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Living wounds (*anfechtungen*) or blacksmithing of the human soul? The pastoral art of marvellous exchange (*mirifica commutatio*) in spiritual well-being

ABSTRACT

Many of the unexpected, undeserved forms of suffering and the constant exposure to human brokenness infiltrate schemata of interpretation and frameworks of meaning-giving, causing guilt, doubt, torment, and anguish – a kind of paralysis of the human soul; the hopelessness of désespoir (the nausea of unhope). Instead of blacksmithing spiritual pathology (spiritual victimisation by means of punishment and self-blame), an approach of living wounds is proposed, namely to embrace them within the process of reaching out to the wounds of the other. Within the framework of Christian theology, the healing dimension of a theologia crucis is researched. In this regard, the notion of mirifica commutatio (marvellous exchange) in Martin Luther’s understanding of a “suffering God” is discussed as an illustration of what the healing of externalisation in pastoral caregiving entails. Thus, the emphasis on divine substitution in a pastoral approach of “double switching”, while facing the factuality of the irreversibility of Anfechtungen (spiritual dread and anguish) and human imperfection.

1. INTRODUCTION

To become engaged in the ministry of healing, care and counselling is without any doubt a hazardous task. Most of the time, pastoral caregivers have to deal with the trauma of loss, anguish, guilt, the fear for rejection, and the reality of death and dying. Guilt feelings develop in most instances, especially where, due to cause-and-effect reasoning, the pain of guilt leads to severe self-blame and the soul-searching question: Why? When the latter is linked to the notion of punishment, probably caused by the intervention of a divine causative factor, self-blame leads to spiritual self-punishment – the blacksmithing of spiritual pathology. Instead of healing and becoming whole, spiritual wounds and the pain of brokenness cause embarrassment, disappointment, even self-abnegation – spiritual terrorising and soulless victimisation. Creasman (2018:2) aptly points out:

We take painful experiences and begin defining ourselves by the themes, seeing ourselves as victims, broken, or shameful. These soul wound stories limit us to small worlds, small dreams, and unfulfilling relationships. A soul wound can be a single, destructive experience or a gradual accumulation of seemingly unimportant hurts. An experience of extreme trauma, such as a rape, can manifest the same sort of soul wounds as a series of easily dismissed rejections by friends, family, or community.

Thus, the poignant question: How does one start to live one's wounds,¹ preventing not to become spiritually terrorised, captivated, and eventually paralysed by them? With reference to Henri Nouwen's notion of becoming a "wounded healer", the crucial question in spiritual torment and distress is: How can one put one's woundedness and hopeless anguish in the service of others? (Hernandez 2006:116).

One can call this spiritual exhaustion and wounded conscience a *soulful anatomy of human terror* (see Camden 1997:822), manifesting into painful "*soul wounds*" – hopelessness as anatomy of a depleted and tormented soul, as feature of existential dread and spiritual disillusionment.

1 It is indeed difficult to differentiate between trauma and crisis due to unexpected loss. Both deal with the pain of loss and different forms of anxiety. In trauma, the core pain is about the unexpected character of the loss and pain and the irreversibility or possible irreversibility of loss and how to deal with long-term implications and the deficiency of appropriate coping mechanisms. Wounds refer to a state of being, namely how the loss impacts on behaviour, disposition, and coping mechanisms. Wounds indicate pain on a spiritual level, namely how it disturbs one's views on life, the meaning of life, norms and values, the quality of hoping, sense of destiny and calling, and on a religious level, one's conceptualisation of God. For example, the appropriateness of God images. Wounds impact on the quality of compassion and sense of sensitivity.

At the end of his life, Vladimir Lenin was racked by doubts, apprehensions, even alarm and anguish. It is said that the spells of sclerotic paralysis that began to torment him at this point served only to deepen his gloom. Part of his agony was related to the poignant question that haunted him, namely that he had perhaps gone too far in pushing to consolidate the revolution's gains and that some of what he had done made a mockery of his own principles, setting Russia on a path very different to the one he had envisaged (Basu 2019).



Lenin passed away on 21 January 1924. When debilitating illness gave him a pause, his self-confidence seemed to suddenly abandon him. Self-doubt, even remorse, assailed him and robbed him of self-confidence. In this photograph from the summer of 1923, the frigid, frightened look (kind of anguish and dread) on his face mirrors the tumult in his soul (Ulyanova 1923).

How then should one face brokenness² and attend to “*soul wounds*” – the past emotional injuries that manifest pain-based identities (Creasman 2018:2)? In the words of Creasman, the spiritual challenge is about attitudinal change; in other words, how to move from victim to warrior (Creasman 2018:90-102); from broken to whole (Creasman 2018:103-121); from shame to acceptance (Creasman 2018:122-134).

2. *DÉSESPOIR* – ANATOMY OF HUMAN TERROR AND SOULLESS DREAD

When loss and a state of brokenness are directly or indirectly related to feelings of uncertainty, inferiority, rejection, being a failure, not being acknowledged

2 “Broken has been a defining theme of my story – in relationships, work, and in my experience of myself and the world, I was driven by the conviction that there was something wrong with me, some unidentifiable source of damage that made me inferior and unlovable” (Creasman 2018:3).

and unconditionally accepted for who one is, the trauma of constitutive dread eventually manifests in despair and an existential state of sheer hopelessness. Morbidity and melancholy set in. These existential wounds eventually infiltrate the very fibre of meaningful existence, intoxicating the realm of future and hope: The hopelessness of *désespoir*.

