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The Communicative Dimensions of Incarnation and Sharing in Spiritual Counselling

Abstract.

This paper explores the communicative dimensions of incarnation and self-giving within the framework of spiritual accompaniment, from both theological and psychological perspectives. At its core lies the thesis that the effectiveness of a helping relationship is not primarily rooted in methodological expertise but in the relational presence of the helper. Incarnation – understood as divine self-revelation through the human embodiment of Christ – serves as a paradigmatic model for pastoral conversation: the embodied, compassionate, and authentic presence of the helper becomes a vessel of divine grace. Drawing on key theological voices (Bonhoeffer, Barth, von Balthasar, Moltmann), pastoral psychology (Nouwen, Palmer, Root), and person-centred therapy (Rogers), the study illuminates the psychosocial and spiritual dynamics of self-giving, vulnerability, and authentic communication. In this context, self-giving is not interpreted as a loss of self but rather as a conscious choice for presence, relationality, and mutual participation. Vulnerability is redefined not as weakness but as the precondition for genuine encounter and spiritual openness. The study demonstrates that incarnational presence and lived vulnerability foster a climate of trust and openness in which mutual transformation becomes possible. Through the sharing of life and presence, a sacred space emerges in which divine proximity can be experienced. The helper is not merely a professional guide but becomes a sign of divine love and relational fidelity. In this sense, the helping conversation transcends

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instrumental function and becomes a spiritual process that integrates psychological insight, relational depth, and transcendent meaning. This incarnational approach thus provides a holistic framework for pastoral care, wherein the act of accompanying others becomes itself a form of witnessing and embodiment of the divine.

Keywords: incarnation, spiritual care, sharing life, vulnerability, presence and authenticity

Introduction

In discussing the communicative dimensions of incarnation and sharing, we explore profound theological and psychological foundations and seek to understand how the helper's sharing manifests at various levels of spiritual counselling – from verbal to nonverbal, and even spiritual.

Counselling is not merely about applying technical tools or solving problems; its essence lies in relational encounters where the helper dedicates their full attention and is being to the service of the other person. The concept of incarnation is crucial here: theologically, it signifies that God became human in Jesus Christ to be fully and truly present among us. In this sense, the helper's service follows a similar pattern: through sharing and presence, they "embody" attention, empathy, and unconditional acceptance. This perspective is particularly significant in our time, where we live in a world of fast and superficial relationships. Human attention and presence have become rare, while the essence of a spiritual counselling is the helper's authentic and deep connection with the client. This connection creates the safe space where the client can undergo transformation and growth.

As Carl Rogers interpreted it, the helper does not work only with words but with their very being and authenticity: "If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within themselves the capacity to use this relationship for growth, change, and personal development, and these will indeed take place."[2] Andrew Root also highlights that at the core of the helping relationship, the incarnational model is always present: a self-giving presence that reflects God's love.[3]

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[2]　ROGERS, Carl R. (2021): *Writings on Client Centered Therapy. Some Hypotheses Regarding the Facilitation of Personal Growth*. Augusta, Mockingbird Press. [e-book].

[3]　ROOT, Andrew (2013): *The Relational Pastor. Sharing in Christ by Sharing Ourselves*. Illinois, Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press. 120–121.

1. Incarnation: Theological Foundations

The etymology of "incarnation" traces back to the Latin term *incarnatio*, meaning embodiment, or taking on flesh. The Bible frequently refers to the incarnation, that is, God taking on flesh in Jesus Christ. The New Testament particularly emphasizes this theological truth: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).[4] According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, incarnation expresses God's active love. This love has a compelling force, calling us to turn to others with full presence and commitment. Bonhoeffer does not regard incarnation merely as a doctrinal truth but as a practice of Christian life.[5] Self-giving and service to others are indispensable aspects of living out the incarnation. He emphasizes that true discipleship is realized through self-denial and sacrifice. Following Christ means participating in His suffering and service.[6]

