

## CHAPTER 5 THE ENDING

### 5.1 Introduction

At the Ending of this hermeneutical research adventure I will start off by looking into the meaning of the E in the ABDCE formula. Then I will think about the possible objectives that might be achieved through this project. After this I will look back over the whole ABDC stages and evaluate and summarise what was said and what happened. This will be followed by a section where each theme will be looked at individually as ideas will be shared about the possible implications the understanding that was constructed might have beyond the local. This ending is open and the hope is that further research will be done in this field and that this research might in some way make a contribution to it. When I am finished with this I will do a bit of brainstorming about where I think that there might be a need for further investigations. Then I will end this section off, as well as the whole research project, with the emphasis that this research story's ending should be seen as an open one.

### 5.2 The E in the ABDCE formula

According to Müller, Van Deventer and Human (2001:90) narrative research deliberately does not end with a conclusion because the end should be open. Narrative research creates its own story with new possibilities (Müller et al 2001: 89). In fact: The research process equals the writing of a story, the creating of a book (Müller et al 2001: 89). So, the research can be seen as a story, but one with an open ending.

Müller et al (2001:90) actually totally deconstruct the concept of a beginning and an ending and even call it embarrassing: To speak of a beginning and an end is in a sense ironic and an embarrassment. Nothing is original and nothing has a beginning, only an origin or history. In the same way there is no ending. But then they do accept that there is bound to be an ending somewhere (Müller et al 2001:90).

So what are they saying? They are saying that the research activity of a specific research project will end, but that the ending will and should be open. Müller et al (2001:90) writes: %Hopefully the end will be happy, but in any case, there will be an end that is different from the beginning. In that sense the end will always be better than the start. It provide a new, although not always pleasant, perspective.+

In this research, so far, I went through the ABDC stages. Following Müller (1996:12) I called this process a hermeneutical adventure. As a consequence of the process of going through this adventure the ending is different from the beginning. It is not a happy one in the sense that all problems have been fixed, all solutions have been found and from now on all seafarers are going to be happy ever after. The hope is that the ending is better because a better understanding has been reached at the end of this social process.

According to Lamott (in Müller 2001:69): %The problem is acceptance, which is something we are taught not to do. We are taught to improve incompatible situations, to change things, alleviate unpleasant feelings+. So, coming to the open ending of this research adventure the aim is acceptance and the challenge is %to guard against glossing this collection with a tightly woven interpretation that obscures the natural fissures+(Winquist in Patton 1994:31).

Looking back it is easy to see that a %tightly woven interpretation+ was not possible and that there are a lot of %natural fissures+. I could not help John, Jonathan, the fishers and the other research characters I mentioned, with the unjust behaviour that they had to suffer. The structures producing unfair treatment of seafarers are still there. The powerful will still use their power to abuse the powerless. I cannot change the built in drawback that seafarers have of being away from their families: this comes with the territory. There will still be struggles on board concerning multi-religious and multicultural issues. The dangers seafarers face will most probably not be less as a result of this research project and the relationships between seafarers will not suddenly become easier.

In another sense the research was also not perfect. There are many more stories out there. There is so much more potential for a better, deeper and broader understanding of all the themes that were developed. More co-researchers could have been involved, more interdisciplinary discussions could have taken place and more results from previous studies could have been integrated into this research. The fact is that there is somewhere a limit and somewhere there is an ending, but the hope is that this will lead to some new beginning.

Recently I have read a review of the research that was done by Paul Mooney (2005) whose book was also consulted during this research. In my opinion this book was very thorough and it consisted of research done in a way that made an important contribution. In the review, though, the criticism was that his research was not really full of new ideas. Leon Rasser (2006:21,22) states: "Ondanks dat het boek niet vernieuwend is en niet bol staat van briljante ideeën, is het denk ik toch de moeite waard." He continues to say that the book in many ways just confirms overly familiar themes such as the influence that globalisation, technology, justice issues and unseaworthy ships have on the lives of seafarers (Rasser 2006:21). This made me think whether the themes that were identified in this research were maybe also just a repetition of something that is already overly familiar.

In a sense it is, for instance with a theme like piracy. Piracy is talked about everywhere and I am sure no one involved with seafarers' mission, or seafarers in any other way, will be surprised by the things that were said. For me the contribution of this research is not so much that it has explored new themes, but it is new in the sense that through the participation of the co-researchers it was possible that a new research narrative was able to be constructed.

The familiar themes many of us who are involved with seafarers know so well, acted as the outlines of a picture in a child's colouring book. What I and my co-researchers were trying to accomplish was to give this existing picture colour and life. For example it is a

well known fact that there is unfair treatment of seafarers on board ships. Rodriguez-Martos (2008:365) explains how a merchant ship is a total institution with a hierarchical structure and that this can lead to abuse: "The problem arises when the person or group exercising authority takes undue advantage of the structure required by life aboard ship for his or her own benefit." What he is talking about was given life through the narratives that for instance Jonathan had to tell about the captain's senseless bullying of him. In this way, through being particular, this practical theological research got its life (cf Müller 2003:15).

So, what are some of the things I hope that this research story can accomplish?

### **5.3 The four main objectives of this research**

Firstly, this research story is part of many other research stories that already exist concerning the lives of seafarers and the circumstances they live in. The hope is that this research story will enrich these other narratives through the descriptions, insights, perspectives and understandings that were developed together with my co-researchers. The ending of this story is open and with this emphasis other researchers are invited to use this to begin their own research story (cf Müller 2003:15). In other words, the first objective that I hope will be achieved is that it will both thicken existing research narratives as well as future research narratives. The hope is that this story will create new possibilities and open space for new research stories to be developed (Müller 2003:15). This first objective has to do with making a contribution on an academic level.

Secondly, my hope is that this research will create a better and deeper understanding with those who are involved with seafarers' mission, concerning the lives and circumstances that seafarers are living in. The reason why I believe this is possible is not because I am more knowledgeable than other chaplains, missionaries and others who are involved in this field, but because of the expertise of my main co-researchers. They are seafarers. Someone like Noel and Ivan were approaching retirement (Ivan had retired a few months after the interview) and they have been seafarers for almost four decades: they knew what they were talking about. John and Jonathan had been in

a messy pressure-cooker-situation of unjust treatment for months and Mohammed had experienced how it is to be so seasick, time and again, that you cannot work even if all the other crew, including the captain, turn against you. Eric said that he had around twenty years of experience at sea. These six seafarers were the main research characters, but along the way many other characters became part of the plot as well.

This involvement with the seafarers with whom I had interviews, could be described as the first movement. The second movement was to search for transversal connections with other disciplines. I had chosen two obvious conversational partners, maritime law and systemic family therapy, because there was a very clear overlap between our concerns. The third movement was to enter into a conversation (albeit a written one) with other chaplains so that their narratives, their perspectives and stories could enrich the understanding which was developed up to that point. Due to these three research movements and the involvement of my knowledgeable co-researchers I am confident that this research can make a contribution to the understanding of those involved with seafarers' mission.

Thirdly the hope is that people who are not knowledgeable about seafarers will become more aware of them and that negative stereotypes about seafarers have been deconstructed. In this sense the contribution of this research can be that seafarers will be less out-constructed. It is similar to what I pointed out concerning Trotter's (2008:16) research who said that his aim is ~~to~~ talk about people and places that are absent from the dominant national narrative+. It is possible that through this research the out-constructed will get a voice. The fact that I am doing this research at a university that is far from any port can already contribute toward this aim.

A fourth possible outcome is one that is hopefully already accomplished and that was to empower the seafarers. While Trotter (2008:16) said that his aim is ~~to~~ talk about people and places that are absent from the dominant national narrative+, my aim was also to let them do the talking. According to Müller and Schoeman (2004:8) to tell one's story empowers people to understand and give meaning to their circumstances. To tell

your story is in addition also an activity that can lead to healing for those telling it. Like Allende (in Müller 2005:174) states, to exorcise the metaphorical demons of your memory it is sometimes necessary to remember the past and tell it in a story. Through facilitating this in the interviews I had with the co-researchers I hope that they, albeit in a small way, were empowered, that they received some healing, that their understanding grew and if there were any metaphorical demons, that at least some of them were exorcised. Eric said: %But actually this is nice, recalling my past.+ Maybe our interview helped to exorcise some of his metaphorical demons (like the priest-demon from the USA).

In summary the possible contribution of this research is to stimulate further research stories, to enrich the understanding of people who are involved with seafarers, to thicken the thin stories, the stereotypes, of those who are not involved with seafarers and do not know them, and to give an opportunity for the co-researchers to give meaning to their circumstances. Why these four objectives? The answer is that this research's aim was that it should be to the benefit of the main co-researchers (Müller et al 2001:77) and seafarers in general. The hope is that it will be accomplished through this development of a deeper and richer understanding.

## **5.4 Critical evaluation and summary of the ABDC stages**

### **5.4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction**

This study started off with an explanation of what it means that this research is seen as a hermeneutical adventure and how the ABDCE formula will be used to guide the co-construction of the research story. In the title this research is called a hermeneutical adventure. This idea of seeing research as a hermeneutical adventure is borrowed from Müller (1996:12) who describes therapy in this way. What does it mean? Firstly this research process was called %hermeneutical+, because it has to do with understanding. As Müller et al (2001:77) states the aim of their narrative research is not to bring about change (not in the first place), but rather to understand the stories of those they are doing research with. The assumption in this research was that both the

researcher and the co-researchers partook in the construction of the understanding that was reached.