When one is convinced that hope is merely folly and life is fundamentally constituted by nothingness (Sartre 1943), the dreaming spirit of humankind can be turned into the nightmare of dread and *nausea* (disgust). “But what does nothing produce?” asked Kierkegaard (1967:38). It produces fear in the dreaming spirit. A human person is then delivered to the strange ambiguity of dread. Dread as a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy (Kierkegaard 1967); an antipathy that robs hope of compassion and concern. The ontic state of non-hope – deepfreeze of the dreaming spirit.

As mentioned earlier, existential dread creates a condition that can be called non-hope/unhope (*désespoir*). This stems from an unarticulated disposition determined by the despondency of non-hope (*apelpizō*); the existential resignation before the threat of nothingness. The antipode of hope is, therefore, not merely despair, but hopelessness as the bleak disposition of indifferentism, sloth, and resignation (Bollnow 1955:110). The French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, called this desperate situation of disgust and sense of nothingness without a meaningful sense of future anticipation, *unhope* (*inespoir*). The eventual threat of destructive resignation is *désespoir* – fatalistic despair (Marcel 1935:106).

Désespoir creates a kind of spiritual fatalism. According to Heering (1964:17-20), the root of the interplay hope-anxiety can be traced down to the metaphysical pattern of thinking in Greek philosophy. When tragedy is the overarching philosophical paradigm for the interpretation of the meaning of life, as in the case of classic Hellenism, fate (*moira*) becomes the dominating paradigm of interpretation.

3. TRAGEDY AND THE COMPLEXITY OF LIFE EVENTS: WOUNDEDNESS AS THE INTOXICATION OF THE HUMAN SOUL

Tragedy contorts woundedness. It distorts misery, brutality, horror, and wretchedness arising from our confrontations with undeserved suffering and unexpected, irreversible loss, into the anguish of dreadful nothingness (*nausea*) (Louw 2016:348-350). It even challenges those theological discourses that speak of suffering and violent death as part of a providential order. “Tragedy gives aesthetic form to a world palpably at odds with the world as we desire to view it.” (Hall 1993:51).

Woundedness penetrates one's sense of purposefulness and fuels a sense of bleak doubt. Doubt, as related to undeserved loss and disillusionment caused by "fate" (*moira*), is closely linked to what Taleb (2010) calls the *Black Swan Syndrome*, namely the unpredictability of life events which occurs without any reasonable or rational explanation, dumping one's being human in the abyss of existential disillusionment.

3.1 The soul wound of Black Swan disillusionment within the "triplet of opacity"

According to Taleb (2010:8), the human mind suffers from three ailments which he calls the "triplet of opacity", namely the illusion of understanding, the retrospective distortion, and cause-and-effect reasoning of platonification – the tendency to platonify, namely liking known schemas and well-organised knowledge to the point of blindness to reality (Taleb 2010:131). Taleb thus reasons that to limit praxis to merely practice, functionality, and factuality is to live in the illusionary bubble of positivistic arrogance. He calls the limitation of praxis to merely empirically informed data, "*epistemic arrogance*" – the hubris concerning the limits of one's knowledge (Taleb 2010:136). One overestimates what one knows, and underestimates uncertainty, by compressing the range of possible uncertain states, by reducing the space of the unknown (Taleb 2010:140). Knowledge, even if it is functional and operational, refers to networking ideas that should represent and instil a kind of existential significance. It is, therefore, a "scientific mistake" to link validity to rational causality, with its basis in the evidence of "because of", without considering the factor of randomness and the highly improbable.

Woundedness, therefore, is not a matter of "complification" – problematising life events with the allure of solving intriguing life issues rationally –, but of "complexification" – dealing with paradoxical determinants simultaneously without rational explanations (Nilson 2007:238).

Within the framework of hermeneutical thinking, complexity implies processes of complexification (Rescher 1998:56). Rather than the offering of "cheap solutions", complexification describes the richness of experiences as embedded in paradox; it does not want to simplify, but to probe into the density of systemic networking (thick descriptions). Complexification is an attempt to understand relational systems in terms of its complementary parts, despite obvious levels of contradiction (Collen 2003:61).

Therefore, the burning question: What is meant by "living wounds" meaningfully and hopefully within the complexity of human brokenness?

3.2 Spiritual complexification: “The dark night of the human soul”

Complexity is not limited to merely the realm of existential orientation and a soulless state of non-hope/unhope (*désespoir*). It even infiltrates and affects the theological realm of faith, namely the interpretation of God’s vivid intervention with painful life events. Traditionally, the intoxication of the human soul and being victimised by “soul wounds” lead to what St. John of the Cross called *the dark night of the human soul* (Hernandez 2006:124). This soulless state of non-hope/unhope (*désespoir*) and sheer spiritual darkness also impact on the theological realm of God images. Who is God and where is God? Is God totally absent (eclipse of God)?

After the breakdown of his friendship with Nathan Ball, Nouwen’s “*dark night of the human soul*” led to what he described as the feeling that God had abandoned him, so that this spiritual anguish completely paralysed him (spiritual forsakenness).

All had become darkness. Within me there was one long scream coming from a place I didn’t know existed, a place full of demons (Nouwen 2014:xvi).³

The point is that the tempest and wounds of a human soul eventually enter the realm of faith and the religious dimension of God images. It can lead to a disconnection with the divine realm of life and manifest in severe doubt.

