# *Lutheran*
# *Mission Matters*

# The Wholistic Missionary Works of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod

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**Abstract:** This article is derived from the author's Doctor of Ministry study; it represents her sole opinion and does not represent or reference to the opinions of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service (HKLSS) or the Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod (LC—HKS). This article offers a view of work in Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, including the development of the author's dissertation exploring the significance of biblical/Christian elements in substance abuse counseling. She had seen some Christian faith-based organizations using Bible-based approaches which helped abusers turn to a new life, a few even becoming pastors. When she became Chief Executive of HKLSS in 2012, she endeavored to put the Christian values as the basic values of the wholistic welfare services. These values guide the agency's range of services to abusers and to the underprivileged, including the development of a social housing project to provide short-term residence for underprivileged families.

## Introduction

In the year of 1949 when the mainland China government changed the sovereignty overnight, all the foreign missionaries, including the missionaries from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), had to leave immediately for the US. On their way home, they stopped over at Hong Kong where they were saddened by the plight of the refugees of Hong Kong people. Some of them decided to stay behind and helped out with the education, missional, and charity services. This was the beginning of most of the missional work of church-affiliated organizations in Hong Kong. The Lutheran

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Church—Hong Kong Synod (LC—HKS) was later registered as a formal organization, and other subsidiaries, such as schools, and the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service (HKLSS) was formally registered as a charity organization in 1977. In this paper, the writer illustrated the wholistic spiritual foundations of her work as a Chief Executive and how she leads the organization forward to meet the challenges ahead.

In 1979, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) formally granted subvention (subsidy) to some services run by HKLSS. These services include youth centres, elderly centres, rehabilitation centres, school social work services, and community development in rural areas. The HKLSS gradually evolved to its present size with over one thousand staff members working in more than funded forty centres with an annual subvention of about US$38M. A number of pilot projects that are either funded by other government departments or donations or are self-financed by about US$10M have been added over the years to serve those in unmet service gaps in the society.

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## The Need for a Bio-psycho-social-spiritual Model of Services Delivery

It has to be pointed out the Government subvention outlined sets of funding and service agreements to be fulfilled in disregard to the religious background of the non-government organizations (NGOs). Since the subsidized services emphasized the neutrality and value-free aspect of the helping process, and not all the staff employed are Christians, the HKLSS will provide the standardized services as the other non-faith-based NGOs.

In 2013, the HKLSS rewrote the new Vision Mission Values (VMV) statement to reflect the Christian values embedded in the services. Subsequently, the new VMV is cultivated in our services and staff training.

Vision
Promote care and justice as we serve God by sharing His love.

Mission
Provide innovative and holistic services.
Advocate a spirit of love to our neighbour and justice.
Build a professional team caring for each other and the community.

Values
Commitment: We promise to deliver professional and client-centred
services.
Compassion: We serve holistic care to people in need.
Community: We respect, accept, and love one another.

## Religion and Social Work

Historically, the concept of social welfare evolved from religious charitable activity. However, early development of the profession avoided integrating religious beliefs and practices, until recent years.[1] M. E. Marty attributes this trend largely to the belief that social work, as a distinct profession, is evidenced particularly by the rational scientific approach of understanding the world.[2] As a result, religion and social work are often deemed incompatible due to the claim that social work is concerned with basic physical and social needs, rather than spiritual. In addition, social workers stress a non-judgmental attitude to encourage clients to reach a place of self-determination—goals which are assumed to be incompatible with value-laden religious enterprises that stress dependence on a Supreme Being or a higher power. Thus, the impact of the religion, either as a protective factor in one's development, or as a reinforcer in the treatment process is frequently ignored in the social work profession or research.[3]

The social work profession has always emphasized a wholistic view of the person. Thus, L. K. Holleran-Steiker, and S. A. MacMaster suggest that wholistic social work treatment for welfare services must adopt a bio-psycho-social-spiritual model of intervention; that such a view of human behavior helps bring understanding as to how biological, psychological, and socio-environmental factors contribute to a person's behavior. At present, the element of "spirituality" must be augmented into this model so as to include all aspects of human function.[4] The bio-psycho-social spiritual model is an excellent guide for social work conceptualizations on the etiology of problem behavior or relationships and their resulting treatment.[5]

This paper will solely focus on "Christian spirituality" when considering the spiritual element in the writer's bio-psycho-social-spiritual (BPSS) model.

