



CHAPTER 3

STORIES OF YOUNG ADULT CHRISTIANS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Within this chapter, the interpreted experiences of young adult Christians with non-Christian family members will be described and developed. For a more effective representation of these works, I will subdivide the present chapter into two sections, entitled ‘Let’s start telling the story!’ and ‘Giving voice!’.

In the first part of ‘Let’s start telling the story!’, the interpreted experiences of the co-researchers in the specific context will be described. Within narrative research, the stories of people’s experiences comprise the action to be researched. Müller *et al.* (2001:79) suggest representing the story of the action in the very first step of narrative research and add that the narrative researcher focuses on the stories that are told about the action, and not the acts or actions within this phase.

The action includes something more than merely problematic stories of the co-researchers. To focus on the story of the action in the very first step of the research enables people to shift their concern regarding the problematic stories to the larger frame of the story with respect to that which is currently happening. The shifting of our concern can help us to perceive the problem differently and can open a space for seeking possibilities to create more satisfying stories in the future.

The next phase of ‘Giving voice!’ allows for the development of the research plot by



attending to the interpreted experiences of the co-researchers. Müller *et al.* (2001:84) introduced ‘the metaphor of the Polaroid’, used by Lamott (1995:39), to interpret the story developing within a narrative research work. After taking the picture with the Polaroid camera at a specific time, we need to wait for a while to obtain a clear photograph from the film. At first, we cannot fully see the picture on the film, but as time passes, it becomes clear. We need to wait patiently, with a sense of curiosity, while the beautiful photo emerges. Once the specific experiences are interpreted by the co-researchers, the researcher should wait until a clear picture develops. After waiting, the researcher can recognize how and why co-researchers gave their interpretations to their events.

3.2 LET’S START TELLING THE STORY!

The story of the action is about the NOW of the story. (Müller *et al.* 2001:79) Müller *et al.* (20001:80) explains this as follows:

The now is never fixed and it never acts as a given or even as a curse. In the narrative approach the now is action, and therefore dynamic in nature. To take the action seriously and to have it told is to open up a possibility, to create a new now for tomorrow.

People live in the now which can alter during the passage of time. Nobody can predict the future, thus, the now can always include possibilities for change.

When the individual person gives interpretations to experiences of the now, he/she forms his/her identity from these interpretations. The personal identities are



continually been constructed and revised (Moen 2006:5). Bruner (1991:6) avers that interpretation on the particular happenings of people is “... their vehicle rather than their destination”. The vehicle can reveal the taste or inclination of the person in it while the person can alter the vehicle in order to reach his/her final destination if necessary.

In the beginning of any research, the researcher needs to seriously focus on the co-researcher’s interpretations of their experiences in order to understand what is happening. After gaining an understanding, the researcher and co-researchers can recognise how the interpretations of the now of the story are connected with the past and the traditions. This process will open space to interpret the experiences of the co-researchers differently for the development of more satisfying stories of the future.

In order to focus on the now of the story, the researcher needs to attend to the co-researchers’ interpretations carefully. Müller *et al.* (2001:86) suggest that the attitude of the researcher in this stage should be like the assistance of someone who is writing an autobiography. To more effectively assist the co-researchers, the researcher needs to have compassion for the co-researchers and their perspectives. Co-researchers are not objects to be researched, but active participants (Müller *et al.* 2001:86). Co-researchers are professional in their lives, thus we can gain a deeper and clearer understanding of interpreted experiences from their way of creating their own order so as to offer interpretations with regards to the events that happen to them. Therefore, the researcher should respect the co-researchers’ manner of constructing meaning and analyze how this is accomplished (Riessman 1993:4).



Within the present chapter, co-researchers' interpreted experiences will be described from their point of view. To start telling the stories, I asked my co-researchers about the difficulties they experienced as a person with non-Christian family members. In their describing these difficulties, I prompted them to tell the stories connected with the problematic ones. I expect that the connected stories will lead to a deeper understanding of the problematic stories. The telling of the stories took place mainly in individual interviews while a few group sessions were conducted in which we listened to and reflected on the stories of each other.

After the description of the now of the story, I will try to describe the story of the background of the co-researchers. "The action in the now is played within a background that must be pictured, but this background is alive with associations and connotations of the past" (Müller *et al.* 2001:83). The story of the background not only concerns information about the co-researchers but also the story of the past. In order to understand the story of the now, we should revisit the rooms of the background that are connected with the past as well as the influence of the story of the past on that of the now. Furthermore, the description of the story of the background can form a starting point for the developing story. In the connection between the story of the now and that of the past, we could begin to recognise influences upon the problematic stories and this might stimulate the development process of the story.