The real temptation to doubt does not come in not believing God but in believing what is not God. The danger is that we press judgement too far and our speculation creates such a distorted picture of God that we cannot continue to believe in good faith. To believe the wrong thing is always halfway to believing nothing. Our misrepresentations of God are so pathetically inadequate or monstrously hideous that to believe in him any longer is unnecessary or repugnant (Guinness 1973:203).

The spirituality of doubt, as manifestation of hopelessness, bleak morbidity, and soulless dread, contributes to religious blasphemy and spiritual pathology (*Anfechtungen*).

3 In *The wounded healer*, Nouwen (1979:82) draws attention to pastors’ weakness and brokenness referring to his own life struggle to come to terms with his own imperfection and experience of personal loneliness. His lonely life was one tormenting existence (Hernandez 2006:116). “The reality of loneliness for Henri Nouwen was compounded by the fact that he was a priest faithfully committed to the vow of celibacy. The very prospect of a real-life companion of any kind was therefore totally out of the question for him” (Hernandez 2006:114).

For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost; I was shaken by desperation and blasphemy of God (Luther, in Camden 1997:821).

The intriguing question surfaces: How did Martin Luther deal with his spiritual tempest, fear, and religious trembling (*Anfechtungen*)?⁴ What is the impact of “fear and trembling” – the sickness unto death – (Kierkegaard 1954) on the pastoral challenge, namely to become healed and to be a healer of the “soul” (*iatros tés psuchés*)? (Oden 1983:187).

4. EMBRACING OR RESISTING “ANFECHTUNGEN”? THE “NAUSEATING IMPOTENCE” OF FACING “RELIGIOUS PATHOLOGY”

I now turn to the question of healing. Healing not as a solution and attempt to get rid of the tension (anguish), but healing as the challenge to internalise the tension (it is my wound) and eventually to externalise the tension (I am not a victim – I am more than the sum total of my wounds; a “saint with wounds”).

4.1 The first movement: From an either/or to a both/and modality

When one is faced with severe forms of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair causing pathological forms of self-abnegation and self-victimisation (*Anfechtungen*), even daunted by a soulless paralysis of spiritual impossibility, the first reaction is flight and attempts to retreat from life. The other option is to face woundedness; in other words, to embrace wounds and integrate them as determinants for spiritual growth. This is the reason why Nouwen opts not for an either/or approach, but for a both/and modality approach. Both the opposites of resistance and embracement should be combined to lessen the tension of *Anfechtungen* (not to struggle how to eliminate them).

A pastoral approach is not about ways to get rid of pain, but how to get enabled to welcome and embrace wounds (Hernandez 2006:116). Welcoming and embracement do not imply ignorance, but realisation. Healing implies a personal confrontation with dread. Therefore, the challenge to internalise (a

4 *Anfechtungen* is the German word that Luther used to describe the overwhelming times of spiritual trial, terror, despair, and religious crisis that he experienced throughout his life. At the heart of such an *Anfechtung* was the terrifying feeling that God was going to judge and condemn the sinner at any moment. “In the wake of such a feeling came subsequent feelings of deep sadness that God had forsaken one” (Bucher 2016:1).

realistic approach) as accepting the paralysing impact: I cannot cope on my own. Unfortunately, achievement (to cope successfully on one's own by means of self-improvement and moral accomplishments) leads, in most instances, to further paralysis. Realisation leads to radicalisation – probing into the very roots of spiritual impotence to reorientate, embrace, and externalise, namely to discover an external source of mercy, hope, and grace (the religious option for healing).

4.2 Understanding the complexity of realisation: Nauseating impotence

The challenge to embrace and not to resist or to deny is complex. This complexity has to do with the fact that the emotional impact of wounds is devastating, namely a kind of spiritual paralysis due to disillusionment. Woundedness becomes self-destructive. Life becomes tragic and, in the last instance, fate determines life so that human beings are basically helpless and disempowered entities. "This nauseating impotence! To sit waiting for death and to do nothing!" (Solzhenitsyn 1968:495).

4.3 Expressing the desperate cry for wholeness and mercy

Within the paradigmatic frameworks of religious thinking, experiences of doubt and despair can be devastating to self-confidence and the courage to carry on with life, despite existential setbacks. When these feelings are related to loneliness and personal imperfection, the spiritual victimisation of destructive self-denouncement sets in. Kurz and Ketscham (in Hernandez 2006:93) refer to the fact that the spiritual struggle to live with imperfection and wounds is about the haunting sense of incompleteness and the desperate cry for wholeness. Thus, the reason why Nouwen links every kind of spiritual ritual in religious thinking to a kind of desperate, despairing cry for God's mercy (*the Kyrie Eleison*) (Hernandez 2006:77).

4.4 *Anfechtungen* as encounters with God: Experiencing the "absence of God" as a state of soulless darkness (eclipse of God)

Often, the impression develops that God is unable to intervene or that the spiritual pain is inflicted by a divine factor or a kind of punishment for inappropriate religious behaviour or even lack of faith. In this regard, Martin Luther's notion of *Anfechtungen* (spiritual and religious temptation) is exemplary of how spiritual experiences infiltrate and determine the believer's understanding of God.

Inappropriate God images feed self-doubt, self-punishment. They even kindle a kind of religious trial that puts the suffocating “soul” in the pit of spiritual distress, morbidity, accusing guilt feelings, and the development of a destructive consciousness.

As Truesdale (2008:1) aptly pointed out: When darkness descends, the experience of the absence of God sets in. That which could be described as the “eclipse of God” – the apparent absence of God, especially in instances where God is projected as pleasant and always automatically there at our disposal.

