This paper seeks to define Christian Counselling in order that the field might be more thoroughly researched. A review of seminal texts, Professional Association websites and peer reviewed articles reveals conflicting definitions and an alarming lack of consensus. The paper takes a unique approach, offering two definitions – one to describe the broad field of study and the second far narrower definition to describe Professional Christian Counselling as ‘a relationship between two or more persons in which a Christian Mental Health Professional (the counsellor) in partnership with the Holy Spirit employs Psychotherapy and/or Christian S/R Interventions in order to advise, encourage assist, and/or accompany another pilgrim/pilgrims (the counselee[s]) to deal more effectively with the journey of Christian living’. It is this latter definition that may be most useful for use in research.

This paper began with the humble desire of a practising Christian Counsellor to undertake research in the discipline of Christian Counselling. The obvious starting point was to utilise a previously determined definition of Christian Counselling for, as Koenig, King, & Carson (2012, p. 12) note, ‘Without crystal clear definitions, research on religion, spirituality, and health is not possible’. To the author’s surprise, an agreed crystal-clear definition did not seem to exist. This conclusion is shared by other authors who observe 'a mind-boggling number of permutations for what may be intended by the term Christian counselling’ (McMinn, Staley, Webb, & Seegobin, 2010, p. 392) and ‘experts disagree on defining Christian counselling’ (Sutton, Arnzen, & Kelly, 2016, p. 204). In a seminal text (now in its second edition), McMinn (2011, p. 24) notes, ‘it’s not just that we use different techniques or styles; we don’t agree on what Christian counselling is’. This situation is not only unacceptable from a research perspective but undoubtedly negatively impacts how other health providers perceive Christian Counsellors and hampers international dialogue between like-minded Associations that is essential for a credible profession in a global era.

To complicate matters further, authors who employ the term Christian counselling often introduce terms such as Pastoral Counselling and Biblical Counselling, with great inconsistency about how these three terms relate to one another, including:

- Authors who consider Christian Counselling as an umbrella term that encompasses subcategories such as Pastoral Counselling and biblical counselling (American Association of Christian Counselors, n.d.; Garzon, Worthington Jr, & Tan, 2009; McMinn et al., 2010)
- Authors who use Christian Counselling and Pastoral Counselling synonymously, often in contrast with biblical counselling (Brunsdon, 2014; Collins, 2007; Falaye, 2013)
- Authors who use Christian Counselling and biblical counselling synonymously, often in contrast to Pastoral Counselling (Christian Counseling & Education Foundation, n.d.; Fouque & Glachan, 2000)

An exploration of the seminal texts, current articles and even the websites of English-speaking Associations of Christian Counsellors was unable to unearth an agreed definition of Christian Counselling. However, several common elements (or themes) emerged, including the unique nature of the counsellor/client relationship, the faith and professionalism of the counsellor, the role of the Holy Spirit, the means by which the counselling is conducted and the goals and objectives of the counselling experience. Considering each of these elements separately, a way forward is humbly offered and described in Table 1.

A PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

The starting point for the definitional activity was Gary Collins’ definition of counselling: ‘Counselling is a relationship between two or more persons in which one person (the counsellor) seeks to advise, encourage and/or assist another person (the
Table 1. Proposed set of working definitions for Christian counselling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Professional Counselling</th>
<th>Professional Christian Counselling</th>
<th>Pastoral Counselling</th>
<th>Lay Counselling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith Lay/ Prof</td>
<td>a Mental Health professional (the counsellor) based solely on their training and experience</td>
<td>a Christian Mental Health professional (the counsellor) in partnership with the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>a Christian member of clergy or religious leader (the counsellor) in partnership with the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>a Christian (the counsellor) in partnership with the Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of HS</td>
<td>(the counsellor) in order to advise, encourage and/or assist another person made in God’s image (the counselee[s])</td>
<td>employs Psychotherapy and/or Christian Spiritual and Religious (S/R) Interventions in order to advise, encourage, assist and/or accompany another member/members of the faith community (the counselee[s])</td>
<td>primarily employs the Christian Spiritual and Religious (S/R) Interventions in order to advise, encourage, assist and/or accompany another person (the counselee[s])</td>
<td>to receive external enlightenment concerning another pilgrim (the counselee[s])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means and Activities</td>
<td>primarily employs psychotherapy in order to advise, encourage and/or assist another person</td>
<td>employs primarily psychotherapy in order to advise, encourage and/or assist another person (the counselee[s])</td>
<td>employs primarily Psychotherapy and/or Christian S/R Interventions in order to advise, encourage, assist and/or accompany another person (the counselee[s])</td>
<td>to receive external enlightenment concerning another pilgrim (the counselee[s])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rel. w/ view</td>
<td>(the counselee[s])</td>
<td>(the counselee[s])</td>
<td>(the counselee[s])</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>to deal more effectively with the problems of life</td>
<td>to deal more effectively with the journey of Christian living</td>
<td>to deal more effectively with the journey of Christian living</td>
<td>to deal more effectively with the problems of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Counselling is a relationship between two or more persons in which a Christian (the counsellor), in partnership with the Holy Spirit, seeks to advise, encourage, assist and/or accompany another person (the counselee[s]) to deal more effectively with the journey of life.

