

Pastoral Care in Disaster: a theological reflection

The research explores three interrelated theological problems – human suffering as encountered during the eruptions of the Soufrière Hills Volcano on Montserrat, the inadequacy of existing Protestant religious traditions on Montserrat to cope with the crisis situation, and the weaknesses of recommended models of pastoral care inherited from Western Christianity. The latter two concerns became obvious at a time of heightened demand for the churches to offer consolation in the face of natural disaster.

At the intersection of the three stated concerns is the researcher who served as a pastor in the context of the disaster. Through critical utilisation of Thomas Groome's practical theological method of *Shared Christian Praxis*, she acts as interlocutor between the theological reflections of focus groups and theological statements, including contributions from cultural art forms, originating in the wider community of people resident on Montserrat during the eruptions. Irreconcilable differences between the practice of pastoral care and the theological bases for the ministry of care are exposed.

The exploration of the spaces between expounded theory and actual practice of pastoral care in this research yields resources to explain the discrepancies and to help move forward the process for a praxis oriented approach to pastoral care that is both theologically valid and contextually relevant.

In identifying sources of traditional wisdom useful for providing care in disaster and for developing culturally appropriate models of care and counselling, the research also suggests *Shared Christian Praxis* as valuable to Caribbean pastoral theological method. It is also recommended as a way of caring and doing theology in disaster situations.

The Paper

In this paper, I will present three valid concerns which have been de-emphasised in pastoral care practice but which proved central to the coping of persons during the Montserrat volcanic crisis. My aim is to stimulate a growing awareness among practitioners of the need to take people's whole environment seriously, and, in crisis situations, to extract from their context, resources for the delivery of pastoral care.

Pastoral Care in Disaster: Lessons from the Montserrat Volcanic Eruptions

Introduction: The Research in the Context of Contemporary Pastoral Theology

In much of the late twentieth century discourse in pastoral theology, participants focussed on clarification of theoretical bases and necessary revision of pastoral practices. They sought pastoral care approaches which respond to the opportunities and challenges of contemporary society, value the insights gained from modern clinical experience, and effectively balance these with the utilisation of classic pastoral resources of Christianity.

Elaine Graham is a significant contributor to this search for theologically grounded pastoral care that is both practicable in and relevant for today. Careful to 'take seriously the challenges of the contemporary world,' she emphasises the need for culturally sensitive pastoral practices while avoiding a common tendency to equate the call for classic pastoral resources with a return to orthodoxy. She suggests that a desirable model for theological formulation and reflection should value cultural experience and social concern 'as valid and legitimate sources of Christian concern and Divine revelation'.¹

Like Graham, I selected a model that values the historicity of participants engaged in the particular pastoral theological reflection. I used a modified version of Thomas Groome's *shared Christian praxis*.² The research itself revealed that people's whole situation informs their theologising. That became increasingly clear as I analysed the field data. My initial search for categories arising in the setting yielded nine:

1. Cultural Theological Thinking - suggesting participants beliefs / reflections arising from three subcategories - Bible bases, Personal positions, Church connections
2. Cultural Connotations - indicating cultural influences whether local or otherwise
3. Social Situation - depending on speaker's social location

¹ Graham, E., 1996, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, London: Mowbray, p.3

² Groome, T., 1991, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, New York: HarperCollins

4. Political Praxis - referring to governmental / social policies of local government and to Montserrat –UK relationship
5. Caribbean Connections - mentioning relationship with the wider Caribbean
6. History Hooks - revealing influence of historical events (sometimes forgotten events)
7. Crisis and Commotion - describing emergency and crisis situation
8. Hindsight Helps - reflecting subsequent thought on the matter
9. Maroon Mention - explicitly stating *maroon* or otherwise showing reverence for marronage traditions

Of course, there were anomalies. (I placed these in a tenth category – definitely different!)

Further analysis showed that, in reality, category one -theological thinking- is influenced by the other nine.

A working definition of pastoral care

I use Lartey's:

Pastoral care consists of helping activities, participated in by people who recognize a transcendent dimension to human life, which by the use of verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication, aim at preventing, relieving or facilitating persons coping with anxieties. Pastoral care seeks to foster people's growth as full human beings together with the development of ecologically holistic communities in which all persons may live humane...lives.³

This definition takes into account the concerns discussed below- the need for transcendence among participants in pastoral care, the promotion of their holistic development through active participation and through using relevant modes of communication.

