openness to continuous dialogue with God. Therefore, prayer as part of the meaning-making process implies 'prayer through' the unfolding story towards becoming a new being.

5.3.4.2 Use of Scriptures in eco-pastoral counselling

Scripture reveals itself as the Word of God that equips His people to live a fulfilled life that exalts the Triune God (2 Pet. 1:3). Scriptural reflection should emerge within an engaged conversation with the Spirit of God. First Corinthians 2:10-11 confirms: "[T]hese things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God' (Bennett, 2013). From a relational perspective, Scriptural engagement presupposes a 'meeting place' where the intent is to have a relational conversation with God (Johnson, 2017:47). Nature offers a quiet space to reflect on the Word of God in communion with His Spirit.

Scripture presents a rich source of knowledge and insight on matters that relate to the scope of pastoral counselling, including the wisdom of God, understanding of human thoughts (Matt. 15:17-20), ethics concerning life, and healing (Ps.19:1; 1 Col. 10:31) (Lelek, 2021:266-267). In the New Testament, Jesus confirms His divine compassion and care for those who have experienced loss and suffering (Matt. 5:3-12). In His parables and teachings, He provides wisdom and direction in the matter of life challenges like anger, lust, divorce, and revenge (Matt. 5) (Lelek, 2021:268). The application of Scripture is therefore a pivotal part of the pastoral encounter.

The pastoral counsellor wants to apply the Word of God in a way that articulates His compassionate 'being-with His people', and communicates the identity of believers as one that

is rooted in the resurrected Christ (Dames & Louw, 2020:11). Moreover, the pastoral counsellor wants to guide the person in despair to a position where his or her own life circumstances become united with the covenantal story of God (Redding, 2021:61). This process requires constant "active listening" to "see life as *it is becoming in Christ"* (Redding, 2021:65). Biblical narratives illustrate God's grace and presence through the stories of ordinary people that experienced similar life challenges as the contemporary person (inadequacies, trauma, insecurities, and defeat) (Parker, 2016:62). Furthermore, they demonstrate the comfort and encouragement of the Spirit in the lives of believers (Parker, 2016:62).

Jesus illustrated the divine model of Scriptural use during His work on earth. He applied Scriptural guidelines as part of an organic process during His encounters with people in their daily existence (Lelek, 2021:297). In a similar way, the pastoral conversation shifts between context and text while contemplating the text to find a message that shed light on the circumstances of the counselee (Louw, 2008:254). Louw (2008:254) explains the process as a 'hermeneutical cycle' contingent on the spoken words of God (Scripture and His promises), involving guidance of the caregiver (counselling), and feedback and interpretation from the counselee (Louw, 2008:254). The Holy Spirit discloses the meaning and promises of the text. Louw (2008:256) identified three techniques that can be applied in organic Scriptural use:

- Paraphrasing – a technique where the text is interpreted in relation to personal circumstances.

- Meditative reading – entails contemplation of a smaller passage over a longer period in a repetitive thought pattern.

- Narrative reading – involves selection of a specific biblical narrative with similar circumstances of the counselee with applicable spiritual truths.

The three techniques explained above will tend to interlace with each other, but all three techniques have potential to be utilised in eco-pastoral counselling. One suggestion is for the caregiver and counselee to use the paraphrasing technique, to explore the text and the way it relates to the circumstances of the counselee together. The last two techniques present the opportunity to equip the counselee to practice personal reflection on biblical passages. The space of nature offers a peaceful and quiet environment to become aware of the work of the Spirit and 'listen' to the voice of God. In an eco-pastoral approach, the option is to select narratives or psalms that refer to nature or natural elements during Scriptural use, in order to

create a deepened understanding of the text through the actual experience of natural elements mentioned in the text.

A few examples of Scriptural passages to be employed in Scriptural meditation in nature follow:

- The Book of Psalms presents a myriad of hymns and poems that presents opportunities to deepen knowledge and strengthen relationships with God. Additionally, it communicates different emotions in an expressive manner to be employed when sharing and communicating personal feelings during prayer (Johnson, 2017:61). Again, many psalms use aesthetics and wonder of nature when relating to human situations, adding an experiential component in the context of eco-pastoral counselling.