This definition emerges from Collins as a highly regarded practitioner with a Christian worldview. It has stood the test of time and is still being referenced by current eminent scholars (Tan, 2011, p. 2).

This definition can accommodate 1-to-1 counselling and 1-to-many (group) counselling but not a many-to-1 situation as is the case in most prayer ministry contexts. The exclusion of prayer ministry from Christian counselling is in keeping with the Christian Counsellors Association of Australia Code of Ethics (Christian Counsellors Association of Australia, 2017).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Spiritual and Religious (S/R) Interventions

In 2015, the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) commissioned a literature review into the effectiveness of spiritual/religious (S/R) interventions in psychotherapy and counselling. This review concluded, ‘Overall, the

by the American Association of Christian Counsellors. One can also see recognition and validation of the role of Prayer Ministry, which is explicitly excluded from within the definition of Christian counselling. Definitionally, this is largely because prayer ministry is usually conducted by a small ministry team (Horrobin, 2003, p. 215; Victorious Ministry Through Christ, n.d.). Collins’ definition can accommodate 1-to-1 counselling and 1-to-many (group) counselling but not a many-to-1 situation as is the case in most prayer ministry contexts. The exclusion of prayer ministry from Christian counselling is in keeping with the Christian Counsellors Association of Australia Code of Ethics (Christian Counsellors Association of Australia, 2017).
literature provides ample evidence to support the integration of a client’s S/R beliefs and practices as part of good counselling and psychotherapy practice’ (Ross, Kennedy, & Macnab, 2015, p. 2). Whilst the literature review provided several examples of S/R interventions, it did not provide a wider definition. The following has been developed as a working definition for Spiritual and Religious Interventions

A Spiritual and Religious Intervention is any proactive measure taken by a therapist or their client with the primary purpose of:

- Spiritual healing or spiritual growth
  OR
- Managing a spiritual symptom
  OR
- Building resilience to support non-spiritual dysfunction

This definition assumes a trichotomistic (three part) model of the person (spirit, body and psyche). A number of dynamic interactions further clarify this definition:

- The measure may be undertaken by the therapist, the patient or both together
- Primacy of purpose is critical:
  - An intervention is not necessarily inherently spiritual or religious. For example, a brisk walk along the beach may be used by one client as a physical intervention (to build cardiovascular efficiency), a second client as a psychological intervention (to ease their depressive symptoms) and a third client as a spiritual/religious intervention (to nurture intimacy with God through nature)
  - An intervention may have numerous secondary benefits – some of which may be more immediately tangible than the intended spiritual/religious impact
  - The definition includes growth. In a counselling setting, an intervention may be used therapeutically (for healing) and/or for growth
  - Non-spiritual dysfunction would likely include physical dysfunction (of the body) or psychological dysfunction (of the mind, will or emotions) but could be broader – for example relationship dysfunction

With this definition in mind, one notes the breadth of options at the disposal of the Professional Christian Counsellor.

CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING AS A CONTEXT – NOT A MODEL

If one accepts the definitions proposed, Christian Counselling is a description of the context in which counselling happens rather than a model, modality or method per se. As a result, standard psychotherapy modalities can be seamlessly employed by the Christian Counsellor along with the potential inclusion of a variety of Spiritual and Religious interventions.

An individual counsellor is likely to find themselves in a variety of Counselling contexts and may need to adjust their practice accordingly – moving between Professional Christian Counselling, Professional counselling as a Christian, biblical counselling and potentially even Pastoral Counselling.

The definitions in this paper are offered for discussion and debate. While they may not achieve the ‘crystal clarity’ demanded by Koenig et al, it is hoped that even their ‘cloudy clarity’ is useful to the practitioner and most specifically useful to the Christian Counselling researcher who can be more precise about what aspect of Christian Counselling their research question relates to. This will hopefully lead to higher quality research and enhanced evidence-based practice in this important discipline.

REFERENCES

For references see page 36

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