Karl Barth, on the other hand, sees incarnation as God's perfect revelation to humanity, through which God not only speaks in words but also demonstrates His love in tangible human existence.[7] Through the incarnation, God's free grace is manifested at the centre of human history – not merely as a historical event but as an active and dynamic process of divine revelation and redemption. Barth underscores that in Christ God fully and definitively reveals Himself to humanity, declaring His love and truth.[8] Hans Urs von Balthasar[9] interprets incarnation as the drama of divine love, in which God, through total self-giving, becomes part of human life.[10]

Like Barth, he does not view incarnation as a singular historical event but as the continuous manifestation of God's love in the world. Through the act of taking on

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[4] See also: Phil 2:6–7; Col 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14.

[5] BONHOEFFER, Dietrich (1979): *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 95–100.

[6] Op. cit. 113–114.

[7] BARTH, Karl (2004): *Church Dogmatics*. IV/2. Bloomsbury T&T Clark. 192.

[8] Op. cit. 321.

[9] A Swiss Catholic theologian who extensively explored the theology of kenosis (Christ's self-emptying), examining its significance in the doctrine of redemption.

[10] BALTHASAR, Hans von (1998): *Theo-drama. Theological Dramatic Theory*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press. 215.

human flesh, God entered human history, and through the dynamic of self-giving, He continuously shapes human communities and relationships.[11]

Similar to Balthasar, Jürgen Moltmann's theology is centred on the concept of kenosis – the self-emptying act of God.[12] Moltmann argues that the crucified Christ is at the heart of Christian theology, as He shares in humanity's suffering and abandonment. This perspective challenges traditional images of God that portray Him as detached from suffering. Moltmann emphasizes that God is not indifferent to the world's suffering; rather, He actively partakes in it, demonstrating His love and compassion for humanity.[13]

In the incarnation, God voluntarily relinquishes power and glory to enter into communion with humanity, sharing in suffering and death. This self-emptying is not weakness but the deepest expression of divine love, offering hope and new life to the world. The abandoned human is already part of God's story through Christ's own abandonment. In this way, Paul's words, "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), become reality, as Christ's death allows us to partake in God's eschatological life. God is within us; God suffers within us wherever love suffers.[14] As we actively and passively participate in God's suffering, we also partake in His joy wherever love, prayer, and hope are present. In this sense, God is our companion, the co-suffering one who understands.

2. The Significance of Incarnation in Spiritual Counselling

In theological terms, the incarnation is the ultimate example of the encounter between God and humanity. God entered human existence to be truly and fully present among people. In the practice of spiritual counselling, this means that the helper does not remain an outsider but "enters" the relationship with their entire being, embodying acceptance and empathy.

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[11] Op. cit. 230.

[12] See his work: MOLTMANN, Jürgen (1973): *Der gekreuzigte Gott*. Munich, Christian Kaiser Verlag.

[13] "For eschatological faith, the Trinitarian God-event on the cross becomes the history of God which is open to the future and which opens up the future. Its present is called reconciliation with grief in love and its eschaton the filling of all mortal flesh with spirit and all that is dead with this love. It is a transformation into the fullest degree of life." MOLTMANN, Jürgen (1993): *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. New York, First Fortress Press. 255.

[14] Op. cit. 256.

Andrew Root points out that incarnation is a relational dynamic in which healing encounters occur through presence and dedication. Incarnation serves as the foundation of the helping relationship, where the presence of the helper reflects the love and acceptance of Christ.[15] Root emphasizes that incarnational presence is not merely a passive state but an active participation in the life of the other, in which the helper is authentically and empathetically present. The focus is on the nature of the relationship, which creates the *encounter* between helper and client. This form of human connection represents a deeper level of engagement. It is not merely an exchange of information between the helper and the client but a meeting where the authentic presence and openness of both parties become essential. In this space, the client truly feels heard, accepted, and supported, enabling growth, change, and healing.