³ Lartey, E., 1997, *In Living Colour*, London: Cassell, p.5, 7-8

Searching for Transcendence

Awareness of a transcendent reality is one feature that makes pastoral care Christian.⁴ The dimension of relating to an ultimate Other is important for persons who may or may not be overtly religious. It does seem that under distressing conditions people's religious awareness is heightened, thereby affording unique opportunities for pastoral care. Contemporary documentation of the social construction of disaster response is placing a growing emphasis on the observation that people with histories of disaster, strong faith, and religious affiliation are more resilient. Montserrat is a deeply theistic society with a history replete with human induced and natural disasters and Montserratians provide an example of a people who have learned about 'holding on' in faith and simultaneously 'letting go' of cherished possessions and place in the course of survival.⁵ Those caring for persons facing crisis must take care not to sidestep their search for transcendence by concentrating solely on immediate needs, pressing as those might be. Illustrations from the Montserrat disaster show that suffering persons are sometimes more intentionally focused on matters of ultimate concern than they are on the difficulties of their present situation.

Lartey's definition above highlights 'a transcendent dimension to human life', and it places emphasis on community. It assumes shared ways of living that promote 'the development of ecologically holistic communities'. Persons, individually and corporately, access the transcendent through reliance on practical wisdom, symbols, rituals, myths, and other practices that hold spiritual meaning for them. For Christians, some of these correspond to the symbols, metaphors and narratives of the Christian faith, what Groome calls Christian Story/Vision.

I use Story and Vision as metaphors to symbolize the whole historical reality of "the Christian faith" and the demands and promises that it makes upon the lives of its adherents. In sum, the Christian Story/Vision includes God's self disclosure to the people of Israel as mediated through the Hebrew scriptures; it has its highpoint in Jesus the Christ, who Christians believe is the "heart" of God's Story/Vision for humankind; and it symbolizes the Christian tradition since then and the living faith to which disciples are called in the community of Jesus.⁶

⁴ Wright, F., 1980, *The Pastoral Nature of the Ministry*, London: SCM Press, p.9

⁵ Barnes, V., 2006, "Letting Go' but 'Holding On': Ten Years into the Montserrat Volcanic Eruption", *Magnet, Magazine of the Methodist Women's Network*, Peterborough.

⁶ Groome, T., op. cit., p. 138-39

Jesus the Christ is at the centre of Christian faith claims. Human history is understood as the story of God's relationship with humankind. For Christians, the climax of this narrative of divine self-disclosure, present in part in the Hebrew scriptures, is found in the Christ. Christian ministry then, roots back into Judaism as it looks forward to fulfilment in God's reign. It accepts that both Hebrew and Christian traditions help to define the tasks of pastoral care and to influence its ways of searching for and experiencing transcendence.

But the church has tended to undervalue the contributions of unfamiliar symbols and to focus on the traditionally accepted ways of communicating Christian faith ideals. For example, in reminding Christians of their moral and ethical responsibilities as followers of Jesus the Christ, the resources employed are generally those inherited from Judaism. Practical theologian and ethicist Don Browning, for example, makes a strong case for pastoral care to take seriously the function of moral guidance and in this regard, to learn from Judaism. He observes that this faith, the cradle of Christianity, is an ethical type of religion practiced in the context of the Torah with its demand for human action to effect worldly transformation.⁷ He stresses the significance of a human-divine covenant as a symbol which connotes privilege but also implies the responsibility of human covenant partners to be engaged in a mission of pointing the way to a moral God.

Browning's argument for the moral dimension in pastoral care seems to be wholly supported by ethical rational standards that can be traced back to priestly, scribal and Pharisaic traditions of moral leaders whose primary tool was 'rational knowledge of the law, its casuistry, and everyday applications.'⁸ He presents Jesus as a moral teacher according to the tradition of the Scribes and Pharisees.⁹

Robert Katz, who integrates religious and psychotherapeutic perspectives and identifies relevant movements in both Judaism and Christianity, writes:

Rabbis have not always sensed the connection between the traditional sources and the actual needs of individual Jews. They have proceeded to

⁷ Browning, D., 1976, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press., p.42

⁸ *ibid.*, p.45-46

⁹ *ibid.*, p.49-51

wholesale the teachings of Judaism without paying attention to questions that agitate the hearts and minds of their contemporaries.¹⁰

Katz' criticism is valid outside of Jewish circles for approaches such as Browning's. Browning does not, it would seem, pay sufficient attention to issues of contextualisation which are of paramount importance for contemporary practitioners of pastoral care.