Secondly, this research is described as an adventure because the commitment of the researchers was to be open to the co-researchers and their stories and not to decide beforehand what the result of the research would be. It was an adventure because I was committed to being open to different opinions than mine, things that are strange and things that I would simply dismiss as wrong. By being open I do not mean that my personal opinion had to change (although it could), but simply that I would allow my co-researchers their space to share their narratives and their understanding. It is also an adventure in the sense that the E, in the ABDCE, which stands for the end or ending, was uncertain. I ended up with stories about Neptune, fist fights, night clubs, stereotypes, homeless seafarers, a shipmate called Danger, social constructionism, fishers ganging up and attacking the bosun, peculiar theories about seasickness, postfoundationalism, eight months without salaries, systemic family therapy, bullying methods based on a boiler suit, maritime law and a big brother. A hermeneutical adventure indeed.

In the introduction it was further explained that this hermeneutical adventure was guided by the ABDCE formula. The metaphor that is behind this formula conveys the idea that, in the same way a story develops while a writer is busy with it, a research story develops while the researcher and co-researchers are busy participating in it. I have explained and recapped it repeatedly so I will not do so again. What I would like to say here is that it has proved to be a helpful formula which assisted the research to progress in a certain way and to have coherence. In the way I used it, it might have given the impression that it is a strictly linear process which unfolds stage after stage. It was more complex than that, but in writing the research down it helped to organise things.

I have also found that at the C and the E stages of the research you are really forced to think about all the numerous narratives that you came across and what they might

mean. At the C stage things should come together and so your co-researchers varied experiences need to be connected in some way. This is quite challenging because the connections should grow out of the local context and should not be artificial. It should be more than the preconceived ideas of the researcher.

The ABDCE formula also helps you to develop thick descriptions (cf Brownings in Müller et al 2001:83). It alerts the researcher to pay enough attention to background as well as to move further than to simply identify and describe certain themes. It helps to move beyond simply giving data to rather construct a new understanding. This development can be compared with the development of a Polaroid picture (Ann Lamott in Müller 2001:67). The development can be said to be an evolutionary process in which the co-researchers are active participants (Müller 2003:13). The hope is that a story had developed that is better and which can lead to emancipation (Müller 2003:14). This research was about the co-construction of something. It was not about discovering objective facts, but rather about the social construction of meaning.

The research narrative that developed in this research was not controlled by anyone. It was influenced by many characters but no one controlled this hermeneutical adventure. Lamott (in Müller 2001:69) says that at the ending you might find yourself helpless to make interesting conclusions or to reduce negative emotions and that the challenge for you at this stage is to accept things. At this stage you experience that everything did not come together in a neat and systematic way and that you might have achieved more. Lamott (in Müller et al 2001:86) says that after the climax things are %a different in some real way+. The way in which they are different, though, is not controlled by the researcher and one might feel that a better understanding could have evolved. Looking back I have to agree that, although I was facilitating the process I was not in control of it.

After I explained the ABDCE formula I proceeded to look at what the research problem or question is. Here I explained the first part of the title which is: %Mission work and pastoral care in the port of Durban+. With this in the title I made it clear that this research was not done out of a neutral or disinterested stance. My reason to get



involved with seafarers was because of a pastoral and missionary concern. However, I did make it clear that the research problem was not about the ministry in the first place, but about understanding. This was not because the ministry was not important, but because my hope was that out of this understanding a new practice could grow. If someone has a new understanding, that person's concept of reality has changed and that opens up the possibility that his/her actions can also change (cf Müller & Demasure 2006:412). So the goal I set out to achieve was to have a better understanding of seafarers and their world; better in the sense of deeper, thicker and more colourful. It had to be a Polaroid picture full of action and drama. The assumption was that if a rich understanding of seafarers and the world they are living in is co-constructed, a relevant and effective ministry can grow out of it. A rich understanding makes an authentic reflection on practice a possibility.

In Chapter 1 the action was described with which the research would participate in, but also a lot of background was already hinted at as far as the epistemology, theology and methodology of the research was concerned. In the next chapters much more background was given.

#### **5.4.2 Chapter 2: Thickening the background**

In Chapter 2 I introduced background concerning the seafarers' mission and the circumstances in which seafarers find themselves in. Here I made extensive use of Kverndal's book, *The way of the sea: The changing shape of mission in the seafaring world* (2008). I found his work helpful because he gave comprehensive background concerning the history, as well as the present day situation, of both the seafarers' mission and seafarers. Secondly I made use of Paul Mooney's book, *Maritime mission: History, developments, a new perspective*. I used this book especially as a guide to other research done in the same field as this project.

Considering all the existing research on this topic it was interesting to note that research in the field of maritime ministry only started in the 1980s (Friend 2008:304). One of the most important works was the research done by Kverndal on the history of the

seafarersmission in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mooney 2005:23; Friend 2008:305). Since then the International Association for the study of Maritime Mission (IASMM) and the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC), attached to Cardiff University in Wales, have made a lot of progress in this field as far as research is concerned. I also mentioned that I made use of Trotter and Otto's books which had a somewhat different approach than the more mainstream research.

After looking at existing literature on this subject I proceeded to explore the background of the seafarersmission as well as to describe something of the reality seafarers are living in. Kverndal (2008: XXIII) pointed out that the seafarerslives can be described with three D's: Danger-Discrimination-Depersonalization. Admittedly, dangers have decreased in a lot of ways in modern times, but a big reason why sailing is still very dangerous is the Flag of Convenience (FOC) system that started after World War II (Kverndal 2008: XXIV).

As far as the link between the church and seafarers is concerned it can be said that it goes back a very long time. The most important way in which Christ used seafarers, as part of His plan with the world, was when He had sent them, the disciples/seafarers, out to witness in Matthew 28:18-20 (Kverndal 2008:7). Although sources are scarce for the time period before the Reformation, it is clear that many Christians followed in Paul's footsteps by witnessing on board whenever the opportunity did arise (Kverndal 2008:10). After the Reformation, Christian literature was spread among seafarers because of the discovery of printing (Kverndal 2008:12). In 1813 the Thames Union Bible Committee was the first to focus on serving merchant seafarers (Kverndal 2008:24). In 1818 they became the Merchant Seamen's Auxiliary Bible Society and appointed John Cox, the first full-time ship visitor and seafarersmissionary in the world and he started to distribute Bibles among the seafarers (Kverndal 2008:24). In Rotherhithe the Bethel Movement started in about 1814, when seafarers on the ships in this port, next to the Thames, began having religious meetings both offshore and on the ships (Kverndal 2008:25,26). This movement had a great influence and the scene was set for a seafarersmission organization to be born.

In 1856 the Missions to Seamen (today called the Mission to Seafarers) from the Anglican Church was launched in London (Kverndal 2008:39). Later, another important organisation that was launched was the *Apostleship of the Sea* (AOS) from the Roman Catholic Church. The exact date of its founding is not sure, because the years 1920, 1921 and 1922 were all three very important dates (Kverndal 2008:88). Initially Protestants and Catholics did not collaborate, but after Vatican II the ecumenical relationships started to change because non-Catholics were no longer seen as heretics, but as fellow-believers (Kverndal 2008:110). After this ecumenical breakthrough the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) could be founded, which is an umbrella organisation for both Protestant and Catholic organisations.

The shipping world also went through a lot of changes. One of the biggest changes came when the concept of the container was introduced (Kverndal 2008:127). This started to happen already in the mid sixties (Trotter 2008:9). The size of the crew decreased from about 40 to plus minus 20 on many of the ships (Kverndal 2008:134). Another big change came in the shipping industry in the 1970s when ship owners started to use the Flags of Convenience (FOC) on a very large scale (Kverndal 2008:131). From the 1960s the composition of the crews that sailed the ships started to change rapidly (Kverndal 2008:140). Owners hired mostly Asian crews because they could be paid much less and they were normally not so connected with unions as their Western counterparts (Kverndal 2008:140).

A tendency as far as ministry strategy is concerned is to see the seafarers not only as a passive object but rather as a co-worker (Kverndal 2008:174,193). This strategy is still not wide spread, but it is successful in some instances such as is the case with the approach of Martin Otto. A second development as far as the practice of the ministry is concerned is the realisation that the efficiency of the ministry might be greatly enhanced if the chaplain's nationality matches that of the seafarers (Kverndal 2008:181). In most ports, though, this strategy is not yet implemented.

After broadening the background as far as seafarers and the seafarers' mission is concerned as well as discussing existing narratives concerning this subject, the question was asked whether there is a research gap for this project. The answer, of course, was yes. Mainly my argument here was that it is my approach, namely the narrative approach which grew out of the ideas of social constructionism, which makes it a possibility that the study can make a contribution to the existing research. In this section the approach was not looked at in detail, but here I laid emphasis on certain positive attributes which I was hoping could assist me in making a positive contribution in the field.

Narrative research can be seen as qualitative research and according to Rubin and Rubin (2005:3) qualitative interviewing, which was one of my most important methods, can be used to shed new light on old problems. To attain new light the narrative approach aims to do research on a small scale (Müller 2003:8). In the same way Müller (2005:79) also emphasised that practical theology gets its life from its particularity. The research gap surprisingly had to do with the research focusing on being small scale. Looking back I am convinced that especially through giving space to my co-researchers and their particular situation and context they were in, this research did come alive and was colourful. And the life that it had was real life: complex, good and bad, exciting and dull, full of light and joy, but also full of darkness and despair. It was not about abstract lifeless concepts.

The hope is that this research will make a contribution because it creates new knowledge to which all those who are involved have a say (Kotzé et al in Müller & Schoeman 2004:8). This new knowledge was socially constructed and a new research narrative emerged.

In Chapter 2 important background was given and through this, the development of the research story started to take place. Through this a need arose to have even more background and therefore Chapter 3 became necessary so that the research approach could be explored in detail.

### **5.4.3 Chapter 3: The researcher as a character and the research approach**

#### **5.4.3.1 Epistemology**

As Kotzé et al (in Müller & Schoeman 2004:8) had said, everyone who is involved in the research has a say about the new knowledge. In this hermeneutical adventure, I as the researcher was therefore also part of the creation of this new knowledge. For this reason it was important to discuss my epistemological and theological concerns.

