Abstract

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Loving care in the final stages of life

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The overall aim of this research is to create a caring science model for loving care that can serve as guidance for a further development of the knowledge of palliative care and loving care on a general level. The purpose is further to understand what loving care is in a palliative caring context. This present doctoral thesis takes as its starting point caritas – loving kindness, where the motive of love and compassion represents the core that motivates caring. Caring is given its deepest formulation through the caritas motive and is ethical in every aspect. The methodological approach is hermeneutic.

The research process consists of hermeneutic circles that together form a hermeneutical spiral. The first circle comprises a description of loving care as it emerges from a caring reality in texts written by patients’ relatives/close friends and family, and conversations with relatives/close friends and family (12) and also with a patient. The interpretation of the conversations with the informants is influenced by Gadamer’s and Ricoeur’s thoughts. The results show that human love reveals itself in what the caregivers are, in a good heart, in their being but also in their knowledge to provide care, to be wise. The heart linked to wisdom leads to a meaningful act where human love is in the actions. Spirituality that can also be seen as fruits of the Spirit emerges from the material. After the empirical part has been introduced a deepening of the meaning of the concepts (included in the fruits of the Spirit) and the way they are described from Greek and Hebrew in the Bible is presented.

The new research questions that the first hermeneutic circle gave rise to result in the introduction to the second hermeneutic circle. A metaphor of a hospice angel is made visible from the empirical material. This leads to an exploration of the essence of the angel and means of acting as it is described within the Christian tradition. Similar metaphors have been used of Florence Nightingale (Angel of the Battlefield) and of Mother Teresa (Angel of Mercy).

The third circle consists of a deepening of the concept goodness that emerges clearly from the empirical material. This occurs with the help of an examination of the philosopher Eero Ojanen’s work on goodness. Subsequently the horizon of understanding meets a new understanding that has emerged from a caring reality which in turn finally results in abductive theses about loving care. The abductive theses imply a derivation towards a synthesis of theory and praxis. By those means an image is frozen and described.

Keywords: human love, caring, palliative care, hermeneutics