- Contemplative reading of illustrations of healing and transformation in the Gospel narratives, holds relevance to the concept of 'resonance'. The passage is read with an intend or mindset of searching for understanding in an 'imaginative engaging' way. Resonance encourages a more creative theological reflection in the search for new meaning (Rowland & Bennett, 2006:11). Nature seems to offer a supportive environment for Scriptural use where the concept of resonance and imaginative contemplation are employed.

- Another suggestion entails a more active engagement with Scripture and nature. The counselee can move around in a natural setting in search of objects that express his/her understanding of a text, or an object that illustrate a metaphor for an important message they learned from meditating on the text.

- Specific elements from the natural environment, or narratives that involve nature, or a psalm about elements in nature, can be incorporated in prayer (Johnson, 2017:65). For instance, if fear is a personal issue, a symbol that presents "God as protector" or an image of "hide in the shelter of God's wings" (Ps. 17:8) can express the feelings and needs that accompany fear, and the counselee can communicate his/her fear to God in prayer (Johnson, 2017:65).

5.3.4.3 Metaphors and rituals

Theological and Scriptural thoughts relate to a transcendent God who cannot be seen. His name and being moves beyond human comprehension and language, therefore metaphors can be employed to portray the character of God (Pembroke, 2017:185).

> Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:193).

Metaphors enable cognitive comprehension through the visible and palpable connection of the physical body with the outside world (Niemand, 2020:75). The Eucharist is an example of a ritual that integrates the body and spiritual awareness as a mental reminder of Christ's death that continues to propose new perspectives and understanding of an established principle (William, 1996:251).

Since natural environments has potential to stimulate the human senses, through palpable or visible objects that connect us to the unseen, it can be utilised as metaphors or as part of rituals to encourage a deepened understanding of the nature of God (Hogue, 2003:133).

Embodied meaning-making means the person's entire body and whole sense of self is incorporated into the meaning-making process. For this reason, the poetry of the Psalms often moves people from instinctive fear to sincere empathy and blissful delight (Niemand, 2020:75). As a teacher of human souls, Jesus pointed to natural phenomena in His teachings to make people aware of the creational realm ("Look at the birds, … consider the lilies" (Martin 2015:173).

Ritual has proven to be a valuable tool in the termination phase of the pastoral encounter in terms of creating a positive and safe sense of departure and movement towards a new period of adjustment (Pembroke, 2017:218).

A few examples of ways to employ metaphors and rituals in eco-pastoral counselling are suggested:

- Employ metaphors to draw comparable narratives between personal faith and natural phenomena e.g., comparing maturing faith with blooming flowers (Berger, 2008:211).

- Elements from nature present a myriad of possibilities to create metaphors that relate to pastoral counselling e.g., hope in redemption and future glory, finding peace in the knowledge of God's continuous provision and care, the character and wisdom of God, becoming whole and restored in God. In distressing circumstances, the portrayal of new life in nature that derives from chaos can bring hope and expectation, through the realisation that God can bring change to situations from chaos into new life. Natural elements do not prescribe specific meanings, instead meaning is created according to

an individual perspective and experience e.g., falling leaves could have many different meanings (Harper *et al.,* 2019:147).

- The creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-3 describes how God has transformed water as a powerful force, into a much-needed resource that gives life to all created beings. This narrative presents an example of the creative ways God use to bring change and transformation during uncertain and hopeless situations. Water is thus a visible element to employ as metaphor to illustrate God's sovereignty and wisdom in order to create understanding of hope during hardships and uncertain circumstances.

- Examples like food chains in nature, illustrate the symbiotic interdependence of all beings and the way that God sustain the web of life. It resonates with the pastoral perspective of holistic healing and wholeness wherein human beings are part of a larger system in creation. In a same sense that Job was able to find insight and meaning, the counselee nature can help the counselee to perceive suffering as part of a larger system where the creative God is in control. The orderliness of time (day and night) in nature provides assurance of God's wisdom and control over life, that includes the daily lives and routines of the counselee during uncertain times (William, 1996:250).

The above suggested applications of metaphors in eco-pastoral counselling implicates the possibility of finding new techniques and ways to support and guide the person in need within natural environments according to their own unique context and circumstances. It is imagined that the same techniques can be applied to groups where the dynamics within group interaction further contribute to new meaning and insight as well as strengthened faith and relationships with God and others.