If we paint a rosy picture of God always showing up ahead of the emergency response crews, we will shortchange the biblical record (Truesdale 2008:1).

A kind of religious, spiritual short-circuiting (*Anfechtung*) sets in.⁵

Come be my light (2007), a book collecting many of Mother Theresa’s most personal and private correspondence, reveals a time of severe doubt, spiritual torment. She even wrote that it seems to her that God hides, is wrapped in darkness. She was afflicted by a deep sense of God’s absence for the last half century of her life.

In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss – of God not wanting me – of God not being God – of God not really existing (in Walters 2021:2).

John Calvin, suffering from chronic anxiety, writes:

We are continually tormented until God delivers us from misery and anguish by the remedy of His own love towards us (Calvin, in Harrison 2020:1).

In his book *A grief observed*, Lewis writes about his spiritual torment and experience of dread when exposed to the loss of his wife and his personal struggle to come to grips with God, uttering a cry while he felt like a drowning man, totally deafened for the voice of hope:

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not “So there’s no God after all”, but “So this is what God’s really like”. Deceive yourself no longer (Lewis 2021).

⁵ The published letters of Mother Teresa reveal that, sometimes, the sense of God’s absence became so oppressive that she even doubted His existence. See Truesdale (2008:1).



"Eclipse of God": When the darkness descends and spiritual doubt sets in, God is experienced as apparently absent (depiction in Truesdale 2008:1. For academic purposes only.)

Martin Luther was also exposed to a kind of "eclipse of God". He struggled with a sense of dread, anguish, and personal imperfection. In one of his letters, he writes:

When I first entered the monastery, it came to pass that I was sad and downcast, nor could I lay aside my melancholy (Luther, in Harrison 2020:1).

According to Roland Baintan (in Griffith 2019), *Anfechtungen* for Luther points in the direction of religious pathology. An analysis of his writings points to existential doubt, turmoil, pang, tremor, panic, despair, desolation, and desperation that invade his spirit and destroy his sense of Christian soulfulness. However, he did not capitulate and rather became involved in a spiritual battle against the forces of evil and destruction. Luther moved from bleak anguish to what he called delicious despair (*mirifica commutatio*).

5. THE HEALING DIMENSION IN *MIRIFICA COMMUTATIO*: MASOCHISM OR TRIUMPHALISM?

Caregivers should realise that a ministry of irreparable loss and the art of living wounds are not about finding answers.

Ministry is not about finding ways to get rid of people's pain, but about enabling others to welcome and embrace it. For healing to take place, pain needs to be confronted for what it really is (Hernandez 2006:116).

The intriguing question now is: If embracing loss and pain is not merely a form of self-pity, a kind of spiritual surrender, fatalistic piety, masochistic dread, or even sheer "spiritual exhibitionism" (boasting with one's wounds, in order to force people into compassion or to impress believers), can spiritual healing not end up in "cheap grace", namely to proclaim an easy kind of instant victory? Or, on a more theological level, is the claim to become spiritually healed not a skewed form of self-boast (*theologia gloriae*)⁶ or manipulation of an all-powerful, omnipotent, *pantokrator* God (my-God-can-do-everything)?⁷

It is important to emphatically state that spiritual healing does not necessarily mean victory *over* suffering and *from* pain. Rather, victory often has to embrace the hope of not overcoming; in other words, revealing the patient and long-suffering nature of hope.

Human goodness and the healing praxis of compassion exist under God's graceful "Yes" to suffering humankind (Berkouwer 1954:226). The triumph of grace over pain, therefore, does not ignore the reality of evil, suffering, and human sinfulness and should not be rendered as a *theologia gloriae*.⁸ False triumph (triumphalism) easily leads to self-glorification and self-justification, with no longer any reckoning with the impact of sin and guilt on a state of spiritual wholeness.

The healing of graceful embracement is, according to Luther, not about "overcoming" *Anfechtungen*, but about a theology of "marvellous exchange" that assists the believer to externalise *Anfechtungen*; in other words,

6 While a *theologia gloriae* is concerned with the glory of works (human achievements; the urge to perform hope by means of an achievement ethics) (*glorificari per opera*), a hope founded by a *theologia crucis* is concerned with the profession of faith in light of redemption, justification, and salvation (forgiveness/reconciliation) (Louw 2016:345-346).

7 See, in this regard, the remarks of Hall (1993:107-108): "Powerful people demand powerful deities – and get them!"; "Power – and precisely power understood in the usual sense – is of the essence of divinity shaped by empire".

8 Berkouwer (1954:194): "... juist deze triomf der genade is alleen vanuit het kruis en tegenover de 'speculatio Majestatis' mogelijk, als christocentrische triomf".

the exchange of *Anfechtungen* due to a sacrificial *pro me* – exchange as substitution. In this sense, the dread and anguish become externalised theologically.

5.1 *Mirifica commutatio*: The substitutional externalisation of wounds

In terms of Luther's theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*), living wounds have a deep theological background. Fundamentally at stake in living wounds is the notion of vicarious suffering and substitutionary exchange: The *pro me* notion of justification and grace alone (Louw 2016:328-338).

The Reformation's struggle to maintain the principle of grace alone had a great influence on the practice of pastoral ministry. It replaced formal confession (with the attendant dangers of forced confession and mechanical forgiveness) with the spontaneous pastoral encounter achieved in home visits, personal encounters, and caring conversations. Luther's practice of pastoral care should, therefore, be understood within the context of his reaction to the penance sacrament and the practice of confession (Schütz 1977:12). According to Luther, confession should be stripped of its orientation towards human achievement and the unilateral concentration on the human deed of confession, repentance, and penance. Therefore, supplementary to confession and repentance (a state of humiliation), is spiritual healing as the delightful discovery of the "suffering God" – *pro me*; reconciliation as the healing of a "marvellous exchange" (Louw 2016:110, 375).

