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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Pastoral Counseling: African American Attitudes toward Mental Healthcare**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity  
the Doctor of Ministry Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The perspectives of African Americans at the Highway to Heaven Ministry were evaluated using diverse theological concepts in this study. The findings of this study help in deciphering reasons why African Americans primarily choose traditional versus pastoral counseling. The results of the survey were based on the responses of 100 people, all of whom were members of the Highway to Heaven Ministry. Sixty-five women and 35 men, ranging in age from 18 to 88, were enrolled in the study. The data was collected using a well-prepared questionnaire to discover the participants' most heartfelt views regarding pastoral counseling and what motivates them to make their own decisions. The study's conclusion is that ideas like cultural diversity, diversity of thought, and diversity of opinion are important. Concepts like cultural background, age, education, level of religiosity, and church affiliation were among the components that formed the participant's foundational beliefs. The research helped participants reformulate their minds with better constructs that improve the conscious experiences of their world. This study was a method of researching social life based on the notion that the meaning of human activity is embedded in the action itself. The methods proposed in this study defined the issue at hand. These new ways of looking at things are not meant to intellectualize reasonable answers; They can be applied to real-life settings at the Highway to Heaven Ministry because they are structures that exist in the actual world, assisting people in reshaping the actions and behaviors that have an impact.

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Ministry Context.....	1
Demographics and History.....	1
Demographics.....	3
Location.....	9
Problem Presented.....	12
Counselor Competence and Clients Beliefs.....	13
Purpose Statement.....	18
Basic Assumptions.....	21
Definitions.....	22
Limitations.....	25
Delimitations.....	26
Thesis Statement.....	26
Literature Review.....	29
What is Pastoral Counseling?.....	30
The Role of Pastoral Counselors.....	34
History of Psychological Counseling.....	52
Modern Concepts of Pastoral Counseling.....	54
Religion, Spirituality, and Identity Development.....	55
Integration and Transformation.....	67
Theological Foundations.....	68
The Doctrine of Christ.....	69
Theoretical Foundations.....	72
The Person-centered Theory.....	73
Cognitive-behavioral Theory.....	76
Psychoanalysis Theory.....	81
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	89

Intervention Design .....	89
Implementation of Intervention Design.....	94
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	97
Discussion.....	101
Beliefs.....	102
Values .....	106
Religiosity.....	110
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....	118
The Proposal.....	121
The Implemented Research Project.....	123
Results and Evaluation .....	123
Limitations.....	125
Recommendations .....	126
Bibliography .....	134
Appendices .....	143
Appendix A .....	144
Appendix B.....	12
Appendix C.....	13
Appendix D .....	14
Appendix E.....	15

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

People have turned to spiritual and religious leaders for guidance and support in facing life's challenges for years. Pastoral counseling is just one of many options available, and, like any other therapy, pastoral counseling is not right for everyone. Although adapting to life's issues outside of the church produces greater results for some people; for others, it does not. The debate over whether pastors should try to apply techniques taught in counseling schools and whether there is such a thing as pastoral counseling continues. People who choose professional counselors that can diagnose and treat their troubles versus a pastor who offers therapy through scripture, prayer, and understanding their circumstances from God's perspective, are at the center of the dispute. In years past, considerable studies have suggested a positive correlation that connects counseling to spirituality and science. Many historical components define aspects such as gaining a better grasp of religion from many perspectives, developing one's identity, and combining science and religion to direct one's knowledge and expectations of the counseling experience.

### **Ministry Context**

#### **Demographics and History**

At the Highway to Heaven Ministry, the primary demographic population is African American, with very few Caucasian members as part of the congregation. In the ministry, members often commune as one working through issues and giving God all glory. Founded in 2011, The Highway to Heaven Ministry's mission involves ministering to men's hearts to reach their souls; so naturally, pastoral counseling plays a vital role. The presence of the different ministries within the church is designed to give directive instruction and uplift people to be the greatest leaders they are called to be. However, to truly understand the African American church

experience, how it relates to the context of ministry and subsequent use of pastoral counseling, there must be an understanding of the world, the church, and the home in terms of experiences, and demographic influences, which develop identity and fuel religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

In the African American community, the Black church remains a stronghold. Numerous existing and ongoing studies attribute that to a close connection between religious symbols like prayer, music, praise, and social actions among community members.<sup>2</sup> The core of the community's economic, socio-cultural, and political elements span a long history of social indulgence.<sup>3</sup> Historically, the Black church has taken the lead in combating social issues, promoting equality, and bolstering a Black culture. However, darker moments in the past have fueled years of frustration and are slowly re-emerging in society and the lives of people today.<sup>4</sup>

For decades, oppression, racism, inequality, and injustices have marked the typical African American experience, starting with slavery and continuing through the civil rights movement.<sup>5</sup> In a time when religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as the practice of church attendance and engagement, allowed African Americans to understand and find meaning in life's struggles, their experiences have only served to destroy the Black family, shattering it in ways that seemingly the church is unable to heal. Economic challenges, high incarceration rates,

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<sup>1</sup> Avent, J. R., & Cashwell, C. S. The Black church: Theology and implications for counseling African Americans. (2015). *Professional Counselor*, 5(1).

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, Sandra L. "'The Alpha and Omega of Our People': A sociological examination of the promise and problems of the contemporary Black Church." In *Free at last?*, pp. 149-172. Routledge, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, Rosalyn Denise, and Madison Rose Winchester. "Let the Church Say...: One Congregation's Views on How the Black Church Can Address Mental Health with Black Americans." *Social Work & Christianity* 47, no. 2 (2020), 48.

<sup>4</sup> Adksion-Bradley, Carla, Darrell Johnson, JoAnn Lipford Sanders, Lonnie Duncan, and Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy. "Forging a collaborative relationship between the black church and the counseling profession." *Counseling and Values* 49, no. 2 (2005): 147-154.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 49



Black-on-Black crime, and broken homes are enough to cause mental health issues that reinforce a systemic religious ideology that allows people the right to choose who would best serve them in their time of need.<sup>6</sup> For the most part, most African Americans identify as Christians; nonetheless, many of their experiences, regardless of age or gender, have created a divide in pastoral counseling that enables people to question its capabilities. As it stands right now, the one place where people once believed they could receive therapeutic relief has now been riddled with doubt that pastoral counselors are unprepared to deal with mental health difficulties and troubles of the world.<sup>7</sup>

### **Demographics**

Pastoral counseling has many definitions in various societies. As a result, to properly investigate pastoral counseling, one must first understand the nature and meaning of pastoral counseling in various cultural contexts.<sup>8</sup> It is imperative to remember that pastoral counseling has its roots in the healing and restorative rituals conducted by priest-healers in their traditions in the past and, to some extent, in the present in many cultural contexts. The traditional healer frequently commingled the responsibilities of priests and doctors. They were typically the people turned to when others were in trouble. They spoke words that, according to cultural worldviews and beliefs, successfully delivered relief and restored health. Traditional healers needed to know about many physical, emotional, social, and cultural concerns.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 50

<sup>7</sup> Brown, Jessica Young, and Micah L. McCreary. "Pastors' counseling practices and perceptions of mental health services: Implications for African American mental health." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 68, no. 1 (2014): 14.

<sup>8</sup> Frunză, Mihaela, Sandu Frunză, and Nicolae Ovidiu Grad. "The Role of Spirituality in Therapeutic Practices." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18, no. 53 (Summer, 2019): 63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 64

Pastoral counselors now may seem very different from their forefathers in the past. It is also possible that their perceptions of what they are doing are vastly different. Nonetheless, the wants, expectations, and wishes for suffering relief that drives people into counseling today are strikingly similar to those that drove people into counseling relationships in the past.<sup>10</sup> In practically every part of the world today, people seek out persons they believe have the knowledge, experience, or power that may assist them in their search for relief and well-being or provide them meaning in life.<sup>11</sup> This part of the research attempted to help counselors understand the many underlying notions that support non-western counseling practices. It is believed that because of western kinds of knowledge, there has been a mismatch between mental health traditions conceptualized in the West from the non-Western communities they seek to assist.<sup>12</sup>

Spirituality, according to healthcare, responds to people's inquiries about meaning, frequently through beliefs, practices, and rituals. Religion is related to philosophy in that it seeks to understand meaning through established faith traditions' such as beliefs, practices, rituals, teachings, and organizations.<sup>13</sup> As recent sociological research has shown, a person's spirituality might involve their religion, but they can also be spiritual but not religious, or religious but not spiritual. Spirituality is thus both an existential and a hermeneutic phenomenon, given its drive toward ultimate meaning. Spirituality is existential because it entails figuring out how to give

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<sup>10</sup> Charles, E. "Cultural and Pastoral Care Response in Treating Mental Illness. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2020): 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>12</sup> Du Plessis, Amanda L. "The Cultural Aspect in the Contextualization of Pastoral Care giving Ministry." In *Die Skriflig : Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 51, no. 2 (2017):

<sup>13</sup> Leins, Chris J. K. "What Makes Pastoral Counseling so Pastoral? Distinguishing between Pastoral Care and Clinical Practice in Modern Life. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 40, no. 4 (Winter, 2021): 344.

meaning and purpose to one's existence as it unfolds over time. It is hermeneutic in that it entails interpreting life within a framework for ultimate meaning-making.<sup>14</sup>

While many spirituality approaches emphasize hermeneutic aspects, spirituality cannot be understood without referencing the sacred and its characteristics. It is linked to a sense of the transcendent, and when encountered, it can elicit strong emotional responses.<sup>15</sup> Religion used to be the domain of the holy, defined as something which binds people to and regulates the sacred. This is the most likely origin of the Latin terms *religio* and *relegere*, from which we get the English word religion. The sacred, however, is not understood purely in religious terms in contemporary Western cultures. Many people regard national holidays, sporting events, natural encounters, and secular social justice campaigns as sacred. Individuals might have secular spiritualities just as easily as they can have spiritualities defined only by religious beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

Exposing too many understandings of the sacred, both secular and religious, allows people to engage in multiple forms of spirituality when training spiritual health professionals. Multi faith awareness and appreciation for many are basic competences for spiritual care practitioners and psycho-spiritual therapists in various professional organizations; therefore, this is already a widely accepted practice.<sup>17</sup> Many people in Western societies participating in several overlapping and occasionally conflicting sacred tales are less commonly acknowledged. To give an example, Italian philosophers demonstrated that Western societies have fundamental hallowed conceptions derived from early Christian theology. The Holy Trinity, for example, is not

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 345

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 346

<sup>16</sup> Beyers, Jaco. "Religion and culture: Revisiting a close relative." *HTS: Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (2017): 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 5

articulated in the New Testament canon, according to Christian theologians and New Testament academics. In the Christian Bible, the titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are frequently employed.<sup>18</sup>

The Trinity is so clearly indicated rather than explicitly stated in that text. Several comments in the Pauline letters indicate that the Apostle believed himself and the other Apostles to be mediators in the economy of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That secret, however, had not been revealed. Christians in the West and East began to understand themselves as living the mystery of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Christian philosophy grew. Later thinkers believed that the mystery had shown itself in the material world and then manifested in the physical world.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Christian writers began to refer to this obvious enigma as the economic Holy Trinity. In short, these Christians believed that their conformity to the likeness of the Son, as rendered through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, brought them into union with the Father; the interchanges between the persons of the Christian Godhead had a direct bearing on the lives of Christian believers.<sup>20</sup> As a result, these Christian authorities saw the Roman Catholic Church as controlling this holy economy. The church's involvement included initiating those new to the church into these spiritual exchanges. This Christian teaching created the philosophical groundwork for later Western governments to conceptualize their commercial trade administration.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>20</sup> Beyers, Jaco. "Religion and culture: Revisiting a close relative." *HTS: Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (2017): 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 9

If these theories hold, as many of today's Western phenomena are rooted in Christian theology. This has enormous implications for spiritual health professionals. For example, contemporary political debates regarding government economic policies can manifest secular divinity in the public consciousness.<sup>22</sup> The theological opinion identified in contemporary economic practices suggests that something sacred is at stake in how governments enact their economic policies. The concepts of justice, equity, and benevolence are all tied to economics and have traditionally been framed in religious terms. It is not surprising that American political theorists took the approach to 20th-century economics in terms of justice. However, this concept of economic justice should not be explicitly stated concerning religion.<sup>23</sup> Second, this reluctance to invoke religious thought in contemporary political philosophy leads to views adopted from German philosophers and their thoughts about political secularism in the West. In the 20th century, Schmitt argued that Western governments embody secular versions of earlier beliefs regarding divine sovereignty.<sup>24</sup>

The difference in spiritually well-formed people can be defined as many Westerners as possible believing that the state has the power to grant those unlimited freedoms and privileges. Modern western states were founded to enhance liberty and liberties. However, the state has always failed to guarantee these liberties because of its power to determine and control the intimate details of people's lives. This power is not more evident than in state-administered and sponsored institutions, where officials act with state authority to determine if ordinary people meet the criteria set by the state to access services or not. When the criteria are met, things

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<sup>22</sup> Chen, Daniel L., and Daniel M. Hungerman. "Economics, religion, and culture: A brief introduction." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 104, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 3

usually go relatively well, where services are provided within the systemic constraints of the delivery organization.<sup>25</sup>

Asian conceptual frameworks tend to emphasize cosmic unity and place high importance on community cohesion. Inner and outside methods of knowing are crucial, and the goal is to integrate body, mind, and spirit, which are seen as various parts of the same oneness. African systems are frequently founded on a spiritual and pragmatic ontology that emphasizes the importance of relationships.<sup>26</sup> Intuition, revelation, ritual, symbolism, and rhythm are used to gain knowledge. The interaction between and among humans whose essential worth is found through the network of spiritual and familial bonds through which they are entrenched is the subject of African healing and counseling. This is also true of African American communities.<sup>27</sup> For most traditional African American and Caribbean people, dreams are extremely important because they may be used to express the most important aspects of life to others. Traditional priest-healers, herbalists, ritualists, diviners, dancers, and creative artists are among the practitioners of the healing arts who are highlighted in this context. All creative performers are viewed as having a role in the healing process. The pastoral counselor is a member of a healing community where life is experienced and comprehended.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, pastoral counseling distinguishes itself by emphasizing the importance of spiritual and cultural resources in the counselor's work. Furthermore, different geographic areas and contexts require the freedom to recognize what is valuable in their historical traditions, the

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<sup>25</sup> Lemasters, Ryan. "An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion: Connecting Evolution, Brain, Cognition, and Culture, written by Claire White." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 22, no. 1-2 (2022): 179-183.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 180

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 182

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 6

ability to reject what is ineffective after careful contextual and contemporary examination, and the ability to create new syntheses from the blending and clashing of the various cultures that make up the majority of present-day populations.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, all forms of counseling are inextricably linked to cultural preconceptions and biases. Diverse therapy styles and approaches are appropriate expressions of different cultural systems. As a result, it is plausible to suggest that effective pastoral counseling practice includes consideration of the importance of both the counselor's and the client's cultural worlds for the therapeutic process.<sup>30</sup>

### Location

Pastoral counseling is speaking with individuals, couples, and families to understand emotional and religious difficulties better and assist them in overcoming those obstacles with the help of religion and other resources. In today's language, a pastor is a leader who offers advice to others in a Christian congregation or within the Christian society; nevertheless, the name pastor is not biblically tied to the Bible.<sup>31</sup> Pastor is a word that comes from the biblical word shepherd, which is implied by the term pastoral as it considers its contributions to the community to be pastoral activity. As a result, religious societies frequently entrust pastoral counselors with assisting people in strengthening their faith in God.<sup>32</sup> Pastoral counseling is commonly known to occur within the church since the believer is to grow within the church community, where there

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<sup>29</sup> Frunză, Mihaela, Sandu Frunză, and Nicolae Ovidiu Grad. "The Role of Spirituality in Therapeutic Practices, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Schuhmann, C. M. and A. Damen, 408.

<sup>31</sup> Evans, Keith A., and DMin DC. "Pastoral Care in Public Settings: A Theoretical and Theological Premise with Effective Outcomes of Chaplaincy."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 78

is accountability for and acceptance of others, according to scripture.<sup>33</sup> The most differentiating element of pastoral counseling, compared to other types of therapy, is that the client and the therapist have already built a relationship before starting counseling. Because of their existing relationship, pastoral counseling is usually a more comfortable option for an engaged church member. In addition, in small communities, pastoral counseling is the only resource where people can seek help, as it is a ministry in which believers are responsible for the well-being of their fellow humans.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the church and the confines of the community are both acceptable settings for pastoral counseling.

Shepherding was accepted by the early church, and common activities were viewed more as pastoral. Medical care was common in the Middle Ages, and many high priests conducted whole-body healing or caring for the soul.<sup>35</sup> These activities subsequently evolved into a technical term in church law that refers to all provided deeds performed in God's name that led to soul redemption. Clergy often personalized care to members of their communities in addition to delivering a public service.<sup>36</sup> This sort of pastoral counseling had a narrower scope, and it accompanied people on their religious journeys at times of crisis, conflict, and significant change. Pastoral counseling refers to a much broader function of the pastor that encompasses a wide range of situations that transcend functional classification. Pastoral counseling might

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 74

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>35</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. "Integration Clients' Religion and Spirituality within Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis. 1949.

<sup>36</sup> Schuhmann, C. M. and A. Damen, 409



include regular contact with constituents and congregation members at home or in hospitals and counseling for couples planning a wedding or other events.<sup>37</sup>

As pastoral counseling addresses common concerns for the community, people seek it most in times of crisis. A crisis is more than a period of risk, suffering, and stress. It is critical for the counselor to recognize that this is a watershed moment, a chance for people to grow toward or away from greater personality strength and wholeness.<sup>38</sup> As a result, pastoral counseling is a valuable resource. Pastoral counseling occurs in various venues and is not often labeled as such. They frequently have private practices where they visit patients, although they are not constrained to doing so in a professional context. Pastoral counseling is provided in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, prisons, manufacturing facilities, homes, law enforcement agencies, and military battle zones.<sup>39</sup>

As more individuals lost faith in pastors as mental health authorities, those in religious roles within secular organizations such as hospitals rose in response, providing faith-based guidance from more trusted locations. Pastoral counselors are no longer just church leaders; they are also persons with a counseling background and training who want to help others in the church.<sup>40</sup> While many ministers choose to provide counseling to their congregations, parishes, or communities, they usually limit this service to those who are members of their congregations or

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 1939

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 1937

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 1949

<sup>40</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. "Integration Clients' Religion and Spirituality within Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis. 1947.

communities. This permits the minister to have a personal history or a long-term relationship with the person who needs counseling, frequently leading to better therapeutic outcomes.<sup>41</sup>

### **Problem Presented**

The problem at The Highway to Heaven Ministry is that people have refrained from pastoral counseling turning more towards traditional counseling to address their problems. People face problems constantly in their everyday lives, and before now, the church was seen as a sacred place to divulge their issues and to seek refuge. However, there seems to be a lack of trust in the pastor's ability to counsel mental health. In general, there are opportunities for both religious and traditional counseling contributions that can help people redevelop their minds, body, and soul in crisis interventions.

Counseling is a therapy that comes in many different forms and approaches. One must fully understand what it means to help build the framework that defines pastoral counseling and all that it involves. The practice of pastoral counseling has different meanings to different people. This is the one factor that influences the client's response, acceptance, and evolving pastoral counseling perspective, depending on the individual cultural background. In addition, other concerns are related to the client's beliefs and the counselor's level of competence. However, in general, pastoral counseling is a one-of-a-kind type of psychotherapy that utilizes spiritual and psychological theories to work with clients in adapting to their life issues.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 1946

<sup>42</sup> Pedhu, Yoseph, "Improving Performance: What Pastoral Counselor Can Do?" *COUNS-EDU: The International Journal of Counseling and Education* 5, no. 1, (2020):29.

## Counselor Competence and Clients Beliefs

According to research, professional counselors and clergy have avoided each other for years. A disagreement that crosses religious and therapy boundaries, with counselors frequently dismissing those who have any spiritual belief as delusional and clergy dismissing counseling as unduly focused on scientific research and secular psychodynamic approaches that contradict Christian ideals. Since the 1970s, modern counselors have maintained that religion can never prevent a person from becoming anxious, depressed, or angry and is harmful to mental health.<sup>43</sup> This love/hate connection between religion and counseling, with theologians rejecting secular counseling and counselors rejecting religious experiences, stems from both parties' attempts to provide insight into what it means to be human. This ongoing conflict reveals the theoretical confrontation between Judeo-Christian subjective commitment and the Greek objective of detachment.<sup>44</sup> The history of the dispute between religion and counseling can be summarized as a disagreement about the portrayal of humanity's significance. Part of this research demonstrated the wide range of philosophical anthropologies when contrasting humans' temporary scientific and spiritual formation. Both parties can go a long way toward locating the gaps at the foundation of society and the heart of the account of the disagreement by extracting and expressing these discrepancies.<sup>45</sup>

Surprisingly, research has indicated that most counselors believe therapy has not truly clashed with theology but rather with particular institutionalized religious practices. The problem

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<sup>43</sup> Aten, J. D., Topping, S., Denney, R. M., & Hosey, J. M. Helping African American clergy and churches address minority disaster mental health disparities: Training needs, model, and example. (2011): *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 3, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 18

is not with religion per se but the church's religious expressionism.<sup>46</sup> Despite the many improvements made by counselors in the field of religion over the last few years, research shows that counselors are among the least religious of all scientists. Nonetheless, many people are curious to observe how these changes will affect religious experience research in the next decades. Individuals with mental health issues seek help from various sources, including physicians, licensed professional counselors, and social workers who are among the professionals who can help.<sup>47</sup> Many of these people seek mental health assistance from their pastors first. The expanding function of the pastor brought serious difficulties affecting society, according to the first discovery, who hypothesized that pastors were thrust into the battle lines of combating the impacts of mental diseases. The counselor's perception of pastoral counseling services as a value to community members will always be questioned, as will the influence of pastoral counseling as a constructive choice for people in the congregation or community with psychological difficulties. On the other hand, many ultimate objectives or ideals toward which experience demonstrates that human activity may be oriented are difficult to comprehend, even when we think we do.<sup>48</sup>

The more radically they differ from our ultimate values, the more difficult it is for us to make them understandable by imaginatively participating in them. Then we can try to understand the action motivated by them based on whatever opportunities for approximate emotional and intellectual interpretation seem to be available at different points in its course can occur.<sup>49</sup> This

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<sup>46</sup> Bartoli, Eleonora. "Religious and spiritual issues in psychotherapy practice: Training the trainer." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 44, no. 1 (2007): 54.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 58

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 59

intellectually focused view of human action is also known as perception. Perception is a phenomenon that presents itself in every facet of daily life and has a rippling effect on one's personal and professional life. Perception finds its way into all settings, including one's home and relationships with family and friends. Current research focuses on the perceptions held by a licensed professional counselor and their views of pastoral counseling.<sup>50</sup> The experience of perception in society does not just happen; it results from complex processes, several of which are not available to one's awareness. The reason to study the keys of perception in the counseling profession goes further than the possibility of useful applications. It allows the profession to understand how and why pastors are being sought out as counselors to their flocks and to glean a working concept of collaboration among professionals. There is a chance to shut the perceptual divide among the counseling professions. Noted in research is the truth that licensed counselors are viewed much less spiritually than the populace they attend to in the overall performance of their duties, which makes clergy reluctant.<sup>51</sup> On the reverse, the understanding held through the licensed counselor is that the clergy currently has a failure to be appropriately educated, which regularly leads to unwillingness on the part of the clergy to make referrals for worship contributors. This information supplies a grasp of the perceptions held by licensed counselors involving the shipping of counseling offerings with the aid of African American pastors in what has grown to be recognized as pastoral counseling. Critical to this answer is the want to observe a) what the beliefs held by using the counseling career in working with or accepting referrals

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>51</sup> Parker, Dennis C. *An analysis of the perceptions of African American church pastors in their delivery of health and human services in southeast Washington DC*. Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012.

from pastors and b) how one opens the traces of conversation in getting rid of the innovative roadblocks to communities served by African American pastors concerning counseling.<sup>52</sup>