5.4 Summary

In line with the collaborative pastoral approach of this study, the purpose of this chapter was to identify theological epistemologies as foundational guidelines for an eco-pastoral counselling approach. An additional goal was to establish preliminary markers for a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling.

Theological points of departure concerning eco-pastoral counselling can be summarised as follows. The human fall in Eden caused both humans and nature to be doomed to futility, while the relation between all beings were jeopardised. Today, human beings have become self-directed and disconnected from nature to the extent that they are in the process of depleting and destroying all natural resources.

This stands in contrast to the relational character of God, that is evident in the close-knit relationship within the Trinity of God. He created all creatures within an intimately connected web of life. The love of God is prominent in His care and providence in nature and in human lives. Created in His image, humans are relational beings who find wholeness and healing in their connections with other. Nature reflects components of wholeness and healing that holds potential for the notion of healing in pastoral counselling.

Because of the relational character of God and humans, healing transpires through wholeness. A holistic approach to healing perceives the human soul within a structure of interweaved connections in creation, hence healing transpires through a restored wholeness and unity between God, His people, and the earth. In the same sense, suffering and despair are a shared interdependent occurrence.

Interactions like prayer and meditation have been confirmed to find expression in the human body and influence physical health. This notion of embodied spirituality relates to the experiences of the work and character of God in nature through human senses like smell, touch, vision and hearing. Embodied spirituality in nature enhances a deepened connection with nature, it motivates people to increase knowledge of nature and its Creator, that could potentially motivate communion with God.

In the light of the above-mentioned suggested theological points of departure, the objective of the second part of the chapter was to identify markers that indicate pathways to an applied praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling. The following markers were suggested.

Eco-theologians have done much work to raise awareness on different platforms and encourage people to take responsibility for their divine task to conserve nature as the creation of God. The matter of a recognised theological perspective on the healing potential of nature is still a cause for attention.

Eco-pastoral counselling calls for a widening of traditional perspectives in the field. The notion of pastoral care that was mainly restricted to congregational settings and other indoor facilities can be expanded with an eco-pastoral approach that suggests natural spaces with aesthetic surroundings and direct experience of God’s creation, and encourages strengthened relationships between humans and nature.

An imagined approach to eco-pastoral counselling would require a certain level of qualification from practitioners. Further administrational implications involve the setting and location of counselling in nature, the safety of the environment, as well as the protection of natural resources and ethical implications like confidentiality.

It is essential to ensure that traditional pastoral components that distinguish it from other helping professions are applied in a way that preserve its unique contribution in the practice. The following suggestions were made.

The work of the Holy Spirit as Counsellor and Helper is confirmed in Scripture, and is especially relevant in the pastoral encounter. The presence of the Spirit is palpable in nature where He restores and transforms all beings. Certain methods like *centred prayer* in natural surroundings will deepen the connection with the Spirit in the healing process.

The Word of God becomes an active part of communication in the pastoral approach, though not in a structural way, but rather as part of the organic process. The book of Scriptures and the book of nature enlighten each other and can be applied in a palpable experiential manner in the context of nature.

Textual narratives that involve nature can be selected and applied in correlation with each other.

A rich variety of natural objects are available to utilise as metaphors and rituals in the eco-pastoral meeting. One example is to become aware of the promise of hope while observing and touching new life in nature.

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarise the findings of the preceding chapters, revisit the aim and objectives, and recap the research process. In addition to acknowledging the limitations of the research, the chapter also presents recommendations for future studies.

6.2 Purpose and approach to the study

The study set out to explore the healing potential of nature from a pastoral perspective. With this goal in mind, the focus of the research was to investigate the collaboration between pastoral counselling and ecotherapy, a field in psychology interested in mutual care and nurturing in the relationship between humans and nature.

In line with the focus of the study, the main aim was to determine whether pastoral care can collaborate with ecotherapy in an eco-pastoral approach to harness the healing potential of nature. To achieve this aim, the objectives of the study were to:

- Describe the nature and scope of pastoral counselling.
- Determine the healing potential of nature as described in ecotherapy on emotional and spiritual healing.
- Investigate selected passages from Scripture with regard to nature as a space for God's involvement with humans.
- Evaluate how the possible emotional and spiritual healing potential of nature as suggested by ecotherapy and the Scriptures can relate to pastoral counselling in order to inform a possible eco-pastoral approach.