Health service providers such as psychologists, counsellors, and therapists trained in the last half of the twentieth century are minimally educated on the positive role of religion or spirituality in clinical practice. M. W. Frame suggests this is due to a number of reasons: (1) psychology and religion have their own paths of development in the past; (2) the assumptions of the scientific world and those of religion are in conflict; (3) religion and spirituality are often unfairly associated with pathology; (4) religion and spirituality are considered to be the work of clergy and other spiritual leaders who are trained in non-scientific manners; (5) there is a lack of training

regarding the ways of integration of religion into clinical practices; and (6) mental health practitioners are suspicious of the effects of religious or spiritual intervention.[6]

The growing interest in incorporating spirituality into the social work treatment process grows out of the development of a greater psychological understanding of human nature. There is a growing trend in helping service-recipients shift from a self-centered view of self-actualization to a concern for a mutually fulfilling manner with others, the non-human world, and ultimate reality.[7] Current social work studies advocate the use of spirituality as legitimate.[8]

For clients, religion is an important element of their larger worldviews and life context.[9] The outcome of one's treatment is closely related to the client's conception of God. A conception of God as loving and forgiving appears to be associated with a lesser risk of substance abuse.[10] Incorporating a client's own spiritual perspectives in cognitive therapy will enhance the outcomes. Miller and Thoresen suggest that "spirituality" is not only a dependent variable but also an independent variable in human health.[11] From their panel studies on spirituality and health, Larson et al. discovered that spiritual and religious involvement was consistently and positively related to health and inversely to disorders.[12] In summary, involving the positive elements of spirituality may enhance hope, forgiveness, restoration of community, and a renewed sense of self-worth.[13]

## The Spiritual Definition of "Addiction" as a "Relationship"

This writer will illustrate the use of BPSS in her counselling the substance abusers in one of the services of the HKLSS, and the spiritual foundation of addiction and its implied treatment.

In Hong Kong, the Government encourages the multi-modality approaches in helping the people suffering from substance abuse. At the same time, there is also a long history of using Bible teachings to help the abusers by some Christian faith-based NGOs. In a few exemplified cases, some abusers recovered and later became Christian pastors to help the others, and the positive results are not to be neglected. This writer found that it is a good demonstration that the element of Christian spirituality in the addiction treatment warrants further research and application to other welfare services.

This writer used Auxier's definition of addiction:

> An addiction is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual disorder, which can be described as: a **relationship** with a reinforcing substance or behavior marked by continued use despite negative consequences, psychological preoccupation, and failed attempts to stop using.[14]

## Relationship

To begin, a theological understanding of the term "relationship" should be explored. The first relationship in the Bible is between the three persons of the Trinity, as noted in Genesis 1:26, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness,"—a concept later developed into that of the triune God. The second relationship is between God and humanity (Gn 1:26; 2:7); the third relationship is between man and woman (Gn 2:21–25) who form the community in which the humans live, love, work, and play. The fourth relationship is between humanity and the rest of God's creation. Humans are designated to love the creation, all of which God saw as "good."

Christian doctrine claims that humans are created in the "image and likeness" of the triune God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knit together in an eternal relationship. Humans exist as God's creatures, not autonomously or independently,[15] and experience a semblance of God's image in relationship to one another. When the relationship with God or to one another is not in harmony, humans may turn to other sources of comfort to form the attachment they are lacking, such as money, food, gambling, or psychotropic drugs. McMinn and Campbell state that "a yearning to connect is knitted into our souls," and this yearning is rooted in the *imago Dei*.[16]

### The Imago Dei

To understand the meaning of *image* and *likeness*, this writer will focus on the exegesis of Genesis 1 where the two terms first appear in the Bible.

