



journal of biblical
perspectives
in leadership

INTEGRATING LIFE COACHING AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY WITHOUT LOSING OUR THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

KARL INGE TANGEN

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the reflection on how one can integrate the late modern practice of life coaching with practical theology by employing Biblical perspectives on this practice. I present the so-called coaching revolution, and try to frame questions that may be followed up in later papers and discussions. I begin by describing coaching as a concrete practice, before I locate it within a larger socio-cultural process and take a closer look at the psychological theories and worldviews that have grounded and now guide the practice. This presentation of what I loosely define, as the coaching paradigm is followed by theologically motivated questions that I see as crucial on the journey of integrating late modern coaching into Evangelical theology and Pentecostal spirituality. In this process, Biblical perspectives are employed in order to facilitate a constructive and critical analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE COACHING REVOLUTION

Coaching is an interesting phenomenon for several reasons. First, coaching is a new way of leading, becoming increasingly more popular in late modern organizations. It is in this context that David Logan has proclaimed a coaching revolution.¹ Second, the concept of life coaching is also a powerful trend that seems to spread with the globalization of late modern individualism. An interesting

¹ David Logan and John King, *The Coaching Revolution: How Visionary Managers Are Using Coaching to Empower People and Unlock Their Full Potential* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2004).

demonstration of this trend is the book, *Therapist as Life Coach*, written by the clinical psychologists Patrick Williams and Deborah Davis, who recommend that psychologists and psychiatrists transform their practice from “therapeutic counselling” to “life coaching.”²

Third, I also suggest that the coaching revolution is influencing practical theology in several ways. Christian literature on coaching is growing fast,³ and several pastors and theological educators are starting their own businesses as life coaches, as a supplement to their more traditional vocations. Courses on coaching are also increasingly introduced to the theological education. Theological educators Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl go as far as suggesting that coaching is the most important format of training in the “missional church of the future.”⁴

II. HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE, METHOD, AND PURPOSE

The basic method of this analysis is hermeneutical, in the sense that it employs an interpretative approach to both science and reality, an approach that also embraces dialogue with other interpretative perspectives. My point of departure, which is Pentecostal theology, shares the Evangelical perspective that gives epistemological priority to the Christian story (the Bible) over other life and worldviews. Thus, the Biblical story of history as a theo-drama is understood as both the first and as the integrative horizon.⁵ Yet, this analysis nevertheless draws on important elements in Don Browning’s model of critical correlation, and therefore seeks to facilitate an open dialogue with other perspectives that seek to both listen and learn from other interpreters.⁶

III. THE MEANING AND ETYMOLOGY OF “COACHING”

The word *coach* has, as Gary Collins notes, interesting etymological roots.⁷ From the 1500s and onward, the word described a horse-drawn vehicle. From around 1880, the word was given an athletic meaning, identifying the person who tutored rowers at Cambridge University to “move from one place to another.”⁸ So even if late modern-life coaching may have its major roots in modern individualist psychology, the image of a “sports coach” who comes alongside someone (or a team) to help people move from one place to another, may possibly be used as “deep metaphor,” or root-metaphor of this practice. Simply defined then, *coaching* is

² Patrick Williams and Deborah C. Davis, *Therapist as Life Coach: An Introduction for Counselors and Other Helping Professionals*, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

³ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality* (Nashville: Navpress, 2001); Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl, *Transformational Coaching: Empowering Leaders in a Changing Ministry World* (Nashville: B & H, 2008); Joseph Umidi, *Transformational Coaching* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005).

⁴ Ogne and Roehl, *Transformational Coaching*, 10-21.

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁶ Browning’s model is embraced with some caution. For a critical review of the model see Ray Sherman Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001); Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁷ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 14-15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

a practice in which one person comes alongside another in order to help him or her achieve certain goals.

At this point it may be useful, however, to clarify the distinction between life coaching and performance coaching. *Performance coaching* is, according to Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl, orientated towards effectiveness in a distinct area, such as job performance (in a Christian context, ministry).⁹ It focuses on the larger context or personal life of the leader *only if* this has negative impact on performance. In contrast, holistic life coaching approaches the whole person and seems to value “personal authenticity and character as well as the person’s relationships to others and community.”¹⁰ Williams and Davis’ secular approach is just as holistic.¹¹ Their model of the life balance wheel includes several dimensions in this form of conversation, including: life purpose, family and friends, finances, romance/intimacy, health/self-care, social fun, personal and spiritual development, and one’s physical environment. I find Williams and Davis’ model to be of particular interest because it is more philosophically conscious than many other models.

IV. LIFE COACHING: KEY PRACTICES AND VIRTUES

For this reason, it might be useful to look at what Williams and Davis define as the basic practices of coaching, and the associated virtues. In their model of coaching, the coach is primarily given the role of a partner in a conversation on the client’s or PBC’s (Person Being Coached) life. But what does this partner do? According to Williams and Davis, a coach on a basic level mainly practices “listening” and “truth-telling” in four (well-prepared) steps:

1. Listens and clarifies
2. Reflects what he or she is hearing
3. Listens more
4. And requests action¹²

The coach should, according to Williams and Davis, primarily listen for what the PBC wants to accomplish and wants to be. The coach should look for and identify people’s goals and strengths—and compliment and endorse these—while at the same time also listen for the gap between where the person is and where he or she wants to be. In this process, the coach is “solution focused” rather than therapeutic, in the sense that he or she looks for possibilities rather than for pathology, history, pain, and psychological blocks.¹³

What does it mean to tell the truth? Telling the truth is about pointing out potential incongruence or intuitions about problem areas, and pointing out the client’s strengths. It might be useful to note here what telling the truth is not. It does not mean to confront and, more importantly, the good coach listens for and with the client for the client’s agenda, not what the coach thinks the agenda and direction should

⁹ Ogne and Roehl, *Transformational Coaching*.

¹⁰ “This transformational paradigm helps leaders live authentically and ‘incarnationally’. . . . A good coach is focused on the holistic development of the leader. A coach must focus on the four areas, helping the leader clarifying calling, cultivate character, create community, and connect with culture.” Ogne and Roehl, *Transformational Coaching*, 29.