In order to achieve the set objectives, an exploratory literature approach was employed to collect the data. Sources consulted for this purpose included academic books, academic journals, postgraduate dissertations, and other reliable media resources.

A cross-disciplinary dialogue of transversality allows for the investigation of strategies from other disciplines to be integrated in the practice of pastoral counselling without endangering the theological character of pastoral theology. Brunsdon's (2014) notion of collaborative pastoral care aligns with the idea of cross-disciplinary dialogue and the structure provided a framework for the study. It incorporates three phases of identification, namely: *self-*

identification, partner identification, and identification of strategies. This approach allows for flexibility, and it was possible to align the objectives of the study with the framework of this collaborative approach.

An outline of the process that was followed commenced with an investigation of the main characteristics of pastoral counselling as a unique practice in Christian care (Chapter 2) and corresponds with the first phase of the collaboration process: *self-identification.*

The focus then shifted to an understanding of the healing effect of nature as described in ecotherapy (Chapter 3), in line with the second phase of the collaboration process: *partner identification.*

Chapter 4 extended the inquiry to accommodate a theological investigation of Scripture towards a biblical understanding of God's involvement with human beings within the space of nature with a view to an eco-pastoral counselling approach. Selected biblical texts that relate to God's encounters with His people in nature were investigated, namely: 1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 104; Mark 4:35-41; Romans 8:18-30.

Based on the insights of the previous three chapters, the intention in Chapter 5 was to articulate possible theological principles as points of departure for eco-pastoral counselling as well as identify markers that could provide guidance towards a praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling. This chapter was aligned with the third phase of the interdisciplinary dialogue: *identification of strategies*.

6.3 Summary of the research findings

6.3.1 The nature and scope of pastoral counselling

The objective in Chapter 2 was to probe the true nature of pastoral counselling as a unique practice in Christian care. It corresponds with the '*identification of self*' phase in the collaboration process and involved a reflection on pastoral care (*cura animarum*) as a foundational partner in the integration process where the goal is to find a clarified outline of the epistemologies and unique 'building blocks of soul care' in pastoral counselling as a foundational partner.

The first part of the chapter explored the nature of pastoral counselling through four core concepts that contribute to the unique nature of pastoral counselling, including certain notions of the nature of pastoral care, an historic account of pastoral care, the four levels of pastoral care, and pastoral anthropology.

An account of the historical development of pastoral counselling confirmed the contributions of history to the unique meaning and character of pastoral care today. A combined exposition of historical narratives of pastoral care conducted by Clebsch and Jaekle (1975) as well as Charles Gerkin (1997) provided insights on the close connection between the pastorate and faith communities throughout the development of history. Historic development demonstrates that faith communities do not exist in a vacuum, therefore *cura animarum* (pastoral care) should constantly reconsider the needs and existential realities of the cultural context. The twenty-first century has seen a more contextually conscious approach in pastoral counselling wherein personal distress is perceived in the context of social oppression, exploitation, and alienation (De Jong van Arkel, 2000:157). A holistic perspective of health therefore considers human beings as part of an "interdependent, intertwined web of personal, internal, social, pollical and cultural structures" (McClure, 2012:176).

Pastoral anthropology denotes a Christian understanding of another person within the pastoral context. It seeks understanding of who and what people ('living human documents') might be, in the light of God's covenant love. Pastoral anthropology confirms the core purpose of human beings, as the creation of God is to reflect His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-2) and honour and glorify His name through their existence (Ecc. 12:13; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 43:7; Eph. 1:11-12). God wants to share intimate relationships with His people.

Since the Fall, there has been chaos in the world, causing disharmony in all parts of life (Gen. 3:8-18), including between people and nature. The whole creation was encapsulated in the chaos set forth by the Fall, but through His grace, the resurrected Christ fulfilled the promise of salvation, and He will return with the final redemption when both humans and nature will be set free to fulfil their divine purpose. Current existential realities portray a dynamic tension between the promise already received, and the promise of the second coming of Christ. In a broken world, pastoral counselling wants to bear witness and respond to God's love by showing care to all created beings. Rooted in the Christian paradigm, pastoral counselling promotes holistic healing through spiritual restoration. Pastoral counselling guides people to recognise the nature and character of God's involvement with humanity and to demonstrate ways of connecting life and existential challenges with the spiritual realm of the Christian faith. At its core, pastoral care and counselling is concerned with life, specifically abundant life (Jn 10:10) as made possible through the salvatory work of Christ (cf. Brunsdon, 2017:111).