Luther's argumentation amounts to the following: Temptation (*Anfechtung* as a state of hopelessness and helplessness) (McGrath 1985:170) brings one to the depth of helplessness (delicious despair – Luther). From this position, one can embrace the cross (embrace brokenness and personal inflictions, soulful wounds) and flee to God (spiritual externalisation). Repentance is, thus, not a human achievement, but a gracious gift of God to be embraced. In pastoral ministry, spiritual healing should, therefore, concentrate on God's promises: The promise (*promissio*) of grace and the assurance of redemption.

5.2 The healing challenge: Delicious despair as spiritual well-being

According to Kelleman (2017), Luther wanted to help the electoral prince (*Kurfürst*) Frederick to understand that the death and the suffering of Christ in his place, for his sake, could change Frederick's perspective on life and contribute to spiritual purification. In this regard, the notion

of “sufferology” (Lake 2007:97)⁹ is not merely about justification, but also about sanctification: The healing of the human soul as embodied in a habitus and lifestyle of gratitude.

Human suffering (existential woundedness) should, therefore, be accessed from the perspective of the suffering and death of Christ (Kelleman 2017). Luther, therefore, wanted that one’s existential and earth-bound, human story of suffering should be reviewed from God’s narrative of the cross (*theologia crucis*) and resurrection (*theologia resurrectionis*). Luther, thus, concurred that, in the living of wounds, one should not grieve over the evil of imperfection but start to glory in one’s tribulation, due to the divine *pro me*.

This newfound joy in Christ (*fröhliche Wechsel*) comes like an unsuspected surprise for the suffocating human being after so many unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with sinfulness and brokenness. Merely human attempts and a constant exposure to human failure brew anguish and dread. To turn away from human achievements to graceful intervention kindles hope and joy; despair leads to gratitude (marvellous despair). To flee from oneself is to become embraced by God’s mercy and reconciliatory grace. This grace is founded on the ontic fact revealed in a *theologia crucis*: Christ’s substitutionary (vicariously) and sacrificial death – in my place, on behalf of me, bringing about new life (the spiritual movement from mortification to vivification).

Mirifica commutatio refers to the fact that living wounds necessarily imply struggle (spiritual agony) (Beer 1980). “*Fröhliche Wechsel*” could, therefore, be described as the “*grundzüge*” (characteristic feature), “heart piece” (Kiessling 2009:455) of spiritual healing and the art of living wounds; in other words, the realisation that God, in his grace and righteousness, is essentially “*pro me*” (for me in my place).¹⁰

What Christ did for us in his substitutionary death and what he did in us because of our spiritual union with him in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-10) (Flaten & Gregory 2002:xii).

Pro me creates the mystery of a unification with Christ that changes the whole identity of the believer from an exclusive understanding of grace into an

9 In the 1950s, Frank Lake, a British Christian psychiatrist, emphasised the link between suffering and healing in the praxis of caregiving and counselling. Lake (2007:97) described a sufferology in healing as God’s school of creative suffering: “There is no human experience which cannot be put on the anvil of a lively relationship with God and battered into a meaningful shape”.

10 “Als solches Herzstück bietet sich uns, ‘der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit’ dar. Dessen Kern ist das, ‘pro me’, das alle wichtigen ‘Probleme der Lutherische Theologie’” (Schwager 1984:27).

inclusive understanding of grace on the same basis as the *unification between bride and bridegroom*.¹¹ Grow (2011:) aptly remarks:

Another implication of this, is that salvation is understood to all be grounded in Christ (justification, sanctification, and glorification); and so, we no longer have this rupture placed between the objective side of salvation (justification), and the subjective (sanctification), it is all placed and shaped by Christ himself. So, Luther offers a participationist understanding of salvation.¹²

The bride-bridegroom metaphor implies that Luther wanted to move away from a clear-cut forensic and positivistic interpretation of the mystical communion between Christ and the new position of the believer in terms of the substitutionary and sacrificial death of Christ.

Nevertheless, this marriage-framework in Luther runs fluid with Calvin's *unio mystica*; both in the *mirifica commutatio* tradition. Both run counter against the post-Reformed orthodox (Calvinist or even later Lutheran) understanding of salvation as purely juridical or forensic in trajectory (Grow 2011).

Mirifica commutatio could, therefore, be rendered not as a moral or ethical category, but as an aesthetic one: Exchange as the beautification of life – life as the gratuitous display of unconditional love, hospitable homecoming, and reconciliatory peace.

6. LIVING WOUNDS: FROM PASTORAL BLACKSMITHING TO PASTORAL ORTHOPATHY

The further impact of an aesthetics of *mirifica commutatio* is that one should no longer become a captive of an ecclesial hierarchy that tries to purify the human soul by means of damnation – pastoral blacksmithing. “Incompetent spiritual directors know no way with souls but to hammer and batter them like a blacksmith” (in Kelleman 2017:1).

11 In developing the marriage metaphor, Luther drew on German law to develop the idea of an exchange that takes place between Christ and the believer. German law distinguished between that which belonged to a person, was that person's own (*proprium*), and that which one possessed or used (as in 'possession is nine-tenths of the law'). He pointed out that, in marriage, everything that properly belonged to the groom now comes into the possession of the bride, and everything that properly belonged to the bride now becomes the possession of the groom. This union effects an exchange (Kolb & Arand 2008:46).