¹¹ Williams and Davis, *Therapist as Life Coach*, 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99-103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

be.¹⁴ For many coaches, this is an important absolute, to the degree that they reject other forms of counseling and guiding conversations. In his extensive work on Christian coaching, Gary Collins gives the following review of the coaching literature: “A perusal of the many available books on coaching shows that most authors emphasise the ability of the PBCs to ‘look inside’ with the help of their coaches, to listen for the values, the purposes and visions that are deep within, to focus on inner strengths, and to discover their passions and life purposes. There are no absolutes and few rules in this thinking.”¹⁵ However, it’s worth noticing that “listening for the solution” is a great obstacle to great coaching, according to Williams and Davis, because it blocks the powerful process of discovery, “uncovering,” and creative ideas that come from the coaching conversation.¹⁶ The latter point is important because it means that the person being coached is, at least ideally, not only his or her own visionary lawgiver (*autonomos*), he or she is, at least in a narrow sense (not necessarily ultimately), also his or her own self-creator (*autopoesis*).

Coaching then, is a practice of empowerment providing or aiming at providing a particular kind of freedom, in terms of individual self-creation or, if one likes, self-actualization. Freedom here means the ability to set one’s own holistic life goals and the ability to achieve those goals “from within.” That this approach and perspective is an important value in this paradigm is affirmed by some of the advanced skills and practices that Williams and Davis promote, such as:

- Purposeful inquiry, which basically means to move together, guided by curiosity
- Never make the client wrong, which means that the coach should focus on what the client needs, and not on what the coach thinks he or she needs
- “Possibility thinking,” which means to see and encourage courageous and positive thinking
- “Standing for,” which means “remembering the dreams of their clients. And believing in the possibility of realizing them”
- Reframing, which means to help the PBC to see situations in new and different perspectives.
- The use of metaphors and parables to stimulate the PBC’s imagination¹⁷

V. LIFE COACHING IN A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Forms of Individualism and Social Systems: The Modern Project

Some of these skills are presented in more depth later. At this point, however, it might be useful to see coaching within a larger sociological perspective. I suggest that Robert Bellah’s analysis of late modernity in general and American culture in particular, may be useful in this regard, since the coaching revolution has emerged in an American context. The great project of modernity, according to Bellah, is freedom, understood as independence from social and religious coercion.¹⁸ Like Charles

¹⁴ Ibid., 101-102.

¹⁵ Collins, *Christian Coaching*, 20.

¹⁶ Williams and Davis, *Therapist as Life Coach*, 101.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Robert N. Bellah and Steven M. Tipton, eds., *The Robert Bellah Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and

Taylor, he identifies a massive “subjective turn” in the history of modern culture, in terms of a turn from external authorities to the self as a source of significance.¹⁹

The modern project is, however, also shaped and driven by social systems. Following Jürgen Habermas, Bellah makes an important distinction between “life worlds” and “systems.”²⁰ Somewhat simplified one might say that the life world is the realm of mutual understanding and meaningful relationships, while systems on the other hand are organized through nonlinguistic media, exemplified by modern market capitalism and the administrative nation–state.

Modernization, according to Habermas, involves two complementary processes: the rationalization of the life world through modern forms of rationalities, and the differentiation of the systems from the life world.²¹ The problem with differentiation is that the systems become autonomous to the degree that they are no longer anchored in the moral universe of the life world, instead they seek to subordinate the life world to forms of “functionalist reason,” meaning that concerns for efficiency and profit invade the moral realm.

Different Languages and Types of Late-Modern Individualisms

Thus, certain cultural forms or interpretative repertoires may feed on these systems, and in particular what Bellah calls utilitarian individualism. In a classic study, Bellah and his colleagues originally identified four kinds of late-modern “individualisms”²²—all sharing the basic belief in the dignity and “sacredness” of the individual.²³ However, only two of these qualify as forms of individualism, and in a more narrow sense as “first languages.” These interpretative repertoires see the individual as the primary reality, whereas society is a conceived second-order construct.

Utilitarian Individualism

Utilitarian individualism has its philosophical roots in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁴ It has affinity to a basically economic understanding of human existence, and views human life as an effort by individuals to maximize their self-interest relative to their given ends. Thus, it is highly compatible with market capitalism. “The utilitarian self,” according to Steve Tipton, asks: “What do I want? Or, what are my interests?”²⁵ His answer to this first question then defines “goodness of consequence.” Ethics is primarily understood in terms of procedures of fair exchange (between self-maximizing individuals), and freedom is understood as freedom to

Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bellah et al., *The Robert Bellah Reader*, 107-109.

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *In Theory of Communicative Action and System* (Cambridge, MA: Beacon Press, 1987).

²² Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*.

²³ See the authors’ own assessment of these terms in Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 334.

²⁴ See Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, ch. 2. Here Bellah explicitly mentions Thomas Hobbes and John Locke as philosophical fathers of this tradition.

²⁵ Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 369.

pursue one's interests.²⁶ The realizations of these interests are often referred to as success. Bellah and his colleagues propose that there are several key images to the utilitarian mode of thinking, such as the independent citizen, the self-made entrepreneur, and the successful manager (or organizational leader).²⁷

Expressive Individualism

What Bellah calls expressive individualism has its roots in the Romanticism of the nineteenth century, and arose in opposition to the utilitarian life mode. It represents a search for a deep understanding of what it means to be "an authentic self," or "a whole person."²⁸ In its classical "romantic form," it holds that each person has a unique core of feelings and intuitions that should unfold or be expressed.²⁹ As Heelas and Woodhead suggest, expressive individualists go deeper in their catering of themselves, and the search for subjective well-being includes a quest for authenticity, creativity, personal growth, meaningful relationships, and the experience of harmony or holism.³⁰ In Bellah's material, this also leads people into different therapeutic practices, in which the individual tries to deal with both external authorities and internal anxieties that obstruct the individual's freedom to develop and express one's "true self." The holistic self-accepting and self-actualizing individual, as well as the therapist, may therefore be seen as typical characters of the narratives of expressive individualism.