The persevered existence of this wall of conceivable false impressions and negative understanding from the counselor towards the pastor conducting counseling solely hurts the man or woman wanting the counseling service. Research involving counseling and the clergy indicates that conservative churchgoers view secular counselors as much less empathic than their pastoral counterparts. At the same time, they see the pastoral counselor as being much less flexible than the secular counselor, regularly trying to affect clients' emotions and moods and trying to trade the clients' morals to be greater in line with the pastor's doctrines.<sup>53</sup> Researchers uncovered the reality that there is a perceived distinction in the vocabularies, mindsets, and worldviews of each African American pastor and the secular counselor, even to the diploma that standards of theories of psychopathology or psychotherapies would make most African American pastors very uncomfortable in dealing with a range of issues, such as personality, depression, vocation, sex, juvenile, psychotic, finance, addiction, and non-public identification when introduced with the aid of the traditional church member.<sup>54</sup> Of course, this is no longer one-sided. The secular counselor, as a consequence, could additionally create hostilities by originating a conduct design primarily based on the thought of most pastors, such as sin, grace, modesty, appreciation, absolution, virtue, and positive coping. It is understood that the two professions, counseling, and pastoring, are special and likely have to be no longer blended as they may also lose their identities at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. However, it is

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<sup>52</sup> Townsend, Michelle A. "African-American Pastors' Mental Health Literacy, Leadership and Counsel: A Systematic Review." (2022).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 88

essential that a speaker of the perceptions held with the aid of the licensed counselors might also beautify and promote at the same time a revered degree of expert courtesy and teamwork, mainly as it affects those looking for offerings from both professions. Because each plays a vital position in the intellectual well-being of our communities, learning about that subsequently examines the perceptions the licensed counselors held about the pastoral counselor was once needed.<sup>55</sup>

In terms of training, experience, competency, and perspective, not all counselors are the same. Psychologists and those aspiring to be psychologists must carefully consider how they view their clients, the world, and problems in life. While God's word is inspiring, it may not contain all the knowledge and information required of a qualified therapist.<sup>56</sup> Pastoral counseling is gaining traction and acceptance in the mental health community; nevertheless, there are not enough acceptances to be viewed as equal within the counseling profession. A therapist who has received pastoral or Biblical training is more likely to see counseling as a Christian ministry and to carry out that ministry by asking Christ to repair lives. Pastoral counselors feel the practice attempts to offer help by shepherding the souls of wayward people to Christ. However, what matters most is that the therapy adheres to procedures and established goals based on biblical knowledge of people that have been thoroughly researched and proven effective.<sup>57</sup>

In traditional counseling, a clinical psychologist will focus on diagnosing the problem or disorder, determining possible goals for the client to attain, and applying various approaches to minimize symptoms and meet therapy goals. This can happen without the therapist considering

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 90

<sup>56</sup> Gonzalez, Jessica, Sejal M. Barden, and Julia Sharp. "Multicultural Competence and the Working Alliance as Predictors of Client Outcomes." *The Professional Counselor* (Greensboro, N.C.) 8, no. 4 (2018): 314.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 321

how their faith or Christian ideals might or should influence the therapeutic process. Clients a clinical psychologist is treating might surely see positive changes in their lives.<sup>58</sup> The key difference is that the therapist does not carry out the treatment based on Christian assumptions or ideas about sin, salvation, or redemption. Professional competence is necessary for the industry to provide good counsel to clients; nevertheless, the capacity to embrace the diversity of clients is also necessary to better identify with them.<sup>59</sup>

Clients' beliefs and preferences being included with spirituality and religion in counseling sessions are influenced by various variables. Clients with more spiritual and religious experiences believe it is more suitable to address their concerns with pastoral counseling than those with fewer past spiritual and religious experiences. Although many clients prefer to talk about religion and spirituality, many do not.<sup>60</sup> Clients appear to be more fearful when a counselor's beliefs differ. Christians and non-Christians prefer counselors who share their beliefs, believing that such counselors are more helpful.<sup>61</sup> The fear of having existing beliefs challenged appears to factor in the refusal to receive pastoral counseling. Clients are more likely to utilize a counselor who does not challenge their beliefs.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to explore mental health issues in the lives of members at the Highway to Heaven Ministry to provide a framework of pastoral counseling, facilitate counseling denoting confidence and provide evidence that biblical guidance is necessary and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 322

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 323

<sup>60</sup> Frunză, Mihaela, Sandu Frunză, and Nicolae Ovidiu Grad. "The Role of Spirituality in Therapeutic Practices." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18, no. 53 (Summer, 2019): 63.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 63



sufficient to address individual needs. In years past, there has been a long-standing two-sided debate on how much religion impacts counseling. Two primary categories of people provide counseling practices: pastors and counselors. They both have different trains of thought. Professional counselors view religion and religious leaders as spirit-filled but ill-equipped and misleading regarding providing mental health advice.

On the other hand, pastoral counselors view trained psychologists' work as rooted in science and research and negate Christian values altogether. One primary concern in this ongoing debate is that in prior years, there has not been adequate research on aspects that distinguish pastoral counselors from clinical counselors. Therefore, the perceptions of each are unclear.<sup>62</sup>

Today, there is very little collaboration between pastoral and mental health counselors for reasons that include inadequate trust on both sides and a lack of knowledge and training.<sup>63</sup> The current disparity between religion and counseling creates a conflict in that it impedes a counselor's ability to successfully counsel a client because they lack the specific knowledge needed to address the issues.<sup>64</sup> Collaboration of both counseling approaches is imperative to the field of counseling because what pastoral counselors are unable to do through spiritual guidance, clinical counselors can provide without passing judgment and with greater openness.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Clemons, Krystal L. and Kaprea F. Johnson. "African American Pastors and their Perceptions of Professional School Counseling." *The Journal of Negro Education* 88, no. 4 (2019): 468.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, Adam E, Ruth Riding-Malon, Jefferey E. Aspelmeir, and Valerie Leake, A Qualitative Investigation into Bridging the Gap between Religion and the Helping Professions to Improve Rural Mental Health, *Journal of Rural Mental Health* 42 (1), 2018:33, doi: 10.1037/rmh0000093

<sup>64</sup> Motalová, Katarína and Tomáš Řiháček, "Religiosity Gap Reversed: How Religious Counselors Belief System Presents when Working with Clients in a Non-Religious Environment, "*British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 44, no 3 (2016): 277

<sup>65</sup> Hategan, Vasile, "The Practice of Counseling between Philosophy and Spirituality, and Interdisciplinary Approach, "*Journal for the Study of Religious and Ideologies* (2021): 154.

Historically, pastoral, and clinical counseling were once considered interchangeable terms in theological circles because they both had the same goal of curing souls. For example, the religious consult was once a prevalent, trusted choice in the African American community. However, theologians saw the terms as distinct entities encapsulating various functions and skill sets over time.<sup>66</sup> Some, for example, viewed pastoral counseling as a broad range of clerical activities aimed at directing and supporting a congregation, while others defined pastoral counseling as the specific clerical job of ministering to a single person in need. Theologians in the twentieth century have continued to expand on these concepts. However, clinical counseling is deemed to be a separate entity.<sup>67</sup>

According to research, emphasizing spirituality and religion in counseling raised awareness but did not result in changes in practice. Over the last decade, expertise in integrating spirituality and religion into professional counseling has become a priority. Some of the disparity could be explained by counselors' desires to avoid harm in this vital area of life, especially since the one competency new counselors lacked was the cultural and social manifestations of clients' spirituality and religion.<sup>68</sup> The fundamental issue is the definition of religion and spirituality and the beliefs surrounding their existence. The most prevalent technique in social science is for researchers to define relationships.

Rather than becoming perplexed, counselors can take a different approach by employing a broad definition of these phrases to emphasize the wide range of counseling that can fall under these rubrics. Not every counselor or client will regard anything as spiritual or religious in the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 150

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 153

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 147

same way. Their interactions may elicit different interpretations of these concepts that do not simply agree or disagree.<sup>69</sup> In addition, counselors can dig deeper into the root of concerns that involve individual beliefs. Beliefs are strong concepts that define relationships and individual experiences that become the primary fold in people's lives.<sup>70</sup>

### **Basic Assumptions**

Numerous assumptions underlay this research in terms of pastoral counseling. The first assumption was that religion has no place in mental health counseling. History proves otherwise in the work of Jung, and Freud was among the first to integrate spirituality as a means of healing mental health concerns. Spiritual and religious values can be viewed as a potential resource in therapy rather than something to be avoided because they each play a significant role in impacting human life and have implications for the future. There was also the assumption that individual choices were heavily influenced by perceptions and what people naturally believe. The manner in that people interprets the information they receive influences decisions. Therefore, people seeking counseling with strong religious convictions could rely on the power of the spirit and choose pastoral counseling as a valid alternative. Finally, there was the assumption that religion and spirituality are synonymous when they are two separate concepts.

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<sup>69</sup> Hendricks, L., Samuel Bore, and L. Rusty Waller. "An examination of spirituality in the African American church." In *National Forum of Multicultural Issues Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 8. 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Motalová, Katarína and Tomáš Řiháček. "Religiosity Gap Reversed: How Religious Counselors' Belief System Presents when Working with Clients in a Non-Religious Environment." *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 44, no. 3 (2016): 278.

## Definitions

*African American Church:* A church primarily serves a Black or largely Black congregation. They are used in this research to describe members of the Highway to Heaven Ministry, where pastoral counseling must be re-emphasized as an acceptable practice.<sup>71</sup>

*Analytical Psychology:* Carl Jung established this term to investigate the nature of spirituality and psychological integration. This study used it as proof that the spirit influences the mind and that being spiritually linked in life has a lot to do with a person's soul, which impacts emotional well-being.<sup>72</sup>

*Client Beliefs:* This refers to a person's personal truth and is influenced by various factors. It is used as part of this research to confirm that clients who have had more spiritual and religious experiences are willing to rely on pastoral counseling more than those who have had fewer spiritual and religious experiences.<sup>73</sup>

*Congregation:* A collection or gathering of African Americans and Caucasians regularly attending church.

*Counselor Competence:* Behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that have a direct and positive impact on the success of pastoral counselors.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Campbell, Rosalyn Denise, and Madison Rose Winchester. "Let the Church Say...: One Congregation's Views on How the Black Church Can Address Mental Health with Black Americans," 47.

<sup>72</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. "Integration Clients' Religion and Spirituality within Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis," 1940.

<sup>73</sup> Motalová, Katarína and Tomáš Řiháček. "Religiosity Gap Reversed: How Religious Counselors' Belief System Presents when Working with Clients in a Non-Religious Environment." *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 44, no. 3 (2016): 277.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 278

*Counselor Identity:* Understanding and addressing how pastoral counselors view their work involves examining their experiences and those experiences driving their identity in terms of their pastoral attitude, their ability to connect research science and spirituality, and their faith.<sup>75</sup>

*Demographics:* A specific population of people used to describe growth in terms of race, community, and church congregations.<sup>76</sup>

*Integration:* The basis of incorporating religion and spirituality as an important component of the counseling process.<sup>77</sup>

*Mental Illness:* A medical condition causing issues functioning in social settings, work, or family activities. It is the state in which this research seeks to prove and address pastoral counseling.<sup>78</sup>

*Pastoral Counseling:* Pastoral counseling is a concept that alludes to the care given to others from a spiritual point of view utilizing different approaches that offer clarity to the process and is the primary subject of this research.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cheney, Gregory J. "Integrating Pastoral and Clinical Identities: A Narrative Inquiry of Pastoral Counselors." *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 72, no. 3 (2018): 172.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid 173

<sup>77</sup> Stewart-Sicking, Joseph A., Paul J. Deal, and Jesse Fox. "The ways paradigm: A transtheoretical model for integrating spirituality into counseling. 235.

<sup>78</sup> Charles, E. "Cultural and Pastoral Care Response in Treating Mental Illness. "*Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2020): 3.

<sup>79</sup> Magezi, Vhumani. "Positioning Care as 'being with the Other' within a Cross-Cultural Context: Opportunities and Challenges of Pastoral Care Provision Amongst People from Diverse Cultures, 1.

*Psychological Counseling*: A form of counseling that focuses on people's emotional stresses and mental difficulties. In this research, it is the form of counseling primarily preferred by people with mental health issues.<sup>80</sup>

*Psychotherapy*: The term is used in this study to describe the process of applying psychological approaches to help people overcome their mental challenges.<sup>81</sup>

*Religion*: The term describes the belief in a higher power. As it relates to this study, religion is the one concept that strongly influences families and is the idea that this study seeks to integrate with counseling.<sup>82</sup>

*Soul Care*: The term is used to measure the amount of attention given to either healing a damaged soul or keeping a healthy soul and is referenced in this study as the concept that pastoral counselors use to nourish the inner workings of people.<sup>83</sup>

*Shepherding*: It is a term that clergy often use interchangeably with pastoral counseling, as in shepherding the flock into the early church or providing leadership to the congregation.<sup>84</sup>

*Spirituality* describes the connection to something larger than the self, the Holy Spirit. As it relates to this study, spirituality has been a primary focus in counseling education as training counselors welcome integrating spirituality and religion into the counseling.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 66

<sup>81</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. "Integration Clients' Religion and Spirituality within Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis," 1942.

<sup>82</sup> Magezi, Vhumani. "Positioning Care as 'being with the Other' within a Cross-Cultural Context: Opportunities and Challenges of Pastoral Care Provision Amongst People from Diverse Cultures." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020),1.

<sup>83</sup> Townsend, Loren. *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*. 2009, 103.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 4

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 1

*Therapeutic Relationship:* The therapeutic bond between a counselor and a client where the two attempt to interact with one another and bring about positive change in life.<sup>86</sup>

*Religious Transformation:* Transition or renewal of the mind from a life that no longer corresponds to worldly ways to a life that pleases God.<sup>87</sup>

### **Limitations**

This study, like any other, has its limitations. Pastoral counselors are exempt from counseling difficulties. Its major purpose is to help people who are having existential problems and need help. Pastoral counseling has restrictions, as other organizations can assist people with existential difficulties. Limits are related to what therapists refer to as the scope of practice difficulties. In other words, therapists should not be performing tasks they have not been appropriately trained and supervised to perform. Sometimes the greatest caring pastoral gesture is the capacity to direct to other people or agencies more qualified to help. The seeds in counseling do not always fall on receptive soil, as in Jesus' parable of the Sower. The counselor's responsibility is to keep sowing and to trust the God-given growth forces in people and relationships.<sup>88</sup>

Demographic variables could also have been a limitation in this study. Although other demographic populations were mentioned as a part of this research, the general overview of pastoral counseling based on the subject being researched was specific to the African American population and how pastoral counseling is not the chosen path to address mental illness.

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<sup>86</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. "Integration Clients' Religion and Spirituality within Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis," 1944

<sup>87</sup> Townsend, Loren. *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 2009, 105.

<sup>88</sup> Cole, Donald L. "A Pastoral Counselor Responds to "The Natural Principles of Love,"47.

Furthermore, while pastoral counseling is a well-established and viable style of therapy, mental health practitioners and those seeking treatment should be aware of some potential areas of concern. Some pastoral counselors consider the therapeutic relationship multifaceted, spanning multiple locations and responsibilities. Even for those who provide a private counseling atmosphere, outside encounters may be unavoidable when dealing with a member of the same church. In this way, pastoral counselors must exercise extreme caution to avoid conflating dual or multiple partnerships, as the power imbalance can place counselors at an unfair disadvantage.

### **Delimitations**

To minimize ambiguity in the research, the primary focus of this study was on pastoral counseling's current struggle and its potential to be recognized as an acceptable kind of therapy in the treatment of mental illness. This study was confined to the African American community by the researcher since the participants are members of The Highway to Heaven Ministry, a largely African American church in rural Georgia. The study's findings and recommendations might not apply to churches that did not have African American congregations. Furthermore, the study believes that the beliefs present among the congregation were the primary cause of pastoral counseling concerns in churches. As a result, some Western leadership literature was employed to help bridge the gap between the intended audiences and the culture being studied to help identify factors that drive people to make the decisions they often do.

### **Thesis Statement**

Effective counseling considers the physical, psychological, spiritual, and relational factors, body, mind, and spirit, and has, at times, been reluctant to recognize the importance of pastoral counseling concerns. However, spirituality's significance in treatment has sparked great



interest.<sup>89</sup> Although pastoral counseling takes place in the community, is based on the people's cultural background, and is heavily influenced by the client's beliefs, none of these characteristics negate the practice's worth. African Americans remain apprehensive about seeking mental health assistance from pastoral counselors. The question then becomes whether scripture is sufficient to address these concerns. If pastoral counselors cannot demonstrate a favorable correlation between religion, counseling, and mental health issues, it may reduce the possibility of African Americans using pastoral counseling to meet their therapeutic needs.<sup>90</sup>

There is much evidence that the connection between mental health and spirituality is important. At the same time, research reveals how sophisticated an interface it is and how little knowledge there is about it today.<sup>91</sup> There is a role that pastoral counselors play in filling that void. Returning to its roots would undoubtedly disclose how past generations dealt with the interface, leaving an inheritance that many have valued and can still provide to the satisfaction of some service providers today.<sup>92</sup> Mental health professionals, including secular counselors and spiritual and religious leaders, are all involved in this attempt. Any entity that can bring these three groups together is more likely to foster spiritual counseling's growth and flourishing and contribute successfully to the care of people with serious mental illnesses.

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<sup>89</sup> Lasair, Simon. "What's the Point of Clinical Pastoral Education and Pastoral Counseling Education? Political, Developmental, and Professional Considerations." *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 74, no. 1 (2020): 24.

<sup>90</sup> Lasair, Simon. "What's the Point of Clinical Pastoral Education and Pastoral Counseling Education? Political, Developmental, and Professional Considerations," 22.

<sup>91</sup> Hardy, Kimberly M. "Perceptions of African American Christians' attitudes toward religious help-seeking: Results of an exploratory study." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 31, no. 3 (2012): 209-225.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 23

On the other hand, any attempt that excludes any of those groups is unlikely to contribute much, if at all.<sup>93</sup> Religious and spiritual leaders can benefit from a better understanding of mental health, which mental health professionals can provide.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, spiritual leaders can also contribute the collective expertise of religion and spirituality to other practitioners from the mental health field. For many first-time pastoral counselors, working with persons with significant mental health issues is sometimes a client's only option.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 24

<sup>94</sup> Lasair, Simon. "What's the Point of Clinical Pastoral Education and Pastoral Counseling Education? Political, Developmental, and Professional Considerations," 23.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter two will focus on the basic concepts of pastoral counseling by first identifying what a pastoral counselor is by definition and, more importantly, what pastoral counselors do. In addition, understanding other concepts of the practice, including religion, spirituality, relationships, trust, empathy, and varied techniques, all serve as components that build on the full understanding of pastoral counseling. It is more than fair to conceptualize it from a historical perspective to understand the definition of pastoral counseling. Doing so will highlight the practice's significance, provide clarity to various individual perspectives to regain the relevance needed to sustain pastoral counseling in society, and end the existing debate on determining whether pastoral counselors can counsel mental health clients.

### Literature Review

Today, many people have trouble with problems such as understanding the basic meaning of life, identifying with religious values, or having good interpersonal communication with others. Society deems these concepts important in individuals' lives, so when those aspects of life are missing, it may cause delays in the spiritual and mental growth.<sup>95</sup> Counseling is an approach used to connect to an individual's emotional disruptions by guiding them through difficult situations and guiding individuals to a more resolved state.<sup>96</sup> To address many of society's problems, in the past, the church responded by suggesting that experienced people in areas of religion and psychology were best suited to address the emotional problems of others so they may achieve a balance in life.

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<sup>95</sup> Pedhu, Yoseph. "Improving performance: what pastoral counselors can do?" 29.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 30

The review of literature will draw upon the expertise of several scholarly reviewed articles that provide an in-depth overview of the practice, individual thoughts and ideas, criticisms, beliefs, modern techniques, and practices that formulate the basis for understanding pastoral counseling. In addition, the review of literature will analyze the writings of Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Ron Hawkins, authors of the book *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, and Loren Townsend, author of the book, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling* to incorporate modern elements of pastoral counseling into the current research that includes concepts such as understanding religion verses spirituality, identity development, integrating theology and science, and the formation and transformation of relationships. Connecting these concepts from religious experts will confirm for this research that religion does have a commonplace in the profession of counseling and inform practitioners that mental illness, despite what people believe is a condition that can be treated through the use of pastoral counseling.<sup>97</sup>

### **What is Pastoral Counseling?**

In society, in the confines of the counseling profession, a pastor is the most trusted and respected person.<sup>98</sup> The religious knowledge of pastoral counselors has a powerful influence over people's choices. For these reasons, people develop misconceptions and inaccuracies that often lead to misunderstanding pastoral counseling. Defining the term helps solidify the importance of who they are and their role. In a 2020 article by Yoseph Pedhu, it is indicated that pastoral counseling is fundamental in helping people improve their lives. This ministry permits counselors to divulge in the prosperity of clients completely and gives them the confidence to

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<sup>97</sup> Clinton, Tim, and Ron Hawkins. *The popular encyclopedia of Christian counseling: An indispensable tool for helping people with their problems*. Harvest House Publishers, 2011, 35.

<sup>98</sup> Pedhu, Yoseph. "Improving performance: what pastoral counselors can do?" *COUNS-EDU: The International Journal of Counseling and Education* 5, no. 1 (2020): 29.

counsel the whole person. Pastoral counseling is a one-of-a-kind type of psychotherapy since it utilizes spiritual and psychological theories to work with clients in adapting to their life issues.<sup>99</sup> It is also a practice that helps in the progressive development of people that can only be directed by individuals who have been exposed to and actively engaged in theological and psychological training.<sup>100</sup>

Other researchers such as Farshadnia, Memaryan, Farid, and Bolhar presented information in a 2018 article that pastoral counseling helps people with problems focus their attention on their spirituality.<sup>101</sup> Some defined pastoral counseling as a biblical concept concerned with addressing issues or problems within the religious community. However, their research showed that pastoral counseling is just as effective outside the church. Magezi described the concepts of pastoral counseling in a 2020 article as an intercession that depends on quality connections between the counselor and the counselee if positive results are warranted.<sup>102</sup> The practice alludes to the care given to others from a spiritual point of view, utilizing different approaches that offer clarity to the process.<sup>103</sup> Research indicates that pastoral counseling involves connecting with humans and the human aspects of hope and healing.<sup>104</sup> As multiple

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<sup>99</sup> Pedhu, Yoseph. "Improving performance: what pastoral counselors can do?" *COUNS-EDU: The International Journal of Counseling and Education* 5, no. 1 (2020): 29.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>101</sup> Farshadnia, Memaryan, Farid & Bolhar. "Who Can Provide Spiritual Counseling? A Qualitative Study from Iran." 2018. *Indian Journal of Palliative Care* 24 (4): 517

<sup>102</sup> Magezi, Vhumani. "Positioning Care as 'being with the Other' within a Cross-Cultural Context: Opportunities and Challenges of Pastoral Care Provision Amongst People from Diverse Cultures." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020), 1.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 3

definitions of pastoral counseling began to surface or become recognized in society, there was much confusion about the role of pastoral counselors and what exactly they do.

Pastoral counseling plays an important role in improving people's lives. A unique combination of psychology and religious counseling, pastoral counseling combines the spiritual resources of psychology with clinical experience to promote healing and growth. A pastoral therapist is a mental health professional with a deep understanding of religious, theological, and spiritual issues. In their role, they help to heal and transform those in need through prayer, scripture teaching, and community involvement. This work allows pastoral counselors to be fully engaged and to motivate the common good of their clients. Counseling is a helpful tool for inspiring and changing the lives of others. It appears in the context of the ultimate significance and concern.<sup>105</sup>

Clinical psychologists, counselors, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists also meet clients with strong beliefs and express genuine spiritual feelings and many beliefs. The wisdom of classical Protestant theology for ministry is known and applied by caring pastors. Traditional wisdom psychology, psychiatry, counseling, psychotherapy, and pastoral therapy provide valuable support and assistance to many people in various situations.<sup>106</sup> This intersection of religion and science shows that both areas alleviate human suffering and promote personal growth and development. Many religious leaders, including pastors and sheiks, are willing to take on the role of counselors. However, most pastors are not prepared to deal with the various

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>106</sup> Ahlskog, G. & Sands, H. (2000). *The Guide to Pastoral Counselling and Care*. Madison, Connecticut: Psychological Press.

issues raised by their clients during counseling sessions. This is due to the lack of training and professionalism of religious leaders.<sup>107</sup>

Religious leaders believe that pastoral service and holiness of faith are important for personal development, well-being, and life management. In a very traditional and modern society, there is a discrepancy between religious beliefs, spiritualism, personal needs, and tensions related to modernity, information, and technological progress. Religious beliefs tend to suppress the usual processes of counseling and psychotherapy, and religion can sublimate the truths perceived by clients. There is a close relationship between an individual's lifestyle, religion, and pastoral counseling and care. This is an important part of counseling psychology, as counseling and counseling services and therapy seem to be at the heart of lives.<sup>108</sup>

Pastoral counseling is a special type of psychotherapy because it uses spiritual and psychological resources to help clients resolve life's problems constructively. Mental health professionals also provide in-depth personal and/or religious theological training. Pastoral counseling is a process that promotes customer growth. Research has shown that pastoral counseling is a therapist-led process that enables clients to resolve conflict situations constructively.<sup>109</sup> It is a special service that helps people find possible solutions for their balance of life, their relationship with God, and their relationships with others. Research shows that the mission of a pastoral counselor is to help people reach their full potential and overcome obstacles along the way.