The heart of pastoral counselling is soul care: the soul finds nurturing, healing, *shalom* and fullness of life in an embodiment of the presence of God. A restored soul encourages spiritual growth that provides strength to negotiate and overcome existential challenges, and to transform and restore other spheres of life, a notion known as 'faith care (*cura animarum*) as

life care (*cura vitae*)' (Louw, 2008:11). Cura vitae or healing of life refers to the theological attempt to move away from a predominant focus on "knowing and doing" towards human "being". A holistic Christian approach to the healing of life (*cura vitae)* wants to renew human beings and their relationship with God and the whole of creation, where they experience *shalom* (peace) and fullness of life (Louw, 2013:7).

The second part of the chapter probed the scope of pastoral counselling, an area that concerns the spheres of caregiving where pastoral counselling could contribute towards the wellness of individuals and communities. The scope of pastoral counselling expands from the present to the breaking in of God's future, an eternity in Christ. Hence, pastoral counselling wants to provide guidance to situate suffering and pain within the wider narrative of the work of God on earth.

Pastoral counselling is a sub-discipline of practical theology. In line with the intention of practical theology to stay relevant to cultural contexts and academic movements, there has been calls in Christianity for a renewed and reformed view with regard to the place of humanity in creation. A reconceptualised paradigm that moves beyond "the living web of humanity", towards the larger "living web of creation" perceives human beings as participants in an interdependent, intertwined web of social, pollical and cultural structures (McClure, 2012:276). From a holistic perspective, human beings form part of a cosmos that today is still in yearning and in pain, awaiting a kind of 'spiritual healing'.

This chapter has worked towards a converged essence of pastoral counselling, explicated within an applicable theoretical theological framework to provide a 'solid cornerstone' from where the collaborative process could progress.

6.3.2 Ecotherapy and the healing effect of nature on emotional and spiritual healing

The third chapter corresponded with the 'i*dentification of partners'* phase of the collaboration process where the possible contribution of eco-therapeutic strategies was considered. The chapter was approached in two sections, of which the first part probed research and theoretical principles that underlie the notion of healing in nature. An outline of spiritual healing within a pastoral theology was included in this section. The second part of the chapter probed the definition and practices of ecotherapy by means of academic sources.

Theoretical principles confirm the positive influence of nature on human health. The ART of Stephen Kaplan (1977) and the 'Biophilia hypotheses' of Edward Wilson (1984), both acknowledges nature's ability to support healing, renew the mind, and nurture the inherent longing to affiliate with nature. There is an innate bond between people and nature, as a

consequence of millennia of biological development in close relation with nature. Research studies confirm the positive relation between nature and emotional wellness. Previous studies revealed that contact with nature increased serotonin production, strengthened anti-viral bodies and the immune system, and decreased symptoms relating to stress and depression.

The aim of the second part of the chapter was to gain knowledge of the practice of ecotherapy. In this regard, the initial focus was on the term 'ecotherapy'. To provide a clear understanding of the concept of ecotherapy as a point of reference in this study, the description of Doherty (2016:15) was considered. He described ecotherapy as a sub-discipline within the field of human sciences that takes place in natural surroundings, where it integrates elements of the environment in the process of emotional healing. The therapeutic emphasis is on the individual, as well as larger groups, social structures, and the earth.

The final part of the chapter probed current modalities and eco-therapeutic techniques as well as the eco-therapeutic process. Well-known models of ecotherapy include horticultural therapy, adventure therapy, wilderness therapy, animal-assisted therapy and ecotherapy in communities and societies or churches. Eco-therapeutic techniques could involve storytelling or a narrative approach, rituals, use of metaphors, and creative arts in nature. Upon completion of this chapter, it seems that nature indeed holds the potential to contribute to the health of human beings. Additionally, certain strategies within the notion of nature's nurturing care and healing, practiced within the field of ecotherapy, have the potential to contribute towards an imagined eco-pastoral approach.

6.3.3 Biblical perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature

In the search for insights on new developments to stay relevant to the cultural context of people, pastoral theology seeks to explore Scriptural revelation. This was done to shed light on nature as a space for God's involvement with humans, especially with regards to healing in the context of nature, in order to deduct theological principles for an eco-pastoral counselling approach.