This ethics has been described (critically) by Charles Taylor as "an ethics of authenticity,"³¹ and may have two components. First, it thinks of an action as morally right if one acts, in any given situation, in a way that fully expresses oneself, specifically one's inner feelings and one's experience of the situation.³² Second, it may include what Bellah and Tipton call *therapeutic contractualism*: "Thus sharing of feelings with somebody that in turn responds similarly. Thus sharing of feelings between similar, authentic, expressive selves—selves who to feel complete do not need others and do not rely on others to define their own standards or desires—become the basis for the therapeutic ideal of love."³³ In its ideal typical form, the therapeutic attitude denies all forms of external obligations in relationships, replacing them with the ideal of open and honest communication and "fair psychological exchange."³⁴

²⁶ Bellah et al., *The Robert Bellah Reader*, 268.

²⁷ The role of the professional manager is important because the modern bureaucratic organization may be perceived primarily as a utilitarian corporation. See Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 39-46.

²⁸ The idea of the inner voice could also be combined with orthodox theism, but in many cases this belief develops towards pantheism or secularism. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 21.

²⁹ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 334.

³⁰ See Heelas and Woodhead, *Religion in Modern Times*, 370; see also Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Karin Tusting, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

³¹ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³² See Tipton's analysis in Woodhead and Heelas, *Religion in Modern Times*, 370.

³³ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 121-130.

³⁴ Giddens calls this "the pure relationship." See Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Oxford, UK: Polity Press, 1992).

Individualism as Loose-Transactional Connections

I suggest that in a sociological perspective, moderate individualism does not primarily mean forms of social independence, or forms of eremitism. Individualism is, in a sociological perspective, primarily a way of relating to others. The utilitarian individualist obviously needs others to succeed.³⁵ *Therapeutic contractualism* may come closer to an arena where altruistic proximity and authentic care is performed, but “the other” is primarily in this paradigm a partner who acts both as client and coach, in a transactional process.

Win–win solutions in the paradigm of individualist languages are therefore basically transactional deals between two sets of individual interests, rather than the transformational idea of the common good that benefits all, including those not present in the transaction. “The other” is therefore always in danger of being used, or being reduced to an audience for utilitarian (success) or expressive self-actualisation. The American sociologist Robert Wuthnow suggests that this development means that forms of solid communities (including churches) are transformed into forms of “loose connections.”³⁶

The practical theologian and leadership theorist Robert Banks offers a theological perspective on this process. He claims that covenantal relationships, understood as “binding two parties unconditionally for a particular purpose or length of time,” are steadily replaced by “contractual relationships of limited duration, with built in conditions.” He argues that “this trend” is noticeable “even” in marriage, friendships, and church.³⁷

From a more European perspective, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck Gernsheim suggest that collective identities, such as the identity of class, seem to wither away in the post industrial economy, and that the national welfare state also seems to fuel the process of individualization, since it is designed to support individuals, rather than groups.³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman proposes that we now live in a “liquid modernity,” shaped by the post industrial transition from “production to consumption,” which is shaping both professional relationships and intimate partnerships in the image of “until further notice rationality,” based on mutual use and consumption. This logic transforms interpersonal intimacy to “episodic” or “liquid” love.³⁹

Strategies of individual self-actualization are therefore not only a choice in the late-modern context, but Beck and Beck Gernsheim suggest that late-modern people are condemned to individualization,⁴⁰ in the sense that they must stage and manage

³⁵ Even Ridderstråle and Nordström, who celebrate the funky ethos of late-modern individualism, admit that one needs the competence of others to be “on the edge.” Jonas Ridderstråle and Kjell Nordström, *Funkey Business: Talent Makes Capital Dance* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2000), 210-212.

³⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁷ Robert J. Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 15.

³⁸ Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

³⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 89-91.

⁴⁰ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 4.

their own biography, and adapt adequately to the dialectics of local and global systems.⁴¹ At this point, I suggest that the metaphor of being condemned might imply a too strong form of *sociologism* (viewing individual thoughts too much as an epiphenomena of the socio-cultural contexts). Yet, even if Beck and Beck Gernsheim are only partially correct, both their and Bellah's perspectives might explain why life coaching is becoming so popular. It obviously addresses urgent individual needs, and the emphasis on individual self-creation provides hope corresponding to the dominant interpretative repertoires.

VI. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF LIFE COACHING

From a theological perspective, one must ask what kind of worldviews and ethics are embedded in the practice of coaching. Davis and Williams suggest that Sigmund Freud had a dramatic influence on society's view on both mental illness and human behavior in general. They state, however, that Freud's theories have little applicability to life coaching, instead Freud and his students lay the foundation for the paradigm they call *traditional therapy* or *old style* counseling. They see the following characteristics as typical of this psychoanalytic paradigm.⁴²

- Deal primarily with pathology
- Orientated towards the inner world of process and feelings
- Approach this world with "why questions" towards the client's past/ biography
- Basically a medical model where the therapist is expert (doctor) and the client is a patient

Models of life coaching may find their theoretical antecedents among Freud's students. Williams and Davis put forward that both Carl Jung and Alfred Adler "broke away from Freud's theories of neuroses and psychosis," and propose that they "posited theories that were more teleological and optimistic about human potential."⁴³ Adler saw each individual as the creator and artist of his or her own life, and involved his clients in goal setting, life planning, and inventing their own future. Happiness was eventually found in a sense of social connectedness and significance. The same applies to Jung's journey towards a higher self (individuation), which was also an act of self-creation, through visionary and purposeful living that culminated in self-transcendence.⁴⁴

Williams and Davis also see Carl Rogers book, *Client-Centred Therapy*,⁴⁵ as a major contribution to later models of coaching. Together with other theorists, like Abraham Maslow, Rogers formed the "third force" of humanistic psychology, focusing more on personal development towards self-actualization and well-being, rather than on pathology. His contribution is of particular importance because it defined counseling and therapy as a relationship in which the client was assumed to have the ability to change and grow. The principle of unconditional positive regard saw affirming the client as the key to change, and this redefined the former imbalanced

⁴¹ See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 214-215, 243.