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<sup>107</sup> Barnett, Jeffrey E. and W. Brad Johnson. "Integrating spirituality and religion into psychotherapy: Persistent dilemmas, ethical issues, and a proposed decision-making process." *Ethics & Behavior* 21, no. 2 (2011): 147.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 150

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 152

In pastoral counseling, clients are responsible for their problems, personal development, and constructive communication. Counselors help clients assess and treat the person they want through psychotherapy that reflects their spiritual beliefs. Pastoral guidance seeks to improve psychological and spiritual well-being. The benefits of spirituality and psychotherapy include theology, faith, and psychotherapy to help people deal with various socio-emotional and faith issues. The integration of theological and psychological discourse creates uniqueness and relevance. Because pastoral counselors are trained in theology and psychology, counseling is bilingual.<sup>110</sup>

Religion and spirituality are defined as cultural and personal factors that play an important role in life experiences and include beliefs, social and moral values, patterns of behavior, and other patterns such as mental disorders (anxiety, depression). Religion also promotes moral and positive values, but that does not mean that all are equal. Pastoral counseling has its roots in traditional societies and religions. Traditional societies have had difficulty managing a variety of physical, emotional, social, and cultural phenomena. Because psychological well-being is associated with gods and supernatural forces in traditional societies, gods have a different destiny from modern life, where certain events or situations can be carefully studied, and logical (scientific) explanations can be found.<sup>111</sup>

### **The Role of Pastoral Counselors**

In pastoral counseling, everyone has a role because one of their ultimate goals is to develop a deeper meaning and understanding of life.<sup>112</sup> According to a 2020 article by Breed,

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<sup>110</sup> Frazier, R. E., & Hansen, N. D. Religious/spiritual psychotherapy behaviors: Do we do what we believe to be important? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, (2009). 41 (2), 81 - 87.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 87

<sup>112</sup> Cole, Donald L. "A Pastoral Counselor Responds to "The Natural Principles of Love. "" *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 9, no. 1 (2017): 48.



and Du Plessis, a primary objective of pastoral counseling is to instruct others in manners dedicated to expressing God, individual identity, and the social context of the world.<sup>113</sup>

Understanding and addressing how pastoral counselors view their work involve examining their experiences and those experiences which drive their identity in terms of their pastoral attitude, their ability to connect research science and spirituality, and their faith.<sup>114</sup> In pastoral counseling, counselors must have the desire to put the needs of the client before their own, understand the framework of their experiences, exercise their ability to show compassion and love, employ excellent listening skills, and overall be willing to do whatever is needed to cultivate a trusting relationship.<sup>115</sup>

According to a 2018 article by Smith, Ruth-Riding, Aspelmeier, and Leake, there were times when pastoral counseling was the only resource for people who experienced mental health issues, primarily because they are generally the first point of contact in the community.<sup>116</sup> However, research conducted in 2018 by Shuman and Damen insisted that the moral values of pastoral counseling are that it connects with people and their struggles, their exploration of life's meaning, and their issues in spirituality.<sup>117</sup> In pastoral counseling, as counselors actively listen to their clients, they seek love and compassion to understand their perceptions of reality and

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<sup>113</sup> Breed, Gert and Amanda L. Du Plessis. "Expressive Therapy in Contextual Pastoral Care and Counselling." In *Die Skriflig : Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese* (2020), 2.

<sup>114</sup> Cheney, Gregory J. "Integrating Pastoral and Clinical Identities: A Narrative Inquiry of Pastoral Counselors." *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 72, no. 3 (2018): 172.

<sup>115</sup> Strunk, Joshua, Frederick Milacci, and James Zabloski. "The Convergence of Ministry, Tenure, and Efficacy: Beyond Speculation Toward a New Theory of Pastoral" (2017): 543.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, Adam E., Ruth Riding-Malon, Jeffery E. Aspelmeier, and Valerie Leake. 2018. "A Qualitative Investigation into Bridging the Gap between Religion and the Helping Professions to Improve Rural Mental Health." *Journal of Rural Mental Health*, (2018): 42.

<sup>117</sup> Schuhmann, C. M. and A. Damen. "Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age." *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 4 (2018): 408.

articulate a response.<sup>118</sup> Recognizing pastoral therapy requires counselors to be connected with people's ultimate aim to live a good and fulfilling life.<sup>119</sup>

An important quality of pastoral counselors is that they can provide guidance and claims about real-world realities with which people need to connect.<sup>120</sup> Instead of focusing on the qualities of a pastoral counselor, researchers suggest honing in on the hopeless circumstances presented to them by their clients, and the counselors attempt to reorient and connect clients with the good in their lives.<sup>121</sup> Three important traits of pastoral counseling are building relationships with clients, the counselor's response to the client's stories, and the pastor's ability to connect with society.<sup>122</sup> In terms of defining the term pastoral counseling and detailing its role in practice, many concepts were developed and grounded in the history and traditions of psychological counseling, the first concepts of integrating science and religion.<sup>123</sup>

One of the responsibilities of a pastoral counselor is to promote tolerance. Pastoral counselors work in various organizations, including the military, police, and hospitals, and are often identified in cases involving tragedy. These terms include language warfare, destruction, violence, suffering, and death. The question of how to support and sustain the sustainability of this practice is relevant. This question also applies to pastoral psychology and pastoral counseling. Pain, violence, and death are existential problems under pastoral leadership. Pastoral

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 412

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 409

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 410

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 409

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 412

<sup>123</sup> Jackson, Brian K. "Licensed professional counselors' perceptions of pastoral counseling in the African American community." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 69, no. 2 (2015): 85-101.

counselors guide people in dealing with existential problems.<sup>124</sup> This shows that pastoral counselors can play an important role in marketing the resilience of police officers, military personnel, firefighters, and fitness professionals. This view no longer seems widely accepted in relevant business sectors or scientific research on resilience. For example, pastoral counselors in military and police units are no longer considered essential for stability or PTSD coaching packages. In research, perseverance, faith, and spirituality are always seen as necessary factors of stability, but the result is a vague, secular struggle that can lead to horrible psychological adjustments.<sup>125</sup>

The researcher aims to add to the theoretical foundation of awareness of the position of the pastoral counselor in the existential field, where he can play a part in upholding stability by examining the existential functioning resistance. The essence of the being is a central issue in pastoral leadership. Pastoral counselors help people find life resources, often helping especially those who have the opportunity to have meaningful life experiences.<sup>126</sup> The meaning is often associated with adapting to difficult situations and times, even if it is no longer clear or existential. In addition, researchers can also create a psychological model, for example, a mannequin drawn from the outside, by understanding the structure of the existential orientation in the moral space based on the philosophical idea of an existential concept. The idea here is

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<sup>124</sup> Anderson, H. (2010). Common grief, complex grieving. *Pastoral Psychology*, 59(2), 127–136. doi:10.1007 /s11089-009-0243-5.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 128

<sup>126</sup> Bonanno, G. A., Westphal, M., & Mancini, A. D. (2011). Resilience to loss and potential trauma. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 7, 511.

finding a suitable way of life with a rational approach and how to approach these points of view.<sup>127</sup>

Tolerance is a concept in many ways, as this area deals with ambiguity in concepts and terms. Researchers see resilience as a way to adapt to difficult situations, typically consisting of three components: recovery, growth, and resilience. The research that continues to explore and connect sustainability is impressive from an existential perspective. The approach to sustainability always includes a measure of adaptive technology that opens life and the ability of pastoral counselors to act as a catalyst for business sustainability when employees struggle to survive. Pastoral counselors can double the resilience of this staff by describing the promising prospects of employees and the significant resistance to expressing stability as part of a sustainable program those organizations can manage and control. The idea that guided the ethical field of philosophy and psychology was that finding meaning is the greatest difficulty in human life.<sup>128</sup>

Other researchers have gone in two directions as one of the many ways to understand the reality and events of existence. They can find a vision of the truth, a desire to know life, and the true value of life. It can also be understood as the difference between understanding and defining meaning. The first is to ask if it makes sense. That is if it conforms to a normal rule or theory. The second raises the question of whether something has a price or a value. The difference between understanding and meaning is that searching for interdependent and relative metaphorical procedures links lifestyle behaviors with generally oriented systems.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Baxter, Kean, Morgan M. Medlock, and Ezra EH Griffith. "Hope, resilience, and African-American spirituality." In *Racism and psychiatry*, pp. 141. Humana Press, Cham, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 149

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 517

The therapist sees meaning in the spatial metaphor of direction. This metaphor is philosophically based on the meaning of life. Existential consequences are problems that simultaneously affect normative and individual beings. This study recognized the existential problem of space travel. It created a unique realm of ethical space. Here, morality and dignity were understood broadly, encompassing the issues of good and evil and dignity and completeness of life.<sup>130</sup> Thus, treating existential problems can be understood as determining where to go in the ethical space. Still existential, these tools can be understood as references to directional structures that inform people in the ethical space. Research shows that human nature is ethical, and that people must strive to find their way in an ethical space.<sup>131</sup>

From this perspective, ethical orientation is related to the human experience and the feeling of being a consumer. At the same time, as people lose their focus on ethics, they lose their organization because they no longer understand where to go. Research shows that ethically oriented structures are culturally strong opinions that form good, complete, and dignified entities supported and employed by pastoral counselors. This affects the existential value of an important dimension of that resource.<sup>132</sup> Existential is a commitment to the idea of an entity that is always valuable and serves a purpose of existence. In principle, the agreement cannot express existential meaning.

Furthermore, the truth cannot inform people in the ethical space. The rational judgment of the good means that this importance is necessary for the existential sense, but the

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<sup>130</sup> Abernethy, Alexis D., Gillian D. Grannum, Carolyn L. Gordon, Rick Williamson, and Joseph M. Currier. "The Pastors Empowerment Program: A resilience education intervention to prevent clergy burnout." *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 3, no. 3 (2016): 175.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 81

understanding is always made in the existential sense. To inform people in the ethical space, one must have a perspective of great value and trust in reality.<sup>133</sup> Confidence seems to be more important psychologically than philosophically. This presupposes that self-confidence takes ambivalent positions in an existential sense. First, the main manifestation of the way of real life is to perceive an attitude towards reality, an attitude towards what is feasible in this world. To explain the guidance system, a very valuable representation of the existence of rights, it wants to relate to the practice of reconciliation with the concept of reality. That is, they want to be understood to some extent.<sup>134</sup>

Secondly, to be oriented in the ethical space, people must want a point of view that is not only soft and personal but also correct. However, easy from one's point of view of the real world as seen in private life. People want these scenes to be more than just distant graphics. They want to go to them and feel that they can combine these scenes in their lives.<sup>135</sup> The existential meaning, the directional structure of life, consists of a rational perception of what real life represents. Today's preferences are not ethical intuition formulated or spoken but indirectly inform people about our lives. The ethical ontology behind their position can often be hidden. Orientation skills are usually intuitive or entrepreneurial.

Finally, a subjective sense of purpose corresponds with the sense that one is moving towards strongly valued goods. So, this subjective sense of purpose corresponds with the believability of visions of the good concerning a particular reality. Existential meaning and

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 89

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 91

<sup>135</sup> Brown, Cameron L. "Fire chaplaincy [electronic resource]: the promotion of resilience-based pastoral care." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 74-87, no. 11 (2018): 1938-1951.

global meaning differ in relative importance. Strongly valued goods are goods that demand awe, respect, or admiration. Strongly valued goods are not just desirable goods but goods that function as standards in judging our choices, desires, and actions. Pastoral counseling is assigned to beliefs and goals. In global meaning, beliefs and goals seem separate and equally important. In existential meaning, beliefs are important as they interrelate with our visions of the good life. This makes existential meaning a more explicitly moral concept than global meaning.

Reorientation after challenge: finding, losing, and restoring meaning in life.<sup>136</sup>

In terms of the spatial metaphor of moving in moral space, experiencing meaning in life depends on our position concerning believable visions of the good. Research contends that people must be rightly placed concerning the good. This results in a gradual conception of meaning in life; people experience life as more or less meaningful as they feel that they are positioned closer or further away from strongly valued visions of the good. This makes it difficult to pinpoint precisely when people may speak of experiencing meaning in life. How close do we need to be to a strongly valued good to experience meaning in life?<sup>137</sup> Do we need to be close to all goods that we cherish? Here, people also need to consider that they live in always changing times and are always becoming. Due to the temporal dimension of lives, a place relative to crucial goods is constantly challenged by the new events of our lives. Generally, this will not lead to serious disorientation, and people can adjust themselves through slight reorientation.<sup>138</sup> Existential questions will remain in the background and orienting in moral space

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<sup>136</sup> Carlin, N., Capps, D., & Dykstra, R. C. (2015). Living stories of resilience, resistance, and resourcefulness. *Pastoral Psychology*, 64(5), 549. doi:10.1007/s11089-015-0667-z.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 550

<sup>138</sup> Paas, Stefan, and Marry Schoemaker. "Crisis and resilience among church planters in Europe." *Mission Studies* 35, no. 3 (2018): 366.

will remain an implicit and intuitive process that does not require reflection or articulation. In this case, people will continue to experience life as meaningful. They will call such a process of keeping directed towards cherished visions of the good, involving no serious disorientation and only slight reorientation, a process of finding meaning in life. Researchers used the following terminology in their meaning-making model. It relates reorientation after a challenging event to the appraised meaning we assign to it.<sup>139</sup>

In general, there is not much difference between judgment and prudence for people to adapt easily. Global focus continues to work well in lifelong leadership. If the predicted meaning of an event contradicts the global meaning of man, it will lead to tragedy. The difficulty begins to make sense, adapting to reduce the discrepancies between predicted values and general meanings. This includes assimilating, reorienting, or adapting and changing the meaning. Attempts to convey meaning may or may not succeed, depending on how small the difference is between the expected value and the total value.<sup>140</sup> This is not a strict standard; as described above, meaning is called a progressive concept. If successful, recognizing meaning leads to meanings, such as event recognition, growth, changed global beliefs, or goals.<sup>141</sup> From an existential point of view, a valuable event can be understood as an assessment of how much we doubt the correctness of our understanding of good. This is true because these opinions do not coincide with our perception of the truth of change or our perceptions of the current situation subject to change. We are morally lost. There is a significant discrepancy between the value of

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 370

<sup>140</sup> Coward, D. D. (2000). Making meaning within the experience of life-threatening illness. In G. T. Reker & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Exploring existential meaning: Optimizing human development across the life span* (pp. 157–170). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 159



capital in this existential value and its existential value. Existential emotions, for example, do not function as leading systems in the moral space.<sup>142</sup>

People no longer know how to deal with existential concerns, and life ceases to be meaningful; the process of seeking meaning in life fails. Following the model, people may distinguish two ways to successfully adapt and restore a process of finding meaning in life. They may either arrive at a new sense of the believability of original visions of the good (assimilation) or orient towards new visions of the good that they find believable in the new situation (accommodation).<sup>143</sup> An existential perspective is that ultimate goods and the uncertainty of finding give life meaning. According to existential theory, finding meaning even when confronted with extremely challenging life events or circumstances is present. People can eventually adapt to the most extreme adversity. They may at first get disoriented in moral space when adversity challenges the believability of a valued vision of the good life.<sup>144</sup> Disruptive events may shatter fundamental assumptions about reality tied up with one's vision of the good, or the vision is no longer perceived as believable due to a fundamental change in (one's view of) the reality of one's individual life. People may will commit themselves to another good that is believable despite the disruptive event. Existential theory emphasizes that, eventually, one can commit to ultimate goods or purposes that are believable in all circumstances as they can be maintained even in the face of the most degrading circumstances. For instance, one can still take a courageous attitude concerning suffering or can still devote themselves to the well-being of

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 160

<sup>143</sup> Clough, William R. "The Promise and Perils of Connectedness: Living in a New Virtual World." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 33, no. 1/2 (2021): 19.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 38

others.<sup>145</sup> Although the existential perspective emphasizes the possibility of finding meaning even in the most difficult circumstances, existential theory also points to the uncertainty of meaning-making processes and finding meaning in life. This uncertainty is connected to the role of time in existential meaning. As time passes, the position for good may change so that a process of finding meaning in life involves continuous reorientation and may easily, at some point, fail.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, finding meaning may take time; finding meaning is not something that can be done quickly.

A second factor in the uncertainty of finding meaning is the lack of complete control over the process. The terms meaning making and meanings made suggest that meaning is always actively created. Meaning making, on the other hand, is not a planned activity. According to research, the process of producing and/or discovering meaning is a complex one. Finding meaning in life may even require letting go of control. It is our nature to seek meaning. However, this often involves letting go, being vulnerable and receptive, and giving up control.<sup>147</sup> Here, the metaphor of orientation is illustrative. People may regain orientation at unexpected moments and in unexpected ways when people are lost. For instance, when they accidentally come across a place they recognize, that helps them reorient. Furthermore, finding meaning in life may necessitate that other, such as pastoral counselors, see searching for existential meaning as a spiritual quest to support them in their meaning-making efforts when they regard the ultimate good they orient towards as sacred. As it relates to resilience, sustainability, recovery, and

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<sup>145</sup> Kent, M., & Davis, M. C. (2014). Resilience training for action and agency to stress and trauma: Becoming the hero of your life. In M. Kent, M. C. Davis, & J. Reich (Eds.), *The resilience handbook* (pp. 227–244). New York: Routledge.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 228

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 229

growth, people must go deeper into the concept of resilience before exploring the connection between existential meaning and resilience.<sup>148</sup>

Resilience is an adaptive response to a challenge composed of three elements: a) resilience as a sustained adaptive effort that prevails despite the challenge, b) a process of bouncing back and recovery from a challenge, and c) as a process of learning and growth that expands understanding, new knowledge, and new skills. These three elements are often denoted as sustainability, recovery, and growth. Globally speaking, resilience refers to certain trajectories of change or stability in psychological functioning over time.<sup>149</sup> As people focus on each of the elements of resilience separately, they find somewhat different understandings of challenge and levels of psychological functioning and different patterns of change/stability in levels of functioning over time.

Sustainability, the first element of resilience, is associated with a more chronically challenging situation instead of one isolated, challenging event and is described as stability of the capacity to pursue aims that give life meaning.<sup>150</sup> Good psychological functioning is not primarily understood in negative terms, as an absence of (psycho) pathology, but rather in positive terms, as having the possibility of leading a good, meaningful life.

Recovery, the second element, is associated with an isolated disruptive event and refers to returning to physiological and psychological equilibrium after the event. Psychological functioning is primarily understood in terms of physical and mental health, particularly in the

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 230

<sup>149</sup> Noullet, Christopher J., Jeffrey M. Lating, Matthew W. Kirkhart, Robinson Dewey, and George S. Everly Jr. "Effect of pastoral crisis intervention training on resilience and compassion fatigue in clergy: A pilot study." *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 5, no. 1 (2018): 1.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 233

absence of (psycho) pathology. Several authors argued that a broad view of mental health, of health as more than just the absence of pathology and dysfunction, is necessary for understanding experiences of recovery.<sup>151</sup>

Recovery seems an ordinary, rather than an extraordinary, reaction to disruptive events that do not need much reflection. According to research, the common reaction to potentially traumatic events is a relatively stable pattern of healthy functioning in which no significant loss of equilibrium exists. In some literature, the term resilience is used exclusively for this stable pattern of functioning after a disruptive event and is thus distinguished from recovery.<sup>152</sup> When recovery is associated with a gradual return to baseline functioning over months or even years, the stable pattern may also involve some distress after the event but during a shorter period. It is impossible to draw a clear line between recovery and a stable pattern as there is no clear distinction between temporal windows stretching over days or weeks and windows stretching over months or years.<sup>153</sup>

The third element of resilience, growth, reflects the idea found in many religious and philosophical traditions: suffering and struggle may lead to positive experiences. Growth may occur in the context of both a single disruptive event and a more sustained challenge. Regarding post-traumatic growth, psychological functioning is understood as having some useful, basic cognitive guides for living. This understanding of functioning is like sustainability, where the capacity to pursue meaningful goals is emphasized.<sup>154</sup> Growth and sustainability represent

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 235

<sup>152</sup> Papazoglou, K., & Andersen, J. P. (2014). A guide to utilizing police training as a tool to promote resilience and improve health outcomes among police officers. *Traumatology*, 20(2), 103–111. doi:10.1037/h0099394

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 105

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 106

different trajectories of functioning. Sustainability represents a trajectory without a fundamental change in the capacity to pursue meaningful goals. In contrast, growth represents a trajectory in which certain fundamental assumptions or cherished goals are given up after trauma as they no longer function as appropriate guides for living. Through struggling with the traumatic situation and persistent cognitive processing, new schemas and goals may be established to allow growth experiences.<sup>155</sup>

These three elements of resilience represent different pathways or appearances that need not occur simultaneously. This makes it complicated to speak of resilience in general and decide whether a process represents resilience. Another complicating factor is time. Resilience can only be recognized in hindsight, which raises the question of the periods involved in resilience. Given that recovery and especially growth, the most unpredictable of the different trajectories, may involve an indeterminate period of relatively poor functioning, it seems unclear at what point one may decide whether a process involving poor functioning represents a resilient trajectory. This brings the question of where one draws the line between successful and resilient adaptation versus non-resilient responses.<sup>156</sup> Sustainability and growth are processes in moral space. Resilience refers to adaptive processes during or following adversity that eventually leads to successful adjustment. Adversity challenges one's views in particular situations in life or assumptions about reality. As a result, adversity challenges the believability of visions of the

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<sup>155</sup> Ojalammii, Jonna. "Existential space with an escape: Meaning making and relationship commitment in the narratives of spouses of people with mental illness." (2021).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 111

good life, and, in particular, orientation is called moral space. So, adaptive processes have a moral dimension of (re)orienting in moral space.<sup>157</sup>

Depending on whether adversity leads to disorientation in moral space, these adaptive processes in moral space do or do not involve meaning-making efforts. To understand the connection between existential meaning and resilience, one must understand how adaptive processes in moral space relate to resilience processes.<sup>158</sup> Sustainability and growth are associated with the spatial metaphor of orientation that figures so prominently in our conceptualization of existential meaning, looking at the three elements of resilience separately. Sustainability involves having a direction of one's own and is explicitly associated with considering existential questions.<sup>159</sup> In sustainability, psychological functioning is understood primarily in terms of having the capacity to lead a good life. Sustainability may be understood as a process in moral space, a process of finding meaning in life that continues despite the ongoing challenge. Something similar applies to growth.<sup>160</sup> Growth is associated with situations in which a person's view of reality is shattered. The person understands that the world and its place are no longer valid, leading to cognitive processing or meaning-making efforts. This may involve event-related rumination, which explains why PTSD and growth are sometimes related. Growth occurs when, at some point, the trauma survivor disengages from certain goals or views of reality and eventually manages to formulate new goals and worldviews that allow a perception that one is

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<sup>157</sup> Sales, J. M., Merrill, N. A., & Fivush, R. (2013). Does making meaning make it better? Narrative meaning making and well-being in at-risk African-American adolescent females. *Memory*, 21, 53–66. doi:10.1080/09658211.2012.745572.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>160</sup> Oh, Whachul. "Spiritual Transformation of Han: Four Levels of Transference in Self Psychology." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 75, no. 4 (2021): 267.

moving forward again towards goals in a world that permits this. Here, the notions of orientation in moral space and believability are almost found. So, like sustainability, post-traumatic growth may be understood as an adaptive process in moral space. It is a process of at first losing direction, giving up on some idea of the good life that is no longer believable, then struggling with the loss of direction, and eventually managing to direct towards a new conception of the good life that obtains believability and value from the traumatic event. This does not imply that the trauma itself is now seen as desirable or that some good is now found in the event itself but that the event is perceived as leading to some good that somehow outweighs the good that was given up. Like sustainability, growth comprises finding meaning in life; unlike sustainability, growth also comprises at first struggling for meaning in life.<sup>161</sup>

Finding meaning in life is a central dimension of recovery, the third element of resilience. Unlike sustainability and growth, recovery does not, almost by definition, refer to a process in moral space. In recovery, psychological functioning is understood in terms of physiological and psychological equilibrium and mental health.<sup>162</sup> Recovery is often associated with meaning. Meaning is particularly important when individuals confront highly stressful and traumatic life experiences. Generally, meaning is even considered to be crucial in recovery. There is controversy about the precise connection between recovery and meaning. Several recent studies suggested that meaning does not play a significant role in recovery or that there is a negative connection between meaning and recovery. First, many people cope well with potentially traumatic events without engaging in meaning-making efforts. Second, when people engage in

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 275

<sup>162</sup> I Silver, R. C., & Updegraff, J. A. Searching for and finding meaning following personal and collective trauma. In K. D. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. J. Lindberg (Eds.), *The psychology of meaning* (2013). 237–255. doi:10.1037/1404-012.

meaning-making after a traumatic event, this is often maladaptive and associated with depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms.<sup>163</sup> Finally, the assumption that finding meaning is necessary for successful adjustment has also been challenged.