The Christian tradition since the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth / the highpoint of divine revelation in Jesus the Christ has intersected frequently with others. Christianity has inevitably interacted and exchanged with cultures encountered. It could not otherwise have achieved its global reach. It seems reasonable, then, that pastoral theology should continue to explore the range of 'verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication' employed by Christians in particular cultural contexts in their search for transcendence.

Christianity's declining ability to offer meaning in the context of changing western cultures and the increasing trend of participation in a range of spiritualities may well be related to a de-emphasis on transcendence in Christian faith practice.¹¹ It would do well to seriously consider the varied contributions that derive from the Christian faith's intercultural exchanges, and to appropriate communication modes that have impacted positively on the worship life and spirituality of Christian peoples. The re-affirmation of Christian faith in post-volcano Montserrat, for example, can be enhanced through the church's acceptance of certain "unofficial" 'verbal and non-verbal, direct and indirect, literal and symbolic modes of communication' that persons have meaningfully exercised in their search for transcendence.

The Place of Symbolic Communication

Pembroke agrees with Browning that pastoral care needs 'a solid moral infrastructure' but he questions the exclusive involvement of rational processes of moral inquiry. The intuitive and affective, he insists, must play a part.¹² Elaine Graham is also critical of the de-emphasis on the symbolic and ritual religious dimensions in determining what is

¹⁰ Katz, R. L., 1985, *Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition: Empathic Process and Religious Counseling*, Browning, D., Ed., Theology and Pastoral Care Series, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.24

¹¹ Drane, D., 2000, *Cultural Change and Biblical Faith: The Future of the Church. Biblical and Missiological Essays for the New Century*, Carlisle, UK, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, p16-7

¹² Pembroke, N., 1999, "Presence and Shame in Pastoral Care and Counselling", PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, p. 7-8

morally desirable.¹³ In order to clarify this issue, let me present a live text from the research setting.

My experience as a pastor working in Montserrat suggests that situations do exist where an understanding of persons' moral decision making requires the caregiver's capacity to recognise and reflect on symbolic communication within the community of concern. I use an experience from the volcanic setting to illustrate where, in spite of what could be describes as fatalistic resignation on the part of persons now deceased, someone's dream becomes the basis for family breakdown. The situation is complicated further as certain burial rituals cannot take place. One sibling bears the brunt of blame although he has given his utmost to prevent a catastrophe. The names of people and places have been changed.

Francisco and Mariella Simpson continued to live in Out-o-bounds Village long after it was officially evacuated. I had already exhausted all forms of reasoning with these two persons, even appealing to Mariella to make good use of her sight which had been recently restored through cataract surgery. I asked her 'Sister Mariella, you don't think the Lord gave you back your sight just so you could let the volcano kill you?' Her answer was: 'Now that I can see, you can leave me. When I was blind, people had to move me from here.' Of course, I could not simply leave them. Their youngest son and daughter, who had both resided in their own homes next door to their parents, were willing to arrange transportation out of the danger zone. There were relatives in the north who were more than willing to squeeze them into the room they had occupied during a previous relocation. We arranged to get them to the north where they remained for some time. Two days before the fatal eruptions, they decided to walk back home and have not been seen since.

The death of the Simpsons signalled the beginning of family squabbles. For the first time, I was contacted by their children living in St. Maarten and the United States. The sister in St. Maarten had had a terrible dream, that their parents had been killed by the volcano, and she shared this with her younger brother. How could he have been so heartless? In her opinion, it was all due to his fault. The young man was distraught. Every time he came to see me there were tears in his eyes. Already he had lost his parents after trying so hard to see to their safety. He would never find their dead bodies to give them a proper burial as life-long Methodists deserve. He could forget all the insults they had hurled at him in his efforts to get them to safety. I remember the day his father yelled at us 'Go! The volcano will have to come right here and cover me. They say that's how

¹³ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, p.88

God made Montserrat anyway!’ Now that the volcano had covered Francisco, who negotiated miles of hilly terrain to walk to his death, his son Kris saw little prospect of a happy life. He had lost his parents, now his siblings. Maybe, he felt, he should have lost his life too.