3. The Context of Incarnation: Creating Space for Mutual Participation

Various pastoral care approaches have attempted to define the nature of the helping relationship and its intra- and interpersonal conditions. The kerygmatic approach understands the struggling individual through Word-centred conversation, while the client-centred humanistic approach prioritizes the client's perspective. The systemic approach emphasizes the holistic dynamics of human-to-human and human-to-God relationships, whereas the contextual approach seeks to understand the client within their life community and relational networks. Each of these approaches has undoubtedly enriched the methodology of spiritual counselling with valuable insights.

Considering the principles of incarnation, the focus in the helping relationship shifts to the helper serving the client through their full presence and authenticity. The helper not only aids with words but also with their very being. Understanding this process is facilitated by Martin Buber's philosophy of the "I–Thou" relationship, which represents the highest level of genuine encounter. This relationship does not perceive the other as an object but recognizes them as a person of dignity and value.[16] According to Buber, the "I–Thou" relationship requires accepting the other as an independent, unique being without manipulation or objectification. This encounter is faith-based, rooted in presence and mutual recognition.[17]

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[15]   ROOT 2013, 67, 89.
[16]   BUBER, Martin (1937): *I and Thou*. Edinburgh, T & T Clark. 61–62.
[17]   Op. cit. 59.

Living out the "I–Thou" relationship does not mean excluding the surrounding reality for the sake of focusing on the other; rather, it sees the fullness of reality realized in the other person.[18] Just as the purest relationship between humanity and God is about placing everything within God rather than outside Him, the most intimate helping relationship is about encompassing the entire world within the Thou. This connection creates the possibility for true understanding and connection. In this mutual process, the helper does not merely "help" but is also transformed through the encounter.

Andrew Root, in describing the dynamics of the helping ministry, highlights the importance of becoming a person. Similar to Buber, he distinguishes between the individual and the person. While the individual seeks self-understanding within the world, becoming a person requires relational dynamics.[19] Root challenges the notion of the person as an autonomous, isolated individual. Instead, he emphasizes that humans are fundamentally relational beings, shaped by their relationships with others and with God. This concept, both theologically and sociologically, suggests that relationships are fundamental to human existence. Root sees the theological foundation of interpersonal relationships in humanity's imago Dei – the image of God. Humans are created in God's image, who Himself exists in relational unity within the Trinity.[20] He agrees with Karl Barth in describing God as one, yet existing as three persons in relationship. Jesus states that He and the Father are one (John 10:30) because they are so deeply interwoven that to see the Son is to see the Father (John 8:19). At the heart of creation is the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, which serves as the fundamental driving force of existence. This relationship is one of action and communication. The Son is the Word, through whom the Father's entire action is revealed, and therefore He only does what the Father tells Him. The Father and the Son have eternally indwelled one another, as Word and Response. The Holy Spirit is the essence of this eternal relationship – the love between the Father and the Son.[21] It is a spiritual relationship because it is one of mutual indwelling.

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[18] "To look away from the world, or to stare at it, does not help a man to reach God; but he who sees the world in Him stands in His presence." Op. cit. 79.

[19] ROOT 2013, 74–75.

[20] "The Trinity is a relationship that exists within Godself. God is a relationship, and we are made in God's image, because we too, as persons, are our relationships (Gen 1:26–27). The incarnation itself makes the Trinity a needed theological concept; the incarnation makes what was hidden revealed, that God is surely a relationship." Op. cit. 119.

[21] Op. cit. 120.

3.1. The Suffering and Self-giving of the Trinity

Root further explains that the perfect relational unity of the Trinity assumes that there is no separation or rupture between the Father and the Son. This unity is so complete that the relationship itself can be named as one. However, when God, through the incarnation, assumes human existence – along with suffering and death –, God Himself is broken.[22] Within the perfect divine relationship, suffering, abandonment, and the experience of death emerge. The Father loses the Son, and the Son descends into death in abandonment. The Spirit works, resurrects the Son, and leads Him back to the Father, now bearing the experience of separation and death.