⁴² Williams and Davis, *Therapist as Life Coach*, 11, 40-46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

relationship between the therapist and the client into a more equalitarian “therapeutic alliance.”⁴⁶

The main psychological basis for coaching is, however, found in what Williams and Davis call “solution focused approaches,” associated with the father of American hypnosis, Milton Erickson, and his students Bandler and Grinder, who formed the paradigm of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) in their landmark study, *The Structure of Magic*.⁴⁷ Solution-focused approaches do not depend on insight or depth psychology; they focus less on pathology and the past, and more on behavioral change through increased awareness, and choices that allow for a desired future (cognitive psychology). Language and questions that focus the client “towards what works, rather than towards what is broken,” are seen as powerful and transformational tools for a process of personal development. Typical characteristics of these transitional models are therefore:

- The client is “supported” rather than cured in a therapeutic alliance
- A “move away from the focus on pathology” to a “paradigm of solution”
- A more “brief” solution-focused approach, orientated towards “outcome”
- Language is seen as a primary tool for desired change (also for the inner conversation)⁴⁸

Williams and Davis suggest that models of life coaching have evolved from a variety of solution-based approaches that include NLP, systemic family therapy (Haley, Madnes, Satir), Ellis’ rational emotive therapy, and Glasser’s reality therapy. Their own model may probably also be seen as a relatively eclectic psychological hybrid that also incorporates impulses from performance coaching in organizational development, and models of personal development, such as that of Anthony Robbins,⁴⁹ which is focusing on possibility thinking and visionary living. Coaching, according to their model is characterized by:

- Paradigm of possibility and human potential
- A move from “Why?” to “How?”
- Action from the inner to the outer world (inside-out) through transformative language and practices orientated towards an outcome
- Outcome is defined by a larger vision of the future
- Focus on a holistic life
- Coach is seen as a co-creator in “a partnership of equals”
- Thus, providing freedom from “managed care”⁵⁰

Overall then, Williams and Davis sum up the major distinctions between traditional therapy and coaching in four broad categories:

1. *Past versus future*. Therapy focuses on the past and has a problem that needs solving, whereas coaching focuses on the future assuming that “the client is whole and capable of having a wonderful life.”
2. *Fix versus create*. Clients seek therapists as a source of fixing or eliminating their problems; clients seek coaches to help them to get more out of their life.

⁴⁶ Williams and Davis, *Therapist as Life Coach*.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12-15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

3. *Professional versus collegial*. Therapy sees the therapist as an expert, whereas coaching sees the coach as a partner who supports the client in his or her attempts to create an even better life.
4. *Limited versus open*. Therapists are limited in the way they generate clients, whereas coaches can approach others more openly about their services, and discuss their services. For therapists, coaching therefore opens new business possibilities.⁵¹

VII. DEEP METAPHORS, ETHICS, AND WORLDVIEWS IN THE HUMANIST ROOTS OF COACHING

It seems clear that these interpretative repertoires, used during both therapy and coaching, are far from being as value neutral. At the level of culture one may also ask if it represents a philosophy or a form of religious hope, meeting deep existential needs, and providing what the British sociologist Anthony Giddens calls a sense of ontological security, based on hope and trust in human potential.⁵²

Don Browning has pointed out that there are deep metaphors, and even a relatively explicit cosmology, in humanistic psychology.⁵³ They share the deep metaphors that express images of harmony with the Jungian tradition (although this tradition is more cosmologically sophisticated). Here theorists like Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow may be fruitful figurants to study since they seem to have been pioneers in defining the good life and health, in terms of self-actualization based on autonomy and *auto poesis* (or self-regulation, to use Perls' term). Browning shows that these theorists share an organic model of self-actualization. Roger's client-centred therapy is based on the following assumption: "The organism has one basic tendency and striving—to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism."⁵⁴ Rogers states that in the patients with whom he has worked, the forward direction of growth is more powerful than the satisfaction of remaining infantile. Like Maslow, Rogers also suggests that spontaneous expressiveness (or what he calls "flow"), in terms of doing "what feels right," may be a trustworthy guide to decision making in all aspects of life, including the moral realm.⁵⁵ Maslow believes that the self-actualized person who has overcome external obstacles to growth, and been placed in a proper environment for self-actualization, also possesses good values including kindness, courage, honesty, love, unselfishness, and goodness.⁵⁶ This belief is also grounded in a cosmological belief. Based on his reflection on "peak experiences," Maslow concludes, "The philosophical implications here are tremendous. If for the sake of argument, we accept the thesis that in peak-experiences the nature of reality itself may be seen more clearly and its essence penetrated more profoundly, then this is almost the same as saying what so many Philosophers and Theologians have affirmed, that the whole of Being is neutral or

⁵¹ Ibid., 41-48.

⁵² Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*; Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*.

⁵³ Don S. Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 69-76.

⁵⁴ Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 490.

⁵⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1961); see Browning's analysis, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 63-65.

⁵⁶ Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1962), 147.

good, and that evil and pain or threat is only a partial phenomenon, a product of not seeing the world as whole and unified.”⁵⁷ What does “whole and unified mean”? Don Browning has tried to show that there is a quite similar implicit worldview embedded in Perls’ metaphor of self-regulation and Rogers’ metaphors of flow and process.⁵⁸ This worldview is harmonic in the sense that it assumes that social justice and harmony are almost automatic by-products of people living out their inner potential. This grand assumption is not empirically-based; instead it seems to be grounded in an implicit metaphysics that gravitates towards a monistic worldview with strong affinity to Eastern, and some versions of Western, mysticism. Monism is, according to Browning, characterized by the idea that the sacred is a united, motionless, timeless, and unconditional self-caused perfection and, furthermore, the human self in its depth is a manifestation of the divine life itself.⁵⁹ It’s worth noticing here that evil (e.g., sin or the devil) is ontologically absent; evil is basically a product of not seeing the world in the right way (and acting on that).

This suggestion should in my view not be accepted out of hand of practitioners of coaching, but it should be explored if one tries to integrate secular models of coaching into Christian practices. Another suggestion that may stimulate inquiry is Browning’s proposal that humanist concepts of health and self-actualization include ethical assumptions that have affinity with the tradition of ethical egoism or ethical individualism, clearly formulated by philosophers like David Norton.⁶⁰ In this tradition, life is primarily a matter of bringing forth or leading out (*eudamonia*) one’s unique set of potentialities (one’s *daimon*). This does not threaten social community, according to Norton, because all potentialities are unique and do not duplicate each other. Thus, this form of metaphysical complementarity seems very compatible with the paradigm monistic humanistic psychology.