12 “Luther held that the Christian is a person who ... *is simil justus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and sinful)” (Kolb & Arand 2008:47).



Pastoral caregiving and personal temptation as existential blacksmithing: Self-torturing, self-blaming, and self-reproach.¹³

Luther initially followed the route of personal blacksmithing because his spiritual tempest was closely linked with his battle with the devil and an acute awareness of sinfulness, imperfection, and a tormenting consciousness.¹⁴ In Luther's case, due to *mirifica commutatio*, blacksmithing did not eventually lead to pathology, but to the healing impact of lamentation. Lamentation, therefore, encircled by *pro me*, leads to what Luther called the dialectics of despair and delight, tempest and freedom, dread and hope.¹⁵

13 See Blacksmith (2022). For academic purposes only.

14 However, the temptations are not merely related to spiritual issues. Temptations were, for Luther, also on an existential and physical level. As in the case of Nouwen, temptations are closely related to human weakness and many ailments. Luther called temptations and personal trauma, which arise from physical suffering or hardship, "temptations from the left side", namely sickness, poverty, dishonour, "especially when our will, plan, opinions, counsel, words, and deeds are rejected and ridiculed" (Sermons on the Catechism 1528 [43], in Griffith 2019). This can lead to laziness, or to anger, hatred, impatience: The inward agony of the human soul. The temptation "from the right side" is trial from prosperity. "It is especially strong when people let us have our way, praise our words, our counsel, ... when they esteem us" (Sermons on the Catechism 1528 [44], in Griffith 2019) This test leads to unchastity, lust, pride, greed, and "vainglory, all that appeals to our human nature" (Sermons on the Catechism 1528 [45], in Griffith 2019).

15 In his sermons on the Catechism in 1528, Luther wrote: "He [devil] can tolerate neither the Word of God nor those who keep and teach it. He besets them in life and in death. While the faithful are alive, he uses great attacks on their faith, hope, and love toward God. He beleaguers and storms a heart with fear, doubt, and despair until it shies away from God, hates and blasphemes Him, and the wretched conscience believes that God, the Devil, death, sin, hell, and all creatures are one and have united as its eternal and relentless enemy. Neither the

Our only consolation is that in affliction we take refuge in the promise; for it alone is our staff and rod, and if Satan strikes it of our hands, we have no place left to stand (in Griffiths 2019).

Thus, the reason why the notion of *pro me* could be rendered as the cornerstone in Luther's therapy of hope. I want to call this "*promissio* therapy" (Louw 2016:430-514).¹⁶ Hope as source of healing can even face death and dying; death as the final temptation.¹⁷

I now turn to the question of the practice of behavioural change on a spiritual level. Delicious despair has implications for the how of change. Learned skills to cope with the paralysis of dread could become hampering factors on the road to healing. In this regard, healing implies therapeutic interventions regarding inappropriate coping skills. These interventions could indeed become a complex issue.

7. THE DIRTY JOB OF THERAPEUTIC PASTORAL ENCOUNTERS: ADDRESSING CHOSEN PAINKILLERS

With "dirty job" is meant the impression that therapy is merely about giving answers and delivering quick-fix solutions (caregivers as Mr or Mrs Fixit) to deal with human imperfection and woundedness. It rather presupposes a radical approach to healing; in other words, to remove the suffocating person's "chosen painkillers" (Hernandez 2006:117).

Turk nor the emperor can ever storm a city with such power as the Devil uses in attacking a conscience" (Sermons on the Catechism 1528 [47], in Griffith 2019).

- 16 Promissiotherapy is about the external source of God's faithfulness. In promissiotherapy, one does not merely impart meaning; on an ontological level, one actually receives meaning. Meaning is a kind of "good grace", a Eucharistic gift. Pastoral therapy, as an exponent of grace, is essentially linked to God's faithfulness and promises. This linkage to God's faithful promises and salvation means that pastoral therapy can be typified as promissiotherapy in terms of its therapeutic effect: a courage to be (*parrhēsia*). When understood in this way, promissiotherapy becomes an academic, scientific term that distinguishes the uniqueness of pastoral therapy as a theological enterprise from therapy as a psychological or medical endeavour. Promissiotherapy portrays pastoral care essentially as a theological issue and helps pastors distinguish between the psychological and pastoral elements in their therapeutic involvement (Louw 2016:513-514).
- 17 "Therefore, you must make thorough preparations not only for the time of temptation but also for the time and struggle of death. Then your conscience will be terrified by the recollection of your past sins. The Devil will attack you vigorously and will try to swamp you with piles, floods, and whole oceans of sins, in order to frighten you, drive you away from Christ, and plunge you into despair" (Sermons on the Catechism 1528 [60], in Griffith 2019).

Chosen painkillers can also be called inappropriate defence mechanisms that developed over a longer period as modes of self-help, but without dealing with the core issue, namely the question about the how of living wounds. For example, many inefficient behaviours as expression of hopelessness, helplessness, and despair are diagnosed as a depression with the view that the only solution is medication. By depression as a mode of coping is not meant a condition related to physiological, biological, or chemical/hormonal dysfunctions as related to psychiatric diagnosed dysfunctions (constitutive depression). What I have in mind is the so-called “normal” existential responses to severe loss and temporary, emotional shock and melancholy, due to unexpected loss and feelings of undeserved “emotional punishment” (reactive modes of depression). The latter is closely related to what is called situational depression.¹⁸

Although a pharmaceutical approach could help stabilise the tormented human soul, the learned painkillers of suppressing the wounds should be challenged – a kind of spiritual surgery.