My epistemology, while doing this research, was positioned within the narrative approach which grew out of the social constructionist way of thinking. This way of thinking holds that stories maintain and organize our reality (Freedman and Combs 2002:141). To get involved with other's stories and the development of their stories can have far reaching consequences because it can be said that our reality is maintained and organized by it. In this sense the research is an intervention, but in narrative research it is seen as a respectful and fragile one (Müller & Schoeman 2004:7).

In the narrative approach it is taken seriously that without stories life would be fragmented and disconnected (Gerkin 1986:5). The stories that we have, which prevent life from being fragmented and disconnected are not constructed in isolation but in relation with other people. Bidwell (2004:62) states that: "knowledge of self and world emerges as people construct, share and correlate experiences through participation in discourse." Therefore, as Gergen (in Bidwell 2004:62) asserts, knowledge lies not within a certain individual but rather in the "collectivity". This research's purpose then, was to create an opportunity for "participation in discourse" in order for knowledge of "self and the world" to come forward. Knowledge does not lie within a researcher, but it comes into being in the collective collaboration between researcher and co-researchers.

This brings us back to the idea of research as a hermeneutical adventure, because in order for new knowledge to emerge it is necessary to become vulnerable and to move over boundaries (Müller 1996:12). Gerkin (in Müller 1996:12) says that you should allow the intrusion of someone else's world into your own. So, this type of research is

challenging because it demands that the researcher must have the discipline not in the first place to intrude into the co-researchers world, but to allow their world to intrude into yours. This intrusion happens through narrative involvement (Müller 1996:V). The result this narrative involvement has is that a new understanding and meaning has come forth which can create a sense of coherence. When we come to a point of saying that life is making sense we refer to a coherence that gives meaning to the whole of our lives (Müller 1996:27). By using the ideas of Polkinghorne, Hiles and Ermak (2007:149) state that a story is a fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into a contextualized and integrated whole.

What this integrated whole would be is socially negotiated. As Polkinghorne (in Hiles & Ermak 2007:149) said: several narratives can organize the same facts into stories and thereby give the facts different significance and meaning. This research can be said to be a story that has produced an integrated whole. Different stories do different things. Some stories can be called problem-saturated stories (Epston & White 1990:16) and organize events in such a way that it maintains problems. This is normally the case in a therapeutic situation and then the challenge for the therapy is to create an alternative story. These alternative stories are meant to empower people. The hope is that this will be true for this research narrative.

Alternative stories refer to stories that incorporate those lived experiences that have previously not been storied (Epston & White 1990:16). In this research then there was an attempt to incorporate lived experiences of seafarers which are normally not storied. Epston & White (1990:15) asserts that those lived experiences outside the existing story are seen by them as a valuable source with great potential to help a person to create an alternative story. In this research I was on the lookout for this valuable source of lived experiences with which an alternative narrative could be constructed. With research it is a bit different than in therapy because in a therapeutic conversation you normally deal with someone who has a problem-saturated narrative. This research did not only engage with people who had problem-saturated narratives, neither was it the case that the existing research narratives are problem-saturated or in some sense not good

enough. The idea was to thicken the existing research narratives with the valuable sources of lived experiences of my co-researchers. In this sense the research is a new alternative story.

Resonating with the idea of an alternative story, Foucault (in Epston & White 1990:25-27) points out that there are always *subjugated knowledges*. Knowledge can be divided into two groups. The one is *erudite knowledge* and the other is *local popular/indigenous knowledge*. The subjugated knowledges can be seen as part of the *local popular/indigenous* category. During the era of modernism the positivistic way of thinking made space for erudite knowledge and the local knowledge was being subjugated. In this research there was a special interest to make space for local knowledge. Epston and White (1990:29) challenge the separation of knowledges in *professional disciplines* and knowledges that are *discontinuous*. In this research the hope was that in a sense these two types of knowledges were integrated. The local knowledge of my co-researchers was shared within an erudite context. This happens by means of this thesis and it happened already in the interdisciplinary conversations.

The narrative approach is an approach that moves decisively away from what Pieterse (1991:39) calls a narrow perspective of rationality. This narrow perspective refers to the view that reality is an objective thing with an unchanging structure (Pieterse 1991:39). As the narrative approach moves away from a narrow definition of rationality Hiles and Ermak (2007:148) states that when we are talking about narratives it should not be seen as something that consists of facts and events in an objective sense, but rather as a means through which we construct meaning. Shafer (in Hiles and Ermak 2007:148) points out that: *a narrative is not an alternative to truth or reality, rather, it is the mode in which inevitably, truth and reality are presented.* Things that happen are not in itself a story, but out of people's experiences of something that has happened, a story is constructed (Hiles & Ermak 2007:149).

In this section in Chapter 3 I explained my epistemological approach and positioned myself in a broader type of rationality. I pointed out that this research was not about

getting objective facts, but rather that it was an attempt to try and create a new story containing knowledge of which all who were involved had a say (cf Kotzé et al in Müller & Schoeman 2004:8); knowledge that can empower and emancipate.

#### **5.4.3.2 Theology**

In this second part of Chapter 3 I introduced more background concerning my theological position. Looking back over this section I realise that although I made a distinction between theology and epistemology they were interwoven with each other to a large degree. The result was that a lot of epistemological issues were relevant to discuss here as well. After the introduction I first looked at the postfoundationalist approach of Van Huyssteen with his emphasis on transversal interdisciplinary conversations. Secondly I explained my missiological concerns because the whole research project came into being because of my missionary involvement with seafarers.

In the introduction I started off with an attempt to explain how my theological position fits into the social constructionist way of thinking. Polkinghorne (in Hiles & Ermak 2007:149) said: "several narratives can organize the same facts into stories and thereby give the facts different significance and meaning". This meaning is socially constructed and so it seems that truth can be seen as something really fluid and negotiable. When theological issues are discussed the question that follows is what then about the truth as far as God is concerned?

My answer to this question was to state that my conviction is that God is not a God who chooses to remain at a distance. God is Immanuel especially in Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23) because God is love (1 John 4:16). For this reason God is a God who participates in our social constructions and is not simply one. God is a God who enters into history (Bosch 1991:181). According to Müller (2005:73) practical theology happens when there is a reflection on practice out of the perspective of the experience of the presence of God. This definition assumes that God is present and that people do experience God. In Christian theology the central event where God's presence was experienced was (and is) in Jesus Christ. The reflection on practice in this research is done primarily



in light of this event.

This reflection on practice should not become abstract though. Müller (2005:78) points out that the essence of practical theology is that it must focus on a concrete situation because when you move away from this your research is moving towards systematic theology. Van der Westhuizen (2010) refers to the work of Alastair Campbell who said that because practical theology focuses on a concrete situation there will be a tendency that it will be fragmented and not very systemised. In addition to this, because of this focus, many times the findings in practical theology will be expressed in the form of practical suggestions concerning the practice of the church. When thinking about the implications of this research beyond the local, I will make this kind of practical suggestions concerning the practice of the church as far as the seafarers' mission is concerned.

After introducing my theological position I went on to discuss Van Huyssteen's ideas about postfoundationalist theology and the transversal approach. In postfoundationalism there is a movement away from relativism on the one hand and foundationalism on the other. Postfoundationalism moves away from the assumption that absolute knowledge can be obtained and it acknowledges the limitations of one's own discipline (Müller 2009:202). It also strives to avoid the relativism of postmodernism (Müller 2009:203).

The reason why this approach rejects relativism is because it assumes that there are shared resources of human rationality (cf Van Huyssteen 1997:4). With a foundationalist approach the premise is that the resources of human rationality is basically situated within the boundaries of your own discipline (cf Müller 2009:202). With postfoundationalism there is the realisation that there are shared resources of human rationality which are not contained by one discipline and therefore the need arises to move across boundaries by means of communication between disciplines. As the emphasis is that there should be communication between disciplines, there is an important link with social constructionism where it can be said that knowledge is being

constructed through conversation (Müller in Van der Westhuizen 2010).

But how do you approach such a conversation? In postfoundationalist Christian theology you have to become aware of hidden beliefs and assumptions that you take for granted, in order to be in this cross-disciplinary conversation (Van Huyssteen 1997:4). In addition to being aware, you are also committed to your own beliefs, but at the same time open to criticism (Stone 2000:417). In this way different disciplines can share in the rich resources of human rationality and a unified perspective is reached (Müller 2009:202), or constructed. This unified perspective can also be called an intersubjective agreement (cf Van Huyssteen 2006b:24). Van Huyssteen (2000:436) and others talk about a wide reflective equilibrium or even optimal understanding which can be achieved.

Out of the perspective of a theological discipline the postfoundationalist position with its transversal approach is appealing. The reason for this is because it holds that it is possible to listen to other disciplines and to find knowledge that might be in harmony with the Christian paradigm while you stay within a personal faith commitment (Van Huyssteen 1997:4). Stone (2000:417) says that for Van Huyssteen it is about constructing a notion of rationality that can take theology out of isolation into a sphere where theology and science are both equal partners.

The postfoundationalist approach moves away from individual to social and from subjective towards discourse (Müller 2009:205). Postfoundationalism takes it seriously that meaning is socially constructed and this construction always takes place within a certain context which consists of the social and cultural traditions within which people are immersed (Müller 2009:205). Müller (2009:205) emphasises that experience is situated and is always interpreted. In the interdisciplinary conversation the hope is that we are no longer hopelessly culture and context bound (Van Huyssteen in Müller 2009:206). We are freed from this because we can explore critically the theories, meanings, and beliefs through which we and others construct our world (Van Huyssteen in Müller 2009:206).