In Genesis 1:26, God said, "Let us make humankind (Heb. *Haadam*) in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over . . . the ground." In verse 26, God created humankind "in our image" and "in our likeness," and in verse 27, the term "in his own image" and "image of God" are repeated twice. The word *image* is used to denote man's resemblance to God in a spiritual sense (e.g. self-consciousness, talents, reasoning power, etc.) or the physical quality (e.g., the upright posture) of humankind in distinction to animals.[17] In Genesis 1:26 these two words are employed, implying that the narrator intended to express a difficult idea or wished to avoid the danger of "*selem (image)*" being taken too concretely.[18] In the Old Testament (OT) context, the two words *selem (image)* and *demut (likeness)* do not singly signify either spirituality or corporeality, for a human as a complete and whole being is made in the image of God.[19] In the creation narrative, humankind is accorded a special, delegated status as God's representatives on earth.[20] The creation of humankind is not incidental, but intended by God to establish a special relationship with God, and to carry out God's mission.[21] The term "image" expresses the delegated quality, which is not effaced even after the "fall" (cf. Gn 9:6).[22]

In verse 27, God creates both male and female. Verse 28 marks God's command for humans to fill the earth and subdue it. "Subdue" (Heb. *Kabas*) resembles "have

dominion," a term frequently used in kingship, which suggests it is a part of the technical language of royal rule.[23] It does not refer to exploitation; rather, it represents taking full responsibility for the well-being of creation (see also Gn 2:15).[24] Humans are called to "rule over," "work and care for,"  and "name" the creatures, while in partnership with God and in His created world and His governance on earth.

As Stanley Grenz concludes, humans created in the image of God are called to have special standing before God, receive and reciprocate His love, and follow His commands out of love. It is in Christ that the divine image is fully revealed. Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:18 reveal God's ultimate concern to create human beings in order that they may "enjoy community with each other, the created world and with the Creator."[25] Thus, each individual is created as God's loving child. In the ensuing chapter of Genesis, the Fall reveals the sinful condition of humankind. Thus, the humans no longer enjoy the loving and caring relationship with God and with creation. In this regard, humans are living as corrupted image bearers. Substance abusers suffer from such fallen conditions. Therefore, most addicts lack self-esteem, but Christian spirituality sees them as fallen but beloved image bearers of God, worth caring about. Unfortunately, human beings are also suffering from the effects of sin, from both their own choices and from impact of the fallen world around them.

## The Fall of Humans and Sin in the World

In the midst of the bliss of the garden, the first human couple chose to challenge the divine prohibition to refrain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God's prohibition gives birth to human choice and desire. Erickson infers that these natural desires are, in many cases, necessary for our survival, for obtaining food, and for betterment. Erickson says that God grants humans the desire to enjoy things, to obtain things, and to do things, but these desires must be satisfied under divinely imposed limits. Failure to submit oneself to the God-constituted limit is sin. Thus, "sin is the choice of the person who commits it."[26] Adam and Eve chose to make destructive choices as a result of either their inner desires (to eat appealing food) or from external inducement (the serpent's suggestion), and they (and all humans) are ultimately responsible for their actions. But Jesus Christ, however, chose not to follow Satan's temptations.[27]

The curse from God is recorded in Genesis 3:14–19. The text as an etiological narrative explains the hardships of lives: men and women disobey the commands of God. They both need to bear the responsibility and the consequences of their actions.[28] As a matter of fact, this narrative explains the innate wretchedness in humankind.[29] After Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, their relationship with God is marred. With the spread of sin, humanity is therefore alienated from God's grace.

As humans are created in the image of God, then, sin is seen as failure to reflect the image of God. Because God is the social Trinity as discussed above, sin is ultimately defined then as the human failure to live in community with God, each other, and with the natural environment.[30] Sin destroys community between God, humanity, the creatures, and the environment.