In the case presented above, my receptivity to information transmitted through symbolic communication was needed for an appreciation of the problem presented. Otherwise, I would have missed concerns that were important for the Simpson family. Mariella subsequently confirmed my initial suspicion that she understood her healing to be more than a sign of divine favour. It was part of her readiness to depart earthly existence. *Now that I can see, you can leave me* was a statement that alerted me to the possibility that Mariella had not viewed the volcanic experience as a personal disaster but as a welcome transition to an afterlife. Francisco’s confident assertion that volcanic activity was part of God’s creative work in Montserrat suggested that both husband and wife viewed the eruptions from similar perspectives. That suspicion later proved correct.

There was also the issue of a dream which represented, for the family, a powerful means of communication. Similarly, the lack of opportunity for a proper burial was a sore point for Kris, as for his siblings. There is much symbolism associated with pre-burial rites and funerals. Sensitivity to this reality could prove a critical factor in subsequent pastoral care for the Simpson siblings and their families. Family tensions related to the dream and the missing burial could last for generations. While families need not be consciously aware of that symptoms are passed on, the transmission of emotional styles is multigenerational.¹⁴

Awareness of the potency of the symbolic is important in every pastoral context. In this African Caribbean situation, it certainly enhances the effectiveness of pastoral care. Lartey mentions ‘symbolic modes of communication’ in reference to their place as means of giving care. But the communication of care requires first an understanding of the situation and of the symbols of communication in the setting where care is to be offered. My research showed that the Montserrat community’s art forms hold potential as instruments of hope and healing. It shows, likewise, that land has high symbolic value. Caregivers need an appreciation of these particular cultural elements and their power as symbols. The one who has neither the will nor the means to understand the other is

¹⁴ Augsburger, D., 1986, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, p. 183

impotent to help the healing or coping process. In pastoral care, it is vitally important to pay attention to how persons feel about any given matter. In an emergency situation when many rely only on their intuition to survive this is especially crucial. One must be aware of the power of symbols such as dreams to influence their feelings. This is so even when, to the caregiver, there is no obvious rational basis for their feelings and beliefs. So a strictly moral-rational approach (based on Euro-American cultural frames and assumptions) to reviving pastoral care's Christian heritage will not do.

The Place of Emotions in the Search for Transcendence

In the context of the trauma inducing volcanic eruptions in Montserrat, in order to transcend the harsh realities they were experiencing, it was vital for persons to express their feelings in helpful ways. Self-expression can have either beneficial or harmful outcomes, depending on the manner and settings in which it occurs. So there was not just a need for people to vent their feelings, but for literal and symbolic ways of giving expression to human emotions through means that enabled persons to move through a painful situation while maintaining their integrity as human persons. To this end, a number of songs were composed and dramatic presentations, locally referred to as "stress busters", were organised. These developments were sponsored by artists and groups who were mostly members of Christian congregations though not acting on behalf of the churches.

The artistic productions, some of which were examined in the research, can be instructive to pastoral care. Used in pastoral settings to affirm human emotive expression, they can help people to understand that they are "like God". If Christian pastoral care presents God as the eternal One, it must also affirm the emotive qualities of this God as presented in the Bible. Otherwise, Lyall's assertion about pastoral care having 'theological integrity located in biblical narrative' does not hold true.¹⁵ He observes the encouragement of full emotive expression in biblical care.¹⁶ A brief survey of selected biblical sources serves to illustrate that God exhibits a range of emotions such as jealousy and anger, joy and gladness, sympathy and compassion.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lyall, D., 2001, *Integrity of Pastoral Care*, London: SPCK, p. xvii

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.92

¹⁷ The Lord was sorry that he had made humankind...and it grieved him to his heart (Gen. 6:6)...for I the Lord your God am a jealous God (Ex. 20:5). ...the Lord ...will have compassion on his servants (Dt.

Other writers support this observation and call practitioners to review pastoral attitudes towards expression of human emotions such as laughter and anger.¹⁸ Freire suggests that the tendency towards suppression of the emotions in Christian settings is pursued to the extent of an implied connection between the human body and sin.¹⁹ In this regard, Stein's reaction to Oden's call for pastoral care to recover its identity through using classic pastoral resources is worth noting. He is grateful for 'Freud's restoration of the somatic depths and creational continuities of transcendence.'²⁰ Stein's observation is encouraging for the Montserrat situation where the success of coping interventions was largely due to their capacity to stimulate people's expressions of pent up emotions.²¹ It is important for me to emphasize that while such exercises involved church goers, they were neither categorised as nor accepted as part of their churches' response programmes.