First, when people do not engage in meaning-making after a potentially traumatic event, one would conclude that there is no significant discrepancy between the appraised meaning of the event and the global meaning. In one's view, when people cope well without engaging in meaning-making efforts, this does not question the connection between existential meaning and recovery but shows that a stable pattern of functioning after a disruptive event comprises a stable process of finding meaning in life.<sup>164</sup>

Second, when people engage in meaning-making efforts after a disruptive event, one would conclude that there is a significant discrepancy between the appraised and the global meaning. Research confirms that these efforts will be maladaptive when they do not lead to a reduction in discrepancy. In pastoral counseling, it is not surprising that sustained meaning-making is often negatively connected with recovery. Studies in this area generally fail to examine the critical core of the meaning-making model, discrepancy. One may still conclude that when a disruptive event leads to meaning-making efforts, recovery requires that, at some point, meaning-making efforts result in reducing discrepancy in meanings made and, from an existential viewpoint, in finding meaning in life.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 238

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 239

<sup>165</sup> Clarke, Margaret Allison, Keith D. Walker, Shelley Spurr, and Vicki Squires. "Clergy Resilience: Accessing Supportive Resources to Balance the Impact of Role-Related Stress and Adversity." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* (2022).



Third, some studies further challenge a positive connection between meaning-making and recovery and between finding meaning and recovery. These studies help find and explain the meaning of a traumatic event. Meaning is understood primarily in terms of comprehensibility, as making sense of an event. For instance, searching for meaning in narrative terms is looking back and trying to fit a traumatizing event into a life story.<sup>166</sup> Although these studies challenge the connection between recovery and finding meaning in an event, they are not concerned with existential meaning and finding meaning in life since existential meaning does not primarily depend on the comprehensibility of events. It is argued that sometimes it may be more adaptive to move forward and assume one can change the future rather than try to make sense of a past that may be senseless. This statement supports the claim that existential meaning is connected with recovery. It may be more adaptive to move towards a believable vision of the good life rather than try to find a comprehensible explanation of a traumatic event.<sup>167</sup> Similarly, it is argued that successful adjustment after a disruptive event does not depend on solving questions concerning the comprehensibility of the event but on finding significance and value in one's life, not necessarily in the disruptive event. In addition, research proves there may be a negative connection between recovery and finding meaning, but it can also be concluded that these studies do not involve the existential notion of finding meaning in life.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 241

<sup>167</sup> Waters, T. E. A., Shallcross, J. F., & Fivush, R. (2013). The many facets of meaning making: Comparing multiple measures of meaning making and their relations to psychological distress. *Memory*, 21, 22–35. doi:10.1080/09658211.2012.705300.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 30

## History of Psychological Counseling

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, our country recognized the need to respond to the suffering of men. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung were at the forefront of this movement and were among the first to develop psychological concepts that led to findings that suggested healing. Both psychologists believed that religion and spirituality were connected to the psychology of the mind. They believed that although religion did satisfy a psychological need, it was not a spiritual quest for truth.<sup>169</sup> In addition, much of the research supports the belief that religion leads to self-analysis and that the integration of dual concepts in psychology adds to the wholeness of people.<sup>170</sup> The innate ability to integrate conversations about theology and psychology aids in the development of identity as it allows concepts to combine the existence of humans with the advantages of ethical and spiritual resources.<sup>171</sup>

Freud, a confessed atheist, criticized much about religion and wrote several books admitting his discontent with it. In one of his writings, *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud referred to religion as nothing more than an illusion. He insinuated that part of the problem in society stems from man's intuition to act in destructive ways. He insisted that religion was created due to man's desire to create a belief system to satisfy those destructive mannerisms so that man would not act on them. In essence, Freud thought of religion as a support system to explain and compensate for the sufferings of men. Nevertheless, while religion was compensating for the suffering of men, science continued progressively and was seen as more of a reliable source of

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<sup>169</sup> Barglow, Raymond, "Why Freud Matters: Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, and the Skeptical Humanist Tradition," *Skeptic*, [Altadena, CA] 23, no 1 (2018), 53.

<sup>170</sup> Pedhu, Yoseph, "Efforts to Overcome Countertransference in Pastoral Counseling Relationships," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 73, no. 2 (2019):79.

<sup>171</sup> Pedhu, *COUNS-EDU: The International Journal of Counseling and Education*, 30

observational truth, and with the growth of scientific evidence, man would no longer need to believe in religion.<sup>172</sup>

Jung established analytical psychology and was among the first researchers to investigate the nature behind integrating spirituality and psychology. He contended that observational proof was by all accounts not the only method to confirm mental or logical realities, that the spirit assumes a critical part in the mind, and confirms how being connected spiritually in life has a lot to do with the soul of a person. These are the concepts that can impact emotional health.<sup>173</sup> Religion and spirituality cannot manifest themselves in counseling without first interaction with human emotion, development of the mind, and relationships as transformation occur in mind and rely solely on psychology.<sup>174</sup>

Jung believed that religion is a means for developing identity or self-awareness. His full justification for human behavior involved the connectedness that individuals feel due to their emotions or actions. In this sense, spirituality entails being closely connected to a higher power as prescribed by religion.<sup>175</sup> Jung accepted that individuals are formed by their past and future and push toward more noteworthy self-acknowledgment and completeness to accomplish individuation. Eventually, the conscious and unconscious pieces of character are incorporated.<sup>176</sup> Jung accepted the idea of individual unconsciousness. He saw it as associated with the

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>173</sup> Stewart-Sicking, Deal, and Fox. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 237.

<sup>174</sup> Stewart-Sicking, Joseph A., Paul J. Deal, and Jesse Fox. "The ways paradigm: A transtheoretical model for integrating spirituality into counseling." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 95, no. 2 (2017): 235.

<sup>175</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. "Integration Clients' Religion and Spirituality within Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis, 1939.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 1941

experiences of mankind and impacted by the spiritual side of man. He valued spirituality and experiential information, often broadly confirming God's presence.<sup>177</sup> The perspectives of Jung agreed that well-being relies upon getting progressively self-acknowledged, completely satisfying one's fate, and living with an equal balance. This was indeed a movement that penetrated the United States and influenced much of the modern practices that are a part of counseling practices today.

### **Modern Concepts of Pastoral Counseling**

Much like the prior work of Freud and Jung, the work of Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins takes on more of a modern approach and focuses on the soul care of the ministry.<sup>178</sup> Their research focused on the belief that spiritual guidance digs deep beneath the layers of Christian pretense, forcing people to be their truest selves.<sup>179</sup> If that meant understanding individual religious values or being spiritually guided, people could somehow obtain what they needed to heal. Part of their research discussed recognizing spirituality as being neglected as a legitimate resource in counseling.<sup>180</sup> This is the very concept that leads to the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. As discussed in the literature, God is the primary source of the Bible, and He is infinite and unchanging.<sup>181</sup> The doctrine of man involves a man having a complete understanding of the Bible, which are the ideas that form the basis of modern concepts of pastoral counseling.

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 1942

<sup>178</sup> Clinton, Tim, and Ron Hawkins. *The popular encyclopedia of Christian counseling: An indispensable tool for helping people with their problems*. Harvest House Publishers, (2011): 36.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>180</sup> Baumsteiger, Rachel, and Tiffany Chenneville. "Challenges to the conceptualization and measurement of religiosity and spirituality in mental health research." *Journal of religion and health* 54, no. 6 (2015): 2344.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 2346

The literature also led to a discussion of the importance of spiritual formation and how that depends on the emotional experiences and the spiritual disciplines of people.

### Religion, Spirituality, and Identity Development

Religion and spirituality alone cannot show themselves in counseling without collaboration with human feelings, mental development, and relationships. Change is something that happens in the mind that depends on psychology.<sup>182</sup> Religion and spirituality together formulate the understanding of the true meaning of life. A huge percentage of today's society sees religion as significant in their lives, as many religious concepts are widely recognized.<sup>183</sup> Developing more of an understanding of the meaning of life and the importance of having a connected relationship with God and others is the basis of incorporating religion and spirituality as an important component of the counseling process.<sup>184</sup> The literature revealed that religion and spirituality are two different concepts that hold different meanings in different people. Religion is the belief in a higher, controlling power or system of faith. It may also be defined as a pursuit of interest that a person deems important.<sup>185</sup> Spirituality is the inner workings of a person's soul or the attachment to the values of religion. As counselors discover ways to address emotional

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<sup>182</sup> Stewart-Sicking, Joseph A., Paul J. Deal, and Jesse Fox. "The ways paradigm: A transtheoretical model for integrating spirituality into counseling." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 95, no. 2 (2017): 235.

<sup>183</sup> Captari, Laura E., Joshua N. Hook, William Hoyt, Don E. Davis, Stacey E. McElroy-Heltzel, and Everett L. Worthington Jr. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1939.

<sup>184</sup> Oxhandler, Holly K., James W. Ellor, and Matthew S. Stanford, "Client Attitudes Towards Integrating Religion and Spirituality in Mental Health Treatment: Scale Development and Client Responses," *Social Work (New York)* 63, no 4 (2018): 337.

<sup>185</sup> Magezi, Vhumani. "Positioning Care as 'being with the Other' within a Cross-Cultural Context: Opportunities and Challenges of Pastoral Care Provision Amongst People from Diverse Cultures." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020),1.

awareness, it is important to acknowledge the integration of science and theology and how that supports the transformation of relationships in counseling.<sup>186</sup>

Recent characteristics in the area of social sciences, in particular, propose a gradual tendency towards the revival of hobbies in the difficulty of religion and identity. It is conceivable that faith and identification may be positively correlated, in particular when seen and analyzed through the prism of a specified team of individuals such as adolescents, youthful cohorts, and older cohorts. The link between religion and identity can be contextualized by exploring the self. For instance, the search for identification has been key to the development of adolescence. Little research has discovered the problem of religion and spirituality as a conduit for identification, consciousness, and formation. While religion addresses problems of beliefs and religious teachings which could influence the improvement of a person's self-conceptualization, the exclusive position of religion and spirituality in the improvement of identification has been overlooked for two reasons. First, some consider religion instrumental in deepening one's insights into identity formation. Second, some people view religion as an inhibiting supply of identity formation.<sup>187</sup>

Religion has been delineated in a range of approaches by various scholars. There is no regularly occurring definition of religion considering the nature of the discipline, range of religions, range of spiritual experiences, and range of spiritual origins, amongst others. Religion, like a song, is a challenging notion of defining.<sup>188</sup> In general, many theologians, philosophers,

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<sup>186</sup> AbdAleati, Naziha S., Norzarina Mohd Zaharim, and Yasmin Othman Mydin. "Religiousness and mental health: Systematic review study." *Journal of religion and health* 55, no. 6 (2016): 1929.

<sup>187</sup> King, Pamela Ebstyne. "Religion and identity: The role of ideological, social, and spiritual contexts." In *Beyond the Self*, pp. 197-204. Routledge, 2019.

<sup>188</sup> Sharp, Ryan H. "Authenticity, Religiosity, and Organizational Opportunity: Exploring the Synergies Between Religion, Spirituality, and Organizational Behavior." In *Religion and Its Impact on Organizational Behavior*, pp. 65. IGI Global, 2022.

psychologists, sociologists, and scholars have described religion from various viewpoints and conceptualizations. This implies that religion has been described in many ways and, in many instances, in line with a specific faculty of thinking or discipline. For instance, scientific tactics on religion have frequently shifted between delineating religion concerning its social or psychological features and its trust contents.<sup>189</sup>

Etymologically speaking, religion is derived from the Latin phrase *religare*, which is the capability to bind again or ‘to re-bind.’ This implies that etymologically as it relates to religion, it entails reconnecting through worshiping a lacking or damaged intimacy between God and worshippers. An alternative much less regarded and used in the etymological beginning of religion is the Latin phrase *relegere*, denoting to re-read. By definition, religion is described as one designating an image of closing concern.<sup>190</sup> This suggests that religion relates to symbols with the last non-secular relevance and impact on worshippers' way of life. The researchers noted that a sturdy definition of religion wants to meet a wide variety of necessities, such as involvement in the totality of life; being open to all types of people; dealing with problems naturally in extensively exclusive activities; dealing with problems in broadly unique notions and beliefs; exists and is practiced in each personal and social milieus; is open to a number opinions as to the veracity or in any other case its beliefs, and has repercussions perceived to be both hazardous or useful to individuals and groups. Because of the above requirements, Sharp defines religion as the most intensive and comprehensive method of valuing that is experienced by humankind.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 65

<sup>190</sup> Orthner, Dennis K. "Assessing Spiritual Development: Reflections on Building a Community Measure." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 14, no. 2 (2021): 198.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 205

It is argued that this definition of religion is ideal, empowers recognition, and explains non-secular phenomena in a higher way. It also empowers understanding of the distinction between spiritual rides and different human experiences. It also helps recognize the relationships between religion and different lifestyles, such as language, amongst others, noting that religion is the feeling of man's absolute dependence. This absolute dependence was once stimulated by man's experience of insufficient protection, provision, sustenance, and supremacy. As such, man has to rely on the divine for all these matters he cannot grant for himself. Other definitions of religion invoke an experience of man's dependence on a Supreme Being believed to be all-effective and all-knowing.<sup>192</sup>

This arises from man's awareness of his boundaries, such as the lack of ability to explain some of the mysteries of the world, such as the beginning of man, the starting place of death, and lifestyles after death, amongst others. Man consequently yearns for a Being that he believes has all the solutions and options to his problems, afflictions, and unanswered questions. Religious leaders posit that religion relates to the feeling of awe, dread, mystery, and fascination on journeys when confronted with what is holy, uncanny, or supernatural. This supernatural being is the power price in the world.<sup>193</sup>

The essence of religion lies in the trust in this supernatural being, who, even though they can no longer be viewed bodily, is believed to be existent and imbued with superhuman characteristics and quantities. There are those whose conceptualization of religion shares a key characteristic with that of spiritual leaders. They all agree that religion offers the existence of a

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<sup>192</sup> Davis, Edward Britt, James Meredith Day, and Philip A. Lindia. "Religious/Spiritual Development and Positive Psychology: Toward an Integrative Theory." (2022).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 101



supernatural being that is believed to be endowed with superhuman qualities and pointers on the feeling of dependence confronted using man in particular when confronted with a mystery, and, thus, man's attachment to Supreme Being.<sup>194</sup> Some spiritual leaders visualize religion from a psychological point of view. They define religion as an ordinary psychological adjustment of human society aimed at constructing a barrier of delusion in opposition to worry. Considering that any extra psychological adjustment is broadly related to stress, it is a supply of emotion.<sup>195</sup>

This definition suggests that man's longing for a Supreme Being is partly based on securing a form of insurance plan towards worry of the unknown. To construct a barrier in opposition to fear, man is friends with a Supreme Being believed to be extra than capable of extinguishing concern and guarding man against actual and imaginative destruction. From a sociological viewpoint, religion is described as a widespread device of beliefs and practices associated with sacred things. It appeals to the area of holy symbols or objects in human society.<sup>196</sup> In this case, people tend to partner sacred objects or symbols with the Supreme Being. As a man cannot see God in person, this affiliation of sacred objects to the Supreme Being may arguably assist in filling the lacunae created by his incapability to be in direct contact with the Supreme Being. Religion is considered a coherent include of convictions, ceremonies, and customs related to a deeper and larger truth Supreme Being in contrast with cloth reality. This

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 107

<sup>195</sup> Freeburg, Paige A., Patty Van Cappellen, Juliette L. Ratchford, and Sarah A. Schnitker. "Meaning behind the movement: Attributing sacred meaning to fluid and nonfluid arm movements increases self-transcendent positive emotions and buffers the effects of nonfluidity on positive emotions." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (2022).

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 120

suggests that religion offers to uphold one's beliefs as it relates to the Supreme Being, the ceremonies that accompany the sustenance of the trust system.<sup>197</sup>

Religion is additionally considered as the cognizance of responsibilities in accordance with divine commands. Therefore, as soon as one does what should be completed at the proper time and location, one understands one is doing spiritual work. The conceptualization of religion appears to be extra non-secular and related to man's obedience to the teachings and commandments believed to have been exceeded by the Supreme Being.<sup>198</sup> Religion is visualized as the expression of the exterior and indestructible metaphysical cravings of human nature. Their grandeur is that they signify man's complete super sensual complement, all he cannot provide. At the same time, they are the reflections upon a super and one-of-a-kind aircraft of total human beings and cultural epochs. Additional definitions of religion tend to seize man's craving for guidance from the Supreme Being, mainly for these matters he cannot supply for himself. The insatiable nature of human wishes suggests that religion has a distinct region in man's life. Suppose this definition holds or stands up to the crucible of reasoning in phrases of a person's or crew's judgment.<sup>199</sup>

In other developments, religion expresses man's complete cognizance of things. Similarly, religion is the attention that all matters are manifestations of a power transcending knowledge. These definitions appear to convey that man's adherence to spiritual beliefs stems from the acknowledgment of his inadequacies, particularly in phrases of troubles or troubles past his appreciation and control. Man's lack of ability to explain the whole lot is related to the

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 122

<sup>198</sup> Rozuel, Cécile. "20 Psychodynamics and the Field of Management, Spirituality and Religion: Deciphering the Unconscious, Mapping the Soul." *Workplace Spirituality: Making a Difference* 1 (2022): 291.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 56

acknowledgment of a Being who can explain the entirety and, thus, is supremely extra-educated in contrast with man.<sup>200</sup> Religion is considered a trust in an ever-residing God who is divine, policies, and will proceed to rule the universe while keeping ethical linkage ethical with humankind. It is ethics heightened by way of feelings. This implies that religion tends to think about the morality of a motion as properly as the distinction between proper and evil. It is rewarding to notice that some authors reject the authenticity of the existence of religion.

Researchers define religion as the opium of the people and argue that it is more of an exploitative invention that works like a drug. This drug works to beclouds man's rationality, thus, thwarting his reasoning ability.<sup>201</sup>

Man's acknowledgment of religion and trust in the existence of a deity leads to childish neurosis and irrational moves that leave him exploited. Because of the above definitions, religion appears to deal with the inexplicable relationship between man and divine, mundane beings and transcendental beings. Proponents of religion see it as a pressure for proper and order in society. From this standpoint, religion is essential in ensuring the harmonious co-existence of human beings. On the other hand, opponents such as Karl Marx see religion as a pressure for evil. It is extra of an instrument construed and invented to oppress the downtrodden and negative masses. In essence, religion looks to be instrumental in the formation of identity.<sup>202</sup>The function of religions in one-of-a-kind societies and epochs varies. Religion may be an effective pressure in one society, much less effective in others, and some societies would possibly have a negligible influence. The differential position of religion in one-of-a-kind societies and epochs arguably no

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 58

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 63

<sup>202</sup> Pio, Edwina, and Guillermo Merelo. "10 Gender and Diversity: Intersections of Faith, Religion, and Spirituality." *Workplace Spirituality: Making a Difference* 1 (2022): 155.

longer cast off in their entirety that impact religion on identification improvement and evolution over time.

The research argued that identification is used in two specific approaches in the social sciences. The first way of conceptualizing identification offers the concept of immutability or at least the slowly altering core of persona that manifests in all factors of an individual's undertakings—however, the influences of a range of position models. The second way offers the transitory and adaptable self as an individual's transit from one social milieu to another, imparting doubtlessly an extremely special identification as it has been on every occasion.<sup>203</sup> The first conceptualization brings up the problem of an involuntary dimension of identity, while the idea raises the difficulty of adaptability of identity. It is bolstered in important groups, arguably in early life, considering that a vast quantity of existence is lived in the milieu outdoors of the most important groups. In the mild of the two conceptualizations of identity, a wide variety of observations would possibly be noted: both conceptualizations appear gorgeous and consequently relevant. Some institutional spheres, especially in phrases of the family, are naturally vital in the first sense, while different institutional spheres are naturally indispensable in the second sense.<sup>204</sup> Alternative institutional spheres such as faith and ethnicity stand out as examples of the conceptualization of identity. This implies that foremost and secondary organizations play essential positions in forging a character or corporation's identification in a unique factor over time. Household and secondary settings such as faculties or places of business appear to be critical in identification formation.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 156

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 158

<sup>205</sup> Nowak, Leszek. "Religion as a Class Structure: A contribution to non-Marxian historical materialism." In *New Developments in the Theory of the Historical Process*, pp. 3-51. Brill, 2022.

Because of any problems that may additionally be related, it is most probable that society does not categorize the deep feel of cohesion as soon as it did in the past, or if it does, it does so for a constrained time. It is crucial to point out that the church might also be a manifestation of deep-rooted predominant affiliations, particularly in conditions where these ties have factors of intra-group linkages. It has been mentioned that there exists a correlation between faith and ethnicity. This correlation holds whether or not one perceives ethnicity subjectively or objectively, or even when one captures ethnicity, the use of proxies of acculturation or assimilation of a character into a group.<sup>206</sup> For instance, participation in a religion that is attributed to one's ethnic team is discovered to be quite correlated with the diploma of one's ethnic identity. A model of this literature relates to how one-of-a-kind ethnic agencies discover and exercise a single faith differently.<sup>207</sup>

Little doubt exists about the energy of the relationship between faith and ethnicity. The interpretation of the fine correlation is no longer straightforward. An experience of ambiguity dominates as quickly as one tries to provide a coherent purpose for the detected linkage. For instance, it has been argued that the religions of immigrant agencies in America have been no longer genuinely derived from the domestic U.S. alone, but that religion performs an essential dynamic position in the configuration of ethnicity as migrants hooked up a neighborhood in America, even the place none may additionally have existed prior to the prevailing arrangement.<sup>208</sup> In a comparable vein, many argue that, in some instances, it is the case that faith equates to ethnicity, but this does no longer practice for all ethnic groups. Groups such as Amish,

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 25

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>208</sup> Ovsepyan, Mari. "The Anatomy of Unbelief: Towards a Materialist Approach to the Cognitive Science of (Non) Religion." In *Emerging Voices in Science and Theology*, pp. 13-27. Routledge, 2022.

Mormons, Hutterites, and Jews are spiritual corporations that fall below the class of direct linkage between religion and ethnicity. The strong link suggests that the non-existence of religion implies the excessive possibility that the ethnic team would now not exist. In some instances, faith performs a forceful foundational function in the formation of ethnicity, and foundational impact is diluted via different necessary foundational elements such as a special territory foundation and perhaps a special language.<sup>209</sup>

The groups that match these examples include the Greek Orthodox and Dutch Reform. In different instances, the relationship between ethnicity and religion is real, but religion plays a minor position in ethnic identity formation. The above submissions recommend that faith and ethnicity can range in phrases of the power of relationship and in phrases of that means, thereby doubtlessly main to a one-of-a-kind diploma of linkages between the two components.<sup>210</sup> The debate over the authenticity of ethnic and spiritual revival is based on the insights won so far. Overall, while religion and ethnicity would possibly be necessary determinants of identification formation, it is probably the case that they would affect these two elements in identification formation in modern technology that is much less pervasive and forceful than before. Here, the link between religion and identification will be reviewed regarding youth's search for identity formation.<sup>211</sup>

Youth are extra possible to warfare with identification cohesion, as they continuously search for an experience of self. Youth pass through this psychological trip to solidify and apprehend their ride of self as nicely as figuring out and associating themselves with familial,

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>211</sup> Gurba, Ewa, Dorota Czyżowska, Ewa Topolewska-Siedzik, and Jan Ciecuch. "The Importance of Identity Style for the Level of Religiosity in Different Developmental Periods." *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 157.

vocational, and societal roles. The search is characterized by cravings and behaviors that bind youths to or accomplice them with something outdoors and past themselves while collectively shaping their experience of singularity and independence. Religion presents both. This implies that religion may also doubtlessly play a necessary function in youth identity formation.