VIII. THE DEEP METAPHORS AND THE ETHICS OF NLP COACHING

The emphasis on self-realization is certainly present in the new psychological paradigm, but there are some differences. NLP emerged, at least according to the classic introduction by O’Conner and Seymor,⁶¹ as a technique of “modeling” or learning from successful practitioners. The root-metaphor of mental programming, and the frequent use of technique in NLP literature, may indicate that this paradigm primarily intends to produce human technology orientated towards outcome. However, there are some basic filters in these techniques, referred to as behavioral frames that color how one learns. These are important because they are important for how NLP practitioners may be reframing certain aspects in the coaching situation. According to O’Conner and Seymor, there are five such frames, some of which we are already familiar:

1. One is orientated towards outcome rather than problems. The problem orientation is referred to as the “blame game,” asking the question: “Whose fault is it?”

⁵⁷ Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 77.

⁵⁸ Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 68-76.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-68.

⁶¹ Joseph O’Conner and John Seymor, *Introducing NLP: Psychological Skills for Understanding and Influencing People* (London: HarperCollins, 1990).

2. The second is to ask “How?” rather than “Why?” questions.
3. The third frame is feedback rather than failure. According to O’Conner and Seymor, there is no such thing as failure, only results, and these can be used as helpful feedback.
4. The fourth theme is to consider possibilities rather than necessities, meaning that one should look at what one could do rather than on possible constrains.
5. Finally, NLP adopts an attitude of fascination and curiosity, rather than making assumptions.⁶²

To the latter frame, one might ask if this in itself, like the other frames, actually entails certain assumptions about what the world is and is not. In terms of ethics, one may ask if frame one and three in practice, at least if they become fundamental for how people assess situations, strongly exclude other views of the world, which might speak about guilt and failure. I suggest that the influence of NLP may indicate that also expressive individualism is threatened by the outcome orientation of utilitarian individualism. In other words, the material power of market capitalism may also invade the realm of counseling, threatening to replace models of value-based authenticity with models of success.

On the other hand, it’s worth noticing that NLP may provide some moral resources that individualistic–humanist psychology associated with expressive individualism possibly fails to provide. The final frame of choosing an outcome is, according to O’Conner and Seymor, that of ecology.⁶³ Since “no one” exists in isolation, people should also reflect on the unintended consequences of action in relation to family, work, and society in general. Thus, there might be an imperative in this model that moves to a utilitarian or consequential model of ethics that incorporates systems thinking and open systems theory, and therefore forms a more comprehensive utilitarian ethical model.

It is also worth noticing that NLP is flexible in its orientation towards learning. For this reason NLP authorities like Robert Dilts (2003) argues that the role of the coach may be too narrow in relation to the PBC.⁶⁴ He suggests that one should be flexible and include other roles, such as that of the “awakener” in the coaching relationship. This means that one should “define the types of contexts and situations which call upon the capital ‘C’ coach to focus on a particular role—i.e., caretaker, guide, coach, teacher, mentor, sponsor, awakener—and to provide a specific tool set for each role.”⁶⁵

IX. CAN WE INTEGRATE AND LEARN THEOLOGY THROUGH DIALOGUE WITH THE COACHING PARADIGM: 7 KEY QUESTIONS

I suggest that one should approach the coaching movement with two of their own values: (1) the idea that most people operate out of positive intentions and (2) the idea that one should approach any phenomena with curiosity. I also suggest that one should ask for what one can learn from this movement before one asks the

⁶² Ibid., 5-6.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Robert Dilts, *From Coach to Awakener* (Capitola, CA: Meta, 2003).

⁶⁵ Robert Dilts, *From Coach to Awakener*, <http://nlpu.com/Coach2Awakener.htm>

classic critical theological questions. We should meet these seekers with an attitude of curiosity, and include self-critical questions, even when our purpose (as in this article) is not cross-paradigm dialogue.

I therefore begin by asking seven questions of curiosity—and then break the rules of coaching, when answering them, as well. I suggest that the following questions might be a useful starting point:

1. How can insights from coaching help us redesign our training relationship towards a partnership in learning (from and with God)?
2. In which way can coaching as metaphor help us understand the work of God's Spirit?
3. How may insights from coaching inspire us to explore and use Scripture in a new way?
4. In which way does coaching teach new ways to nurture spiritual processes in ourselves and others—including new ways of mediating the gifts of the Spirit?
5. How can we nurture healthy individuality and help people discover their uniqueness—in God?
6. Can the coaching paradigm teach us to see new possibilities in other people?
7. What can practical theology learn from solution-based coaching—in terms of building “the new man,” rather than refurbishing “the old man”?

How can insights from coaching help us redesign our training relationship towards a partnership in learning (from and with God)? I suggest that the coaching paradigm may help us to rethink our roles as pastors and theological trainers. Here Jesus' teaching on training seems to correspond to some key values in the coaching paradigm: What did He mean when He said that we should have only one teacher, Jesus, and that we should not call anyone else “father” or “teacher” (Mt 23:1-8)? I am not suggesting that this is the only way to do training—one might also model and teach by example, as Paul suggests when he encourages the Corinthian church to follow him as he is following Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Yet, the purpose of teaching and training is always the maturity and empowerment of others (Eph 4:11), not absolute model power or dependency (Rom 12:3). In this perspective, coaching may provide new insight and new practices, and expand our repertoire of educational genres. This may lead to a more fundamental question.

In which way can coaching as metaphor help us understand the work of God's Spirit? In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is described as a *paracletos*, meaning, “one which is called to one's side.” In the Gospel of John, He is portrayed as one who comes to exhort, encourage, and comfort (Jn 14:16)—or should we employ coaching terminology, and suggest that God's Spirit is standing for us? Since this is a key description of the Spirit in the Gospel, which most frequently speaks about the Spirit, and since Luke and Paul describe this function of encouragement as well (Acts 4:31; Rom 5:5), one might suggest that coaching, as way of “being in the world,” may correspond to fundamental aspects of God's. This metaphorical connection may at least be worth exploring, though critically in dialogue with Scripture.