Recovery of traditions of Christian Story/Vision must address the human need for emotive expression in catharsis as in celebration. The God of the Bible has emotions. Hence current emphasis on narrative theology as is intrinsic to *shared Christian praxis* expects that the telling of personal stories will not proceed apart from recollections often unspoken but recorded through tears and in body language that words cannot express. The words of Pattison are instructive.

It is time for Christian thought to re-assess and embrace all aspects of the emotional lives of individuals and groups. People need theologies that help to affirm incarnate worldly experience rather than to escape or deny it... It may even allow a contribution to world peace; many wars are inspired by a flammable mixture of religious belief and practice that is gained by powerful emotional experiences. Furthermore, this kind of engagement is consonant with central doctrines and images within Christianity. Notions of creation, incarnation and bodily resurrection point to the importance of

32:36)... the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel (Judges 2:20). ...the Lord loved Israel (1Kgs. 10:9) ...he delivered me, because he delighted in me (Ps.18:19). As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him (Ps. 103:13). ...may the Lord rejoice in his works (Ps. 104:31).God is love (1 Jn. 4:16)

¹⁸ Campbell, A., 1986, *The Gospel of Anger*, London: SPCK, Capps, Lester, A., *The Angry Christian*, London: Westminster John Knox, especially Ch.13, Pattison, *Critique*, op. cit., p. 169-190

¹⁹ Freire, P., Faundez, A., 1989, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation*, Geneva: WCC Books, p.18

²⁰ Stein, E., 1980, "Reactions to Dr. Oden's 'Recovering Lost Identity'", *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 34, p. 21

²¹ A prime example is the teamwork of clinical psychologist Carol Tuitt, songwriter Randall Greenaway, and others ("Zunky and dem") who used the written and sung productions *Little Island Live Volcano*.

taking all aspects of embodied human existence, including emotions, very seriously indeed.²²

This is a call to adopt a theological anthropology more consistent with the biblical doctrines of creation.

Developing Culturally Consonant Modes of Care

The Montserrat volcanic disaster, notwithstanding its life denying aspects, presented opportunities for the development of human potential and for demonstration of resolve by persons who worked together to transcend difficulties. Many responded positively in a burst of creativity. Through the practical creative outlets they employed, we can find both tacit and explicit expressions that are instructive for pastoral efforts at nurturing hope and promoting human resilience and transcendence.

We need to look to the creative expressions of those who flourished in disaster and identify resources to enhance Christian praxis of faith. There are two valid reasons for affirming these as indices of faith. Firstly, to look at the history of survivors for resources that qualify as Christian is to take *shared Christian praxis* seriously as a way of doing theology and ministry. This approach appropriates theological meaning from current history as it accepts that divine revelation continues. After all,

to be Christian means for us to see ourselves, the world about us, and human responses within the interpretive vision provided by the metaphors and themes of the Christian story.²³

Here, the understanding of *Christian Story/Vision* is not static. We consider valuable contributions of Montserrat which have not been officially categorised as Christian, but which have assisted Christian persons in their search for transcendence, thereby showing promise as effective means for Christian pastoral care in disaster. This is consistent with my womanist commitment to facilitating the expression of marginalised voices in the research context.

²² Pattison, S., 2001, "Mend the gap. Christianity and the emotions", *Contact*, 134, p. 8

²³ Gerkin, C., *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p.37

Secondly, this research constitutes a practical response to the problem of evil. Given the particularities of a historical situation, it seeks to answer spiritual and ethical concerns regarding what action ought to be taken and how. It represents

a quest for sense that takes the form of how one is to continue to live in the face of insuperable suffering and death.²⁴

It is worth noting that:

The successful solution to the problem of evil as a practical issue will look very different from the successful solution to the problem considered abstractly in theodicies. Given that the latter is looking for the logical coherence in the assertion of a set of propositions, the solution is evidently a certain demonstrable logicity. In the case of the former, the aim must be (1) to understand how, and to will, to diminish or defeat evil; where this is impossible, (2) to know how one is to live in the face of evil; and (3) to find consolation.²⁵

We therefore explore what is practicable in the light of actual human experience. Practical successes take precedence over seemingly logical explanations that have not proven useful for persons coping with the Montserrat volcanic disaster. As aspects of present praxis are considered, resources are highlighted that stimulated, encouraged or communicated Christian faith and offered consolation to those living in the face of evil and suffering; and these are recommended as potential contributors to renewing the praxis of Christian pastoral care.