The type of rationality that Van Huyssteen is propagating can be called transversal rationality, referring to the point where one line crosses other lines as a metaphor to describe how different discourses, modes of thought and action intersects with each other (Stone 2000:418). The idea of talking about transversal rationality was used by Schrag, but taken over by Van Huyssteen (Stone 2000:418). For Van Huyssteen a person's experience is always interpreted experience, but it is about something and this something, although only provisionally conceptualised, actually exists (Stone 2000:421). This interpreted experience can be called tradition and we are part of it as well as able to be critical of it (Van Huyssteen in Stone 2000:422). This type of interdisciplinary conversation helps us to have perspective on our own discipline's tradition.

A core issue for Van Huyssteen is the question whether transversal rationality is possible seeing that disciplines are so different from each other. For him the answer is, yes, because the human mind has the ability to bind together the patterns of interpreted experience through rhetoric, articulation, and discernment (Van Huyssteen 2000:429). Further, humans have the skill or remarkable ability to move between domains of intelligence with a high degree of cognitive fluidity (Van Huyssteen 2000:429). Van Huyssteen (2000:431) asserts that it is discovered in this type of conversation that one discipline or reasoning strategy cannot contain human rationality in its fullness. The human mind is able to move between different disciplines, but a discipline is not able to contain human rationality.

In the postmodern culture some philosophers of science have one-sidedly emphasised that there must be a trust in local scientific practice (Van Huyssteen 2000:432). This is in reaction to the positivistic way of thinking, but it also leads to an end to the possibility of a meaningful relationship between theology and science (Van Huyssteen 2000:432). For Van Huyssteen (2000:433) a human's ability to be able to move between widely diverse intellectual domains holds the promise that interdisciplinary communication is possible. Van Huyssteen's (2000:434) hope is that through the interdisciplinary process a rationality will emerge which is guided by interdisciplinary standards which are shaped

by its context, but which is not hopelessly culture and context bound. In order for the emergence of a postfoundationalist rationality there has to be an ongoing process of collective assessment (Van Huyssteen 2000:431).

According to Wildman (2008:476) one gets a view in Van Huyssteen's book of a gradual conversational construction of a sophisticated interpretation of human uniqueness. This description of what Van Huyssteen is doing reminds one strongly of the notions of social constructionism which lays emphasis on the conversational process by means of which new knowledge can emerge. What is socially constructed though is not only local, as postmodern relativism would have it. Demasure and Müller (2006:417) state that postfoundationalist theology is always local and contextual, but that it also reaches further than this to interdisciplinary concerns. Relativism accepted the hopelessly cultural and contextual nature of knowledge, but Van Huyssteen asserts that it is possible to move beyond the local.

To not be in this type of conversation can cut theology off from the shared resources of human rationality in other reasoning strategies. The aim in this approach is that everyone should share in the rich resources of human rationality (Van Huyssteen 2000:436). This approach strives for a creative enhancement of our intellectual culture (Van Huyssteen 2000:437). Van Huyssteen (2000:439) observes that rationality is about having good reasons for what we do, think, decisions we make and for the convictions that we have.

King (2008:452) pointed out that Van Huyssteen's aim is to have a non-competitive relationship with the sciences; a duet rather than a duel. Disciplines need each other. Philip Clayton (in Van Huyssteen 2006a:650) pointed out that the interdisciplinary approach is very important and valuable as one perspective on its own, cannot adequately describe and understand specific phenomena, not even if it is only on the physical and biological level. Stephen J Kline (in Van Huyssteen 2006a:650) asserted that the basic structure of the phenomenal world is multileveled. King (2008:454) notes that this type of interaction is able to expand and transform thoughts.

This section in the research was ended off by means of an evaluation and summary of Van Huyssteen's approach. The emphasis in this evaluation was that his approach provides an important framework in which one can interact with other disciplines in a productive and responsible manner. This approach makes you aware of the interdisciplinary nature of theology as well as the enriching possibilities when engaging in this type of cross-disciplinary conversation.

Personally I do not agree with Van Huyssteen on everything that he said, but I still used his approach. This is exactly the strength of his approach: that although we disagree, we can have productive, mutually enriching conversations across the boundaries of our disciplines and theological differences. My theological position was further developed and expressed in the next section.

I went further to explore the meaning of mission, especially by means of using the books of Bosch (1991) and Kverndal (2008). The whole research project was done within a context of mission work. Due to the postfoundationalist and social constructionist nature of this research there was awareness that there should be transparency as far as the missiological assumptions of the researcher were concerned.

My emphasis was that mission is not an optional activity that the church can do if it is convenient. It was argued that mission is part and parcel of what it means to be church. Mission was not an invention of colonialists or of Constantine. Mission is part of what makes church truly church. It is what church is because it is part of who God is. With the concept of *Missio Dei*, David Bosch (in Niemandt 2007:147) has emphasised that God is not only busy with and involved in mission, but that mission is part of the essence of who God is. Niemandt (2007:147) points out how mission is connected to the trinity: The Father sends the Son and the Son sends the Holy Spirit and links this with John 3:16-17. Keifert (in Niemandt 2007:148) said: "The very life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a process of mission: a Father sends a Son, a Son who sends a Spirit. In this very likeness of God, we are called, gathered, centered, and sent

within the life of the triune God and God's mission, an infinite journey of being called and sent.+ Guder (in Niemandt 2007:147) says: "a mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.+

None the less, it is still the case that there are many objections to mission work, but referring to Matthew 28:18 Kverndal asserts mission work is God's initiative. Referring to the evangelistic dimension of mission, Kverndal (2008:232) uses Bosch's words who said: "If you cut the heart out of a body, that body becomes a corpse. With evangelism cut out mission dies; it ceases to be mission.+ This dimension to mission is normally the one aspect that is the most criticized and most controversial. Bosch (in Kverndal 2008:234) further emphasized: "Our lives are not sufficiently transparent ÷ we must name the Name of him in whom we believe+. The evangelism dimension of mission also brings forth the question as to in what way you relate to other religions. I pointed out that I subscribe to an exclusivist position. The Bible emphasises this position in verses such as John 14:6 where Jesus states that no one comes to the Father except through Him (Da Silva 2008:279). Da Silva (2008:279) does admit that this type of position begs the question as to what happens with those who do not believe in Jesus through no fault of their own and then answers by stating that the Bible itself does not really dwell on this question. Therefore he takes the view that it is not for us to decide, but says that we must rather trust in God's justice and mercy as far as this mystery is concerned (Da Silva 2008:279).

Kverndal (2008:250,251) describes the time we are living in as the in-between era where Christ has put mission in the centre of the agenda of the church. Seeing that mission is at the centre of the church's agenda it is important to explore in more detail what mission is. From here on I made use especially of Bosch. One of the dilemmas that the church faces, especially Western Christians, is feelings of guilt, because of past wrongdoings to people of other faiths (Bosch 1991:3). This leads to a situation where many Christians will not consider participating in mission work (Bosch 1991:3). In the past mission work was done out of a lot of wrong motives and therefore Bosch (1991:5) argues that when doing mission you have to have a good foundation and the right

objectives and motives. The implication of this is that we should not stop doing mission as many do because of feelings of guilt and shame, but that we must start doing it for the right reasons in the right way. His book helped to provide a correct understanding and motive so that also in this research past wrongdoings would not be repeated.

The bad reputation of mission came from the time of Constantine when the church which was politically powerless suddenly became powerful. Therefore they had the option of forcing people into conversion by things like fines, taking away their property, sending them to exile, torture and jail (Bosch 1991:223). The argument was that it was for their benefit (Bosch 1991:223). This attitude to mission continued up to the colonial times when colonialism and mission became partners, because the rulers over the colonies saw it as their duty to Christianize their colonies (Bosch 1991:227). This is part of the reason why this word became so contaminated. This way of doing mission in Europe and by Europe went on for around one thousand years (Bosch 1991:230). Mission changed from what the Bible meant into becoming %Christian propaganda+ (Bosch 1991:201).

Looking back over the past it is clear how perspectives of the era people lived in had an influence on the way mission was seen and theology was done. It is of course the same for us today. This realisation, of being part of a specific context that has a great influence on the way you do mission and theology, urges you to be careful and conscious of the way in which you interpret the Bible and apply it. In other words Bosch also put a strong emphasis on realising your contextuality and embeddedness and he expresses this by means of the idea of paradigm shifts.

Bosch (1991:181) says that the challenge is to %prolong the logic of the ministry of Jesus and the early church + Bosch (1991:181) asserts that it is important to realize that we have a historical faith, which means that God does not communicate with humans in the first place through abstract dogmatic phrases but rather through events in history where God reveals Godself (Bosch 1991:181). God enters into history and therefore we have an %incarnational+faith (Bosch 1991:181). The Bible witnesses about God who entered

into people's stories and not about abstract doctrines. These ideas of Bosch are quite similar to the emphasis of the postfoundationalist approach on the embedded nature of our existence. Jesus is the eternal God who became embedded.

In the Bible it is clear that the nature of mission was that it is all-inclusive. Jesus included the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressor, the sinner and the devoted (Bosch 1991:28). Jesus's mission was not just all-inclusive by including all people, but also all-inclusive by not only including the spiritual, but also other dimensions of life.

Further, mission work was not done to help the church grow, but it was only done as an automatic expression of Christians' faith in Christ (Bosch 1991:49). That mission is an automatic expression of our faith is also evident in the texts which Bosch had used to inform his perspective on mission. He made use of Matthew, Luke-Acts and the writings of Paul. According to the gospel of Matthew believers can only find their identity in so far as they are involved with mission (Bosch 1991:83). Matthew also points to the fact that a missionary community is at the same time different from the world and committed to it (Bosch 1991:83). Mission is such an integral part of Matthew that it is actually his missionary vision which made him write his gospel (Bosch 1991:57). According to LaVerdiere and Thompson (in Bosch 1991:88) in Luke-Acts Jesus's mission is incomplete and the church is called to complete it. If someone might argue that mission work is immoral then they have to say that Jesus's work was immoral because if the church is doing its work correctly it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, continuing his work through the church. This message is communicated by people who are called as witnesses and the Holy Spirit gives the power to them to complete their task (Bosch 1991:91).