7.1 Addressing the painkillers for unattended wounds

The following responses could be viewed as attempts to work around one’s abyss – chosen painkillers:

- Negligence/carelessness/imprudence – not attending to pain.
- Denial and withdrawal – suppression of pain.
- Masking – pretending “as if” – artificiality of ineffective coping mechanisms.
- Spiritual exhibitionism – boasting about trauma of loss, grief operations.
- Fatalistic despair – the drowning victim.
- Narcotic business – to become so task-oriented (workaholism) that one cannot enjoy the beauty of relaxation or even find time to dwell on shortcomings (self-insight and the wisdom of learning from pain).

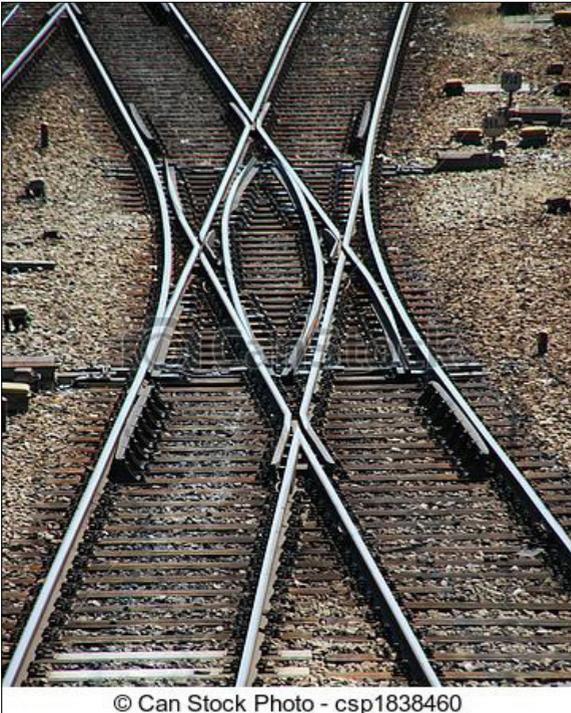
The flipside of removing spiritual killers is the spiritual vaccination of “double switching”.

18 “Situational depression is a short-term, stress-related type of depression. It can develop after you experience a traumatic event or series of events. Situational depression is a type of adjustment disorder. It can make it hard for you to adjust to your everyday life following a traumatic event. It’s also known as reactive depression” (Legg 2018:1).

8. THE HEALING INTERSECTION OF *PRO ME*: THE CROSSROAD OF “DOUBLE SWITCHING” IN PASTORAL CAREGIVING

Pastoral healing is not to hammer the soul to the point of destructive behaviour (blacksmithing as self-punishment), but to use wounds as turning points to develop a different perspective on the same situation of loss and despair.

The cultivation of new perspectives (spirituality of change as healing) started for Luther at the intersection between the cross of Christ and the cross of human suffering. The *pro me* (God for me in my place and my place in God on behalf of me) as a spiritual and religious perspective on the how of becoming whole again (*mirifica commutatio* as the spiritual and pastoral art of double switching).



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Photo: Railroad Double Switch. Can Stock Photo – CSP1838460.

Due to what one can call “double switching”, the cross of Christ (vicarious suffering) functions as the intersection between God and our being human.

Double switching started with the incarnation (divine enfleshment – *hypostasis*)¹⁹ and is embodied in human whereabouts by means of divine inhabitation – the indwelling work of the Spirit (pneumatology) – divine presencing²⁰ within human imperfection. Through the mystical unification of Christ, suffering became the entry point of divine presencing in one’s daily struggle. It empowers one to come to terms with loss and trauma and to start living wounds. The cross of suffering becomes the intersection and entry point where pneuma and soul (*nēphēsh*) become so interconnected (union of Christian mysticism) that one’s mortification is immediately about the revival of the spirit (vivification). In the healing of “double switching”, the interplay between “delicious despair” and “marvellous exchange” kindles the joy of eschatological hoping: Already and not yet within the in-between of imperfection, loss, and struggle.

At this spiritual conjunction and intersection of double switching, one can say that the healing dimension in *mirifica commutatio* amounts to the following therapeutic challenges:

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- 19 *Hypostasis* should be understood in close connection with *ousia*. The latter would refer to the inner core of subjecthood, the “I am”, wholly present in each hypostasis as the transcendent subject immanent in each. It constitutes the “existential” object that is affirmed when one judges that this “real” object (the *hypostasis*) is the presence of the one subject who is true God. *Hypostasis* in Christology is often used in close connection with the incarnation as the event of *kenosis*. In Christian theology, *kenosis* (Greek: *κένωσις*, *kénōsis*, lit. [the act of emptying]). Incarnation then refers to the event of “self-emptying” of Jesus’ own will. Jesus, thus, represents God as the “Son of God”, and in this sense, of becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will. The word *ἐκένωσεν* (*ekénōsen*) is used in Philippians 2:7: “[Jesus] made himself nothing ...” (NIV). *Hypostasis* could thus be rendered as the mystical dimension in the sacrificial event substitution (marvellous exchange – *mirifica commutatio*).
- 20 Kempen (2015:140-141) refers to the social theory of Otto Scharmer regarding the important difference between an experience that is merely about sensing and observation, and another kind of being-there with the other that opens up meaning and new perspectives regarding a future orientation. “In vielfacher Weise ähnelt die tiefste Stufe der Aufmerksamkeit, das Presencing, dem Sensing. Beide erweitern den Ort der Aufmerksamkeit von dem in sich geschlossenen Beobachter, über die Schwelle zwischen Subjekt und Objekt der Beobachtung hinaus in eine ganzheitliche Präsenz, das sowohl die kognitive als auch emotionale Dimension (open mind und open heart) des Menschen miteinschließt.” “The key difference is that sensing shifts the place of perception to the current whole while presencing shifts the place of perception to the source of an emerging future whole – to a future possibility that is seeking to emerge.” (Kempen 2015:143). Presencing as a listening with the heart, and existential knowledge regarding the significance of our being human – knowledge as wisdom, *sapientia*. Presencing leads to a new world view regarding the reality of life that transcends merely the cognitive intelligence of the human mind. Presencing is, thus, about a process of opening up, of allowing something new to land, to emerge, and to come into reality with us (Kempen 2015:141).