Similarly, it acknowledges that religion is probable to play a necessary function in a youth's identification formation.<sup>212</sup> Specifically, it is noted that religion is intently related to an imperative section of the socio-historical matrix that gives the wished platform for identity formation. Besides, Gurba contended that religion is and stays the oldest and long-lasting group that creates the enabling surroundings for the improvement of fidelity and attachment to an ideology that arises at the profitable conclusion of the psychological disaster related to identity formation.<sup>213</sup>

Further perception suggests that religion offers each a transcendental point of view that helps to forge ethical beliefs and behavioral modus operandi primarily based on an ideological platform. In addition, spiritual norms are vital in transitioning spiritual beliefs to a neighborhood of believers. This implies that non-secular beliefs, values, and morals assist in empowering youths higher to apprehend the world and their special location in it. It is greater in all likelihood that ideologies generated via religion help to deepen one's perception of occasions and experiences as properly as associating meanings to these occasions or/and experiences.<sup>214</sup> Religion is extra in all likelihood to play a full-size position in identification formation in a subculture where early life confronts an always fluctuating social and political milieu.

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 156

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 157

<sup>214</sup> Casteel, Amy. "Pillars of Salt: Pastoral Care with Adolescents with a Migration Experience." *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 184.

Essentially, the transcendent means derived from spiritual affiliation are essential for childhood identification improvement and well-being. In the absence of the point of view reachable via non-secular beliefs, the worldview it provides, and its function in shaping and guiding behavior, the multiplicity of selections and preferences reachable to contemporary childhood is greater, possibly to breed despair, hopelessness, and confusion.<sup>215</sup>

Religion can probably grant final solutions and viewpoints about elusive problems of existence that may be interesting and pertinent for a youth. The current literature on religion and identification is limited. Research in other parts of the world suggests that religion correlates with identity formation. For instance, religiosity is applicable in explaining dedication and purposefulness in phrases of identity formation.<sup>216</sup>

On associated development, hookup finds proof of a fantastic relationship between excessive identification fulfillment, excessive religiousness ratings, and low extrinsic religiousness scores. This suggests that identification fulfillment is tremendously associated with internalizing spiritual commitment. Proof suggests that non-secular attendance is associated with identification dedication preferences of foreclosures and achievement, while identification diffusion is related to decreased fees of spiritual attendance. On a barely distinctive note, there is proof of a vulnerable correlation between spiritual dedication and identification achievement. On the other hand, identification diffusion is associated with decreased quotes of church and temple commitments. Overall, religion tends to be a key determinant of identification formation, relying on circumstances, the agencies protected, and the length included in the analysis.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Cook, Jeffrey D., and Thomas L. Cook. "Reclaiming faith identity: through progressive journaling." *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* (2022): 1.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 161



## Integration and Transformation

The literature of Loren Townsend ties in much of what pastoral counselors do in terms of integrating science and theology and transforming relationships. Research provides evidence that religious pastors unequally counsel mental health clients, citing a lack of knowledge, skills, adequate training, and awareness.<sup>218</sup> Townsend suggested that the combination of spirituality and psychotherapy, although their meanings were different, still held to the pastoral concepts of counseling.<sup>219</sup> In addition, studies show that mental health professionals severely lack training and development in administering counseling on issues of religion. The same lack of training is present in pastoral counselors who are not properly trained on modern mental health techniques.<sup>220</sup> Townsend indicated that this has much to do with the cultural differences in people.<sup>221</sup> The idea of separating boundaries between religion, spirituality, and psychotherapy became an important concept involving integration as they all have individual values, are relevant to the client, and help transform relationships.<sup>222</sup>

The work that pastoral counselors do involves establishing therapeutic relations with others to foster positive change in their lives. Townsend added that, in most cases, the

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<sup>218</sup> Karadzhev, Dimitar and Ross White. "Between the "Whispers of the Devil" and "the Revelation of the Word": Christian Clergy's Mental Health Literacy and Pastoral Support for BME Congregants." *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 22, no. 2 (2020): 147-172.

<sup>219</sup> Townsend, Loren. *Introduction to pastoral counseling*. (Abingdon Press, 2009): 75.

<sup>220</sup> Motalová, Katarína and Tomáš Řiháček. "Religiosity Gap Reversed: How Religious Counselors' Belief System Presents when Working with Clients in a Non-Religious Environment." *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 44, no. 3 (2016): 277.

<sup>221</sup> Townsend, *Introduction to Counseling*, 76

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

therapeutic relationship did more for the client than the act of providing therapy.<sup>223</sup> The ability to recognize that as clients embark upon counseling sessions brings their systems of belief, emotional framework, and history.<sup>224</sup> Counselors must develop pastoral presence or align their identity to the client's style to formulate successful relationships. Townsend articulated that more than 50% of the effort to transform the lives of others lies with the individual. They have to be willing to change.<sup>225</sup> The other 50%, Townsend contended, involves renewing the mind, practicing spiritual disciplines, and having faith that the love of God will induce the change in lives that is desperately needed.

In summary, pastoral counseling is built on the past's perspectives and reflects today's contemporary perspectives. Although psychologists Freud and Jung did not agree on many terms, they did agree that religion, if integrated with psychology, can be beneficial in counseling. Contemporary authors Townsend, Clinton, and Hawkins agreed that identity development, understanding religion, and spirituality, and the transformation of lives are the key components that make pastoral counseling relevant today because these are the concepts that develop strength in counselors that gives them the ability to impact the lives of the people they serve.

### **Theological Foundations**

Pastoral counseling, an extension of pastoral care, is a vital ministry within the church, no matter where it is located. At times, those who are part of congregations experience crises, loss, loneliness, anxiety, depression, divorce, and family issues. The church provides pastoral care

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<sup>223</sup> Motalová, Katarína and Tomáš Řiháček. "Religiosity Gap Reversed: How Religious Counselors' Belief System Presents when Working with Clients in a Non-Religious Environment." *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 44, no. 3 (2016): 277.

<sup>224</sup> Townsend, *Introduction to Counseling*, 77

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, 78

based on Jesus' life and mission. His ministry is a paradigm for one to follow in pastoral work and a gentle benchmark by which people self-access.<sup>226</sup> God's knowledge comes from many places, including the created order, which bears witness to the Creator's glory. It considers God's immensity in connection to the intricate order, design, and balance that speak to a purposeful Creator.<sup>227</sup> This understanding assures people that the universe and everything in it is rational, ordered, and predictable. People are capable of conducting scientific research. God's knowledge and epistemic consequences are central to the Christian Theology of God, but it also extends to God's self-revelation in the Bible. As a result, the theological foundation of pastoral counseling is then heavily rooted in the doctrine of Christ.<sup>228</sup>

### **The Doctrine of Christ**

There has never been a person who has elicited so many self-imposed questions as Jesus Christ. Although disciples struggled to understand him, they realized Christ was no ordinary man, for they had seen and heard too much to believe otherwise.<sup>229</sup> People around Israel testified of his presence, home, and miracles during his three-year public ministry. Although there is only one God, he is shown in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ's humanity meant He spent living on Earth the same way normal people do. Hunger, thirst, loneliness, misery, suffering, and death were all part of his human experience. The only difference is that he could do it without committing a sin.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Clinton, Tim, and Ron Hawkins. *The popular encyclopedia of Christian counseling: An indispensable tool for helping people with their problems*, 430.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 31

<sup>229</sup> LeDoux, Jeannie. "Understanding Spirituality and Faith Practices: Advocating for the Whole Person." *Professional case management* 24, no. 3 (2019): 165.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 166

It is in those times of suffering that God provides great comfort. Second Corinthians 1:3-5 talks about the God of all comfort, stating, "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts all in times of trouble so that comfort can be provided to others. When they are troubled, we can give them the same comfort God gave us. For the more we suffer for Christ, God will shower us with his comfort through Christ."

In a commentary by J. B. Phillips, it is explained that because Paul views the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as all being comforters, God is full of comfort, strength, and assistance for others in every aspect of His being. God comforts people for various reasons, one of which is to enable them to comfort others. Through others, God's comfort can be given and received.<sup>231</sup>

Jesus had posed the essential question of all, and Peter's confession ensured that he and anyone who joined him would have an eternal relationship with Christ. As J. I. Packer put it in his commentary on the relevance of our relationship with Christ, "The core of Christianity is neither a set of beliefs nor a set of behaviors. It is the experience of being in real-time connection with Christianity's living founder, Jesus Christ."<sup>232</sup> Through the work of the Holy Spirit, a sinner who believes in Jesus Christ is born anew. That same spirit then empowers that believing sinner to engage in the process of transformation that results in Christ being made visible in the redeemed sinner's life and witness, working through the scriptures and a community of believers.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Phillips, John Bertram. *New Testament in Modern English*. Simon and Schuster, (1980), 310.

<sup>232</sup> Zachhuber, Johannes. "Conclusion: Christ Alone and the Doctrine of Christ." *The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology Series* 48 (2017): 130-137.

<sup>233</sup> Al-Shawabkeh, Islam AbdulWahab. "The doctrine of sin and its impact on the Christian view of man." *Jordan Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 4 (2018): 2.

For repentant sinners in his kindness, Paul had spent considerable time detailing what God had done and will continue to do. In Romans 12:1, Paul told those whom God's mercy has touched that the most appropriate act of worship is to give themselves as living sacrifices to God.<sup>234</sup> A commentary by J. B. Phillips explained how people are no longer to think or act like non-Christians. Their brains must be changed to perceive matters differently, God's perspective. They will better understand God's will as they learn to think more Christianly, and their behaviors will be more attractive to God.<sup>235</sup> The pastoral counselor's ability to engage in the ministry of spreading reconciliation, which the Father so sincerely desires for everyone, is made possible by the concept of Christ. Internally, God's unparalleled grace forgives our sins, heals our wounds, and allows us to make peace with God and others.<sup>236</sup>

There is a specific scripture that conveys a clear idea of what church leaders are charged with doing and in some way reveals early church practices: 2 Timothy 3:16 states that "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make others realize what is wrong in their lives. It teaches people to do what is right."<sup>237</sup> So then all of these things are added to the individual's life; exhorting, rebuking, correcting, and training, all to provide practical support through the interpretation and application of God's Word. A commentary by Robert Yarbrough stated that this scripture summarizes what real Christians think about the Bible. Referring to the Old and New Testaments, the Word of God has been spoken, and the Word of God is true. If people are to do anything as believers, they must get into the Word of

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<sup>234</sup> Romans 12: 1 (NIV)

<sup>235</sup> Phillips, John Bertram. *New Testament in Modern English*. Simon and Schuster, (1980), 308.

<sup>236</sup> Tomlinsonz, Anne. "Finding Ourselves Lost: Ministry in an Age of Overwhelm. *Anglican Theological Review* 102, no. 2 (2020): 327-328.

<sup>237</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

God, and it is through His words, they become trained to do what is necessary to survive.<sup>238</sup> This is the essence of pastoral counseling and what those in the profession strive to instill into people that seek help. Pastoral counselors are equipped to deal with broken people by sharing a message of redemption and restoration meant to provide hope and life where there was once darkness and pain.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Pastoral counseling is critical in ministry because people are in desperate need of being healed. Today's pastoral counselors are confronted with a variety of counseling frameworks. The discipline of pastoral counseling is quickly moving toward differential treatment theories. The pastoral counselor's attempt to assist individuals with their problems has developed into a controversy over how much and what kind of theories to add to Scripture to provide meaningful support.<sup>239</sup> This research did not seek to develop its theoretical approach to pastoral counseling; instead, it constructed conclusions based on pre-existing theories that are now being used in various fields of counseling to aid in counseling procedures. The surprising idea is how counselors rely on theories about people and understanding their ways of being, how counselor seeks to intervene, and countless efforts to help others as the primary source of support.<sup>240</sup> Theories such as the person-centered theory, cognitive and behavioral theories, and psychoanalysis theories all play a vital role in understanding people, how they think, react, and

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<sup>238</sup> Yarbrough, Robert W. "The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary." *Trinity Journal* 23, no. 2 (2002): 263.

<sup>239</sup> Clinton, Tim, and Ron Hawkins. *The popular encyclopedia of Christian counseling: An indispensable tool for helping people with their problems*, 470.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 471

how those things influence what people believe and prove to be a determining factor in the decisions that are made.

### **The Person-centered Theory**

The Person-centered theory (PCT) was founded by Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist who thought everyone has needs that must be met for wellness or well-being. Therefore, the PCT was created using a humanistic approach to psychology, and the primary focus was on the client rather than the therapist. Carl Rogers believed that when applying the person-centered approach, the client should concentrate on the present and the future. It is through this process that the client can learn more about themselves.<sup>241</sup> This theory recognizes that each person has the capacity and desire for personal growth and change, rather than viewing people as fundamentally broken, with challenging behaviors and thoughts that require treatment. In his description of human desire, Rogers believed that living organisms strive for balance, order, and increasing complexity. People can self-understand and modify their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed actions, and these concepts can create psychological reactions.<sup>242</sup>

Rogers also felt everyone could identify the best solutions and make necessary life changes. The PCT is a shift from the therapist's traditional role as an expert and leader toward a process that allows clients to view their own experiences as a healing platform. It is successful only if requirements are met that include unconditional positive regard. Therapists must be empathic and nonjudgmental to communicate their feelings of understanding and fully trust their

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<sup>241</sup> Harrison, Mark T. "Person-centered encounter and its facilitation in terms of fundamental theory." *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* 19, no. 3 (2020): 230.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 233

clients, encouraging them to make their own decisions and choices. Therapists with empathetic understanding fully comprehend and embrace their clients' thoughts and feelings. The term congruence means that therapists do not exude an air of authority or professional superiority but rather present themselves as genuine people.<sup>243</sup>

These are the phrases used to define Carl Rogers' therapy method. The distinctions between the requirements can be extremely perplexing as they demonstrate a progression to the approach. *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts in Practice* was published by Carl Rogers in 1942. He introduced the concept of non-directive therapy at this point. It was called non-directive therapy since the therapist's job was to follow the client's lead instead of the therapist steering the course of therapy by employing interpretative methods or reinforcement regimens to find solutions for the patient.<sup>244</sup>

Rogers released Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) in 1951, over a decade after his 1942 work on counseling and psychotherapy, in which he presented his more refined theories. The word termed "client-centered" by Rogers had superseded non-directive.<sup>245</sup> The terms non-directive and client-centered relate to two sides of the same coin. Whereas non-directive refers to what the therapist does not prefer, which is to challenge the client's action over their feelings and perceptions, client-centered refers to what the therapist wants to do, which is to support the client's agency and follow their lead in terms of understanding what hurts and what is needed. Rogers began implementing his ideas acquired from his research in the following years.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 235

<sup>244</sup> Crisp, Ross. "Person-Centered Rehabilitation Counseling: Revisiting the legacy of Carl Rogers." *The Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counseling* 17, no. 1 (2011): 26.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 27

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 27



Person-centered therapy evolved incrementally because Rogers did not claim to offer a complete paradigm. What is now called PCT is seen by some counselors as a foundational approach on which other theories can build. Humanistic in philosophy, PCT posits that people are generally trustworthy, capable of self-reflection, and autonomous growth towards self-actualization. In the right environment, people live up to their abilities. A person-centered therapist or counselor primarily provides a positive environment for the client through relationships. Counselors must be congruent, authentic, or genuine, demonstrate unconditional positive regard, and provide accurate empathic understanding.<sup>247</sup> With such a supportive relationship, a client is sure to learn about themselves. Rather than focusing on the client's complaints, person-centered therapists focus on the client. Therapy aims not to solve problems but to help people improve in facing their problems. Counselors must be present with their clients and generally focus immediately.

Person-centered theory posits that the client can be fully realized when the individual is exposed to unconditional positive regard. Unconditional positive regard means that the counselor shows a positive attitude and acceptance for change and progress to occur. The counselor accepts the client unconditionally and respects and cares for the client. The therapist does not have to agree with the client readily.<sup>248</sup> According to PCT research, a counselor can accept someone as an important and unique human without necessarily endorsing all of their actions rather than contradicting them. Unconditional positive regard allows clients to express what they think without feeling judged, and this helps facilitate the process of change by showing that they can

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<sup>247</sup> Thorne, Brian. *Person-Centered Counseling: Therapeutic and spiritual dimensions*. London: Whurr Publishers, 1991.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 56

be accepted.<sup>249</sup> The client is free to examine all thoughts and feelings, positive or negative, without fear of rejection or disapproval. Many counselors respond to Roger's call to be genuine, accepting, and empathetic, using other techniques and methods to encourage client growth. Person-centered therapy is often used in crisis interventions and to train staff in service-oriented areas. Person-centered therapy can provide helpful tips for building relationships with others.<sup>250</sup>

Of course, the Bible welcomes authenticity because we must be honest in everything we do. We are called to love others, not based on what they do, but on God's unconditional love for us and taking the time to hear another's story and respond accurately with care and love. Person-centered therapy can be unconditional positive consideration. Christians react with a balance of love and truth.<sup>251</sup> In pastoral counseling, specifically for the purpose of this research, people wanted to be open to the counseling experience, being fully self-aware and willing to move toward growth. However, the reality was that each person experienced counseling differently based on their past experiences and at The Highway to Heaven Ministry. One of the primary goals of pastoral counseling is to help clients develop their paths to have a greater sense of self-worth.

### **Cognitive-behavioral Theory**

The Cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT) is based on the premise that an individual recognizes the thoughts and behaviors that influence and cause their moods and intervene in those thoughts and behaviors that affect change in lives. The concept that conduct can be learned

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 61

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>251</sup> Ephesians 4:15

is at the heart of CBT.<sup>252</sup> A counselor utilizing this theory is more concerned with a client's current condition and obscured thinking than the client's overall history. They implement a variety of behavioral and cognitive psychology techniques to help clients change their thinking patterns in ways that allow individuals to maintain a certain level of control. Maintaining control of their own body, soul, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, either with or without the help of others, transform lives. Commitment to hearing the truth is essential for altering people's thinking patterns and allowing them to address the true issues in their life. Pastoral counseling helps individuals to walk in truth continuously. It is an experience requiring people to be humble to learn who they are and who God is.<sup>253</sup>

CBT that includes Christian counseling with a therapist is called Religious Cognitive-behavioral therapy (RCBT), which helps individuals cope with irrational thoughts about religious issues, such as guilt or religious doubt. In RCBT, religious concepts are used to promote healthy thinking and behavior.<sup>254</sup> Clients are encouraged to use their religious beliefs to turn depressive feelings into a positive worldview. This kind of therapy also helps in understanding individual faith. This aligns with the idea of strengthening virtues such as hope, meaning, optimism, and purpose. RCBT therapy adheres to the same principles and styles as traditional CBT and uses the same tools.<sup>255</sup> A hallmark of RCBT is the explicit use of the client's religious traditions as an important basis for identifying and replacing unnecessary thoughts and behaviors to reduce the symptoms of depression. As clients discuss responses to symptoms and signs, the therapist looks

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<sup>252</sup> Klimstra, Theo A., and Jaap JA Denissen. "A theoretical framework for the associations between identity and psychopathology." *Developmental Psychology* 53, no. 11 (2017): 2052.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 2052

<sup>254</sup> Tan, Siang-Yang. "Addressing religion and spirituality from a cognitive-behavioral perspective." (2013).

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 35

at the material from the perspective of a traditional CBT model and listens with a third ear to see if it can be constructed from an RCBT model.<sup>256</sup>

CBT encompasses several therapeutic approaches based on the basic principle that human thoughts and beliefs are key determinants of emotional and / or behavioral responses to life events. CBT is the process of responding to these situations. In addition, the immediate and rapid interpretation of life's events is influenced by a set of fundamental beliefs that represent a more central, stable, fundamental, and ultimate view of the individual, others, and the world at large. These core beliefs develop at an early age and often reflect mental beliefs and expressions acquired through early interactions with parents, families, educators, schools, communities, and others. An important influence on forming one's beliefs and values is the potential influence of culture, including religious beliefs. Given the central importance of human belief systems in shaping responses in Cognitive-behavioral therapy, Johnson et al. recommended evaluating those beliefs in the context of the client's cultural environment to assess them sensitively and accurately.<sup>257</sup>

Religious Cognitive-behavioral therapy focuses not only on cognition but also on behaviors that contribute to depression. Regarding the behavioral part of therapy, religious beliefs, such as in traditional CBT, can be an effective motivator to support the client's efforts to create positive behavioral patterns to combat depression. For example, most religions require forgiveness, gratitude, generosity, and altruism, all considered in Religious Cognitive-behavioral therapy. Clients are instructed daily to practice a variety of specific religious practices, including

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<sup>256</sup> Johnson, Shannon, Lindsay Rollins Heaton, and Patricia A. Galan-Cisneros. "The use of spiritually integrated psychotherapies in mental health treatment centers." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* (2022): 9.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 12

meditation and Bible recitation. This means that everyday experiences have the potential to affect psychological abilities and the ability to grow spiritually.<sup>258</sup>

In other words, spiritual growth means that you can overcome depression. One of the strengths of RCBT is that it combines CBT techniques with the structures of daily spiritual activities, prayer practices, and rituals. Daily rituals are considered important components of spiritual growth in religious traditions, such as prayer, a major source of inspiration. It is used in RCBT to support the development of psychological skills, such as easy access to learned emotions, difficult thinking, and the ability to seek support.<sup>259</sup>

Religious Cognitive-behavioral therapy encourages clients to use the many religious/spiritual resources available. This includes meditation, social support for church members, dialogue with religious leaders, participation in religious groups, reading religious literature, reviewing religious programs, attending charitable events, and participating in religious activities or events sponsored by religious organizations.<sup>260</sup> RCBT identifies people who participate in religious communities and supports patients. For example, they may spend time together and pray. This is different from simply seeking support from others in the religious community, as religious traditions usually encourage followers to live their religion by supporting and caring for others. Participating in this community can lead to increased social support and altruistic behavior to help neutralize negative emotions.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Sudak, Donna M. "Cognitive behavioral therapy for depression." *Psychiatric Clinics* 35, no. 1 (2012):99.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 102

<sup>260</sup>Koenig, Harold G., Michelle J. Pearce, Bruce Nelson, and Alaattin Erkanli. "Effects on daily spiritual experiences of religious versus conventional cognitive behavioral therapy for depression." *Journal of religion and health* 55, no. 5 (2016): 1763.

<sup>261</sup> Prout, Tracy A., Danielle Magaldi, Elena E. Kim, and Judy Cha. "Christian therapists and their clients." *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1-12.