In Paul's letters the perspective on mission is that mission is to lead people to salvation in Christ, as they are lost without Him (Bosch 1991:134,135). Seeing that God loves people, God is not satisfied with people being lost. Paul argues that he has an obligation to the gentiles to proclaim the gospel to them (Bosch 1991:135). This is not



an obligation due to anything done by the gentiles, but because of Christ's concern for them and because of what Christ has done for Paul (Bosch 1991:135). This is the same kind of obligation the church today has to those outside the church. For Paul mission is not about being indebted to God, but about gratitude for what God has done for him (Bosch 1991:138). God's righteousness can only be received through faith and faith is only possible where someone proclaims the gospel (Bosch 1991:149).

I ended off this section on missiological considerations with a summary of the content and the implications of what was discussed. Mainly I consulted the work of Kverndal (2008) and Bosch (1991) which were helpful to orientate myself as a researcher within the context of mission work. Both shared some theological and historical background which had led to more development. After discussing my epistemological position as well as theological issues it became possible to look into issues of methodology as well as method. The research story has developed to the point where more practical issues became relevant.

#### **5.4.3.3 Methodology**

In this section I recapped what the ABDCE formula is all about. After this I proceeded to describe the roles that the researcher and co-researchers would be playing. Dreyer (1998:22) uses the hermeneutical concepts, and their dialectical relationship, of ~~%~~belonging+and ~~%~~distanciation+to propose a way of keeping both the insider and outsider role of the researcher. Belonging refers to the stance of a researcher, inside the world of those being researched so that those being researched can be studied and represented as they interpret their reality (Dreyer 1998:22). Here the researcher is not critical and does not take a step back to evaluate those who are being researched. On the other hand, with distanciation is meant a position of stepping back and not just accepting the interpretations of those who are being researched (Dreyer 1998:22). It was also my approach to try to maintain both these positions. To listen to my co-researchers with empathy, but also to evaluate and compare what they have said afterwards. It could be said that especially when I did the interviews I tried to truly listen to the co-researchers without being critical of their opinions, but when the stories came

together in the alternative perspective (C), my stance was more evaluative.

In this research, done with a social constructionist mindset, the idea was that the person who participates in the research is co-constructing an understanding, together with the researcher. This is one of the reasons they were referred to as co-researchers. Dreyer (1998:23) also affirmed that the participants should not be seen as %objects of information+but rather as %subjects of communication+. In this research the intention was to maintain this type of tension in order to maintain a distance between me and the co-researchers, but also to really come to an understanding that is more than the researcher's own ideas. The aim was to come to an understanding that truly arises out of the social interaction between researcher and co-researchers in a particular context. Looking back it is my conviction that this was achieved, at least to some degree, because the co-researchers were taken seriously and enough space was allowed for them to share their flesh and blood experiences. This prevented the research from becoming abstract.

In this section I went further to consider the roles that both my co-researchers and I should be seen in while the research was taking place. With the term %co-researcher+ something was expressed of respect. This is in the same line of thinking as Rubin and Rubin (2005: IX) who calls this relationship between a researcher and a participant a partnership. The researcher and the co-researchers had different roles, though. I did most of the listening and facilitated the process (cf Müller & Schoeman 2004:11). The end result of this process was hopefully an understanding which was truly co-constructed. In an attempt to do this I tried to maintain a not-knowing position, to see the co-researchers as the experts of their own lives and situations and to facilitate conversations where stories could be retold and new realities could emerge (cf Demasure & Müller 2006:418).

I stated that I do have a special interest in people's stories about God, but also asserted that my interest was not limited to the spiritual. This research can be seen as qualitative research but with the emphasis that it is narrative research. This research could be

described as explorative as it explored the lives and circumstances of seafarers through questions such as %why+, %what+, %when+and %how+(cf Babbie 2007:88). This research also had some characteristics of descriptive research (cf Babbie 2007:89), but it was not about describing something as objectively as possible, but about co-describing and in this manner co-constructing meaning. The third characteristic was that there was a dimension of explaining to the research (cf Babbie 2007:89), but this explaining, as with the describing, was not so much about explaining something in an objective manner but more about constructing explanations with my co-researchers in order to arrive at a better understanding.

After explaining the basic aspects of my methodology, emphasising notions of social constructionism, I went on to discuss certain methodological considerations as far as the research approach was concerned. Here I indicated that I would be making three research movements. Movement one refers to my involvement with the seafarers, movement two refers to the two interdisciplinary conversations I had and movement three had to do with the interaction with other chaplains.

Van Huyssteen stated (in Müller 2009:207) that with the interdisciplinary approach we are able to be critical of our own traditions and therefore the hope was that through interacting with other disciplines this research story was thickened and enriched because it was no longer hopelessly determined by a specific local context only. The question was how I could engage with other disciplines. I decided to enter into interdisciplinary conversations by following Müller (2009:227) who developed three questions as a way to interact with another discipline in a transversal manner. In order to be grounded in a local and concrete situation I made use of the seafarers' stories and their own words, around which the conversation could take place (cf Van der Westhuizen 2010).

At the same time I entered in a discussion with the chaplains based on my interviews with the seafarers in movement one. This movement helped to develop some further interpretations which could lead to deconstruction of harmful narratives but it also

opened up the opportunity to socially construct an understanding that could point beyond the local (cf Müller 2003:304).

#### **5.4.3.4 Methods**

In this section the focus was on the practical things I planned to do in order to develop an understanding together with my co-researchers. The aim was that this should be in harmony with my methodology and should grow out of it. The research started in movement one where I began to participate in the action. The first thing I did was simply to be aware that while I am doing my work as a chaplain, I am also a researcher. I added %researcher+ to my identity. With this mindset I started to make field notes about the experiences I had while interacting with the seafarers. This research started in the port of Richards Bay. Here, for about a year, this was all I did as far as practical research was concerned.

While I was busy with this I learned more about the background of seafaring and the whole research project started to develop. Themes started to emerge and I got to the point where I could conduct interviews with seafarers based on my previous involvement with the action. Then I was transferred to the port of Durban and here most of the research took place.

The idea was not to interview hundreds of people but to get different points of view to obtain a clearer picture (cf Rubin & Rubin 2005:68). I only interviewed seafarers, but they came from a variety of different perspectives. They had different religious backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, ranks, ages and were on different types of ships. In other words the understanding was constructed not only based on a single perspective.

These interviews were the same kind of conversations that Rubin and Rubin (2005:4) were referring to when they talked about qualitative interviews. They see this as an extended discussion in which the conversation is gently guided by the researcher. Broadly speaking this was what I tried to do while having the conversations with the seafarers. In the end I interviewed six seafarers.

While being involved with the action I strived to be self-aware (Rubin and Rubin 2005:31). This I did mainly through being conscious of the role which I was playing in the research process as was explained under methodological issues. My role was to ask questions and to listen, but it was not in order to get information in the first place. It was rather to co-construct an understanding.

For Rubin and Rubin (2005:71) it is very important to report your findings in an accurate way. This I also tried to do through transcribing exactly what the seafarers said in the interviews. At first I even included all the extra utterances such as %um+, %h+, %h+etc. Later I decided to leave this out (most of the time) because this sometimes made it difficult to understand what the seafarers were actually saying. With all six of the seafarers English was not their first language. The result was that it was sometimes difficult to understand what they were saying. Sometimes I simply left out some parts of the interview because, after repeatedly trying to hear what was said, I had to give up. In addition to their English not being that good, their accents also caused some problems. This being said, I am convinced that their words in this interviews were accurately written down and that while reading the interviews one can really hear their voices and witness how a conversational construction took place.

While these conversational constructions took place it was not only important to be aware of the role that I was playing, but also to be sensitive to the role that the co-researcher saw me in, as Rubin and Rubin (2005:85) pointed out. I think that most of the time the seafarers saw me as a chaplain from seafarersmission, but many times I think they also saw me in the role of a friend. With all of them I first established a relationship and then asked them whether they would consider participating in the research.

In the interview the co-researchers were comfortable that they were being recorded, but they were also aware of it. This could have caused them to be hesitant to share some things, but the impression I got was that they made an effort to make a contribution.

Part of the reason for this was maybe because they knew that there would be an audience who would listen to them (cf Elliot (2005:11)). This gave the conversations a bit of a formal tone, but I am convinced in a positive way. They were still willing to share personal things because they knew that they participated anonymously. There was also spontaneity in the interviews and many times we would laugh about the things that they said.

I am convinced that the interviews succeeded in creating space for the seafarers to share their ideas and their opinions and most of all their stories. As Rubin and Rubin (2005:109) observes these stories came out like a jack-in-the-box as soon as someone asked: "What happened?" Some of the jack-in-the-boxes were: Eric's experience with the priest at the seafarers' mission in the USA, Mohammed who was constantly seasick, Jonathan's experiences with the abusive captain, John and the idol worship at sea, Ivan and his experience with another culture on board and Noel's wife who told him: "You better go!" These jack-in-the-boxes helped that the development of meaning could take place.

Further development took place as I wrote the stories down and brought them together in the section where I discussed the alternative perspective. I made use of more co-researchers than only the seafarers in order to develop a deeper understanding through different perspectives. The other co-researchers were Douglas Stevenson, Surita Stipp as well as a number of chaplains. I called the involvement of these different groups, movements, in following Müller (2009).

In my second movement I aimed to engage people from non-theological disciplines by means of Müller's (2009:227) three questions. Although there are many other disciplines with which I could have had conversations, there is a limit as to how many can join the conversation. In order for these co-researchers to get involved, I shared some of the stories of the seafarers where I thought that there might be a transversal connection (Addenda B & C). By using the stories and the actual words of the seafarers the aim was to stay true to the local and concrete situation while moving across the

boundaries to interdisciplinary concerns (cf Van der Westhuizen 2010).