Art Forms: Vehicles for Pastoral Care

Among the indigenous resources that surfaced during the Montserrat volcanic disaster, some of the songs and dramatic productions were valuable for encouraging resilience. In order to understand their potential as instruments for the delivery of contextually relevant pastoral care through encouraging hope and promoting resilience, an understanding of the dynamics of resilience is helpful.²⁶ Cultural features and other elements which facilitate the communication of hope are powerful instruments to be employed in situations of deprivation and loss.

²⁴ Felderhof, M., 2004, "Theodicy: Evil or resistance?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57,4, p. 398

²⁵ Felderhoff, op. cit., p.398

²⁶ Monteleone's essay is helpful. See Monteleone, R., 1998, "Vision, genius and Commitment: An Essay on Resiliency", *The Journal of Pastoral Counselling: An Annual. Dynamics of Resilience*, 33, 93-109. See also Capps, D., 1995, *Agents of Hope: a new pastoral psychology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press

Art Forms for Encouraging Hope and Resilience

From the wide range of the musical compositions produced, one song is used to illustrate within it the elements of vision, genius and commitment which are essential for inspiring hope.²⁷ Assuming that the singer's words reflect his intuitions, and bearing in mind that a calypsonian usually speaks to and for a community, one can discern features for promoting resilience in "Cupid's" *The Crisis We Face*.²⁸

The opening stanza introduces the vision which takes the risk of hoping towards a better future, a time beyond the 'worst crisis.'

We are a people faced with the worst crisis in our history
Over us hangs this cloud of uncertainty
But deep within I do believe we will survive
Out of all this hurt there must be some good that can be derived

Here the singer calls the listeners to acknowledge the gravity of the present crisis, but he also shares his conviction that there is value to be gained from the painful experience. His is a summons to envision a better future. This pointer to an alternate reality comes in the context of the undesirable yet real present. The artist shares the sense of deprivation felt by his hearers and is qualified to make an appeal that encourages them towards a more desirable reality. As hope, this is risky because

hopes...are projections [that] envision a future that is technically false and unreal, as it does not exist, and as yet is profoundly true and real, as it expresses yearnings and longings that not only exist but are often more real than the objective world.²⁹

But the risk is absolutely essential if persons are to conquer fatalistic inaction and move beyond the present.

The song makes explicit an element of genius that gives staying power.

And although we sometimes wonder why
We dare not hang our heads and die
This situation is just a chance to prove our resilience.
Is the crisis we face that go make us stronger

²⁷ Monteleone, op. cit., 97-9

²⁸ Francis, H., 1995, "The Crisis We Face", in *Take De Road*, Olveston, Montserrat: H. Francis

²⁹ Capps, *Agents of Hope*, p.66

This is an emphatic statement of human resolve to seize whatever opportunity the moment affords. A definite choice is to be made - ‘to hang [their] heads and die’ or to ‘prove [their] resilience.’ This communal call expressed in the first person plural reminds the individual that s/he is part of a larger community called to rally together. Their collective strength and support can provide persons with the endurance needed to survive crisis conditions. This collaboration furnishes the genius to believe that since they were created for better conditions they should see themselves through to these. The current crisis is to be viewed as something ‘that go make us stronger.’

The expression of commitment to follow through is clear.

The seriousness of the time go help to bring us together
In our common nature and help us remember
That we are one people
In joy or in trouble- yea,
We have too much at stake to just sit down here and grumble.

The song encourages commitment to the vision by giving focus to the people as to where they should concentrate their energies. These should not be wasted on grumbling and complaining, behaviours that are likely in such depressing conditions. Rather, persons should recognise that these behaviours only rob humans of their capacity to move forward. Instead of allowing people’s thoughts to wander into unproductive areas, the singer harnesses their intellectual and spiritual energies by emphasising their common humanity and their need to work for the common survival.

It should be noted that the theological theme of a common humanity is emphasised through the use of “non-theological language”. The art form of calypso, as the name suggests, presents a cryptic message using language that portrays a more obvious meaning.³⁰ This artistic feature is effective in stimulating theological reflection where an overtly religious emphasis may not help.