A therapist who wants to recommend RCBT to a client must first be familiar with conventional CBT. Then they need to learn how to effectively, sensitively, and ethically integrate the client's religious beliefs and experiences into the CBT model. It is a form of cultural competence and lifelong learning and improvement process. Much has been written about the need for integrative spiritual and religious psychotherapy based on empirically proven theories.<sup>262</sup> Interventional studies have shown that combining clients' spiritual and religious beliefs in therapy is more effective in reducing depression than secular therapy for religious clients. There have been few empirical studies examining the effectiveness of religiously integrated psychotherapy, and so far, no passive mental health interventions have been developed for medically ill people of religious beliefs.<sup>263</sup>

Researchers recommend RCBT as a way to treat depressed patients of religious beliefs, and it is believed to be a new strategy for reducing depressive thoughts and behaviors. The purpose of RCBT is to use the patient's personal religious traditions as a basis for identifying and replacing depressive thoughts and to emphasize that religious beliefs and practices can be used as a means of reducing depressive symptoms and alleviating positive emotions.<sup>264</sup> Some of the main tools of RCBT are the Bible, which renews the human mind, prayer for contemplation, spiritual testing through religious teachings, participation in religious practices, and participation in religious communities. Helping clients to integrate their religious beliefs, behaviors, and resources competently and appropriately is the heart and soul of RCBT. Depression in people

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 9

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>264</sup> Saritoprak, Seyma N., and Dorothy Yun. "David H. Rosmarin: Spirituality, Religion, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy: A Guide for Clinicians." (2019): 129-130.

with the disease has no cultural or religious boundaries.<sup>265</sup> Therefore, this treatment was developed for the world's five major religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism) and has a high potential to help people with depression from different religious groups. Although RCBT is sensitive to the specifics of religious traditions, it is also broad enough to apply to many of the world's religions and the different beliefs of each religious tradition.<sup>266</sup>

Given the popularity of CBT among mental health providers, the growing interest of professional organizations in religious issues, and the importance of religion in the general population, research on mental health is likely to be needed.<sup>267</sup> Healthcare professionals who use the CBT model can incorporate religion into their work with clients. Even more so when it comes to CBT, the topic of when and how to incorporate religion into therapy is highly delicate because it is based on logical positivism that reduces knowledge to concrete results. Although the empiricism of CBT has been admired by the scientific community and has helped promote evidence-based practice, it raises questions about how CBT can address fewer tangible aspects of coping with life.<sup>268</sup>

### **Psychoanalysis Theory**

Psychoanalysis is a collection of psychological theories and practices that originated from the work of Sigmund Freud. The concept that everyone has unconscious thoughts, feelings, memories, and wants is at the heart of the psychoanalysis theory (PT). It argues that by bringing

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 130

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 130

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 135

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 140

the unconscious content into awareness, people might experience catharsis and acquire insight into their current state of mind.<sup>269</sup> In psychoanalysis, an individual's conduct is determined by their unconscious impulses. All things outside of individual consciousness, such as early childhood memories, secret desires, and hidden drives, are considered part of the unconscious mind. The unconscious, according to Freud, contains things that are unpleasant or even socially unacceptable. Because these things may cause grief or conflict, people tend to bury them into the subconscious, unaware of how these ideas impact thoughts and behaviors.<sup>270</sup> Pastoral counseling is when many people's unconscious mindsets are unpacked, so developing a working knowledge of and fluency in a variety of PT of understanding the conscious and unconscious mind can influence the interpretations of religious concerns.<sup>271</sup>

Speech therapy, free association, resistant analysis, transfer, and countertransference are among the tiers of PT, which are, in general, primarily based on Sigmund Freud's work. As therapists and clients attempt to explore, test, and tackle difficult emotional problems, this method takes time and requires a couple of sessions.<sup>272</sup> Speech therapy is the initial step of PT, in which the therapist and the client speak about what is going on in their lives. The therapist makes inquiries and approves the client's categorical ideas and emotions by asking questions and listening. This will increase the therapist-patient relationships, increase faith and recognize challenges as they develop.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Barglow, Raymond. "Why Freud Matters: Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, and the Skeptical Humanist Tradition." *Skeptic* [Altadena, CA] 23, no. 1 (2018): 53+. Gale In Context: Biography (accessed June 27, 2021).

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, 113

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, 115

<sup>272</sup> Wallerstein, Robert S. "Psychoanalytic understanding and psychoanalytic therapy: Veikko Tähkä's contributions." In *Power of Understanding*, pp. 1-28. Routledge, 2018.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, 15



Free association is the second step of PT. This means the individual can express whatever one wants without fear of being restricted. This can be difficult for some people who do not speak fluently or are not used to expressing themselves verbally. The therapist must pay close attention to grasp what the patient is saying and how to fix the situation.

Resistance analysis is the third step of PT. This indicates that the therapist is looking for evidence of patient resistance. Certain topics may be taboo for some people. It is possible that they do not grasp what the therapist is saying. They may believe the therapist is incorrect about their feelings and thoughts. All of these are symptoms of resistance, and both the patient and the doctor should be aware of them.

Metastasis and countertransference are the fourth and final stages of psychoanalytic therapy. When a patient views the therapist as a specific person at different stages in their lives or as a symbolic image of another person, this is known as a transfer. Countertransference arises when the therapist has a love attraction to the patient, and the patient cannot help him properly. There are many terms used to describe Freudian psychology. Essentially it is a psychology of the opposing forces inherent in humankind's dualistic nature, whatever label it is given. The mind's contradictory dualism can be divided into conscious and unconscious dualisms. The person as a biological animal and the person as a social being can be dichotomized in terms of human dualism in society.

Freud's understanding of neurosis arose from his research into hysteria and hypnosis. In these investigations, he discovered that certain undesirable events and thoughts people had consciously encountered were occasionally repressed into the unconscious mind. These sexual experiences directly impacted the person's behavior and resulted in hysterical symptoms. Freud's theory of neurotic development was founded on these notions. As a result, the hysterical neurotic

became the acknowledged paradigm for Freudians' understanding, diagnosis, and treatment of maladjusted patients in the early 1900s. The early investigations of hysteria and hypnosis gave rise to psychoanalysis methodologies. Hypnosis effectively alleviated hysterical symptoms in certain situations, but not all of Freud's theories.

The therapist's view of psychoanalytic remedy is based on the premise that the therapist and the affected person can recognize and act constructively in the patient's life as long as the patient's psychodynamics can be elucidated through following his or her relationship. The therapist uses all the effective equipment that a psychoanalytic device needs to provide. In current practice, therapists do more than train clients to expand on their childhood experiences and fantasies.<sup>274</sup> Rather, the psychoanalytic therapist works with the client to discover what they are presently experiencing and discovering while in the therapy room. They declare that PT now offers more than any different therapy. According to research, a psychoanalytic cure can be understood by inspecting empathy, intuition, and introspection. It is defined that empathy is a shape of emotional knowing, central to the psychotherapeutic process, whereby a therapist's regular routines and capability are perceived and share the client's experiences effectively and cognitively.<sup>275</sup>

Many therapists describe instinct as the organization, in the therapist's mind, of the myriad of statistics communicated by means of the client into significant configurations, the scope of consciousness of the therapist but made mindful via unconscious intellectual operations. The therapist becomes conscious of such unconscious fabric via introspection, a method of

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<sup>274</sup> Tudor, Keith. "Cocreative Counseling." *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling* 58, no. 2 (2019): 135.

<sup>275</sup> Jastrzębski, Andrzej. "Models of Psycho-Spiritual Care: Responding to the Spiritual Needs of Our Contemporaries." *Studia Elckie* 23, no. 2 (2021): 173.

intellectually free association whereby the therapist consciously synthesizes the client's gathered communications.<sup>276</sup> These introspections are no longer communicated to the client. A substitute is used to recognize and assist the client in achieving the perception, and ego electricity wanted to cope with any emotional traumas or dilemmas introduced to him or her to a remedy in the first place. The conversation of empathy at once to the customer has been identified and encouraged by using many contemporary psychoanalysts as a prerequisite to nice psychotherapy.<sup>277</sup>

According to psychologists, the character evolves out of the interplay between inherent organic elements and the vicissitudes of experience. The psychoanalytic persona concept is based on various necessary principles. The identification exists at the start and is the supply of psychic power and instincts, the most vital of which is intercourse and aggression.<sup>278</sup> Energy in the identity is cellular, can be effortlessly discharged through motion, and want fulfillment. One feature of the identification is fulfilling the pleasure principle, a fundamental motivating pressure that minimizes anxiety through searching for pleasure and averting pain. Identity is the newborn's reservoir of emotional energy. A fundamental characteristic of the identification is to hold the client in a country of tension-free comfort. When a baby is hungry, the identification seeks instantaneous gratification to fix the child to a nation of comfort. Frustration happens when the infant's oral erotic desires are not satisfied at once.<sup>279</sup>

The journey of overcoming early frustration initiates gaining knowledge of and development. The sucking intuition serves some necessary purposes. It satisfies the oral erotic

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 177

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 179

<sup>278</sup> Hattangadi, Vidya. "Id, Ego and Superego of Human Behavior defined by Freud." *Journal of Commerce and Management Thought* 12, no. 2and3 (2021): 105.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 106

need for stimulation and satisfaction. Because of this, a cathexis, the awareness of one's psychic electricity on some person, thing, idea, or element of self, develops between the infant's want for safety and delight and the mother, the mother's breasts, or the bottle. The infant's early experience of locking the mouth onto the nipple may serve as the first 'click' of perception and, thereby, the root of all later learning. Thus identity is the energizer and the beginning factor of the person's personality.<sup>280</sup>

The ego is a complicated psychological company that acts as a go-between between the identity and the exterior world. It has each protective and independent functions. It is no longer current at the start but is developed as the individual interacts with the environment. The ego operates via the actuality principle to feature as this intermediary.<sup>281</sup> The truth precept postpones the discharge of power until an object that will fulfill the need or decrease tension is found. Unlike the id, the ego can tolerate anxiety and lengthen gratification. The fact precept is served by the secondary process, which consists of discovering or producing facts via a sketch developed with concept and reason. The secondary system interacts with the surroundings and develops the ego.<sup>282</sup> The aid of heredity and maturational processes additionally influences the strain of improvement.<sup>283</sup> The ego is the foundation of the persona because it controls and governs the identification and the superego and keeps interplay with the exterior world.

The superego is the person's moral, social, and judicial departments. It represents the best rather than the real. The superego strives for perfection alternatively to pleasure or reality. It

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 107

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>282</sup> Ullah, F, M. Khan, and R. A. Y. Zai. "The Comparison of Sigmund Freud's Id, the." (2021).

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 75

develops due to the desire to manipulate the aggression of consequences when desires are no longer satisfied at once. The superego develops from the ego by assimilating parental requirements and eventually substitutes parental authority with its internal authority. It takes over the governance of the psyche and mediates between the character and the environment.<sup>284</sup> It acts as the ethical and social gatekeeper and keeps the person's baser instincts from going for walks rampant. The superego has two subsystems—the ego perfect and the conscience. The ego is perfection, composed of the child's conceptions of what the mother and father consider perfection or the ideal person. These conceptions are set up via experiencing parental acceptance. The sense of right and wrong is composed of the child's conceptions of what is regarded as morally horrific and is set up thru experiencing admonitions, punishment, or lack of acceptance.<sup>285</sup>

In conclusion, counseling generally has a spiritual premise, as confirmed by the work of Freud and Jung, who did extensive research on the unconscious mind. Much of their research contends that spiritual ideas influence psychological views and vice versa, so it is nearly impossible to tell them apart. Counseling and counseling theories serve as a major guide for observing those ideas, as they influence emotions that cause people to react. Furthermore, it is increasingly recognized that spirituality and religion are not always synonymous and that spirituality can be defined in various ways. Human beings have the predisposition to generate meaning, characterized in various ways as God, wholeness, or oneness. Ultimately, it appears to be part of human nature to conceive a higher power, regardless of definition.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, 80

<sup>286</sup> Klimstra, Theo A., and Jaap JA Denissen. "A theoretical framework for the associations between identity and psychopathology." *Developmental Psychology* 53, no. 11 (2017): 2054.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

People employ many methods to decrease the effect or impact of trauma in times of crisis to help with coping. In difficult circumstances, one of the most commonly recognized techniques used by people worldwide is religion. It has been the primary source for thousands of years. For many people, particularly in the African American community, religion is the most significant factor in coping with difficult situations because it allows people to rely on God's help which in part is one of the primary factors that led to the development of what is now known as pastoral counseling. As it relates to mental illness, it would seem that more African Americans would instill their trust in that pastoral counseling, but that is not the case, and this research seeks to find out why.

The conflicting views have sparked a long-standing debate. Researchers agree that seeking clinical help instead of spiritual help is a personal choice. Because religion and spirituality can be incorporated into counseling, it is difficult to say what common variables influence clients' decisions to seek clinical counseling rather than pastoral counseling. This chapter will ultimately seek to ascertain information that will help the researcher understand what drives people and their overall beliefs about pastoral counseling. This chapter will describe the study's research methods, the intervention approach, and the rationale for the sample selection. In addition, this chapter will also include a sample of the data collecting tool utilized by the researcher, explain the data collection process, explain the analysis of the varied responses among the respondents within the sampled group, and results from procedures.

### **Intervention Design**

The intervention used in this study took on the interpretative research design. The primary issue this research sought to answer was what drives people, specifically in the African

American community, to choose the clinical counseling method to address their mental health needs over pastoral counseling. Interpretive research can result in useful descriptions and interpretations of social processes and focuses on theories people use to explain their behavior that is exposed through interpretive engagement.<sup>287</sup> The researcher in this study helped participants uncover such assumed meanings and reformulate them into better constructs that improved their conscious experiences of the world. The design was a method of researching social life based on the notion that the meaning of human activity is embedded in the action itself.<sup>288</sup> This strategy was used to grasp the problem at hand better. These new ways of looking at things were not meant to be intellectualized, reasonable answers; rather, they were real-world structures that helped people reshape the actions and behaviors that affected their lives.

In the sampling process, the researcher collected a sufficient sample representative of the target population by identifying The Highway to Heaven Ministry members aged 18 to 88. The researcher identified eligible participants by selecting an initial group from the church based on age, level of education, and religiosity (see Table 1). The snowballing technique allowed selected participants to identify other potential members with similar characteristics to participate in the study. This technique predicted non-responsiveness during the data-collecting phase but guaranteed that the target audience has common interests with the problem.

<b>Demographic Category</b>	<b>Demographic Information</b>
<b>Age</b>	
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GED</li> <li>• High School</li> <li>• Graduate</li> </ul>

<sup>287</sup> Stringer, Ernest T. *Action research*. Sage publications, 2014.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 136



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some College</li> <li>• College Graduate</li> </ul>
<b>Length of Time Affiliated with Highway to Heaven Ministry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0-2 Years</li> <li>• 2-3 Years</li> <li>• 3-5 Years</li> </ul>
<b>Level of Religiosity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently Attend Church</li> <li>• Often Pray or Attend Bible Study</li> <li>• Regular Tithing</li> </ul>

Table 1

The researcher produced an informed consent form to go along with the questionnaire, which was the primary data collection tool in the study (see Appendix A). This consent form provided participants with important information such as the researcher's identity, an explanation of what they were being asked to do, by whom, and for what reason.<sup>289</sup> The informed consent form also notified the participant whom to contact if they had any questions or concerns about the study and any risks they could take by participating. During the procedure, the researcher advised the participants of their rights, including the right to review materials and withdraw from the study. This form indicated if the study utilized the participants' real names, other names, or pseudonyms. The form stated how the study's findings would be distributed, as well as whether or not participants could expect any cash or other benefits in exchange for their participation. Finally, this form made it clear that whether or not individuals chose to participate in the study,

<sup>289</sup> Davison, Robert M., Maris G. Martinsons, and Julien Malaurent. "Research Perspectives: Improving Action Research by Integrating Methods." *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* 22, no. 3 (2021): 1.

they would not be judged.<sup>290</sup> The informed consent form was written in plain English, so participants understood it without fear of coercion or improper influence. Each participant was given a 24-hour to 48-hour window to confirm participation. This research used qualitative approaches to collect and evaluate data in order to gain a better understanding of people's patterns and the usage of religion to treat concerns such as mental health. The researcher employed a range of instruments to aid in analyzing and observing the data acquired. These methods were combined to build a triangulation analysis, including using a journal to document each step of the research process. The researcher conducted interviews before the research began and again after the research was completed (Appendices C and E).<sup>291</sup>

The researcher created a printed, double-sided questionnaire. A data sheet was attached to one side of the questionnaire, requesting respondents to reveal their age, degree of education, and level of religiosity (see Appendix B). The opposite side of the questionnaire included 11 open-ended, easy-to-understand questions that allowed the researcher to learn more about the participant's beliefs, values, and religious experiences from their perspectives, allowing respondents to express their true feelings (see Appendix D).

The researcher established a seven to fourteen-day preliminary testing period to circulate the questionnaire, which served multiple purposes for the study that included ensuring that questions worked as intended, that the people who were most likely to answer the questions were familiar with them, reducing sampling error, and increasing questionnaire response rates. The researcher enlisted the cooperation of five local African American ministers to serve on a panel to conduct the preliminary testing (see Appendix C). Each minister was reimbursed for their

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 89

<sup>291</sup> Zuber-Skerritt, Ortrun, ed. *Action research for change and development*. Routledge, 2021, p 101.

time. The researcher introduced each question to the panel during the early testing phase and invited the ministers to collaborate and participate in the discussion. The researcher then interviewed the panel and changed the questions based on their suggestions.

To begin the data-gathering process, the researcher distributed the questionnaire over fourteen days utilizing two traditional collection strategies. In the first strategy, copies of the questionnaire were placed on a table next to a drop box in the church lobby so that participants could collect them at their leisure and anonymously drop their completed responses in the dropbox. The Highway to Heaven Ministry's minister issued weekly announcements promoting research participation and reaffirming the research deadlines. In the second conventional method, the researcher set up a table in the church's parking lot, which occurred during both weeks of the data collection period. There were copies of the questionnaire on the table and a dropbox where all completed questionnaires were stored. The researcher presented at each tabling session to answer any questions the participants may have had about the study.

The researcher studied the data in depth, assigning codes to define the content to analyze and understand the data received from the questionnaires. The researcher categorized the information using the coded data to find similar themes.<sup>292</sup> The numerous themes that emerged from the data were compared with data from individual replies to generate a reflective analysis that led to modified practices that encouraged The Highway to Heaven Ministry members to seek pastoral counseling. As soon as the data analysis was finished, the researcher set up a regular time and location for a 60-minute debriefing session with the respondents to review the research findings.<sup>293</sup> The results were published in the study's results section after the study.

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<sup>292</sup> Altrichter, Herbert, Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. "Defining, confining or refining action research?." In *Action research for change and development*, pp. 3-9. Routledge, 2021.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 93

## **Implementation of Intervention Design**

Because interpretive research assumes that social reality is formed through human experience and social context rather than individually or objectively, it can be better studied in a socio-historical context by combining the subjective interpretations of different participants. Interpretive researchers interpret reality through a sense-making process rather than a hypothesis-testing approach because social reality is integrated within and unable to isolate from their social environments. This is in contrast to the positivist or functionalist paradigm, which holds that reality is generally independent of context, that it can be abstracted from its settings, and that it can be investigated in a decomposable functional manner using a tool that standardized measures.

Numerous psychological phenomena are undermined by a lack of interpretation or the ability to comprehend individuals' experiences and acts concerning their cultural surroundings. Cultural influences in research must be considered when developing interpretative energy. Various characteristics in this study relied on the knowingness of interpretation in terms of normalizing and over-generalizing people's behaviors and approaches, education, tradition, and lifestyles, where leveraging interpretive power eliminated these negative outcomes. Finally, by imposing behaviors that understand the experiences that influence people's choices as it relates to pastoral counseling, this framework developed a vision for cultural exchange at the Highway to Heaven Ministry.

One of the objectives was to better understand human behavior by considering the people who provided the data. In order to meet reality and the hypothesis was tested in nature, and the researcher has delved into reality, where he contemplates data rather than life. The study expanded on this request by asking questions to support pastoral counseling in the church by

carefully observing and leveraging an awareness of varied persons and experiences. This change entailed acknowledging that people are cultural creatures shaped by their histories, values, and experiences regarding what constitutes acceptable or normative behavior and how they make sense of the world. The researcher looked at interpretative capability, or the ability to comprehend, as a lens.

Group traits served as cultural proxies because they suggested that persons with similar qualities were likely to engage in similar cultural processes. Cultural influences, on the other hand, are not uniform. There was variance within and between individuals and groups of individuals within a given cultural setting. In different circumstances, the same person may have exhibited distinct behavioral processes based on the prevailing norms and expectations and the prominent group traits in those contexts. When researchers ignore differences in psychological techniques within and across cultures, or rely entirely on culturally homogeneous samples, their theories reflect a limited and erroneous knowledge of human behavior. Interpretive research design requires paying attention to who is represented in the research and how tradition impacts the subjects' experiences.

To implement this interpretive research design, the researcher set forth a course of action that included a pre-determined questionnaire, introduced with the same wording and in the same order to all respondents, focus groups, and subsequent interviews as the primary data collection tools. The researcher carefully examined the most important parts of the questionnaire, the general structure, question sequencing, and question formulation and language. Focus groups were used as a discussion point with participants and those selected to pre-screen the questionnaire to explore and construct knowledge. These strategies served as observational and analysis techniques intended to draw meaningful inferences that could foster a change in pastoral

counseling at the Highway to Heaven Ministry. The data collected from this interpretive research design was dependable as the research used the same questions to arrive at authentic responses from participants independently. The data collected was credited as the researcher demonstrated data triangulation through various data collection techniques. Finally, the data collected from this interpretive research design displayed transferability as the researcher could arrive at assumptions and details that transferred to real-life settings at the Highway to Heaven Ministry.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This research sought to discover the primary drivers that influenced the attitudes and behaviors of African Americans at the Highway to Heaven Ministry to understand why they chose traditional counseling over pastoral counseling to address their mental health problems. The questions were categorized into beliefs, values, and religiosity (see Appendix D). These categories were chosen because they were all factors that contributed to the individual ability to react socially. Before disseminating the questionnaire, the researcher sought the advice of five local ministers through preliminary questions to ensure that what would be asked of the participants was appropriate and non-biased. As a result, none of the questions were disqualified, and the overall consensus of the group was that 100% of the questions were appropriate for the study and designed to produce thought-provoking responses about the participants' past experiences and subsequent beliefs.

During the structured observations, the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed participants to respond in their own words to express their true beliefs. An 11-question questionnaire focused on specific behaviors was investigated to learn more about the participants' experiences. Questions were categorized into beliefs, values, and religiosity to translate their responses into quantitative outcomes. Each category was designed to draw a meaningful conclusion about the intended audience's authentic feelings and played an important (see Appendix D) role in influencing ideas and expectations. The findings from the survey are listed below from a total population of 100.

## **1. What impact do life experiences have on how you view yourself?**

From this question, three psychological concepts developed by Carl Rogers were primary themes that came to the surface: recognizing the ideal self, self-image, and self-esteem. The ideal self reflects who people want to be. In reality, there is genuineness, and being judgmental is harshly associating those thoughts with what is believed to be true. Recognizing truth is a pure and open-hearted embrace of what is believed to be real in a skeptical world. Participants wanted to be their ideal selves. This person possessed the characteristics or qualities they desired to have. Of the 100 people surveyed, 4% revealed that life experiences impacted their overall sense of self.

The term self-image relates to how people see themselves at any moment. Physical attributes, psychological traits, and social roles are all factors in self-image. Analysis of the results showed that 8% of the people surveyed described having a good self-image as influenced by their life experiences. People's self-esteem is influenced by how much they like, accept, and appreciate them. It was a collective product of life experiences. Various factors can influence self-esteem, including how people believe they compare to others and their societal role. The survey revealed that only 9% of the targeted population indicated that their life experiences strongly impacted their self-esteem.

## **2. What characteristics do you believe a counselor should have to produce positive outcomes in people's lives?**

African Americans already have a negative view of mental illness and treatment. Research shows that groups are afraid to seek help because of a lack of trust in mental health services and the mislabeling of Blacks. Five point six percent (5.6%) of respondents in the



survey referred to counselors who pay attention to positive concepts and perceived progress as a key feature of achieving positive outcomes in people's lives.

### **3. What is the best way to address situations out of your control?**

What is true for most people is that stress is the primary cause of situations becoming out of control. Seven percent (7%) of the participants indicated that prayer was the best way to address situations that were out of control.

### **4. Why do you believe some people struggle while others prosper?**

Five point five percent (5.5%) of the people surveyed attributed positive thinking as the leading cause of a prosperous life. Positive thinking is a way of unity to encourage individuals to focus on their strengths and qualities and encourage others to do the same.

### **5. Describe a value that is currently important to you?**

Values are important in the life that people want to live. They communicate priorities, form individual characters, and are based on basic beliefs about how people live and are viewed by others. Throughout the survey, respondents identified several values. Six percent (6%) of the people surveyed indicated that they value work and responsibility. They claimed it provided the strength to do what needed to be done instinctively without fear. Another 3% of the people surveyed indicated that they valued self-determination because it helps influence and motivates the choices they make.

Eight percent (8%) of the people surveyed valued spirituality, citing it as one of their core beliefs to believe in a higher power, while 4% said that they operated in forgiveness because if God can forgive, so can they. Five percent (5%) of the people surveyed identified love as one of their core values, citing that it is the universal language of the world and often influences how people interact with others.

## **6. How do your values differ from your friends and family?**

People's values are inherently different based on their cultural background and often change due to individual beliefs. Of the 100 people surveyed in the study, 5.6% indicated that they are more loyal than their friends and family. Three percent (3%) of people indicated they were more trustworthy than their family and friends. Two percent (2%) indicated they were more generous than their family and friends. Four percent (4%) indicated they were more spiritual than their family and friends.

## **7. How does what you value in life support your actions?**

Three percent (3%) of people indicated that because they value self-determination, they are careful about their decisions and how they will impact their lives and others.

## **8. Have you ever sought out counseling?**

Seven point three percent (7.3%) of the people indicated that they sought out counseling at some point in their lives.

## **9. What did you seek counseling for?**

Three-point three percent (3.3%) of people indicated that they went to counseling to address issues with depression. Two percent (2%) of people indicated they went to counseling to address marital issues. Two percent (2%) of people indicated they went to counseling to address issues with family.