This love now fully shares in human brokenness, and brokenness itself becomes the invitation and the key to entering the life of God. The rupture within the divine relationship presents humanity with the opportunity to enter into communion with God. In our need and brokenness, we enter into the space of the relationship between the Father and the Son through the mediating connection of the Spirit. From this, Root concludes that human personhood is deeply rooted in relationships – with God and with others.

3.2. The Mutual Participation in Divine and Human Relationships

The concept of humanity entering into the relational unity of the Trinity serves as an archetype for mutuality in the helper–client relationship. Our souls connect with the Spirit when we connect with others, share life with them, and engage in action and communication. During personal encounters, where "two or three gather in my name" (Matthew 18:20), we participate in God's life, in the love between the Father and the Son. When we experience this mutual indwelling, we can only describe it as a sacred moment[23] – one key condition for this is authentic, personal presence. This chapter emphasizes that a person cannot be understood in isolation but only within their relational network. This profoundly shapes identity.[24] This is the essence of the helping ministry: to create space for mutual participation in each other's lives, which is simultaneously participation in the life of God.

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Op. cit. 121.
[24] Op. cit. 87–88.

4. Understanding the World of the Other – Through Acceptance: Psychological Basis

According to Carl Rogers's client-centred approach, the effectiveness of the helping relationship is determined by three fundamental factors: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity. These elements together create the psychological framework that enables the client's inner process of change. Empathy, as defined by Rogers, means that the helper is able to perceive and understand the client's inner world from their own perspective without judgment or offering advice.[25] Empathic understanding also includes the ability to reflect the client's emotions, helping them gain deeper self-awareness. In an empathic helping relationship, the other person feels truly understood, which facilitates the release of inner tension and supports personal development.[26] Thus, empathy is not merely a technical tool but an attitude, where the helper approaches the other person with personal presence and genuine interest.

A close connection can be observed between empathy and Andrew Root's concept of incarnational presence. Root argues that in a truly effective helping relationship it is not enough to understand the other person; the helper must *enter* the reality of the other and share in their experiences.[27] Incarnational presence is not simply empathy but an active participation in the life of the other, which is particularly significant in pastoral care and pedagogical relationships.

Another crucial factor in Rogers' approach is unconditional positive regard, meaning that the helper fully accepts the other person without judgment or imposing expectations.[28] This creates a safe environment in which the client feels free to open up without the pressure of conforming to specific norms. Rogers considers unconditional acceptance essential for psychological growth, as it lays the foundation upon which the client can discover and accept themselves more fully.[29] Through non-judgmental acceptance, individuals can free

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[25] ROGERS, Carl (1957): The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change. In: *Journal of Consulting Psychology*. 21, 2. 100. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357 (accessed on: 10.02.2025).

[26] ROGERS, Carl (1980): *A Way of Being*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin. 115.

[27] ROOT 2013, 56.

[28] ROGERS, Carl (1961): *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin. 34.

[29] Op. cit. 37.

themselves from internal conflicts, allowing for personal growth and transformation. Root, in alignment with this view, emphasizes that incarnational presence is not conditional but based on the complete acceptance of the other, just as Christ entered the human world unconditionally.[30] Thus, the helping relationship does not merely focus on the client's development but fosters a deeper existential connection.

Authenticity, or congruence, refers to the helper's ability to genuinely acknowledge and express their own inner feelings and reactions rather than hiding behind a professional role.[31] A helping relationship lacking authenticity may remain superficial, as the other person will sense if the helper is not genuinely engaged. When the helper is honest and open, it fosters trust and enables deeper emotional connections. Through this relationship, the client also gains the courage to express their own emotions and thoughts openly, which is essential for personal growth.[32] Root asserts that authenticity is an integral part of incarnational presence, which is not just a professional interaction but a genuine, personal engagement.[33] This means that the helper is not a distant figure but fully present as a whole person, willing to take relational risks.