One can identify similar motivational potential in *Have a Little Faith*. This song mentions ‘the Lord’ who will bless those oppressed by insurance companies. While this reference can be taken as an unambiguous statement of religious faith, the accompanying rhythm is

³⁰ In an interview the artist referred to “the literal, obvious meaning” in contradistinction to “the second [meaning].” This is one characteristic of the art form. cf. Greek *kalupto*

described as *bena*.³¹ So, while the tempo suggests the song as having entertainment value, the lyrics direct the participants in song and dance to reflect on divine grace. This is by no means accidental. In an interview, the singer stated explicitly his intention to use the song to stimulate hope.

Using Humour and Laughter as Coping Resources

Humour and laughter, if used appropriately, can be valuable pastoral tools for caring among persons whose circumstances seem anything but laughable. In this regard, one needs to take seriously the community drama productions that arose in the context of the Montserrat volcanic crisis. In 1996, a group of amateur dramatists led by Yvonne Weekes staged *God Will Find a Way*.³² This production bore the name of its theme song, a calypso. To an outsider, the very title *God Will Find a Way* could sound fatalistic. For one thing, the sung response to every conundrum surfacing in the crisis was ‘but I know that God will find a way.’ In reality, the production was essentially an effort to lighten the aura of tension surrounding everyone. Moving from shelter to shelter, and eventually to relocated residents abroad, it was an exercise in good humour designed to help people to find amusement at a time when it seemed impossible to laugh at themselves. It encouraged persons to listen to themselves and to others and helped prepare them for more serious stresses to follow. In later years the chorale group *Voices* re-worked songs like *Good Morning* in an effort to increase people’s awareness of the real tensions that were present among them. The theatre group *Plenty-Plenty Yac-Ya-Ya* used its stage performances *Ash* and *Ash: the Second Falling* with similar effect. The aim was to present laughter as a resource for coping with natural phenomena associated with a supernatural power. Music, song and drama proved effective vehicles for de-traumatising persons. From a theological perspective, these productions seemed to present a good sense of humour as one element of grace for survival.

Where humour and laughter have proven valuable in helping persons to transcend their present misery, there God must also be. Through grace, persons can be helped to view their experiences in a different light and so find help for coping. In essence, *God Will Find a Way* used techniques of reframing situations, a method recommended by pastoral

³¹ *bena* roughly equivalent to “secular”

³² Weekes, Y., 1996, *God Will Find a Way*, Montserrat: Department of Culture

psychologist Donald Capps. He suggests that where helpful, pastors can help persons to reframe, that is,

to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the 'facts' of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby change is its entire meaning.³³

Residents found it easier to reframe many of their experiences when they were able to laugh at themselves and to believe that *God* [would] *find a way* [out]. In many cases, a simple way was suggested, but one that their burdened minds had not thought about. Seeing current difficulties in a different light was a way of lightening the problems and sometimes presenting them as blessings with value to be realised.

The gifts of humour and laughter have been undervalued in Christian pastoral care. In making this observation, Pattison presents a commentary on Rabbi Lionel Blue's hilarious radio broadcasts.

With the laughter comes an authentic experience of pastoral care which makes present life bearable and new life possible. Why should this be so?

The reason lies behind the fact that Jewish humour arises from the profound suffering of the Jewish people over many centuries. Unhappy people listening to Blue's talks instinctively sense that the humour in them does not circumvent or minimize misery, but embraces it.³⁴

Humour and laughter, then, can help to make the seemingly unbearable life easier to cope with. There are several other techniques of reframing that may be used with similar effect. In each case, the idea is to stimulate persons' hoping and coping processes through enabling them to perceive an alternate reality towards which they can move.

Focusing on the Emotive and Affective

It is neither necessary nor even possible to present the range of songs and dramatic productions which were instrumental in the coping processes of residents, which, if viewed as elements of a gracious framework of support, can be seen as suggesting divine presence. In view of its great contribution, *Little Island, Live Volcano* should not be overlooked. This collection of songs organized into a chronological record of experiences during the eruptions was supplemented with a text for children. Apart from its obvious

³³ Capps, D., 1990, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, p. 17

³⁴ Pattison, S., 1988, *A Critique of Pastoral Care*, London: SCM Press, p.173

value as an educational tool for children locally, regionally and globally, *Little Island Live Volcano* became part of the community's coping strategy. The song *Shovelling* was particularly helpful.³⁵

Montserratian psychologist Carol Tuitt who worked along with Randall Greenaway in producing the package *Little Island Live Volcano* speaks in this interview.

* ...you did some work with Zunky, *Little Island, Live Volcano*.