## **10. Did you seek counseling from a pastoral or clinical counselor?**

Two percent (2%) of people indicated they sought pastoral counseling.

## **11. Why do you believe pastoral counseling is needed?**

Five percent (5%) believed that pastoral counseling is needed to form a closer connection with God and receive His guidance through life.

### **Discussion**

Values influence the way people choose between decisions that are made. Values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs anchor individual identity and way of life. They serve as the foundation for other people's perceptions and the world. If values are the guiding principles that indicate right and wrong, then beliefs are what people hold to be true. Values inform what is good and wrong. They do not always compel us to act. Some values are more challenging to describe objectively because they have quite different meanings to many individuals. Consider the value of love, for instance. Individual emphasis on one value impacts that individual and the people around them because the complete system of values is like a living creature. In addition, values are not always meant to be positive. Although many are unquestionably harmful, self-awareness is essential to help people recognize whether they adhere to them. Values and beliefs are also not ingrained in DNA. They have been learned and developed from birth and continue through life due to unique environments, experiences, life events, and decisions that people where they are today. The ability to change one's beliefs and values and replace them with a new framework that empowers and supports one's objectives and vision for life is now available to those with high levels of self-awareness. Understanding these ideas and probing deeply into one's character reveals the motivations for behavior.

People can also go in the opposite direction if they do not like how they behave in a certain situation. They can figure out their underlying values and beliefs and change them to enable other behavior. That would mean they would first identify what they want to do, which

entails developing a personal vision or establishing objectives for the future. They then dissect those objectives into smaller components and determine whether their present values and beliefs are consistent. Otherwise, what is valued cannot be realized because the appropriate behavior enabling achieving those goals will not be motivated by decisions and attitudes. People can only succeed when their aims and beliefs are in line. They are motivated by personal experiences, and the fact that they are a human means that they have lived by those beliefs so much that some have developed into routines and habits.

### **Beliefs**

Concepts or ideologies that people fervently and deeply believe in are known as beliefs. These ideas usually make sense when a person is young or in their early adult years. Fundamental opinions are not always negative. Healthy life and interpersonal experiences frequently lead to positive ideas about oneself, others, and the world. Beliefs begin to formulate, resulting in activity in the brain. The brain is initially exposed to stimuli that enable it to continuously digest information to make logical, reasonable, or reactive decisions as it tries to make sense of what has been received. It provides reasons for beliefs it has already acquired, almost invariably after the fact. This process demonstrates that individual beliefs shape reality by influencing not just one's conduct but also other people's behavior, not the other way around.<sup>294</sup>

The mind is complex and navigates while simultaneously producing images that serve as a basis for understanding the environment's patterns and relationships. In addition to serving as life support systems, beliefs frequently serve as learning role models. Since each person can choose to accept or reject Christian beliefs, changes to these beliefs are frequently made. Each

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<sup>294</sup> Eccles, Jacquelynne S., and Allan Wigfield. "Motivational beliefs, values, and goals." *Annual review of psychology* 53, no. 1 (2002): 109-132.

person's mind subconsciously creates a belief system. Whether or not they are true, these concepts are frequently accepted as given because they have ingrained themselves into daily life. Decisions are based on what people genuinely think, feel, or consider concerning their experiences.<sup>295</sup>

African Americans frequently report having negative therapy experiences that often stem from their unequal societal experiences, making them stigmatized by the idea of counseling. Pastoral therapy is available to support individuals as they process these experiences, enabling them to make wiser decisions about their lives and maintain their faith in God. Most African Americans identify as Christians, and many hold to conventional notions of what constitutes a religion. As an illustration, the overwhelming majority of Black Americans say they believe in God or a higher force, making religion almost universal among this population.

Individual attitudes and beliefs impact how African Americans behave and seek therapy. Their resistance to receiving mental health care is suppressed, as are their attitudes toward and behaviors in reaction to mental illness. Previous medical experiments influence African Americans' attitudes toward obtaining care for mental illness. African Americans' suspicion of racism and oppression has been greatly influenced by history. The stigma associated with mental illness in the African American community has been linked to high levels of cultural mistrust. These stigmas, which take the form of attitudinal reactions to people with mental illness, are indicators that arouse prejudices about a specific social group.

In the Beliefs category, 39.1% of the population surveyed responded. Beliefs are things that people generally accept, with or without objective evidence of the truth. It is a concept that is both developed and inherited and often changes over time. Beliefs also come from a person's

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 110

personal experiences and the emotions that connect them at that moment. They build confidence through repetitive actions, and because they tell personal stories, beliefs tend to shape what people truly are. Question 1, “What impact do life experiences have on how you view yourself?” was designed to discover how much a person’s life experiences impacted their view of themselves. Three themes became the central focus, ideal image, self-image, and self-esteem. Because people are habitual species, what they do becomes automatically programmed, and so do their responses to it. This impacts how people approach situations because the mind and body discover comfortable patterns to follow and pre-empt how people will react. As it relates to pastoral counseling, what people believe about the profession matters, and if what people believe is driven by their experiences, then a counselor’s ability to produce positive feedback becomes paramount.

According to an analysis of the data, 8% of the respondents said that having a positive self-image is influenced by their life experiences. The degree to which someone likes, accepts, and values them affects that person's sense of self-worth. It is the result of many people's experiences throughout life. Self-esteem can be influenced by various elements, including social function and perceptions of how one compares to others. Only 9% of the targeted population answered in the poll that their life experiences significantly impact their self-esteem. Positive thinking was cited as the main factor in living a prosperous life by 5.5% of those polled. Focusing on one's strengths and encouraging others to do the same are two ways that positive thinking brings people together.

People, particularly African Americans, who are more prone to facing difficulty in their lives may find it hard to discuss their issues. Much of the difficulty in their lives brings on anxiety or feelings of anxiousness. In the Black community, these experiences are referred to as

nerves. It is important to look into the context of which circumstances arise to understand individual feelings better. Seven percent (7%) of the population surveyed indicated that prayer is typically the most common method to address issues.

For Question 2, “What characteristics do you believe a counselor should have to produce positive outcomes in people’s lives?” 5.6% agreed that counselors that focus on positivity possess favorable characteristics that produce positive outcomes in counseling. This is a key factor because, within the counseling context, positivity is important to initiate the healing process. Positivity is also part of what determines whether people adamantly struggle through life or if they go on to have prosperous lives.

This study inquired about qualities connecting people with God (Question 3, “What is the best way to address situations out of your control?”). The respondents indicated that prayer was one of the most important values in their lives. Compared to men, Black women are more likely to state that religion is very important to them, that believing in God is necessary to be a moral person, and that God controls their lives. Furthermore, older Black adults are more inclined to hold similar opinions than younger ones. Regardless of age or gender, most Black Americans who identify as religious regard their beliefs as central to their religious identity. The meanings, symbols, and rituals that interpret and govern human interactions and exchanges with others and the natural world are all included in religion as a distinct entity. Humans must conceive, ritualize, and assess the significance and worth of the power they encounter during these interactions. Beliefs are all a part of the concept.

It is traditionally assumed that religious beliefs strongly influence behavior and is a major variable affecting religious involvement. A great deal of pastoral effort assumes that the greater one’s belief, the more likely an individual is to participate. The level of church attendance

prompted this research to question whether beliefs influence religious affiliation or do religious affiliation influence the formation of beliefs. This study confirmed that religious affiliation influences the development of belief and continued commitment. If the cognitive approach is correct and the group's effect is primarily cognitive, then the church's primary role is to support members in keeping their commitment to and belief in the group's norms. It has long been believed that religious beliefs have a significant impact on behavior. Participants of this survey believed that the main factor influencing religious involvement is belief. Much pastoral work is predicated on the premise that people are more inclined to participate if they have stronger beliefs. The level of church attendance raises the question of whether religious affiliation influences beliefs or whether beliefs impact religious affiliation. This study was able to demonstrate that a person's religious membership does have an impact on how strongly they hold onto their beliefs.

### **Values**

In the values category, 43.6% of the population surveyed responded. Values focus on a cultured society viewed as a set of beliefs, habits, and practices that contain hidden or shared ideas about what is right and necessary. Values are clear rules that tell people what is appropriate in various situations and a culture that considers common beliefs. The values identified by 6% of the participants in this study, such as work, responsibility, and self-determination at 3%, are all associated with high self-esteem levels, desiring social support, and satisfaction with life. Eight percent (8%) of the participants valued spirituality and love. As these two combine, they are the components that help people grow spiritually. Love manifests the growth that allows people to be close to God and others. This leads to another question relating to values, as they indicate that their values differ from those of their family and friends based on loyalty, trustworthiness,



generosity, and spirituality. These differences occur because values can vary from person to person depending on the cultural background and what the people believe. In the study, 5.6% of respondents claimed to have higher levels of loyalty than their friends and relatives. Three percent said they were more reliable than their loved ones and friends. Two percent (2%) of respondents said they gave more than their friends and relatives. Four percent (4%) of respondents claimed to have a stronger spirituality than their relatives and acquaintances.

Question 4 asked, “What is the best way to address situations out of your control?” personal beliefs play a role in how people make decisions. The consequences, ambitions, and decisions an individual makes are determined by their values. An individual's values find external expression in the goals they select and the decisions they follow. The person bases their decisions on their values. Notably, choosing one's goals is a choice in and of itself. If people allow it, religion can have an impact on several aspects of life, especially when it comes to societal ideals. Many people decide to uphold high moral and social standards, and their justification has nothing to do with their faith. Others benefited from their religion's teachings because they had a respectable, orderly social life. While 4% of those surveyed stated they operate in forgiveness because they believe that if God can forgive, then so can they, 8% of those polled valued spirituality and listed belief in a higher power as one of their key values. Since love is the world's global language and frequently shapes how people interact with one another, 5% of those polled listed it as one of their essential beliefs.

Cultural conventions and beliefs influence values, but God will decide how people live these values through His Word that is alive in them. Depending on personal beliefs and obedience to God's principles, they will develop faith that His Word is accurate. One's values and character traits are developed through upbringing and life experiences. Values usually referred to

as principles, are what guide daily decisions, whether they pertain to personal or professional lives. Human values offer a potent decision-making process. Life seems to flow when one is in line with their ideals. Misalignment can cause things to feel challenging. One moves away from pain and suffering and toward pleasure or comfort by activating a response.

People must allow their values to guide their decisions to avoid default responses to difficult circumstances. A framework for decision-making that reflects each person's core, or essence, is necessary for action. Some people employ values to override the body's natural response. Because of this, people can create their behaviors rather than having their behaviors created for them. Conflicting ideals can occasionally cause the reluctance African Americans frequently experience. Value conflicts can cause a great deal of hardship. Finding the means and end values is crucial and usually changeable over time. End values are usually fixed and characterize who people are. There is always the option to modify beliefs after a traumatic event or health concern. People frequently do so. Decisions require a hierarchy of values. Once values are defined, people need to order them based on importance. It is worth identifying which are means values and which pertain to an end goal or state. A clear hierarchy will reduce ambiguity and enable intensely focused work. Suffering comes when people are neither immersed in activity nor making clear decisions.

Values also fall into different categories. The category of social values encompasses the values, traditions, and convictions widely regarded as the norms of a specific society. In contrast to state policy, social factors govern these kinds of values. Social values include respect for loyalty, honesty, and a work ethic. Because they are accepted by a significant portion of society and are seen as appropriate ways of thinking and acting, particular ethnic codes of conduct represent societal values. Cultural values, on the other hand, are a category that denotes

standards and norms incorporated into public policy. In other words, cultural norms are codified into the American culture as standards. For instance, regulations that mandate some educational activity for American adolescents address issues of equity and education.<sup>296</sup> The category of religious values reflects moral principles for those who identify as followers of particular religious communities. These ideals are frequently expressed in doctrinal pronouncements that cite a certain holy text as the source for their ideas.

The rules and guidelines in the category of professional values are intended to control how people who work in a particular field behave. African American spirituality, frequently confused with religiosity, is a cultural value that includes a sense of connection with one's ancestors and the notion that natural forces influence life events. This value coexists with one's religious practices or is distinct from them. It has been discovered that spirituality, as a cultural belief, is favorably related to the quality of life and optimism and unfavorably related to depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. It has been discovered that African spirituality is positively correlated with both psychological health and life satisfaction. To prevent cultural mistrust between the counselor and potential clients, therapists must be cognizant of the cultural values held by African Americans. Understanding cultural dynamics can be gained by helping people recognize illogical beliefs and thoughts. Counselors can better discuss culture, ethnicity, and finances without feeling uncomfortable as they become more culturally aware.<sup>297</sup>

One's views on life, freedom, and protective norms have an impact on many decisions, both personal and professional. Additionally, to be competent in counseling, one must be self-aware and committed to helping people heal, reinforcing the need to consider one's values. As a

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 110

<sup>297</sup> Starks, Sandra H., and Aaron W. Hughey. "African American women at midlife: The relationship between spirituality and life satisfaction." *Affilia* 18, no. 2 (2003): 133-147.

result, the current study aimed to focus on the truths and experiences of African Americans in terms of their ethnicity, values, and value conflicts in connection to their personal beliefs. Values manifest themselves in behaviors, which is especially crucial when competing values, like equality and financial security, are at stake. However, there may be times when one of these values must be chosen depending on what it signifies regarding a particular social or economic context.

### **Religiosity**

African-Americans in the US are noticeably more religious than the general population regarding their religious affiliation, attendance at religious services, regularity of prayer, and the significance of religion in daily life. Given that so many African Americans identify as belonging to one or more religious groups, African Americans are among the racial and ethnic groups most likely to record a formal religious connection. Religiosity is frequently correlated with a person's level of religious behavior, which is motivated by their beliefs. Due to the complexity of the idea, individuals have used terms like 'religiousness,' 'orthodoxy,' 'belief,' 'devotion,' and 'holiness' to describe various levels of religiosity. These concepts reflect what pastoral counselors might classify as characteristics of religiosity rather than words synonymous with religiosity.<sup>298</sup>

While some would define religiosity as having to do with church attendance, membership in a religious organization, acceptance of one's beliefs, doctrinal understanding, and a commitment to one's beliefs, psychologists would opt to focus on the characteristics of devotion, holiness, and piety. The intellectual component of religiosity involves the assumption that a religious person will be enlightened and aware about the fundamental principles of his and

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 138

sacred texts. Given that acceptance of a belief requires understanding of it, the latter two characteristics are intimately related. Religiosity operates on the notion that not all religious knowledge necessarily precedes belief, and that religious knowledge does not always lead to belief.

How people express their religion depends on both internal and external circumstances. Those who use religion to gain social acceptance are externally motivated. A person who finds their ultimate purpose in religion is intrinsically motivated and represents the population of people that are a part of this study. Beyond emphasizing church attendance, other aspects of religion, like personal devotion, are also significant. Religious commitment requires a certain level of understanding. A religion's rituals must be understood to be believed in. Religious institutions require members to understand the doctrine and participate in various rituals.

To measure levels of religiosity, this research utilized a questionnaire to ask participants a set of open-ended questions to try and understand from individual perspectives, just how religiosity relates to the social behaviors they display in society as it relates to pastoral counseling. From this study involving the impact of beliefs, values and religiosity and how those concepts influence people to utilize pastoral counseling, this study found that when personal aspects were extended regarding specific situations in daily life, the responses revealed a positive relationship between religion and happiness. According to the study's findings, there is a correlation between religiosity and life satisfaction, and those who report higher levels of religious involvement and faith represent the population of people who are likely to use pastoral counseling. The growth of compassion, honesty, and altruism, as well as the good effects on happiness, quality of life, physical and mental health, depend on one's affiliation with religion. Because values link to religiosity at the juncture of religion and morality and because religious

experience is essential for moral functioning, these factors provide a strong association between religiosity and values.

African Americans have had a burdened past, impacting how religion is practiced and understood. These experiences and the experiences of their ancestors define their connection to religion today. In addition to the in-depth experiences in this environment, characterized by a constant desire to defend one's existence, African American religion assumes great significance.<sup>299</sup> However, those scars do not represent African American religious life. Some people believe that the purpose of life can also be found in ritual practice, adherence, and submission to God. There are ways to find peace and comfort in God. This life holds all people believe about themselves and where they fit in the universe. African American religion is ultimately just as wide and complex as the faiths of other American ethnic groups, but it developed due to the complex tension between religion and what they felt was unfair and unequal treatment by society.<sup>300</sup>

Though they are less likely to access mental health care, African Americans are more likely than white Americans to report experiencing severe psychological discomfort.<sup>301</sup> Counselors can do more to assist in this area, as they already play a significant role in helping African Americans deal with and recover from racial trauma and stress. They can, for example, take action to alter a system that is unfair and racist that has a significant, detrimental impact on the mental health of African Americans. Pastoral counselors are frequently tasked with providing

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<sup>299</sup> Hackett, Jamie Rose. "Mental health in the African American community and the impact of historical trauma: Systematic barriers." (2014).

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 78

<sup>301</sup> Avent, Janeé R., and Craig S. Cashwell. "The Black church: Theology and implications for counseling African Americans." *The Professional Counselor* 5, no. 1 (2015): 81.

care for vulnerable people who must make painful decisions and navigate tough situations. Client spirituality plays a significant role in the healing process when counseling is involved.

There is strong evidence that a person's religious life plays an important role in their growth and can enhance their general well-being. Improving physical and mental health is another advantage of incorporating spirituality and faith into one's life. Like people of other races, African-Americans turn to spirituality for comfort as they struggle with various issues. These difficulties include both family struggles and oppressions like overt racism. Given these stresses of daily life, spirituality and religion may provide some justification for why African Americans are more psychologically and socially adjusted than some experts anticipate and expect. This study examined African Americans' attitudes on and resistance to using pastoral counseling to treat mental illness.

Question 8 (Have you ever sought out counseling?) addressed the is of seeking out counseling). African Americans are less likely to seek counseling because of the stigma, a lack of faith in mental health services, and the mislabeling of African Americans presenting issues. They are also less likely to have access to culturally appropriate counseling.

Counselors unfamiliar with the cultural background of those they seek to counsel may be perplexed by these complications. Additionally, many people are skeptical of the theological variances and the frequently contradictory nature of the religious organization that can simultaneously be highly innovative and deeply based on traditional theology. Many people are troubled by this seeming uncertainty. Counselors who want to improve their multicultural competence and comprehension of African American clients might gain valuable insight from the religious theology that underpins their experiences. This theology frequently impacts the

personal lives of congregation members, particularly how they decide whether to seek professional counseling.

Historically thought of as the religion of white men, African Americans modified Christianity to reflect their struggles and victories. Because it considers how people perceive God and how they relate to one another, theology is regarded as complete. African Americans who were oppressed received a sense of freedom from the Black church that they rarely encountered daily. It allowed them to congregate and express their difficulties as a community in the Black church. The Black church served as a platform for the development and implementation of transformation. Many churches during that time tended to place less emphasis on oppression and more emphasis on the freedom that congregation members felt through connection with one another. African Americans placed great importance on creating and maintaining healthy relationships since slaves saw the master-slave connection as the height of wickedness. Churches would treat persons as a whole and emphasizes the relationship between the body and the mind.

Many African Americans who seek counseling typically present the same issues that most people seeking counseling do. Additionally, they frequently seek counseling due to voice and value difficulties because they go through events that either diminish their voice or subtly or blatantly convey that their issues, opinions, and ideas either matter or do not matter as much as those of others. These concepts create anxiety, despair, and other mental health problems resulting from feeling unappreciated, disregarded, and unheard of. Pastoral counselors can assist people in regaining their confidence and sense of worth by dispelling negative beliefs and employing self-affirming strategies that enable clients to recognize and acknowledge resilience and strength. Even if counselors cannot relate to some client circumstances, more than likely,



they can connect to the feeling that their voice has not been heard, and with that viewpoint, therapists might take deliberate initiatives to empower patients throughout sessions.

Another factor contributing to the high counseling need among Black people is emotional weariness (Question 9: What did you seek counseling for?). In addition to being worn out from the injustices and discrimination they encounter daily, they frequently need to code-switch, which involves altering their speech and expression while away from their homes and Black communities. It is emotionally taxing to change roles, to constantly weigh how much information to share and what the role is in the new setting, and to be cognizant of what can or cannot be said or done. However, in some situations, African Americans are expected not to be vulnerable, not to disclose their emotions, and to carry the weight of everything on their shoulders, both inside and outside of their community. This is what can lead to an emotional breakdown. When it comes to problems relating to their mental health, Black people may rely on informal support networks such as family, friends, and their church communities. Pastoral counselors urge people to keep using these social networks since they must have reliable people to talk to about their experiences. In that space, counselors should make a concerted effort to connect with people in Black communities to help build relationships with the people they seek to serve.

In this category, religiosity, 17.3% of the surveyed participants responded. Religiosity, or the act of being religious, is a very present factor in African American culture. The fact that participants in this study indicated that prayer brought them comfort as they experienced difficult times in life, and how many viewed spirituality as one of their core values confirms that in the African American culture, religiosity is an important concept. Being religious or spiritual encourages good moral behavior, if nothing else because people generally want to do what is

right. Religiosity is so present in the lives of many that it often acts as a social agent influencing concepts such as love and how to interact with others. In the African American community, people would rather attend church than counseling. This is partly due to the stigma surrounding the idea of counseling, symbolizing weakness, distrust, or fear that the counselor will be unable to relate. 4% of the participants indicated they had been counseled by a pastoral counselor for issues addressing family or marital issues, but 3.3% had been counseled for depression.

Each participant's responses seemed to confirm the researcher's intent that there is a correlation between spirituality and therapy. Three percent (3%) of people indicated that because they value self-determination, they are careful about their decisions and how they will impact their lives and others. Five percent (5%) of people believed that pastoral counseling is needed for people to formulate a closer connection with God and to receive his guidance through life. There is a genuine connection that says that the power of beliefs, values, and religion based on individual cultural experiences impacts a person's willingness to seek pastoral counseling to address their mental health needs. As noted in the literature review, studies have shown that religious people prefer to work with a counselor who shares their religious beliefs. Thus, if individuals believe that a pastoral counselor will share their religious beliefs with significant positive feedback, this will increase the likelihood of choosing pastoral counseling.

Reconsidering how African Americans value community, tradition, and the centrality of God in church spiritual practices shed insight into African American cultural themes. A key commitment to the African American culture reveals various dimensions of tradition, its resources, and the work a pastoral counselor must be willing to perform. Counseling in a cultural context has evolved into a counseling paradigm. Traditions influenced different practices and beliefs held by African Americans, values and beliefs they have held on to for a lifetime, and

those impulses fueled the responses of the African American participants in this study. Because the surveys were anonymous, participants were allowed to be honest in their comments without fear of being judged by others, which seemed to be a theme from the write-in responses to the last question, which offered individuals the freedom to express their thoughts about therapy (Question 10: Did you seek counseling from a pastoral or clinical counselor?). Most of the write-in responses were supportive of therapy and its necessity.