In conclusion, empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity together form the foundation of the Rogersian helping relationship. These factors create a safe space in which the other person can process their inner experiences, contributing to personal growth and transformation. Andrew Root's incarnational perspective aligns with these principles, emphasizing that the helping relationship is not just about understanding the other but about the helper's active presence and participation. This deeper spiritual dimension is rooted in God's incarnation, Christ's suffering in human form, and the redemptive experience embedded in the human condition.

5. *Practical Conditions for Relationship-Centred Encounters*

The realization of a relationship-centred encounter is based on several key factors that ensure the depth and authenticity of the connection. These include *presence*, *vulnerability*, and *role modelling*.

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30 ROOT 2013, 89.
31 ROGERS 1961, 61.
32 ROGERS 1980, 125.
33 ROOT 2013, 142.

5.1. The Healing Nature of Presence

Presence means that the helper is not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually present. Full attention – through eye contact, body language, and active listening – creates the possibility for connection and provides a safe space for the other person.[34] Presence is not merely passive attention but an active engagement that arises from mutual responsiveness between the helper and the other person. According to Henri Nouwen, the helper's vulnerability is also part of a relationship-centred encounter. The helper becomes "reachable", which makes them authentic and real in the eyes of the client.[35] Presence is not simply a matter of physical proximity or time investment but a deep, qualitative attentiveness in which the helper is fully engaged with their whole being.[36] This healing presence has a profound effect on the other person because it *creates a safe space* in which they feel accepted without judgment and can open up about their emotions. The helper's attention communicates *value* to the client: it sends the message that the client is important and that their story and emotions matter. Furthermore, presence fosters a *sense of connection*: the client is not alone in their struggles but is in a relationship with someone who shares their burdens.[37]

Nouwen states that attentiveness and care are healing because many people in modern society feel neglected, rejected, and lonely.[38] Genuine attention is one of the most powerful tools for making someone feel valued. When we truly listen to someone, we communicate that their life and story matter in this moment. The connection created through attentive presence can initiate inner healing processes because the client experiences acceptance and belonging.

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[34] GOLEMAN, Daniel (2006a): *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. New York, Bantam Books. 33.

[35] NOUWEN, Henri (1979): *The Wounded Healer. Ministry in Contemporary Society*. Montgomery, Image Books. 34.

[36] Op. cit. 45.

[37] Goleman, as part of emotional intelligence, considers empathetic attention one of the most essential elements of relationships, fostering deeper connections and a sense of security. GOLEMAN, Daniel (2006b): *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, Bantam Books. 112.

[38] NOUWEN 1979, 92.

5.2. *Vulnerability and Authenticity as Foundations of Presence*

The willingness to be vulnerable means that the helper does not hide behind a professional role but connects with the other person through their own human experiences and struggles. Role modeling in helping relationships is not just about spoken words but about embodying the acceptance and love that the helper conveys to the other person. Parker Palmer argues that an authentic helper not only teaches but also inspires through their own life.[39] This life example provides a model through which the client can also experience the possibility of genuine connection.

Nouwen highlights that the helper is not perfect but rather a wounded and vulnerable person. However, it is precisely this vulnerability that makes them authentic and capable of helping others.[40] This is known as the paradox of the "wounded healer": the helper does not appear as a distant, omnipotent expert but as someone who also knows pain and struggle. This authenticity and honesty create a deeper connection with the other person. The helper, by sharing their own vulnerability – even if only through their authentic presence –, opens the path for the client's healing process.

