

Preface

THIS BOOK IS an attempt to present an indigenous *holistic, narrative pastoral counseling* approach in postcolonial indigenous contexts, with a focus on Zimbabwe. It opens with a history and stories of change brought about by colonialism and Christianity to indigenous contexts such as Zimbabwe, and an examination of how colonization subjugated and marginalized the culture, values, religion, and the humanity of African peoples. Narrative pastoral counseling has always been present in indigenous contexts, since story is the way of life. Problems are shared in family, community, or group settings called the “palaver.” A palaver (*padare*) is an informal gathering usually for the purposes of providing counsel and support for those facing personal, family, and/or community crisis and problems, and sometimes for the purposes of education and to share joys.¹ In most cases, the problems, education, or joys are shared in the form of stories.

In this book, I argue that therapy or counseling as taught in the West will not always suffice in indigenous contexts since these theories tend to promote and focus on individuality, autonomy, and independence. The training of counselors in indigenous contexts needs encourage counselors who will “get off their couch or chair” and into the neighborhood. The type of counselor needed in these contexts is one trained to essentially work with orphans and widows using a *holistic, narrative pastoral counseling approach* in assessing and servicing the three basic areas of human needs: *the body, mind, and spirit*. This counselor would need to have the skills of a social worker as well as well as those of a counselor.

1. In Zimbabwe, the Shona word for “palaver” is *padare* or *kudare*. A palaver can occur in many different forms. It can happen at family, extended-family, and community levels as a formal or informal gathering (open or closed) to resolve a crisis or a problem, or at times just to meet. Traditionally it was led by a family elder or community chief; however, everyone who sits at the palaver has a voice.

Christianity brought the Bible, and today people are able to weave together biblical stories with the traditional folktales, metaphors, and symbols in narrating their life stories. Folklores, using animals as players, allow room for those telling their story to externalize their problems, thus giving one an opportunity to attack the problem head-on. In this way, the problem is externalized from the person to the symbolic animal character, giving the person room to step back and analyze the problem without feeling blamed. Narrative pastoral counseling uses naming and externalizing processes in speaking the unspeakable. How can we, for example, address the HIV/AIDS crisis—a crisis requiring an open discussion about sex, itself a topic not usually talked about in public? The palaver is the answer. The issues of poverty, poor medical systems, and inclusion of such Western ethical standards as confidentiality have complicated the ways in which indigenous contexts address problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In addition, how can we move away from some of our traditional values that may threaten the widows and young girls in some of these indigenous contexts? Must a young widow be forced into a marriage inheritance to a man known to have lost his wife to HIV/AIDS, because it is the *customary thing to do*? Though no longer at the center of today's indigenous societies (especially in the cities), the traditional palaver healing/counseling process has not been totally lost *and* can be easily reclaimed.

African people have always depended on God and the neighbor. Revillaging, religion, and reauthoring are the main signposts for the future in these contexts faced with horrendous suffering from poverty and HIV/AIDS. Today scholars and other writers from indigenous contexts are being called upon to reauthor the subjugated history of the past, bringing it from the margins to the center. The blending of the past and the present can be one way to bring a hopeful future. The church palaver as exemplified in this book can help foster that hopeful future.