How may insights from coaching inspire us to explore and use Scripture in a new way? We may for instance reread Jesus' use of parables and metaphors, asking how we can form stories that create reflection and teaching that “teases the mind into

imaginations,⁶⁶ rather than just providing finished answers with almost pornographic theological clarity. This practice may generate new questions about how spiritual and personal development is stimulated.

In which way does coaching teach new ways to nurture spiritual processes in ourselves and others—including new ways of mediating the gifts of the Spirit? I suggest that Pentecostals and Charismatics may reread John 4 and the story about the woman with five ex-husbands, and ask whether prophetic facilitation, at least in many instances, is a preferable alternative to prophetic confrontation. Even though the supposed value neutrality of coaching is a (unintended?) hoax, the coaching movement may show us how to interact with people in ways that make them develop themselves, or even repent, through participatory processes that take place with rather than against their inner conversation. Here Pentecostals and Charismatic Evangelicals may have the advance over non-Charismatic Evangelicals, since we may be more familiar with processes that move from prelinguistic experiences to intelligible knowledge,⁶⁷ without being controlled by an external word in the process, even though the final result may be tested and affirmed or refined by Scripture.

How can we nurture healthy individuality and help people to discover their uniqueness—in God? First, coaching meets an urgent need in the runaway world of late modernity that our teaching might ignore, namely the needs and questions about how one should be defining personal identities. As Evangelicals, we may ask if we have overlooked some Biblical resources that could provide answers to these questions. As Joseph Umidi suggests, the Bible (e.g., Ps 139) may also offer a creational theology of individuality.⁶⁸ Second, even though some of us may share Robert Bellah's concern about the lack of a robust conception of the common good in the thinking of the late-modern individualist,⁶⁹ we must nevertheless approach people where they are and both affirm and challenge people's needs to come to terms with their individuality—before we move on to call for a moral conversion.

Can the coaching paradigm teach us to see new possibilities in other people? Could we learn something about human potential that may help us to see new potential in the people we encounter? Although the anthropology of humanist psychology may have significant flaws, it is not nihilistic in the bad post-modern sense of nurturing apathy or ecstatic irony. It gives hope. Human life can be good and there are certain goals for which are worth striving. As Evangelicals, we might ask ourselves: Have we overlooked human potential, both before and after conversion? This is a pertinent question, since the Pentecostal–Evangelical tradition may lack a robust theology of creation, including a robust theology of individual potential. First, we may ask: Do we think and speak too simplistically negative about human nature? Should we develop forms of contagious trust that may encourage and transform people with whom we relate? Second, based on our theology, we also have the privilege of asking: What does faith in Jesus and the presences of the Spirit add to the potential of the new man in Christ?

What can practical theology learn from solution-based coaching—in terms of building “the new man,” rather than refurbishing “fallen human nature”? Even if the solution-based approach may have its obvious shortcomings, one may ask if it can

⁶⁶ John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1990).

⁶⁷ See 1 Cor 14:13-17.

⁶⁸ Notes from Seminar HLT at the Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology, November 2008.

⁶⁹ See Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 2008.

teach us, or at least inspire us, to reflect on what Paul means when he states that God is creating new men in Christ, rather repairing humanity in the “old Adam” (2 Cor 5; Rom 5-6).

X. SEVEN AREAS TO WATCH AS WE ARE INCREASINGLY INFLUENCED BY THE COACHING PARADIGM

However, as we become enthusiastic about the practice of coaching and its underlying paradigm, we must also ask critical questions and identify paradoxes that may help us to integrate insights from the paradigm without losing our theological integrity. For this reason, I break another rule of coaching and employ a problem-orientated approach, looking for important areas that we need to watch as we try to integrate coaching into our practical theology.

1. The question about coaching as a dominant paradigm: How do we avoid that coaching represses other theologically valid modes of training?
2. The issue of models of human nature: Can we encourage people without losing sight of a realistic view of man?
3. The issue of relational responsibility: What do we lose if the language of guilt and reconciliation is overwritten by a solution-based paradigm?
4. The issue of community and individuality: How do we avoid that our coaching may nurture unhealthy forms of individualism—and even repressive narcissism?
5. The issue of worldview: How do we coach people to be God-centred, rather than self-centred?
6. The issue of power: How do we identify and manage the hidden power-mechanisms of coaching?
7. The issue of money: How do we avoid that coaching accelerates the businessification of church?

One must ask whether coaching is enough to lead people into their calling as humans and Christians. This question emerges out of a more fundamental question: What is the responsibility of a pastor, elder, or ministry gift? (Eph 4:11-12). The push and pull from the late-modern social context may direct us to prefer coaching as an educational genre to the degree that it may become so dominant that it, in practice, represses other modes. Against this challenge we must keep asking ourselves: Are we as theological trainers true to our calling if we let go of our responsibility to lead, teach, and protect the Church of God in other ways, including teaching, mentoring, and even politically incorrect confrontational proclamation, if it is needed? Here Ogne, Roehl, and Umidi seem to provide a theologically valid answer. They suggest that coaching should be understood in the context of discipleship and moral transformation, and thus be reframed in light of Scripture.⁷⁰

Yet, acknowledging this on the level of theory is not enough. We should also monitor our own practice and see if it is faithful to models of teaching provided by Christ, seeking to develop a balanced and varied approach to learning, which also transcends the idea of partnership in terms of making training a form of servant leadership that empowers others out of love for them and for Christ.

As theologians, we should also question the coaching paradigm’s view of human nature. Can we encourage people without losing sight of a realistic view of

⁷⁰ Ogne and Roehl, *Transformational Coaching*; Umidi, *Transformational Coaching*.

man? Some coaches suggest that obstacles exist only if you believe in them. Is this vision of individual potential realistic? This is, in my view, at best a partial truth, which in the long run may promise more than it delivers, and lead to disillusionment. Constructively then, we may ask how we can combine confident speech about a person's possibilities as a creature created in God's image and as a participant in new realities that come with Christ—with the realism that is drawn by the theodrama, in terms of humankind's fallen nature and limitations in an unjust world that is far from fully redeemed—and in the final instance, humankind's relational dependence upon God.