5.3. *The Spiritual Dimension of Presence*

Henri Nouwen emphasizes that the helper's presence is not only effective on a human level but also conveys a spiritual connection.[41] The helper can become a "carrier" of love, acceptance, and grace, through which the other person can perceive God's presence. Thus, presence is not just an individual healing force but also a mediatory tool – the helped person, through the helper's mediating role, can experience God's care and love.

In summary, the helper's presence is healing because it is authentic and complete; it reflects the value of the other person and creates the space where the client can feel love and care.[42] This presence itself becomes a form of "sacredness", where God's love and care become tangible. Attentiveness, care, and authentic presence thus become not only transformative on a human level but also a spiritual and healing force.

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[39] PALMER, Parker (1998): *The Courage to Teach*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. 72.
[40] NOUWEN 1979, 56.
[41] Op. cit. 75.
[42] Op. cit. 102.

6. The Goal of Relationship-Centred Encounters: Creating Space for the Other

The goal of a relationship-centred encounter is to create a healing space where the person receiving help feels heard and accepted, can connect with their own emotions and needs, can experience God's love and presence through the helper.[43] A relationship-centred encounter is not just a technique but a way of life, in which the helper, through self-giving, authenticity, and dedication, creates space for the other person to experience connection and healing.[44]

Parker Palmer asserts that in genuine encounters, a transformation occurs – not only for the client but also for the helper, as the relationship is based on mutual understanding and acceptance.[45] Nouwen highlights that the helping relationship is not merely problem-solving but the deeper experience of presence, in which the client is recognized as a whole person and feels unconditionally accepted.[46] Paradoxically, when helpers withdraw into themselves – not out of self-pity but out of humility – and do not emphasize their own importance, they create space for the other person to be themselves and to approach on their own terms. J. Hillman suggests that for the other person to open up and talk, the helper must step back. The helper must withdraw to make room for the other.[47]

However, the withdrawal of the helper is often a painful and lonely process. It forces one to confront one's own existence directly, in all its beauty and misery. When we are not afraid to enter our own inner world and focus on the deepest stirrings of our soul, we realize that to be alive is to be loved. This experience teaches us that we can love because we were born out of love, we can give because our life is a gift, and we can set others free because we have been set free by the One whose heart is greater than ours.

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[43] Op. cit. 45.

[44] PALMER 1998, 85.

[45] Op. cit. 90.

[46] NOUWEN, 52.

[47] "This withdrawal, rather than going-out-to-meet the other, is an intense act of concentration, a model for which can be found in the Jewish mystical doctrine of Tsimtsum. God as omnipresent and omnipotent was everywhere. He filled the universe with his Being. How then could the creation come about? … God had to create by withdrawal; He created the not-Him, the other, by self-concentration … On the human level, withdrawal of myself aids the other to come into being." HILLMAN, James (1998): *Insearch: Psychology and Religion*. Los Angeles, Spring Publications. 31.

When we find the anchors of our life within our own centre, we become capable of letting others enter the space we have created for them and of allowing them to dance their own dance, sing their own song, and speak their own language – without fear. At this point, our presence is no longer threatening or demanding but inviting and liberating.[48]

A relationship-based encounter gives the helped person the opportunity to discover their inner values and resources while growing in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.[49] The helper's authentic presence and self-giving create a space of trust, in which the other person can experience the power of genuine connection.

7. *Sharing Life and Vulnerability in Spiritual Counselling*

Sharing life means being willing to reveal ourselves fully, including our strengths and weaknesses. Brené Brown asserts that vulnerability is not a sign of weakness, but, on the contrary, it is the greatest source of courage.[50] This aligns with Rogers's thesis that self-giving and empathy are essential in the helping relationship, as true connection between helper and helped can only emerge this way.[51] It is a conscious decision on the part of the helper to share their feelings, thoughts, and experiences in order to create a genuine relationship with others.[52]