While 3.3% of people indicated that they went to counseling to address issues with depression, only 2% indicated they sought pastoral counseling. As a result, many factors affect counseling. Pastoral counselors must be knowledgeable. Pastoral counselors should use this information to increase understanding, educate, and build skillful techniques to assist persons in need. To do this, they can study more about their members' cultural backgrounds to get to know them better and establish a level of familiarity that can boost trust and visibility. Counselors can also offer other services that might encourage African Americans to approach pastoral counseling to address mental health concerns rather than relying on outside support from mental health professionals. Through the written responses, the study's African American participants opened up about their personal experiences, including what they value, what they believe, and how religious they are. A concentrated effort is required by American society and the African American church because of religion's enormous role in African American culture. The main objective is to enlighten and educate about the benefits of pastoral counseling to answer the call of encouraging African Americans to utilize pastoral counseling to address their mental health needs.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore mental health issues in the lives of members at the Highway to Heaven Ministry to provide a framework of pastoral counseling, facilitate counseling denoting confidence and provide evidence that biblical guidance is necessary and sufficient to address individual needs. As African Americans begin to discuss the Black community's mental health issues openly, they should be willing to do what is necessary to reconcile their faith in God with the seriousness of mental illness, so that more individuals will feel stronger and stand on God's word of faith to obtain the care they need. Mental illness is real, and it is a disease that affects both African American and religious people. Historically, African Americans have preserved important Christian beliefs passed down from generation to generation. Today, the Black church remains a central part of African American life. It is a place where people of color gather to express their faith. However, as it relates to mental illness, African Americans seem reluctant seeking help from pastoral counselors and this study tried to find out reasons why. The experiences of African Americans from past to present contains variables that make this culture vulnerable to mental illness. More than 20% of the general African American population has mental health problems. This country's Black population has long endured tyranny, poverty, and brutality, and for many African Americans, they have become ill as a result.<sup>302</sup>

African Americans have relied on the Bible, their faith, and their beliefs for generations to offer them hope and peace of mind. They frequently utilize Bible texts to calm themselves, to direct their concerns to the Lord, and to seek God's assistance. These biblical prayers and

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<sup>302</sup> Neighbors, Harold W., Cleopatra Caldwell, David R. Williams, Randolph Nesse, Robert Joseph Taylor, Kai McKeever Bullard, Myriam Torres, and James S. Jackson. "Race, ethnicity, and the use of services for mental disorders: Results from the National Survey of American Life." *Archives of general psychiatry* 64, no. 4 (2007): 485-494.

teachings existed in our country before equality and health care. Finding the genuine connection to improve the lives of others requires people to go through interruptions in life and painful situations that allow them to feel and return to where they started. Pastoral counselors have helped churches understand God's work in the storms and afflictions of life by listening and speaking. Pastoral counseling entails more than preaching the word for African Americans, it is a ministry of healing that creates a lifetime of hope. Those not seeking care for a mental illness is nothing more than a behavioral response that stems from difficult life experiences. Some of what hinders African Americans help seeking behaviors is mixed between stigmas that are out of their control such as cultural norms in their community, cultural standards, and cultural mistrust. These obstacles are ongoing because they are built into society. Other stigmas that are within their control include anxieties, attitudes, what people believe and what they value. These are the factors that help formulate the decisions made about pastoral counseling.<sup>303</sup>

Participants in this study considered religion as the foundation of their experiences and inner lives. As a result, they attested to how it affected their daily lives, attitudes, ideas, and everything they do, providing a foundation for comprehending the world around them and the people in it. In the African American community, religion and spirituality are perceived as alternative coping tools and protective factors against anxiety, depression, and pain. The results of this study revealed that 46.7% of the African Americans surveyed participated in prayer, Bible study and are regular tithers, and 53.3% go to church frequently. This study proves that religion is an important aspect of African American lives.

Participants in this study were asked about their views on ways to address mental health issues. They recognized spiritual elements when appropriate and identified prayer as a successful

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 488

form of coping. In addition, participants identified positivity as a primary characteristic for pastoral counselors to possess and homed in on the fact that when people exude positive energy, they are typically happier and more successful in life. Participants also identified three themes that allow life experiences to impact their self-view. The themes that surfaced were 1) self-identity, 2) self-image, and 3) self-esteem, which drives inner feelings about self and helps in forming identity—knowing the self changes individual world views and life perspectives that ultimately impact people's experiences. Values were another area of discovery, as participants responded that work and responsibility, self-determination, spirituality, forgiveness, and love were of the greatest value. These values change from person to person based on cultural background and beliefs. Finally, in terms of counseling, the participants surveyed were not totally against pastoral counseling. They had sought the advice of the profession for other areas of support. In the end, 3.3% of the 100 surveyed indicated that they sought help for depression, a mental health condition, in the past (Question 8: Have you ever sought out counseling?).

The results of this study show how several factors influence the use of pastoral counseling in support of mental health care among African Americans. The research suggests that age, education, level of religiosity, and church affiliation are among the driving factors influencing people's use of pastoral counseling; however, beliefs and values were also identifiable themes. Nevertheless, both counseling styles provide valuable contributions to the profession and have a common position in society regarding mental health treatment, despite the ongoing dispute concerning pastoral counseling against traditional counseling and African American use. Nevertheless, both counseling styles provide valuable contributions to the profession and have a common position in society when it comes to the treatment of mental health, despite the ongoing

dispute concerning pastoral counseling against traditional counseling and African American use (Question 10: Did you seek counseling from a pastoral or clinical counselor?).

The discussion in this final section includes the initial research proposal and findings. In the end, the discussion highlights the lessons learned, implications, and recommendations for future research for the success of pastoral counseling at The Highway to Heaven Ministry.

### **The Proposal**

The purpose of this study was to explore mental health issues in the lives of members at The Highway to Heaven Ministry to provide a framework within which pastoral counseling can facilitate counseling that denotes confidence and provides evidence that biblical guidance is both necessary and sufficient to address individual needs. At the onset of this project, it was believed that there was a stigma in the African-American community about counseling and its implications that prevented members of The Highway to Heaven Ministry from seeking pastoral counseling. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. These include individual beliefs, the values people carry, and their level of religiosity. This study revealed that lack of trust and anxiety, in general, are also factors.

Currently, counselors at The Highway to Heaven Ministry believe that for African Americans, 1) it is in their cultural beliefs to approach the pastor for help in difficult times, 2) they often do not seek pastoral counseling for mental healthcare (Question 8), and 3) typically never consult counseling services for anything other than relationship or marital help. The researcher implemented an interpretive research design to discover how members view themselves, understand their values and measure their level of religiosity in support of pastoral counseling. One aspect of the survey was that, despite the absence of a pastor, all interviewees were positive in terms of self-perspectives and perspectives on counseling. This data collection

method included the selection of pastors for the preliminary interviews, member-focused questionnaires, and follow-up focus meetings to discuss findings. This study used these methods to ensure that the sample size was valid and reliable for the research and could yield a relevant understanding of both pastoral counseling and the prospective members of the church.

From this study, the researcher learned that pastors must be proactive and develop ways to encourage African Americans to utilize pastoral counseling to overcome mental health problems. The process can be initiated as pastoral counselors think beyond mental health and see the congregation's and community's needs being served. In doing so, pastoral counselors must be willing and able to respect their African American clients' religious knowledge and beliefs and adapt their care accordingly. Developing a successful plan utilizing positive feedback is important in improving individual morale and leading to better understanding and respect for the client's religious values and beliefs. Participants said they had used pastoral counseling, just not for mental health concerns. However, a well-trained pastor is key to offering the kind of help people need, which can change attitudes that will positively impact future generations.

Unlike this study's effort to understand African Americans' reluctance to use pastoral counseling, other research focuses on different aspects of pastoral counseling, such as the views of licensed practice counselors versus those of pastoral counselors. In this instance, the two professions are different entities, thus leading future research to focus on integration efforts. However, one of the researcher's goals was to transcend theoretical thinking and explain the dynamics of real-life experiences of African Americans and their impact on pastoral counselors who counsel church members. The overall results show that the participants surveyed provided information that led this research to understand those individual beliefs, what people value, and their level of religiosity, in conjunction with primary demographic information, collectively



creating the attitudes that hinder African Americans from seeking help from pastoral counselors for mental healthcare.

### **The Implemented Research Project**

An interpretive research design uses qualitative research methods to understand people's beliefs, motivations, and judgments using quantitative data collected to understand their social interactions. The population of study for the researcher was The Highway to Heaven Ministry in Locust Grove, Georgia. The target population was specific to African American members of the church. These participants were selected based on their age, level of education, length of time at the church, and level of religiosity. The research investigation enlisted the participation of 100 people. Members participating in the voluntary study had to be eighteen years old, of African American heritage, and agree to take the survey. There were 65 females and 35 males aged 18 to 88. The tri-fold data collection consisted of an 11-question questionnaire evaluating beliefs, values, and religiosity, factors influencing attitudes and decisions, preliminary interviews with selected pastors, and a focus group to discuss the findings.

### **Results and Evaluation**

As a result, the study's findings indicated that the 18-29 age group accounted for the larger percentage of participants (56.5%). All of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree or some college: (59.5 %) were college graduates (18.3 %), had post-graduate education (8.2 %), had a graduate degree or beyond (12 %) had high school diplomas, and only two percent (2%) had their GED. The sample's racial/ethnic background was predominantly Black or African American (68.4%), and (22.3 %) of the population was white. The remaining population was Hispanic or Latino, representing 9.3 %. The religious orientation of the participants was as follows: frequent church attendees (53.3%), frequent prayer or Bible study (36.7%), and regular

tithe (10 %). The participants' time with The Highway to Heaven Ministry was measured in years of 0-2 years (14.6%), 2-3 years (32.6%), and 3 to 5 years (52.8%).

Religion is the largest belief system that allows people to behave in a cultured manner. This research investigated the relationship between religiosity and pastoral counseling. This aspect is especially true for African Americans because they have the highest rate of church attendance among all ethnic groups across the United States. Review of the results proved that the relationship between religiosity and pastoral counseling is high for the age group representing 18-29, which has the highest church attendance in The Highway to Heaven Ministry. This phenomenon is true because their religious commitment makes them more susceptible to receive advice from a religious counselor and to participate in religious social engagements.

This research also investigated the correlation between beliefs which is the leading factor in the choices or decisions that people make and how that influences use of pastoral counseling. Beliefs are related to that which contradicts basic scientific principles. It relates to views about causality in which people believe they have some control over events that defy commonly recognized physical principles. This research suggests a significant but complex positive association between religiosity and belief factors, with higher levels of religiosity being associated with stronger beliefs. However, religiosity, and personal beliefs are not only vital for culture and social life, but they also appear to have a major influence in individual physical and mental health.

There is an important link between what people value and their level of religiosity and how that influences use of pastoral counseling. In essence, beliefs that people have ultimately shape their values and how they view religion, roles and other aspects of life. These are the things that influence choice and behaviors. Other analysis supports the evidence that there is a

positive relationship between people who have attended The Highway to Heaven ministry for 3-5 years and have a comfort level with the pastor, which can also affect the likelihood of choosing a pastoral counselor for therapeutic needs. This formulates the idea that mental health is oftentimes nurtured by the relationships that exists.

Essentially, beliefs and values are the primary factors that influence individual decisions about pastoral counseling. These decisions are preempted by demographic factors that impact behaviors and decision-making patterns, such as age and level of education. The researcher believes that people of appropriate age and receiving a formal education is in the best position to make informed life decisions. Affiliation with The Highway to Heaven Ministry and religiosity are factors that focus. This research shows that if people are committed to attending religious events consistently, they have formulated the kind of commitment that could lead to the potential use of pastoral counselors for mental healthcare. The themes identified from the questionnaire responses that affected the variables were self-identity, self-image, and self-esteem. These factors promote personal efficacy, motivation, and responsible discipleship that comfort cultural identity and self-esteem in conflicting circumstances.

### **Limitations**

This study has some fundamental limitations. The bulk of responses was from participants between 18 and 29 (56.5%). This population may have had less professional counseling experience than elderly people. This might operate as a barrier. Early adulthood is also frequently a time of exploration, which can result in a weaker relationship with organized religion. Using a different age range and frequency may have produced different results. It might have been plausible to add the category, 'Other,' when asking about levels of religiosity when gathering demographic data. Those with other unique dimensions of religiosity who did not fit

into the other groups would be included in the Other category. The data would be more accurate if more specific information were added to Other, even if the category's participant proportion were only 1%.

Following the review of the literature, it was discovered that not all definitions of pastoral counselors included ordination. So it is not always evident when respondents are not Christians while coding questions. The wording of the questions reflected Christian customs and beliefs that may be foreign to non-Christians. The effect that these conditions may have had on the outcomes is unknown. The pastoral counseling profession must first educate the public and expand its reach to address many of these concerns. The findings of this study demonstrate that choosing a pastoral counselor is more likely when one is knowledgeable about pastoral counseling.

Only 7.3% of respondents said they had engaged in pastoral counseling. Of those, only 3.3% had addressed depression, a component of mental illness, while 4% had used the profession to address other issues. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting the lowest level of knowledge and 5 denoting the highest level of knowledge, respondents did not achieve a mean score of 4 or higher. It would seem essential to find strategies to improve the understanding of potential clients if pastoral counseling is to be used as effectively as possible. Many of the respondents may not have been aware that pastoral counseling could be used to address mental illness. This will be advantageous to pastoral counselors and clients seeking a with whom to work.

### **Recommendations**

One positive outcome from this research study was that pastoral counselors are positioned to offer mental healthcare at The Highway to Heaven Ministry. The congregation is receptive to pastoral counseling in other areas but has not specifically used it to address mental health issues. In the exploratory effort, this study confirms that participants were measured in

response to their ideas and statements about their values and how those factors influence the

Because of the salience of spirituality and religion in the experiences of African Americans, the positive correlation between religion and the likelihood of choosing pastoral counseling to address mental illness is developing. This research also challenged pastoral counselors to evaluate and incorporate clients' stories, worldviews, and life experiences into the counseling relationship. A critical dimension of these considerations is the religious and spiritual background of the clients. Particularly as it relates to African American clients, this process involves examining the intersection of at least two social identities: 1) what it means for the client to be religious and 2) what it means to be African American. A key aspect of the identity of many African Americans is the Black church and the expression of its diverse theological perspectives.

In conclusion, the study's findings reveal many truths about The Highway to Heaven Ministry members that should help clarify how pastoral counseling will be used in the future. The study demonstrated that people's self-image and how they experience life impact their daily experiences. Additionally, this study demonstrated that people's life values affect their choices. It also demonstrated that individuals are more likely to choose to work with a pastoral counselor if they 1) have a better grasp of the role of pastoral counselors and 2) experience positive counseling interactions. Pastoral counselors are more frequently sought after by deeply religious and conservative people. The study's conclusions indicate that many participants expressed increased religiosity regarding spirituality, belief in God and church attendance. Some others have even employed pastoral counseling to deal with different problems. In essence, the will to utilize pastoral counseling is present. The members of this church lacked an understanding of pastoral counselors' responsibilities. Pastoral counselors have the chance to serve more

individuals by expanding outreach and education about their profession because knowledge appears to be a significant predictor of choice. In the counseling profession, pastoral counselors occupy a special role. They are qualified to deliver effective mental health counseling capable of respectfully integrating religious and spiritual components thanks to their mix of theological studies and extensive experiences with religious behaviors.

The influences on African American Christians' decisions to seek or refuse pastoral counseling were examined in this study. The findings concerning the factors influencing the participants' decisions to seek mental health assistance from pastoral counselors identified concepts consistently throughout the research phases. Such studies might examine how African Americans navigate their emotions in the face of historical hostility in protective and sometimes demeaning ways, the positive partnerships between the Black church and mental health organizations. Future research on this topic should feature mixed methods in these areas. Studies using a combination of methodologies would probably improve triangulation and broaden their applicability offering helpful information regarding trends, developments, and linkages over time.

Additional related research should look at samples of African Americans with a wider range of religious affiliations since the current study, to some extent, analyzed historical animosity from the viewpoint of African American Christians. In addition to this diversity, African Americans have no religious ties or views. This new study would be helpful to the literature field because it would shed light on how historical antagonism has forced some African Americans to be careful in their daily encounters while promoting positive interactions among African Americans. It is the belief of this study that although participants expressed how what they believed, what they valued, and their level of religiosity had an impact on their decisions to

seek mental healthcare from pastoral counselors, these same concepts have also given them emotional support and perseverance as African American Christians during periods of unjust treatment and generational prejudice. Therefore, more research might look into partnerships that support African Americans' use of mental health care systems while still preserving, respecting, and embracing their beliefs.

This country's health depends on the health of its citizens. Although services are available to enhance mental wellness, not all populations have equal access. Compared to white Americans, African Americans are less likely to seek mental health therapy, and their treatment outcomes are worse. Additionally, African Americans have poorer access to high-quality mental health services and less access to care that is culturally competent. One of the goals of this study was to focus on the factors that affect African Americans' use of pastoral counselors to address mental health care. In doing so, this study was able to assess how African American Christians' decisions to seek assistance were impacted by examining their experiences and true beliefs.

As part of the research, an 11-question questionnaire provided to 100 members of The Highway to Heaven Ministry, a predominantly African American church in rural Georgia, was disseminated and served as the basis for this study. The questions focused on individual beliefs, values, and levels of religiosity and how they impacted African American Christians' decisions to seek mental healthcare from pastoral counselors. Other areas of the research revealed sociohistorical context-based trust and mistrust, anger, resilience, religiosity, and the Black church. Some of the ideas in this study have already been studied in the past. However, this research should add to the body of literature because of its distinctive qualitative appraisal of these ideas via the experiences of African American Christians associated with the Black church.

Evidence from this study reveals participants' honest yet private reactions to what they believe and value from both a religious and personal perspective to determine that if they should one day seek mental healthcare, would they consider pastoral counseling as a means of support? A pastoral counselor who works with African Americans must consider several crucial difficulties, given the history of racism and demeaning behaviors in this country. For the counselor to comprehend the underlying presumptions of the presented problems, they must focus on the theological worldview that African Americans bring and look at the social background of those people. These challenges specifically affect men and women, the effects of intergenerational dynamics, and their full life cycle.

For African Americans, pastoral counseling is at least as much about supporting and healing those who have been wronged as it is about addressing Christians who are wronging God and others. This does not lessen their hatred of sin, their understanding of human depravity, or their attention to God's glory. However, African Americans are aware, from the Bible, church history, and national history, that pastoral counseling must address both the sins that have been committed, the injustices that come with it, and the mental disturbances it has caused. The participants' great emphasis on viewing religiosity as their private matter was perhaps the most defining aspect of the study's findings. They considered religion a crucial component of their identity and an important resource.

Participants viewed religion as the core of their life and primarily an internal experience. As a result, they instinctively saw it as impacting their daily lives, attitudes, opinions, and everything they did, which helped them build a framework for comprehending the world, and people. Most participants understood their beliefs to be reinforcing, significant, and decisive for their lives, although this aspect was personal. The participants valued spirituality, which meant



that God's presence helped them trust God's ability to heal and actively entrust their problems into his hands. The general identification of moral conflict, counseling as a practice, and faith as a supplementary resource felt competent. For all involved, prayer was the most vital way to put problematic situations into God's hands. As it relates to values, some participants indicated that they had used pastoral counseling in the past to address other issues. For that to have happened, at one point, they had to be aware that the counseling process somehow reflected their religious beliefs.

The hesitancy of African Americans is partially due to their misunderstanding of the role of pastoral counselors. They observe a pretext for the definition of pastoral counseling at each stage, but there is no clear understanding of what it means or how it affects society. Even in the Bible, the role of a pastor is not precisely defined, yet it is linked to teaching. According to Scripture, shepherding the sheep is a part of pastoral counseling, so pastoral counseling is a pastor's attempt to assist individuals. At each stage, people observe a justification for the prospective definition of pastoral counseling, but there is a lack of a precise understanding of what it means or how it affects society. Even the Bible lacks a clear definition of a pastor's duties, though it does link them to teach. The Bible says that pastoral counseling entails "shepherding the flock, feeding the flock, providing for the flock, protecting, refreshing, restoring, leading by example to propel individuals forward in their quest of holiness, soothing, and directing." Above all other meanings, it refers to a pastor's effort to assist others by helping them become aware of their inner problems. It is an emotional reeducation that involves using a variety of healing (therapy) techniques to assist people in resolving their issues and crises.

The African American community values its pastors highly and frequently turns to them for guidance when dealing with spiritual problems and other issues they may face. However, this

study seeks to address the community's widespread mental health problems and get people the help they need to survive. The pastor's function encompasses more than just giving sermons; it also includes components like consolation, guidance, and support along every step of the congregation's journey. The pastor significantly impacts the church, the family, and the community as a whole. People cannot alter their behavior before altering expectations in response to their communal obligations. Opinions are only unquestionably true among a community of believers. One must be outside the group to recognize perceptions as relative and affect change.

The behaviors of individual people and the pastoral counselor act in a way that may be characterized as a responsibility to be educated and a chance for knowledge to be shared in counseling and mental health. It will not necessarily change beliefs and actions to show pastors that the world has changed. It must also understand that maintaining the existing attitudes and actions would prevent them from achieving success now and in the future. It is necessary to continue identifying the key elements that will enable pastoral counselors and African Americans to collaborate to promote a healthy community, putting aside historical differences between theology and psychology.

At The Highway to Heaven Ministry, the utmost care of each member is important. If there are those in need, the pastor will act accordingly to ensure that proper care is adhered to. Mental health is a serious issue that anybody can have. As it relates to African Americans, they have mostly lived a battered life, filled with mistreatment on every level, which is a fact that cannot be disputed. This church intends to continue to build a body of believers willing to stand on the word of God and proclaim good health, longevity, and the power over their lives that was instilled in them from the start. The African Americans at The Highway to Heaven Ministry may

not fully entrust in pastoral counseling to minister to their mental health needs, but that is no fault of their own. As a church, The Highway to Heaven Ministry can be a resource for members to demonstrate the use of pastoral counseling in a way that will change lives and the future of the church.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** Pastoral Counseling

**Principal Investigator:** William Hansford, Liberty University PhD. Candidate

You are invited to participate in a research study. Eligibility is based on age, sex, education, and religious beliefs, and you must be a Highway to Heaven Ministry member to participate. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

The purpose of this research is to explore mental health issues in the lives of members at the Highway to Heaven Ministry to provide a framework of pastoral counseling, facilitate counseling denoting confidence and provide evidence that biblical guidance is necessary and sufficient to address individual needs.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Provide your responses on a questionnaire that will consist of 11 open-ended, easy-to-understand questions meant to help the researcher discover more about the participant's religious views, values, and experiences.

During the questionnaire process, participants will not be audio/video recorded.

Participants should expect direct benefits from participating in this study, to be the ability to understand what drives individual religious beliefs to better identify pastoral counseling as a source of support in a mental health crisis.

Benefits to society include the identification of pastoral counseling as a means of social support and facilitate an understanding of how that role functions to help people as they undergo crisis.

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- There will be no audio or video recordings.
- Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.
- To participate in the research, you will not need to pay for any expenses.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the questionnaire.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

The researcher conducting this study is William Hansford. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Richard Nichols at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects' research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I agree for the person named below to take part in this study.*

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Printed LAR Name and Relationship to Subject

---

LAR Signature

Date



## Appendix B

### Participant Data Sheet

**Title of the Project:** Pastoral Counseling

**Principal Investigator:** William Hansford, Liberty University PhD. Candidate

**Age:**

**Highest Level of Education: (Circle One)**

- GED
- High School Graduate
- Some College
- College Graduate

**Length of Time Affiliated with The Highway to Heaven Ministry:**

- 0-2 Years
- 2-3 Years
- 3-5 Years

**Level of Religiosity (Circle One)**

- Frequently Attend Church
- Often Pray or Attend Bible Study
- Regular tithing

## Appendix C

### Preliminary Interview

**Title of the Project:** Pastoral Counseling

**Principal Investigator:** William Hansford, Liberty University PhD. Candidate

1. What are the strengths and or weaknesses of each question?
2. Do you find any of the questions to be offensive, intrusive or invasive?
3. Are there any questions that appear to be repetitive?
4. Are the questions designed for the respondent to provide the necessary information?
5. Do the questions appear to be in a meaningful order?
6. Are any of the questions too wordy or long?
7. Do the questions appear to be designed for the respondent to answer easily?
8. Are the questions designed so the responses can be easily coded and classified?
9. Are there any questions that you feel might be difficult for a respondent to disclose their true opinion?
10. Are there too many questions or too few questions in the questionnaire?

## **Appendix D**

### **Participant Questionnaire**

**Title of the Project:** Pastoral Counseling

**Principal Investigator:** William Hansford, Liberty University PhD. Candidate

#### **Beliefs**

1. What impact do life experiences have on how you view yourself?
2. What characteristics do you believe a counselor should have to produce positive outcomes in people's lives?
3. What is the best way to address situations out of your control?
4. Why do you believe some people struggle while others prosper?

#### **Values**

5. Describe a value that is currently important to you?
6. How do your values differ from your friends and family?
7. How does what you value in life support your actions?

#### **Religiosity**

8. Have you ever sought out counseling?
9. What did you seek counseling for?
10. Did you seek counseling from a pastoral or clinical counselor?
11. Why do you believe pastoral counseling is needed?

## Appendix E

### Debriefing Statement

**Title of the Project:** Pastoral Counseling

**Principal Investigator:** William Hansford, Liberty University PhD. Candidate

You recently participated in a research study. You were selected as a participant because you met the eligibility requirement based on age, sex, education, religious beliefs, and The Highway to Heaven Ministry membership. Participation in this research project was voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask any questions you may have.

The purpose of this research is to explore mental health issues in the lives of members at the Highway to Heaven Ministry to provide a framework of pastoral counseling, facilitate counseling denoting confidence and provide evidence that biblical guidance is necessary and sufficient to address individual needs.

The purpose of this debriefing statement is to inform you that the true nature of the study was fully disclosed in the research process.

Deception was not necessary for this study because alternative methods will be used to yield results.

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer, and all electronic records will be deleted after three years.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

The researcher conducting this study is William Hansford. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Richard Nichols, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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