In the third movement I invited the chaplains to participate in the conversational construction. In order to stimulate a conversation I used the words of the seafarers, which they shared with me in the interviews. I also made use of one of the chaplains' reports about incidences that occurred in the harbour. However, the response I got from the chaplains was less than I hoped for. I am sure that the best method would have been to conduct interviews with them as I did with the seafarers, but an interview at that stage of the research was simply not practical. None the less, those who did respond made a positive contribution and helped to develop an interpretation not only based on the local.

In this part of the research I explained my practical methods with which I conducted this study. These methods grew out of the methodology based on some of the concepts of social constructionism, the narrative approach and postfoundationalism.

#### **5.4.4 Chapter 4: The development of a thick understanding**

I started off this section by stating again that the ABDCE formula was used to guide the research. In this part of the research a lot of action and background were described but the main characters (the six seafarers) had not been introduced yet. It was with the introduction of these research characters that the research story started to gather some momentum (cf Müller 2001:70). Here I shared background about the main characters so that the reader of the research could get to know them. These six characters were the primary people with whom a new understanding was constructed.

After I introduced the characters I went on to explain what the climax entails. Here I explained the theory behind the climax again so that I did not have to explain it as the individual themes were developed. When I moved on to the alternative perspective (climax) a lot of background fell away and certain phrases and stories were used in order for the co-researchers to come into conversation with each other. The co-researchers included the seafarers, the chaplains and the two interdisciplinary partners.

The chaplains' understanding was mainly shared in the section where I discussed the alternative perspectives. In this section I pointed out the highlights, the understandings and descriptions that in a sense ~~was~~ <sup>made</sup> it all. The hope was that in this section something of an ~~aha~~ <sup>aha</sup>-experience had been constructed together with the co-researchers. The climax is where and when things come together (Müller 2001:68). This is what I tried to accomplish here. Ann Lamott (in Müller 2001:67) said that the development of the story can be compared to the development of a Polaroid picture.

Now at the E, the ending, the picture has developed through the co-construction of all the co-researchers. The ending is reached and it is hoped that this Polaroid picture is a good one. Good in the sense that the knowledge that was constructed will be emancipating and empowering.

## **5.5 The E of the different themes: some thoughts on “beyond the local”**

### **5.5.1 Introduction**

When I discussed the different themes that were developed I did not include the E. I went through the ABDC stages and then stopped. Here at the Ending of the research I would like to look back over each theme in order to have an ending for each one individually. By doing this I will identify a few important points based on the whole process of action, background, development and climax.

In this section I am going to make some generalisations, although I hope it will not be seen as statements which pretend to contain absolute truth. Müller (2004:304) warns clearly that when interpretations are made which point beyond the local that generalisations should be avoided. However, I have done it already under the section I discussed the alternative perspective (climax). The more I think about it the more I am convinced that somehow there will be a measure of generalisation. Why? Because if an understanding grows out of a certain context, if different co-researchers are brought into communication with each other, if there is an attempt at interdisciplinary conversations, and the ideas are distributed and feedback is given, then I do not see how your understanding will not somehow point beyond the local and that this will be



expressed through statements that make some general claims. Müller (2004:304) states that when one makes interpretations which point beyond the local, it should rather be aimed at ~~de~~deconstructing negative discourses.+ Hopefully the way in which the research developed there will be a deconstruction of some negative discourses. For instance the stereotypical ideas (thin narratives) about seafarers were hopefully deconstructed through the thick descriptions that were co-constructed between the researcher and the co-researchers. However, research is not only about deconstruction but also about the construction of an understanding. This understanding is bound to be expressed in statements which will make some general claims. It is important though that this is done with the awareness that what is said is very provisional.

### 5.5.2 Sharing some ideas of possible implications beyond the local

#### a. Stories about a shipmate called Danger

- Danger is a shipmate. Sometimes he is not on duty, but he is on the ship; always, on every contract. No matter how good the ship or the company is. It is as John said: ~~%n~~ fact for anybody that calls themselves a seafarer [they] must have experience[d] a lot of ugly situations at sea.+One of the biggest causes of danger at sea is the weather, which can be very traumatic as seafarers still remember it years after the event, such as Ivan who said of a storm he encountered a long time ago: ~~%~~ery, very, very bad...+ And Eric who saw a ship swallowed by the water said in amazement: ~~%cand~~ believe [ ] there~~s~~ such a thing like that.+ Talking about his trip coming to Durban when their ship looked as if it would capsize, he said: ~~%ts~~ kinda scary...+
- One of the worst dangers on board today is caused by the situation with piracy. Recently piracy has taken over the headlines and it seems that, for now, this will keep on happening. The IMO is actively involved in finding solutions to this problem. One of their priorities, which is very relevant for those from the seafarersqmission, is that they want to make sure that those who were in a hostage situation, as well as their families, should receive care and support. Those involved in the seafarersqmission can be of great help and assistance as

far as the after care of these traumatised seafarers is concerned. Concerning piracy the feeling I got was: More is needed. More involvement of governments. More awareness needs to be raised. More ideas and strategies should be implemented to prevent this from happening. More seafarers need to be released. More should be done for the betterment of the political situation in Somalia. Much, much more effort is needed.

- Even though safety regulations are strict and are in many cases diligently followed, (as was seen on Noel's ship) there are still many seafarers trapped in circumstances on ships where there are constantly life threatening situations, as was the case with Jonathan. These seafarers' voices are normally silent as they are afraid of being victimised if they speak out. Those involved in the seafarers' mission are needed to be a resource to seafarers in circumstances like this, even if it is only to be of emotional support to them. In this manner we can show them that, although danger is a shipmate, so is Jesus.
- Seafarers who are mentally unwell become a hazard to themselves and those who sail with them. As Eric said when you are "mentally upset", you are "stepping [ ] on a slippery floor and you might fall." Therefore, one of the best things that those from the seafarers' mission can do, in order to help seafarers to face less danger, is to be a resource to seafarers as far as their mental health is concerned.
- One of the chaplains who participated in the research said that he admires the seafarers for the way in which they are able to cope with living in a multicultural and multi-religious environment. I would like to add that I am also impressed and admire the resilience that seafarers display while having to face so much dangers. The 19 year old Norwegian cadet, who was raped in Durban, is continuing her career after just a short time at home. Ivan simply accepted the dangers caused by storms: "It's part of the package, part of the package." Concerning piracy, a seafarer told me that he sees it as similar to bad weather

and so, in other words, also as part of the package.+ And Eric said, after almost falling off his bed because of a big wave rolling their ship: % Instead of being afraid I just laugh and laugh...+

b. Stories about God and faith in a multi-religious environment

- Seafarers are in need of ministry as there are often spiritual vacuums on board. The seafarers' mission is important and needed not only for meeting more general needs such as communicating with the family, but also specifically spiritual needs (not that it should be seen as either/or). To borrow from Martin Otto (2007), there is a need for a church on the oceans+. Normally the price for religious harmony on board is to be quiet about your beliefs and not to express them. This is not good as a ship is not only a work place but a home. In addition, those in seafarers' mission should take the whole idea of ministering %with+very seriously.
- On the ships it is surprisingly rare that religious differences lead to conflict. Seafarers set an example of how it is possible that people from different religions can live and work together in harmony. Politicians and religious leaders, in fact, everyone can learn from them.
- Although there is more often than not religious harmony on board, it should always be kept in mind that it is indeed a very difficult matter and should be handled with care. Both, owners who simply put different religious groups on board, and those in seafarers' mission who are doing their work as part of expressing their religious beliefs, should be sensitive to this fact.
- On ships there are some social constructs that can maybe be called superstitions, which are somehow envisioned to be connected to the transcendent. These thin narratives can be harmful to the seafarers and can lead to discrimination and bullying. The two examples were John mentioning that you are sometimes forced to participate in rituals when the ship crosses the

equator and Mohammed who said that if you are not clean inside you will be seasick all the time. Fortunately this does not seem to be too widespread.

c. Injustices on board: Floating prisons

- At times justice issues are a matter of life and death. Seafarers who are treated unfairly sometimes act irrationally and might even resort to breaking the law, for instance the Indonesian fishers who almost killed the Chinese bosun with knives. However, they are not %naughty+and there is a need to understand something of their desperation. When these seafarers act irresponsibly someone like a lawyer or someone from a union might need to dissociate themselves from the seafarers for legal reasons. Someone from the seafarersqmission cannot do that. We should stay involved and try to redirect the focus onto the original transgression.
- One should expect justice issues to easily become messy. The reason for this is that victims tend to get blamed. You might end up sharing in this blame.
- Unjust and unfair behaviour is not only something that happens between employer and employee, but also between shipmates. In Jonathan's case the captain abused him and the other crew. Seafarers have the right to be protected against this.
- We should not think that we know about all the abuse, unfairness and injustices going on, on ships. One of the first things victims lose is their voice. Jonathan and I knew each other for more than a year before he mentioned the abuse of the captain. It was only because we had an interview in the seafarersqcentre, away from the ship that he could talk about it.

- As Stevenson said: %Seafarers enjoy more legal rights than any other class of worker...+ But then he added: %a, but they aren't always able to find access to justice to enforce their rights.+ Part of our ministry is to help seafarers to find %access to justice+. One of the most important ways is to empower seafarers with knowledge and information. Stevenson said: %But, what can be very empowering for them is for them to receive an honest appraisal of their situation and some advice on how they might proceed.+
- Fortunately today those in the seafarerssqmission have moved away from the question of %whether+to the question of %how+(Stevenson 2008:377). As we continue to search for answers to the %how+, we do so with confidence that there is Someone bigger than us at work.

d. The social dynamics of women on board

- It has to be recognised that a female seafarer can change the social dynamics between the crewmembers dramatically. Sometimes it is in a positive way, but there are always the possibility of rivalry and jealousy among the men. The female seafarer might or might not be to blame for this, but unfortunately it does happen. This makes the issue of women seafarers very complicated.
- There are still social constructs about women which make it difficult for them to enter into and to work in this industry: %a, they have been only trouble, each of them in their own way+. This statement should not be ignored as if there is no truth in it. This was Ivan's experience and at least shows that at times this issue is problematic. The problem is that it is a thin narrative and can have an extremely negative influence. Sometimes these types of constructs do not only make it difficult for women, but can actually result in their death as might be true in the case with Akhona Geveza.
- The fact that women are normally either officers, cadets training to be officers or working in the galley does suggest that although the doors to this profession are

open for women to enter, it is only selectively so. It seldom happens that a female seafarer is simply a normal crew member.