As theologians, we must therefore dare to ask questions concerning humankind's, at least in part, sinful nature: Does it exist, and in what way does it influence what we pursue, how we pursue it, and how we act in coaching conversations? Is the will to power, exposed extremely by the shocking story of Joseph Fritzl (the man who imprisoned and abused his own daughter), an aspect of human nature that to some degree influences what we want, how we pursue it, and how we coach others? This question might become even more difficult to handle if we try to integrate coaching and Charismatic spirituality, since the latter at times may have a tendency to neglect that the Kingdom of God is not only already, it is also not yet. Yet, both secular and Christian triumphalism may have dangerous consequences in terms of blinding us to our factual sins and the consequences they have for others, as life is lived and not only imagined or confessed.

For this reason, we must also ask: What do we lose, if we lose the language of guilt, atonement, and reconciliation, to a solution-based monopoly? I believe that it is advantageous to use solution-based language in our inner conversation. As I suggested above, I think the New Testament idea of the new creation that comes in Christ is the solution-based approach—and that this teaching, as well as the presence of the Paraclete, stimulates courageous faith and opportunity thinking. Yet, since God's kingdom is already but not yet, we must also ask: Why does the New Testament also teach us the art of confessing sins in relation to God and each other? (1 Jn 1:6-10). On the individual level, we must ask: May we deprive individuals of an important form of wholeness, when we deny people a critical assessment and insight of their past? Why did Jesus confront Peter with his three denials (Jn 21), rather than just referring to it as "in the past"? Might it help Peter to live with himself more authentically afterwards? May a one-sided solution-based approach in the long run lead to a dangerous form of self-denial (ref. 1. Jn), which makes it hard to create a true, and at the same integrating, self-narrative?

May we lose even more on the level of relations? If one should exclude every kind of "blame game" from our thinking, it would be preferable to approach the tyranny of Joseph Fritzl primarily in terms of a need for feedback and learning, and frame his main responsibility as identifying his "improvement potential" in relation to himself, rather than as a responsibility of confessing his sins to his eldest daughter and other children. In a relational perspective, the second is most important. The Fritzl case might be read as an odd or extreme example, but I suggest that it shows us that this switch of language is problematic also in less critical cases. And this turn to a pedagogical and individualist language that focuses on personal growth rather than on relational responsibility seems to take place in the Church, as well. My own research on late-modern conversion stories shows that the old atonement—plot,

entailing images of sin, atonement, and reconciliation to a large degree is being replaced by images of health and personal growth.⁷¹ This leads us to the next issue.

The issue of community and individuality leads us to ask: How do we avoid that our coaching may nurture unhealthy forms of individualism? This question is obviously more relevant for individual coaching than team coaching. Does this kind of conversation inspire interdependency, or does it basically form instrumental individualists that evaluate relationships based on transactional (utilitarian) rationality or unrealistic (harmonic) expectations (expressive) of what feels right. I suggest that we should watch whether we start to drift away from communitarian relationships as we are coached towards realizing what I really want out of life. The “I” here needs to see itself in reference to a relational and communal context, where individuality is found not only in autonomy and difference from others, but also in a personal calling to serve others with one’s unique gifting. Moreover, the Biblical vision implies that people should be exhorted to commit to and then fight hard for the relationships that God has intended to be covenantal, such as the relationship to one’s spouse, one’s children, and one’s church. I am not suggesting that leaving such relationships is wrong in every case, but it should be a last option, based on ethical premises.

Yet, this must also be balanced. I maintain that individuals should develop reflective distance to both people and norms in a given community, which might empower them to live in forms of critical loyalty. Alternatively, one might speak about liminality. Inspired by Victor Turner, Don Browning suggests that at least some people may need a “liminal phase,” in which they “step out” of their tradition before they are reintegrated into their community.⁷² Kierkegaard also provides a quite similar approach in *Either-Or* and in *Stages on Life’s Way*, where the protagonist moves from an unreflected bourgeois commitment to a more reflected commitment, through an uncommitted aesthetic phase.⁷³

I suggest that liminality possibly may be an option for a short period of time, but not a necessity. In any case, we should ask: How then can the coach inspire transformational and covenantal relationships—and nurture commitment to common goods, and not only personal goals—and at the same time guard the client’s need for reflective space? At this point, Biblical stories and metaphors may be used as resources for reframing. It’s worth noticing, however, that reframing raises questions about model power.

From such a theological perspective one must also ask: Is the coaching paradigm fundamentally anthropocentric and individualistic? While we affirm individuality, we may also ask critically if the anthropocentric mode of development in the long run may nurture unhealthy forms of individualism—perhaps even repressive narcissism. One way to approach this problem is to ask whether coaching leads to a God-centred or self-centred life. From the perspective of a Pentecostal and Evangelical theology, one may ask: Is not Christianity fundamentally communitarian? If the Christian community is God’s dream and vision for the world,⁷⁴ becoming a Christian (and therefore also to become authentically human) then is to learn to

⁷¹ Karl Inge Tangen, “Ecclesial Identification Beyond Transactional Individualism?” (Ph.D. Thesis MF, The Norwegian School of Theology, 2009).

⁷² Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 83.

⁷³ Soren Kierkegaard, *Enten-eller: et livs-fragment* (København: C.A. Reitzel, 1843); Soren Kierkegaard, *Stadier paa Livets Vei* (København: Gyldendal, 1966).

⁷⁴ See Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*.

belong and depend on a community, in which one serve others within the frame of a vision that is not only our own initiative, but God's. In this sense, becoming a Christian is to die to oneself (as one's own lawgiver and creator), and to find a new source of freedom and creativity in relationship with Christ and His Church.⁷⁵ This is, in my view, a key challenge for Christian coaching.