Erickson concludes that there are two major aspects to the human problem of sin. First, sin is a broken relationship with God. Humans either transgress God's divine limit or fail to do what God intends, and the result is God's punishment. Second, the nature of the person is spoiled, now having a propensity for sin. The community of humans is also affected and ruptured to the point that the whole community inflicts hardships or wrongs upon one another.[31]

However, this narrative also sets the stage for God's grace and judgment in the "salvation history" of humankind.[32] Only God can use His divine way to rectify, restore, or reconciliate this dreadful sinful condition. Similarly, the fallen *imago Dei* can only be rectified by God's grace. God's redemptive work comes from His love for humanity. Salvation is completed by Jesus' atoning work, and the sins of human beings are forgiven.

In theological terms, addiction is the result of an individual forming a substance attachment, which will result in a marred relationship with God and with their community. Addictive behaviour not only affects the "addicts," but their loved ones too, as well as the broader community. The helping process of the treatment reveals God's intended love for the sufferers through the hands of loving Christian counsellors or social workers. Thus, in theological terms, treatment is made possible through the love of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit. Thus, the Christian social workers, in the midst of helping people, see that God is actively involved in redeeming and in restoring people to a complete relationship with Him. The story of the Fall does not end there; it is followed by God's active redemption work in the history of salvation.

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## Spiritual Understanding of Addiction and Treatment

Based on the discussion of the *imago Dei* and sin, this section summarizes the theological understanding of addiction:

First, addictions exist because although human beings are made in God's image, we are fallen. The Fall affected the physical order in Christian worldview, meaning that our bodies sometimes work against our best interests. The Fall helps us understand

that we are genetically predisposed to addiction, or that there are physical processes which "lock in" craving neurologically, reducing the role of choice in substance misuse.[33]

Second, a preeminent aspect of the *imago Dei* is that people are choice-makers and responsible for their actions. The fallen biological condition affects the ability to make choices. Therefore, our choices often counter what God intends for our lives. Certainly, harming our bodies or stealing to maintain a drug habit are wrong choices.

Third, the Fall has also corrupted society and family life. Hence, individuals may have been subjected through no fault of their own to evil influences (for example, child abuse, poor models of coping) which then made them susceptible to substance abuse or other problem behavior or wretched relationships.[34]

Fourth, the social work intervention, coupled with Christian faith, will ultimately enlarge the recipient's worldview and life goals, to be applied as positive helping factors to re-instate their own purpose of life with God.

## Spiritual Understanding of Christian Faith-based Welfare Services

The above discussion laid down a solid Christian faith-based understanding of the nature of human beings and our understanding of the services delivery. The staff, as change agents of God, will help the service recipients to understand the aetiology of human suffering. The service recipients will be helped to understand that connection with God, the Creator, and the actualization of self-beings.

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In the coming two years, the HKLSS will be funded to build and operate social housing projects in response to the huge demand for improving the living conditions for the underprivileged families living in very disastrous living conditions in Hong Kong (Due to the high living cost in HK, some families now lived in a less than 10-square meter home, including kitchen and toilet, in the downtown area). It will be a God-given opportunity to serve the needy in a wholistic approach. The HKLSS examined the basic needs of a family with proper minimum space, environment, and healthy public space for children and parents or residents to

live and grow up together. Without sufficient space and living in poverty, the children and families do suffer a lot physically and mentally. When the social housing project will be realized, this is like a blessed garden come true. In the first of Psalm, it is written that the blessed people will be able to live under the trees and enjoy the fruits and leaves (Psalm 1:3). This housing project, though it is a large-scale investment from HKLSS, is an opportunity to rethink the basic creation by God and re-build the relationship between the humans and the Creator again.

## Endnotes

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[17]  For a full discussion, see D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53–103.

[18]  N. W. Porteous, "Image of God," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, 15th ed., Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 682–685. See also J. M. Miller, "In the 'Image' and 'Likeness,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 293–304. Miller suggests that *demut* is a more abstract term and can be used in reference to similarities other than the visual ones, while *selem* is a more specific and concrete term which specifies the divine similarity.

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