- When a female seafarer is from a different cultural background the intensity of the discomfort for some male seafarers is increased. Owners and companies should be sensitive to this when employing their crew. It is not realistic to expect all discrimination against women seafarers to disappear, but it is realistic to expect owners and companies to put systems and procedures in place to prevent it from happening or to handle it responsibly when it does occur.

e. Coping with and appreciating diversity: Stories of many cultures living under the same roof

- Diversity should not be seen as necessarily a negative thing. Seafarers like Eric and Mohammed appreciated the things they could learn from their shipmates who were from a different culture than they were. But, companies and owners should be aware that seafarers are living in a confined space and that a clash of cultural values can be very serious in the sense that it can lead to severe conflict and social isolation. They should especially try to avoid having only one seafarer from a certain culture on a ship as this can cause an unbearable situation for that seafarer.
- It would help both the seafarers who offend and those who are offended if they understood more about the other culture. Being made aware about other cultures and their values should be part of a seafarers training as much as they are made aware of safety issues. A ship where the crew do not understand each other on the level of language and culture is a ship waiting for an accident to happen.
- As far as the ministry is concerned, as well as being sensitive to cultural issues ourselves, we should also be mindful of the impact cultural issues can have on

seafarers. We can for instance remember that social isolation is sometimes the result when different cultures are mixed together and try to reach out and be a friend to those who do not find their place within the dominant culture of their ship.

f. Seafarers and the stories of their families: An ironic relationship

- Seafarers are caught up in a situation where they have two homes: One on the ocean and one with their families. Unfortunately they do not seem to be at home in any of these two in the true sense of the word "home". Both with John and the seafarer's wife it seemed that they were able to rise to the challenge through their faith in Christ. So, it is difficult for everyone, but some are able to overcome it.
- Those in the seafarers' mission have a special obligation to strengthen and protect the bonds between seafarers and their families. This is why the seafarers' centres are such an important component to the ministry. Here they can make contact with their families in a relaxed environment. In our ministry attention should be given to the fact that we know marriages and family life is normally strained and difficult. Families have to cope with triangulation, the problem of long distance communication, the absence of one of the spouses as the family makes a transition from one life stage to the next, the ever present possibility of unfaithfulness, the phenomenon of the "honeymoon stage" which inevitably will fade, and in general the problem of the seafarer who does not feel at home either at sea or with the family.
- In spite of all the negative things that can be said about seafaring there are also many positive aspects. On many occasions seafarers create new opportunities for their children and even their wider family circle. In addition to this, being someone with a high income and therefore able to help many family members, seafarers gain a position of importance in their families that they would not have

had without it. Seafaring and family are therefore in some instances good companions because it empowers seafarers as well as their family members.

g. Seafarers and the seafarersmission: Shaving things, a little drinking and even a spiritual dimension

- The impact that the seafarersmission has on seafarers seems to be in some cases surprisingly little as seafarers such as Ivan and Noel, sailing for many years, do not have that much experience with the seafarersmission either with ship visitors or with seafarerscentres. This again points to the urgency to not only minister to seafarers, but also with as Kverndal and Mooney have stressed. With will make the ministry much more effective.
- As was stated before, seafarers are one of the most exploited groups of workers in the world (Cockroft 2008:288), and sometimes they get exploited even by people from the seafarersmission like the priest who was taking advantage of Eric. Those who are involved in the seafarersmission should be mindful of this fact and therefore they should be careful when employing chaplains, lay ministers, volunteers, staff working at the seafarerscentre and other ship visitors.
- It seems that seafarers do not always identify the seafarersmission with spiritual matters, but rather with things like telephone cards, transport and a little drinking. This suggested to me that people involved in the seafarersmission sometimes forget their identity as participants in the *Missio Dei*. This might be the reason why they do not make a connection between the diaconal and the evangelism dimensions of mission. I am convinced that as we grow more aware of our participation in the *Missio Dei*, we will communicate this more effectively to seafarers.

h. Positive narratives about being a seafarer: A profession of hope



- Money is by far the greatest positive aspect about seafaring. Seafaring, especially for seafarers from developing countries, is an empowering career which creates opportunities for them and their families that would never have been possible without it.
- There are many other positive aspects to seafaring and seafarers actually express their positive attitudes in quite strong terms: %Even me too I love this job...+ And: %This [is] my profession. I love it.+ And: %One can almost be amazed that one should be paid for that kind of pleasure!+(Douglas 2008:303). And: %And to all those people who has been the bridge for me to get there I thank them all. May God bless them all, I am really glad that I got my job.+
  - i. Relationships between seafarers: Friendships and fistfights
- Seafarers are normally strangers who have to make the ship not only their work place, but their home. Their home is a confined space which is governed by a hierarchical social structure. This is a challenging environment to make yourself at home in and therefore it is prone to cause tension between shipmates. This tension is evident for instance in the careful approach that Eric laid emphasis on when he talked about relationships on board. As a result of the hierarchical social structure the lower ranking crew are vulnerable to bullying.
- However, sometimes it is the lower ranking crew that causes trouble on board as Ivan and Eric both testified to: %The funny thing is it is sometimes the one who is having the lower rank who is acting like that...+
- Due to the hierarchical social structure on the ship the way in which the company approaches the captain and other officers determines to a large degree the relationships between crewmembers. Eric has explained how constant commands from the company can cause a lot of stress on the ship.

- Sometimes real friendships are able to develop, as was for instance the case between Eric and the friend who saved his life. With Jonathan and Peter they were the only Kenyans on their ship and a strong bond developed between them as could be seen in the way Peter stood up for his friend to a fuming captain.
- These real friendships do not always form and we, from seafarers' mission, are called to become friends to those who are socially isolated. We are there to show to the friendless that they do have a friend in Christ who does not relate to them in an hierarchy way: ~~No~~ longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends ....+(John 15:15a . NASB95).

I have now shared some ideas about the understanding which was developed. It is important to note that these observations should be read in context of all the background that went before this. In the next section I will point towards some ideas about further research that might be helpful to the seafarers.

### **5.6 Possible new research narratives**

The ending of narrative research should be an open ending. Therefore it is appropriate at the ending to think about possible further research narratives that might join the conversation and so the social construction of new and better understandings that might be to the benefit of the seafarers.

As far as danger and seafarers are concerned there is an idea that developed in my mind as I was busy with this research. This idea developed based on the stories that the seafarers shared with me in which the theme emerged that weather is one of the biggest reasons that their work is so dangerous. As many of us know predictions are that climate change will cause extreme weather conditions to occur more often. As Friedman (2009:173) asserted this change will not only be about ~~global warming~~+but rather about ~~global weirding~~+, because the weather will become unpredictable, strange and extreme. The possible impact of this on seafarers might become a very important

subject of research in this field. When global weirding starts to happen, seafarers' lives are going to get radically more dangerous.

At the present, though, the biggest concern as far as dangers are concerned is piracy. It is hardly necessary to mention it here, but research is needed in order to find solutions to this problem. More is needed and what exactly this more needs to be investigated.

On the topic of multi-religious and multicultural issues an area of research that can be explored is the question as to which religions and cultures are more likely to work together well than others; for instance as was the case with Ivan from Bulgaria who did not seem to get along with someone from the Moslem faith. He explained to me once how Eastern Orthodox Bulgarians had been oppressed by Islamic Turks for many years and this might be behind his intense feelings. Surprisingly, though, more often than not it seems that in general all combinations of religions work well, but not all cultures or nationalities. As an example I can again refer to Ivan whose Bulgarian culture clashed with Zulu culture. In further research this might be an important topic to explore as this is also to the benefit of the owners. Where crew work together well the ship is safer and more productive.

As far as justice issues are concerned there should be awareness that this is not only the work of the unions but also the responsibility of the seafarers' mission. Research can centre on the question of what someone from the seafarers' mission can do in cases where a union, for some reason, cannot help. There is sometimes a tendency to become relaxed about justice issues because there is a feeling that a representative of a union can handle it. Our role has become one of calling a union representative and then to proceed to the next ship. When situations become complicated this approach does not work and more research about situations like this can be very helpful. Chaplains need to be more empowered so that we can empower seafarers more effectively.

Another area of research can be on how victims tend to be blamed. Here an interdisciplinary approach can be very helpful as the psychology of this phenomenon can help to create a better understanding as to why this happens. Knowing that this can happen can help chaplains and people from unions to avoid this mistake.

Almost needless to say, another area of research remains the complicated nature of the circumstances in which fishers find themselves in. Much research has been done, but as this industry is riddled with crime against fishers there are still more questions than answers. Possible solutions that can be explored are whether it is possible to have a union that can specialise on justice for fishers. Another question that can be investigated is the responsibility of the country in which port a fishing vessel comes to discharge. What I mean by this is that South Africa is a country that puts a lot of emphasis on human rights, but why does it not extend to the people who visit our ports? Why can our laws not protect seafarers when crimes are committed in our countriesq ports? Why do the police not arrest a captain who is accused of causing the death of a seafarer due to his negligence? The country who does business with a ship should share in the responsibility that the seafarers on board that ship should be treated with dignity. How this idea can be implemented is of course a question and that is why more investigation is needed. It is urgent that the fishers should at least receive the same amount of protection as the fish (cf Tronche 2008:382).