- Accepting the imperfection and wound as part of one's struggle to cope with pain, loss, and personal helplessness. Become, therefore, engaged with victimisation – having communion with pain and loss. Pain and loss then feature as sacramental encounters whereby the grace of healing can be demonstrated. In this way, the “dark night of the soul” becomes “my cross”. One can say: Powerlessness and forsakenness become ingredients of a conative willpower – a voluntary courage to be (the fortigenetics of a persisting hope).
- To turn pain and woundedness into an opportunity to grow and to reach out to others (comforting the other in terms of a Pauline perspective). Forsakenness could then become an expression of a cry for help and mercy. Human suffering as living wounds thus becomes an integral part of the journey toward the full realisation of one's humanity and the attempt to humanise dehumanising structures. Wounds can, thus, be rendered as gateways to becoming whole, instead of merely being viewed as obstacles.
- On the level of theory formation in pastoral caregiving, a paradigm shift is most needed, namely to move from *orthodoxy* (right belief and the mode of complication – giving right answers and providing rational solutions) to *orthopraxy* (become actively engaged with the existential fact of paradox – internalising pain and loss and reaching out to the pain and loss of others) and to *orthopathy* (the sacrificial stance of compassionate being-with in the midst of the mystery of complexification). This paradigm shift implies the movement between knowing (faithful, trusting God), doing (demonstrating and presencing God), and being (enfleshing, embodying compassionate being-with).
- Integrating brokenness and befriending morality – discover the blessing of brokenness (move from curse and punishment to acceptance and grace). Rather than to invest a great deal of energy in getting rid of one's pain, pain and loss should be embraced as elements of spiritual maturity.
- In a Christian approach to healing and helping, to discover in one's wounds the woundedness of Christ, to the extent that his substitution in my place for me, kindles a new form of hope that discovers a kind of joy that does not seek freedom from the burden, but a freedom for...; in other words, to use imperfection as a medium to serve others in the same way that Christ served us (marvellous exchange). Christ as a kind of New Testament prolongation of the suffering servant of God: The metaphor *ebed Jahwe* (Greek: *pais Theou*), as portrayed in Isaia 53:5:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (NIV).

Living wounds then become, on the level of a theological hermeneutics, living in the presence of the “suffering and weak God” by demonstrating the resisting power of the “resurrected, all-empowering God”.

9. CONCLUSION

The challenge in pastoral caregiving is living, embracing, and welcoming one’s wounds as opportunities for spiritual growth – in other words, to use personal pain to put woundedness in the service of others (Nouwen, in Hernandez 2006:116). In Luther’s case, he put his despair in the service of the reformation, the transformation of Christian piety, and the rediscovery of a Christian perspective of the cross. Living wounds become a crossing point, exchange event, an event of double switching, an entry point of spiritual intersection within the realm of imperfection. It creates the courage to be, despite setbacks. In Luther’s case, his struggle with the malpractices of the church.

One is not whole in the sense of spiritual perfection. One lives within the eschatological tension of already and not-yet. The discovery that one is a saint with wounds (Hernandez 2006:112) helps one understand, like Luther and Nouwen, that “(r)estlessness goes with a dreaded sense of incompleteness” (Hernandez 2006:112). The spirituality of woundedness and restlessness drive one into the welcoming embracement of the suffering Son of God – the *passio Dei* as source of marvellous despair and *mirifica commutatio* – “*fröhliche Wechsel*” as the spiritual therapy, as theological and religious externalisation: My dread becomes God’s dread, in my place, for me – the spiritual art of gracious despair.

A theology of switching places (*pro me*) challenges a healing praxis of comfort to switch places with the other, in order to create new perspectives and to offer hope within the realm of human imperfection: The hope of perspectivism; in other words, thinking and feeling from the position and predicament of the other, demonstrating compassion from the perspective of “the wounded healer” – the substitutionary sacrifice of the forsaken Son of God as demonstration of the faithful presencing through the indwelling presence of the empowering Spirit of God.

Living wounds then become not the surrender of Doris Day’s song during World War II: The bleak “Que sera, sera,²¹ whatever will be, will be” (the unhope of surrender as capitulation). It points more in the direction of spiritual wisdom, as expressed by the lyric of The Beatles: “And when the

21 Whatever will be, will be means that the future is unresolved, and whatever is going to happen, is going to happen.

broken-hearted people living in the world agree; There will be an answer, let it be." Let it be then becomes the wisdom of embracing wounds, because then one can still sing: "Whisper words of wisdom, let it be" – even when facing the dark night of the human soul: "And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me" (The Beatles 1968).

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