CT: ... it was two-fold...for both of us our way of coping, and dealing with ... making some sense out of all that had happened. Well for me it was writing a commentary, creating your music, writing and putting lyrics into it and so on.

* Yea.

CT: ... it was a chance to deal with and just put in some kind of order, all the stuff that was just going on around, to give me a chance to focus on the reality of what had happened really... because from day one, you really had no time to deal with it. You had to deal with everybody.

* As a professional you were very much in demand.

CT: Right. I think that time to sit and write gave me a little chance to remember, to put in some sort of order, whether it was an evacuation order, or when the mountain was glowing....

Now for the kids, what I found for many of them, it was an opportunity to not focus so much on the negative part of what had happened, in other words to ... make light of some of the events and to give an opportunity to them all to sit back and look... to help them to go beyond the sad part of it, to help them to be able to dance to *Shovelling* with ash all about and so on. So you don't see shovelling ash as just the terrible thing that it was. You know it's hard, back breaking work, but when they could sit down and make the steps to *Shovelling*...

* So technically, you were actually finding resources in the difficult situation to make it light?

CT: Yea. Because even now, *Shovelling*, as soon as they sing, they have to do their steps.

* I suppose now it comes naturally, not just for the children but even for adults.

CT: Yes, right.

(Interview, February 17, 2004)

³⁵ Greenaway, R, 1998, "Shovelling" in *Little Island live Volcano*. See App.1.11.

Shovelling promoted catharsis through simultaneous stimulation of therapeutic bodily actions and positive emotions along with evocation of the memory of adversity. This effective combination was encouraged by the words and music of the song from its opening line.

When a crisis challenges a nation, men will rise to the situation.

By reminding people of their potential, these words can tap into the genius that makes for survival.

Men on rooftops galvanize or shingle
Answering nature with the hoe and the shovel
No complaining though out in the hot sun
Just concentrating on getting the job done

The song realistically pits human response against a powerful natural phenomenon by admitting that ‘ash is heavy load’. And this realization coincides with the actual motions involved in the hard work that is demanded. The important difference between shovelling volcanic ash before and after the production of *Shovelling* is that in the latter case, the hearer and singer (for most persons will sing along) have on offer a means of defusing the gruelling nature of the task. The words are meant to remind persons that they possess the commitment required to see them through the present difficulty.

Shovelling effectively reclaimed the potency of work songs of an earlier era. But while earlier work songs associated with the *maroon* did not mention the task to be completed, this newer genre uses no avoidance strategies. It faces the harsh reality and helps the sufferer to stare hard work in the face with a view to claiming transcendence in the moment. In stimulating persons through simultaneous appeal to the cognitive, emotive and affective dimensions of the human psyche, the music, song and dance proved therapeutic. Feelings were released which gave a sense of victory so many needed to see them through difficulty. From a theological standpoint, it brought the message of Resurrection alive. This shows one way in which Christian pastoral care can respond to the call for an anthropology that is more consistent with the doctrines of creation, and value a wide range of human expression as proved useful for the Montserrat situation.

Conclusion

Official church practice continues to devalue its own giftedness. While its faith claims suggest human worth, the church has not created an environment in which the worth of

many Montserratians is valued since their special gifts are not embraced. This is particularly troubling for Christian pastoral care which would be enhanced if it appropriated indigenous resources such as art forms which have been used to great benefit in facilitating human coping in the context of the Montserrat volcanic disaster.

Whereas many churches in Montserrat failed to actively sponsor their membership's participation in relevant shared ministry, thereby continuing a trend of bad stewardship of their human resource potential, the research, through its outcomes, validates *shared Christian praxis* as one way of promoting confidence and competence among pastors and laypersons alike. It was through their reflections that participants demanded a focus on the arts which had served them well. The method of shared Christian praxis made for settings in which people acting together, simultaneously reflected theologically on their experiences and provided support for each other. This method can be seen as a support mechanism to enable persons to recreate their own lives and become resilient. An agenda for empowering congregations must focus on the roles these groups play in the transformation of God's wide world. The structures and ways in which they use resources peculiar to their context must be determined by needs which will suggest means to find transcendence in the specific situation.

In this regard, artistic expressions in Montserratian culture that hold potential as tools for counselling processes in pastoral care should be prized. The research cited musical and poetic forms expressive of people's theological concerns. Further research is needed to determine how, for counselling purposes, the emotive and affective elements stimulated by music and song can best be attended to in combination with the theological reflection they inspire.