A socio-cultural analysis was employed to investigate the historical significance of the pericope, since God reveals Himself and His will progressively throughout history and in all the books of the Bible (Van Rensburg *et al*., 2014:208). Four Scriptural passages were analysed at the hand of relevant theological sources. The selected texts included 1 Kings 19:9-18, Psalm 104; Mark 4:35-41, and Romans 8:18-30.

Theological insights gained from the textual analysis are summarised as follows. In 1 Kings 19:9-18, Elijah experiences an intimate moment of spiritual presence with the divine God that

restores him to be able to fulfil his purpose. The spiritual encounter between Elijah and God on Mount Horeb resonates with the pastoral epistemology of healing taking place through an encounter with God.

The divine Creator provides and renews His manifold work in creation. His intention is for creation to reflect His relational character; therefore, He wants all beings to live together in a symbiotic relationship of mutual care, peace, and love. The Creator rejoices and finds pleasure in His creation (Ps. 104:31). Humans are called upon to join in appreciation of His abundance in the beauty of creation by praising and thanking Him. Appreciation of aesthetics in nature leads to communion with nature that could enhance spiritual togetherness with God. Romans 8 confirms this divine purpose for creation to be in a symbiotic relation, but extends the understanding of this notion to the eschatological revelation of His covenant with creation within the 'threefold groaning'. Humans, nature, and the Holy Spirit groan together, longing for redemption in order to be able to fulfil its divine purpose. God is present in creation through the Holy Spirit who renews and transforms all to glorify His name (Ps. 104; Rom. 8:23). It could thus be confirmed that the work of the Spirit constitutes the core of healing.

Mark 4:35-41 seems to be an illustration of the pastoral principle of 'faith care (*cura animarum*) as life care (*cura vitae*)'. Jesus is present with His disciples in the midst of a 'storm' in their lives. He engages with them in their own world with its own specific challenges from where He leads them to know and understand His divine character, and to build a deeper relationship with Him. In most of His healings and wonders, Jesus first guided them to know Him, and strengthen their faith before attending to their physical needs. In a similar way, pastoral counselling believes healing takes place in the presence of God when people are able to perceive their existential challenges in the light of His divine work. Just like Jesus revealed His identity to His disciples by means of a gradual unfolding process, pastoral counselling wants to lead people to know Jesus as their Saviour with whom they can share a relationship.

Nature is often implicated in the revelational history of God, for instance darkness and an earthquake immersed during the crucifixion and death of Jesus (Lk. 23:44-47; Matt. 27:50-54). Jesus often implied nature in His teachings on earth, and in certain instances His teachings occurred in the context of nature. Nature reveals and demonstrates the unique character of God, for instance, the wisdom and authority of God is portrayed in the whole cosmic system where all creation, even symbols of chaos like chaotic waters and the Leviathan, honour and obey Him. The wonder and authority of God, and His creative work and provenance revealed in the beauty of creation, provides evidence that could help people to find meaning, insight, and new perspectives in their own suffering. Despite all the wonder and

mystery, creation can never express the full identity of God. His majesty could not be constricted to preconceived expectations like a powerful display of natural forces (1 Ki. 19:18).

A Scriptural analysis confirmed that God created humans and nature in a symbiotic web of interrelatedness. He is intimately involved with each creature of creation, both human and non-human species. His presence is manifested through His Spirit who is intimately involved in creational change and renewal. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of life, renews and transforms all beings, including humans and nature. The Spirit helps humans to remain faithful when they experience suffering and pain; He gives them hope and spiritual strength.

6.3.4 Towards a possible eco-pastoral counselling approach

The purpose of Chapter 5 was to apply the data collected from the literature of previous chapters with a view to provide theological points of departure for eco-pastoral counselling. In the light of the cross-disciplinary dialogue that unfolded in correspondence with Brunsdon's (2014) approach to collaborative integration, certain theological points of departure were identified as preliminary suggestions towards a foundational framework for eco-pastoral counselling, while the second part of the chapter suggested markers that indicate direction towards the praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling.