Vulnerability means being open to others, even when it carries risks (e.g. rejection, criticism).[53] According to Parker Palmer, showing vulnerability is not merely a part of individual growth but also a key to deepening communal relationships.[54] At the same time, embracing vulnerability is the foundation of the helper's authenticity. A genuine helper is aware of their own wounds and does not hide them but uses them as a resource to help others.[55] When someone embraces their vulnerability, the other person feels that they are not alone in their insecurities, which creates a deeper, more

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[48] NOUWEN 1979, 83–85.
[49] GOLEMAN 2006b, 65.
[50] BROWN, Brené (2012): *Daring Greatly*. New York, Gotham Books. 34.
[51] ROGERS 1961, 45.
[52] ROGERS 1980, 62.
[53] BROWN, Brené (2010): *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Center City, Hazelden Publishing. 45.
[54] PALMER, Parker (2004): *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. 79.
[55] NOUWEN 1979, 41; PALMER 2004, 91.

trusting helping relationship. There is a direct connection between vulnerability, self-giving, and authenticity in the helper's attitude. The willingness to be vulnerable and to give oneself helps break down the barriers behind which we often hide. Authenticity in this sense means that the helper does not try to appear perfect or invulnerable but instead honestly reveals their human self.[56] A helper who shares that they have struggled with similar challenges appears more credible to the other person, strengthening mutual trust.

However, self-giving always carries risks because honesty makes us vulnerable. According to Brown, these risks are necessary for relationships to deepen.[57] Irvin D. Yalom, a leading figure in existential psychotherapy, shares this view, stating that the therapist's personal openness strengthens trust and helps the client in their journey of self-discovery.[58] This aligns with the views of Sándor Ferenczi, who, unlike Freud, believed in embracing the therapist's vulnerability: "A therapist who truly wants to understand their patient must do more than observe and listen; they must fully experience them. This requires openness – if the therapist approaches the patient with honesty and transparency, they will experience the patient through the patient's response."[59] In addition to assessing the risks, such as the possibility of rejection, misunderstanding, or the fear of appearing weak, we must also consider the potential benefits: the formation of deeper, more authentic relationships, the creation of emotional trust and closeness, providing the helped person with an inspiring example that embracing vulnerability brings strength and courage.[60]

Self-giving does not mean complete self-abandonment; the helper's role is to support the client through their inner processes while maintaining professional and personal boundaries. For the helper, self-giving means being honest and open with the client, while also being mindful of the boundaries of the relationship. Brown elaborates that self-giving and vulnerability are closely connected, but self-giving should not equate to total self-sacrifice. Self-giving means that the helper embraces their own vulnerability

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[56] BROWN 2012, 67.
[57] BROWN 2010, 88.
[58] YALOM, I. D. (1989): *Love's Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy*. New York, Basic Books. 59.
[59] YALOM, I. D. (2004): *Egzisztenciális pszichoterápia*. Budapest, Animula Kiadó. 321.
[60] YALOM 1989, 75.

and feelings but does so while maintaining awareness of their role's limitations. The helper cannot take on the client's problems or life but must maintain their own boundaries while supporting the client in finding their own solutions.

Thus, the helper–client relationship is not only about connection but also about respecting roles and boundaries.[61] The model of the helper's self-giving and vulnerability shows the other person that embracing vulnerability is not weakness but an essential part of growth and healing. It creates closeness, as the helper does not appear perfect or omnipotent, making them more relatable and accessible to the client. It encourages the client to open up, as the helper's honesty and openness inspire the client to share their own emotions and thoughts.

8. Sharing Life and Vulnerability as a Spiritual Strength

According to Brené Brown, embracing vulnerability is not only an emotional but also a spiritual source of strength, as self-giving enables a person to form deeper connections with themselves and others.[62] When we expose our vulnerability, we truly connect with others and with God, as humility and sharing life form the foundation of an authentic spiritual life. This is a central aspect of human experience, through which an individual can perceive God's presence in daily life.[63] Authentic spiritual transformation does not stem from striving for perfection but rather from accepting weaknesses. Self-giving and vulnerability serve as means of experiencing divine love, as they open a person towards divine grace – this is the foundation of authentic spirituality.