This question is tricky, since it is possible to solve this problem by equating God with the God one finds in one's inner conversation. As I have suggested above, from a Pentecostal perspective, this is a partly valid suggestion, since we believe that there is a theologically valid Spirit mode in the inner conversation, in which one can interact with the Spirit of God.⁷⁶ However, joining the Evangelicals, we will still maintain that God is transcendent, and not only immanent in the "I" or the inner process (as in monistic forms of mysticism). This might imply that personal transformation is based on a relational (encounter) spirituality even though it also includes intrapersonal process, as well. How then, can both the coach and PBC learn to discern the work of the Spirit in and outside of the inner conversation? In the final instance, this becomes a question of how the inner conversation, as well as the coaching conversation, relates to Scripture. Is it possible to give relative authority to the inner conversation, and nevertheless make the PBC and the coach accountable to the God of the Scriptures at some point in the process? And finally, how can coaching be reconciled with the idea of dying to the self, with Christ—for the Kingdom and the Church—with rather than against inner reflexivity? This obviously raises questions about power.

How do we identify and manage the hidden power mechanisms of coaching? I suggest that power is an aspect of all forms of conversation, even those forms of dialogue that are designed for a partnership for learning. The practice of reframing, where the coach helps the client to see a situation in a new perspective by means of finding other words or descriptions for the problem (or challenge) is, according to Williams and Davis, a classic skill exercised by great teachers and mentors.⁷⁷ This practice can be found in the roots of the Western tradition. In Plato's description of Socrates' dialogues, Socrates can be interpreted as a midwife who delivers truth in the conversation. The problem with this approach is, as Stein Bråten points out, that the questioning mediates certain models of the world, thus giving the mentor or coach a privileged epistemological position in the relationship—or what Bråten calls *model power*—in the sense that the PBC is empowered towards the world on the coach's premises, and thus de-empowered in relation to him or her.⁷⁸

I suggest that reframing can be, and in most cases is, a very useful practice. The reason is that we need frames or different forms of preunderstanding to understand the world. In my view, reframing, in most cases, may be considered a useful form of power, as long as both actors openly acknowledge it, so that it may be

⁷⁵ See 2 Cor 5:17-21.

⁷⁶ See Rom 8:11-14, 9:1-3.

⁷⁷ Williams and Davis, *Therapist as Life Coach*, 108.

⁷⁸ Bråten's "model power" theorem suggests that the conjunction of the simulation version of theory of mind and the Conant-Ashby theorem (every good regulator of a system must be a model of that system) implies in certain conditions the following: if you regard the other as the source of the only valid model of a domain, D, and try to overcome your subordination in a closed interaction situation of decision-making on D, by adopting the other's model, you thereby enhance the other's control by giving him the power to simulate even your simulations. See Stein Bråten, *Dialogens vilkår i datasamfunnet* (Oslo: Universitetsforl, 1983).

challenged, in particular by the PBC. Reframing is a problem, however, if the idea of partnership and the experience of drawing one's own conclusion make the PBC blind to the factual model power of the coach. And it may become outright dangerous if the coach's perspectives over time are allowed to establish forms of model monopoly. Thus, coaching in general and reframing in particular, can become a way of seducing the PBC into a certain way of seeing the world.

At this point, we may also encounter a classic problem in humanistic education. As Steinar Kvale points out in his analysis of the way Socrates is questioning Agathon in the classic dialogue, *The Symposium*, not only does Socrates lead his client to a conclusion by way of powerful questioning, his form of questioning also presupposes a specific theory of knowledge—the belief that man is an immortal soul, and that learning is recognition of what the “soul already knows.”⁷⁹ Thus, instead of being a value-neutral deliverer of truth, this conversation mediates certain anthropology, with roots in Plato's philosophy (which might be compatible with philosophical monism). Thus, on a meta-level, the idea of value-neutrality is in itself a highly seductive form of power. In a theological perspective, seduction may be considered as dangerous as more outright raw oppressive power yielding.⁸⁰

The issue of money raises the question: How do we avoid that coaching accelerates the businessification of church? To put this differently: How should we approach the possibility of new roles and new ways of earning money for pastors and educators? There are obviously some good opportunities here, in particular for church planters and tentmakers who need funding for their ministry because their church can't provide it. On the other hand, there are also obvious dangers when the pastor also becomes a businessman. When pastors become coaches, every event, including our children's birthday parties and our sermons, become potential marketing events. How do we manage double roles in a morally responsible way? How do we avoid choosing the easiest and richest clients over the seemingly hopeless ones (that we could leave to underpaid counselors)? If we don't handle this challenge properly, Habermas may become our prophet, since this development obviously may exemplify how the instrumental rationality of the market invades the ecclesial life world, as well as our own inner world.

XI. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

This article has shown that coaching and the coaching movement is an interesting dialogue partner for practical theology, and that it offers both valuable insights and important questions to the practical theological discourse. I have also shown, however, that several critical questions need to be asked if we shall integrate these insights without losing our theological integrity. This calls for a continuous process of asking new questions and answering them from theological perspective.

I suggest that the following questions may sum up and dialectally integrate both the seven affirmative and seven critical questions addressed in this paper:

1. How can we inspire healthy individuality without nurturing unhealthy and sociologically naive forms of individualism? What questions do we ask?

⁷⁹ Steiner Kvale, (1996). *Inter Views*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996, 23.

⁸⁰ In the Biblical description of the theo-drama, evil repeatedly seems to seduce first (concealing its power) before it uses its power to oppress the believers more openly (e.g., Rv 13-14).

2. How do we nurture forms of relational spirituality that help people to discern the work of the God of Scripture in their life—and in their inner conversation—without drifting to monism?
3. How can we coach people to become God-centred—through a process of dying to themselves for the Kingdom—without quenching their inner voice and individuality?
4. How do we inspire faith and help people to be possibility thinkers who develop a faithful vision for life without losing a Biblical vision for life in this age?
5. How do we help people to develop authentically relational and ethical life strategies—and to avoid a mainly instrumentalist view of others (as resources)?
6. What are the main strategies that help us as coaches to be led primarily by our calling to serve others and the Church—and manage all the possibilities, challenges, and temptations associated with coaching, including the economic ones?
7. How can we learn to coach and stimulate people's inner conversations in ways that make them and us more acquainted with and dependent upon God and less dependent upon us?

About the Author

Karl Inge Tangen, Ph.D., is associate professor of practical theology at HLT The Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology.
Email: karlinge@hoyskolen.org