Proposed theological principles included the Fall as a turning point in the revelational history when humans caused nature to be rejected with them to futility. Currently, there is an interruption in the web of life that God intended to move in symbiotic peace and wholeness that leads to pain and suffering in the world, in that humans and nature are both in a process of decay and are disconnected from each other.

In contrast, God has a relational character which is evident in His relation within the Trinity and the symbiotic connectedness within creation. Human beings as imitation of His relational nature find healing through restored wholeness and unity between God, His people and the earth. From this holistic perspective, it can be said that just as healing transpires through wholeness, brokenness, suffering and despair are a shared interdependent occurrence that affects all creation.

The embodied spiritual experience confirms that the touchable and visible elements in nature connects people with the unseen. Human senses enable people to experience nature with their bodies and this enhances the ability for spiritual connectedness and growth.

In the light of the above-mentioned suggested theological points of departure, the objective of the second part of the chapter was to identify markers that could indicate pathways to an applied praxeology of eco-pastoral counselling. The following markers were suggested.

There is a need for a grounded theological perspective in respect of the healing potential of nature.

Eco-pastoral counselling has the potential to contribute to a widening of traditional perspectives, with regard to an extended environment from a mainly restricted milieu to outdoor spaces in the aesthetic surroundings of nature.

An imagined approach to eco-pastoral counselling would require a certain level of qualification from practitioners. Further administrational implications involve the setting and location of counselling in nature, the safety of the environment as well as the protection of natural resources, and ethical implications like confidentiality.

It is essential to ensure that traditional pastoral components through which it is distinguished from other helping professions are applied in a way that preserve its unique contribution to the practice. The following suggestions were made.

The work of the Holy Spirit as Counsellor and Helper in the pastoral encounter can be supported in nature where His work of restoration and creation is evident and palpable.

Prayer can be facilitated in line with Scriptural passages, especially in the Psalms that proclaim the wonders and care of God in nature.

The book of Scriptures and the book of nature enlighten each other and can be applied in a palpable experiential manner in the context of nature. Different approaches towards organic use of Scripture can be applied from a peaceful space of ‘active listening’, which enhances an openness and receptiveness to the work of the Spirit through the Word of God. Scriptural texts with references to nature can be incorporated in the eco-pastoral counselling session. In this way, the Word of God, can be studied in a space that provides physical evidence of His work and character.

A rich variety of natural objects can be applied and utilised as metaphors and rituals in the pastoral meeting. One example is the important concept of hope in pastoral counselling, that becomes a reality through the observation and contact with a new leaf or other examples of growth in nature.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The study was undertaken to explore the possible contribution of a nature-based approach to pastoral counselling. As an early proposition of a relative unfamiliar field, the study is presented in an exploratory framework. While the study concludes that ecotherapy relates to pastoral counselling in a positive way, the suggested theological points of departure need further exploration, and empirical research in the domain and practices of current ecotherapy frameworks will provide a more comprehensive framework for an eco-pastoral counselling praxeology.

6.5 Recommendations for further studies

The study has recognised the potential of an imagined eco-pastoral counselling approach and the potential contribution of nature towards emotional and spiritual healing. Results from the literature study, especially in the matter of recent developments in the work of eco-theologians, call for a reassessment of theological perspectives concerning the relation between humans and nature, as well as the theological perspective in respect of creation. It is imagined that this would be a prerequisite for any further research in this field.

With the evolvement of the research, the researcher became increasingly aware of the possibilities that can develop from an eco-pastoral counselling approach.

Some of the recommendations for further studies include:

- The development of specific training programmes in eco-pastoral counselling
- Research on the different modalities of ecotherapy e.g. horticultural, wilderness and adventure therapy, and the application of each modality in eco-pastoral counselling
- Probing the experiences of participants in eco-pastoral counselling sessions to determine the degree to which it succeeds to strengthen faith and relationships with God
- Eco-pastoral counselling programmes for children

The following quote by Augustine (n.d.) aptly brings this study to a close:

> Let your mind roam through the whole creation; everywhere the created world will cry out to you: “God made me”. God round the heavens again and back to the earth, leave out nothing; on all sides everything cries out to you of its Author; the very forms of created things are as it were the voices with which they praise their Creator.

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17 November 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: LANGUAGE EDITING

This letter serves to confirm that I have edited the thesis titled:

Pastoral counselling and the healing potential of nature: An exploratory study

By

Cecile Myburgh

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lee-Anne Roux