We must recognize that accepting our weaknesses and the resulting openness to divine grace is a mutual and dynamic process, not a one-way action. Authentic spirituality transforms both the person and their relationships – it influences how we experience our humanity and how we dare to embrace ourselves in forming authentic relationships. True, deep bonds can only be created through this openness.[64] A cyclical process of spiritual and personal growth can be observed here: authentic spirituality

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[61] See: PALMER 2004, 95; YALOM 1989, 103.

[62] BROWN 2012, 103. See: NOUWEN 1979, 63.

[63] ROHR, Richard – MORRELL, Mike (2018): *Az isteni tánc. A Szentháromság és a belső átalakulás*. Ursus Libris. 113–114.

[64] PALMER 2004, 108.

deepens one's transcendent relationship, in which a person repeatedly encounters God's presence and transcendence. Acknowledging vulnerability increases emotional depth and relational intimacy, ultimately leading towards greater acceptance and love.[65] This self-giving has a liberating power – a force whose source is not *potentia humana* but *gratia divina*. "It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:16).

Thus, the helper's self-giving and vulnerability hold not only psychological but also spiritual significance. The helper can truly open themselves to God only when they relinquish the urge for self-protection and allow divine love to shape their life. The helper's presence extends beyond technical methods – it is a deeply relational, personal, and spiritual process, in which not only the person receiving help but also the helping one undergoes continuous transformation.

Summary and Conclusions

This analysis approaches the topic from both theological and psychological perspectives, drawing upon the thoughts of Carl Rogers, Henri Nouwen, Andrew Root, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Relationship-centred helping is of central importance, as the quality of the helper–client relationship determines the success of the conversation. The essential elements – empathy, unconditional acceptance, and authenticity – create a safe space where the client can open up and embark on inner transformation. The concept of incarnation is not merely a theological idea but a relational dynamic, in which the helper's presence "takes on flesh" through attention, acceptance, and empathy.

The study further highlights that self-giving does not imply total self-sacrifice but rather conscious presence and boundary setting. Embracing vulnerability fosters authentic connections. However, it also requires the helper to maintain their emotional and spiritual resources. Through incarnational presence, the helper becomes a conduit of love and acceptance, which has an impact not only on an emotional level but also on a transcendent plane.

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[65] YALOM 1989, 127.

The success of helping conversations is not solely dependent on technical skills but on a deeper relational dynamic, where the helper's presence and self-giving play a central role. The theological concept of incarnation in helping relationships is not merely symbolic – it embodies the experience of true encounters. The helper does not merely listen but "takes on flesh" through attention, acceptance, and empathy. The helper is not merely a facilitator or counsellor but provides a presence that can open new pathways for the client's self-awareness, spiritual growth, and transformation.

The study emphasizes that self-giving is not equivalent to self-abandonment but rather a conscious choice to be accessible and relational. The helper's vulnerability is not a weakness but a sign that they are a relational being – not someone dominating the client but someone walking alongside them. This approach requires balance: the helper must know their emotional and spiritual limits, yet they must not shut themselves off from moments of genuine human connection.

As a final conclusion, incarnational presence and self-giving serve as a bridge between the psychological and spiritual dimensions. The helping relationship is not merely a space for solving problems or therapy – it is a spiritual process where both the helper and the helped are transformed. Through sharing life, empathy, authenticity, and openness, the helper creates a safe space in which the other person can be themselves and experience the liberating power of unconditional presence.

The helping profession requires more than professional competencies – it demands an inner attitude in which the helper also grows, develops, and connects. Incarnation and self-giving are not merely tools or methods in helping conversations – they form a way of life that gives depth and true significance to encounters. A helper who can embody this does not only assist others in their path of transformation but also deepens their own understanding and fulfilment through relationships.

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