In general the research that is done on these justice issues should concentrate on how to bring together the reality that on the one hand, as Stevenson said: %Seafarers enjoy more legal rights than any other class of worker...+, and on the other hand there is still a lot of abuse on ships.

An important theme that is part of the life of seafarers is that the captain and other officers are under a lot of pressure from the company. This pressure trickles down to the rest of the crew. The reason for this increased pressure is partly because of the reduction in crew sizes. There is a need to investigate how the captain can be protected from being overstressed and over fatigued. Solutions to this will be to the

benefit of the whole industry.

Possible research on the issue of female seafarers can focus on things such as how to break down negative concepts that male seafarers might have about them entering this profession. On the other hand an investigation can also focus on the social dynamics on the ship when there is a female seafarer on board and on how she impacts it in a positive and negative way.

Looking back over family issues I cannot help but feel a bit pessimistic about it, especially as far as marriage is concerned. Here research done with an interdisciplinary approach can be of great help. Disciplines such as systemic family therapy might be a helpful conversational partner. In my transversal interdisciplinary conversation with this discipline we focussed largely on problems. Maybe research by means of a transversal discussion focusing on solutions can be of great help.

More research is needed concerning the identity that the seafarers' mission has amongst seafarers. We are in the first place involved with seafarers in order to participate in the *Missio Dei*. What might even be helpful is to do research on the concept in marketing that has to do with a company's corporate image, another possible interdisciplinary investigation. Our corporate image seems to be distorted amongst the seafarers. That being said, I think the change should firstly come from us in the seafarers' mission so that we can realise that our involvement with seafarers has to do with the *Missio Dei* in the first place. How this could be done can also serve as a field of further investigation.

Another aspect concerning the seafarers' mission that can be looked into is that seafarers could sail for many years and not have much experience of the seafarers' mission. For years some will not visit a seafarers' centre or receive a visit from a chaplain. Research as to how we can have more of a presence among seafarers can be of great help to the ministry.

The seafarers-centred approach suggested by someone like Mooney (2005) is an approach I am in agreement with, but it is not widely implemented yet. Martin Otto's (2002; 2007) books gave the impression that he is already successful in empowering seafarers to become partners in the ministry. So, firstly more research is needed in order for this seafarers-centred approach to become more widely implemented and secondly one should take note of places where this approach has already been successful.

### **6.7 A weakness?**

As I stated before there was much more that could be done to enrich the research narrative. However there is one specific (possible) weakness that I would like to highlight here. I am referring to my relationship with my epistemologies. Many times there was tension between some aspects of my epistemologies and my personal point of view. For this reason I only agreed with social constructionism, the narrative approach and postfoundationalism as far as certain aspects were concerned.

Social constructionism and the narrative approach are non-theological disciplines and therefore the only time that God will be of relevance in their thoughts will be as part of a social construction or if a client in a therapeutic situation, for instance, includes something about God in their narratives. To take Jesus Christ seriously as a co-constructor of our social realities would be unthinkable except on the level of a symbol or a metaphor. In the postfoundationalist theology of Van Huyssteen I disagreed with the vagueness with which Van Huyssteen talked about God and his theological commitments (cf Van Huyssteen 2005:122; Van Huyssteen 2008:515; Peterson 2008:470).

Another point of concern for me about Van Huyssteen's approach was whether he really succeeds in avoiding relativism on the one hand and foundationalism on the other. To evaluate whether he does was not part of the scope of this research and so I could not really enter into a discussion about it. He wants to move beyond the local, but is an interdisciplinary conversation not actually simply a bigger local?

So there was tension between me and my epistemologies as far as certain aspects were concerned. However, the way I see it there were many transversal points of connection between me and my epistemologies and for this reason I could make use of them. They made me aware of the embedded nature of our existence. I felt drawn to the colourful way in which the narrative approach sees research: people are more than numbers and their opinions and view of the world, however strange and weird, is important. I agreed with the respect with which the co-researchers are approached and it was exciting to see research as the social construction of something new that can lead to empowerment and emancipation.

There was a tension, but I hope it was a creative one.

## **6.8 The End**

At the ending of this hermeneutical adventure I am looking back. It is true that it is not easy to say where a story ends but it is also difficult to say where it began. But, if I had to identify a beginning it was in Richards Bay. There I started to visit ships, got to know seafarers, the seafarers mission, the seafarers centre and ship visiting. This is where I started to participate in the action, where I got more and more background and where this process started to develop while I was making field notes.

I remember the first time I learned how out of place seafarers sometimes feel while they are with their own families. It was in Richards Bay coal terminal on a ship with a captain from India. Later on in Durban this theme developed further in much more detail through John, Noel and Ivan. Based on their local contextual experiences the research moved further and explored this in a transversal interdisciplinary discussion with systemic family therapy. This theme was also developed further through the participation of some of my colleagues. The end result was a complex and thick understanding on this theme.

In Richards Bay I also learned a lot about the ministry and the opportunities that there are to reach people with God's story. Before I started this ministry I think that I gave away maybe two Bibles to two other people. After starting to participate in the *Missio Dei* in this particular way, I have lost count of the amount of Bibles I had the opportunity of handing out. I remember especially one of these, the one I gave to Yu to whom I referred to at the beginning in order to illustrate something of what seafarers' mission is about by means of using a concrete example.

I am not exactly sure how long after I gave him the Chinese Bible; I guess it was about a year and a half later, that Yu's ship visited Richards Bay again. This time he was the captain, but then I was living in Durban. Fortunately he met one of my colleagues, Jaco Dreyer, and told him what had happened after their ship had left Richards Bay. He said he decided that yes, this story about Jesus is the truth. He also told one of his shipmates about it and he also accepted it as true. Then after his contract he went home to his village and he witnessed to his wife about it. She also believed. She went on to tell the people in their village and at the time his ship came back to Richards Bay there was a Christian community of about one hundred people. This type of response suggests to me that truly this is not in the first place the church or an organisation's mission. This is God's mission and ministry.

This research was not about practical theology referring to seafarers' lives and circumstances, but it was a practical theology growing out of specific seafarers' lives and circumstances (cf Müller 2004:296). It was a narrative hermeneutical adventure where I attempted to contextually and socially construct an understanding guided by the ABDCE formula. Through being involved with the action, for instance by doing ship visits, the background was expanded and I also started to orientate myself concerning my epistemological and theological positions. It was important to state my preconceived ideas because this research was not done from a disinterested stance, but it was motivated by missiological and pastoral concerns and guided by certain epistemological assumptions. The researcher was not seen as an objective spectator, but as someone who was part of the action (Müller et al 2001:81). Instead of striving for



objectivity it was actually important to have compassion and empathy for my co-researchers/characters (Müller 2001:68), and so things were possible to develop and to come together in the climax through staying with my main characters and through having compassion and empathy for them and their stories.

Gerkin (1986:5) said that without stories life would be fragmented and disconnected. Through the stories of the co-researchers, the stories with which they lived and prevented life from being fragmented and disconnected, meaning and understanding were possible to emerge and a new research story was able to be socially constructed. The point was to arrive at an understanding that was not there before, but through a social process an understanding was co-constructed.

The hope is that this new research story that was constructed will in some way lead to the emancipation and empowerment of seafarers (cf Müller 2003:14). This research story had developed similar to the development of a Polaroid picture (cf Ann Lamott in Müller 2001:67). The aim was that this picture should be colourful and that it should contribute to the existing research as well as help to stimulate further research narratives.

This picture was about a lot of things, but I hope especially that it was evident that God was part of this whole picture and that the idea that seafarers' mission participates in the *Missio Dei* was present throughout it. John Green, the director of development from the AOS said: "Our chaplains and ship visitors are the human face of shipping" (*Nautilus International Telegraph* April 2011:3). This is our aim, but also more than this. May we also show seafarers the face of God who loves and cares for them.

According to Müller (2005:73) practical theology happens where there is a reflection on practice out of the perspective of the experience of the presence of God. This definition implies that God is present and that we can have an experience of this, even if we are limited and our language through which we express this is inadequate. The belief in Christian practical theology is that the most important place where there is an

experience of the presence of God is through the particular person of Jesus Christ and his continued presence through the Holy Spirit. In this light, out of this perspective there has been a reflection on practice. This reflection was not always in a systematic way and many times it was in the form of practical suggestions (cf Alastair Campbell in Van der Westhuizen 2010). It was not important that these practical suggestions had to be part of a bigger system or based on a model. What did matter was that they had to be developed out of the understanding that grew out of a particular context with the hope that it might even be to the benefit of seafarers who were not themselves part of this context.

In this research I did not want to be vague as one of the key attributes of Van Huyssteen's postfoundationalism is to take the embeddedness of our reality seriously. Through the narratives of John, Jonathan, Mohammed, Ivan, Noel and Eric I tried to be specific because to speak of just any man is to speak of no man at all. In the beginning and the end I also referred to Yu, a specific person who came into contact with a specific Person, Jesus Christ. Throughout the research I tried to keep these two concrete contexts in communication with each other.

The seafarers' mission is a ministry which participates in God's mission to all the nations in a very special and unique way. People in this ministry always point out how convenient our mission is. Instead of us going to the nations the nations are coming to us. In one hour you can visit a ship with Ukrainians and Russians, go to the next one with Indians, another with Chinese and end up drinking coffee with Filipinos sailing with German officers. Just in one hour you can have contact with so many nations and, although there are numerous obstacles, there are also many opportunities to reach out and show them that God is a God who is love. God is a God who is not only a social construct, but a God who transforms our constructs through God's Word and Holy Spirit. May it be that the seafarers' mission might be a transforming mission so that seafarers' lives will be touched, changed, blessed and enriched through Jesus Christ, whose mission it is in the first place and who is also the Narrator and Constructor of the most empowering and emancipating Story. Like Pi in Martel's (2008) novel said: Our religion

has one Story, and to it we come back again and again, over and over. It is story enough for us.