In a few of the group sessions conducted between the individual interviews in order to reflect on each other's stories, we also discussed how we could reflect more effectively on these stories in a manner that would lead to a more active story



development. All of us (the co-researchers and I) agreed to create a secure website on which co-researchers would write their stories, reflect on the stories of the others, and also pose questions to all the members in order to gain a more in depth understanding. In the web-activity, I suggested that they begin by telling their religious history, such as ‘when and how did you become a Christian?’ My intention was that co-researchers should shift their concern from the problematic stories so as to broaden their life stories through answering this question. I hoped that co-researchers could have opportunities to see their problematic stories differently by thinking through the story of the past which could be connected with the problematic stories. In fact, by telling the story of the past, co-researchers were encouraged to develop their stories spontaneously, and so many stories of each co-researcher could be listened to.

In order to represent co-researchers’ stories in the present thesis, I will employ the pseudonyms they used as an ID on the website for the sake of their privacy.

The interviews and web narratives have been translated literally from Korean and, in order to preserve the colloquial flavour, only light editing of the English has been undertaken.

3.2.1 Story teller 1 (Happy)

3.2.1.1 The story of Happy (H)



- R**⁹: Can you tell me about your difficulties as a person who has non-Christian family members?
- H**¹⁰: Well... Everything is difficult for me. To go to the church as such is difficult.
- R**: Can you explain a bit more about the difficulty?
- H**: There is an old saying, 家和萬事成¹¹. Before going [to] the church, I usually have some troubles with my father, thus, I cannot be comfortable in the church.
- R**: What makes you uncomfortable in the church?
- H**: Because of the trouble with father at home, the uncomfortable feeling influences me even in the church. I usually try to overcome the uncomfortable feeling in the church, but it is difficult. The trouble with my father can be expected when I return home. Thus, if the time to come back home is delayed by the church, it is a great strain on me.
- R**: Have you tried to tell about your difficulties at home to any member of the church?
- H**: Yes, I have but I am not happy with it. Sometimes, I need some help but it is quite a difficult problem to share easily. Most people seem to lack understanding about this kind of difficulty. Moreover, I do not want to be treated like a pitiful person because of my specific background.
- R**: For what reasons do you have trouble with your father?
- H**: The main issue of the trouble with him is about my attending the church. My sister sometimes goes to the church, but not often, thus she does not experience

⁹ I will refer to ‘R’ instead of ‘researcher’ for the sake of convenience in the presentation of the interview.

¹⁰ I will use only the initial of the co-researcher’s fictitious name for the sake of convenience in the presentation of the interview.

¹¹ ‘Ga-Hwa-Man-Sa-Sung’: When one’s home is happy, all goes well.



major trouble with her father and brother. In contrast, my father and elder brother think that I attend the church too often.

R: Can you tell me how your father prevents your attending the church?

H: Do you know the most effective threat of parents for their children who are still students? It is money. Father does not give enough money to me because of attending the church, thus sometimes I do not have travelling expenses to go to the church. This is a sensitive, but materialistic problem for me. Actually, I have had some experiences when I could not go to the church because of the money. One day, I went to the church on foot from my house. It took about two hours. On the way, I felt huge sadness and depression. Why do I have this difficult situation to have faith? Why only me? Why does my father not trust me? Why does my father treat me like this? These kinds of questions make me much more depressed.

I also have so many troubles because of father's indirect oppressions. For instance, in the cases of not receiving a good school report and being absent from a family meeting (eating out with family or visiting relative's house...). I think this is not connected with my attending the church, but my father always blames me in these cases and ascribes all the basic factors to the church.

R: When your father blames you, what does he say?

H: He usually worries about my becoming a religiously fanatical person. He thinks that to go to the church too often can spoil people negatively.

R: From where does the negative thinking of your father come?

H: I think that father sometimes heard about negative aspects from relatives, and



saw some bad news, which is connected with Christians, in the public media.

R: Why do your relatives tell the negative aspects of Christianity to your father?

H: They also do not like my faith as a Christian, thus in the family meeting where I am absent they usually express displeasure and start blaming Christianity.

R: What is the attitude of other family members to your Christian faith?

B: My younger sister sometimes goes to the church. I am not sure if she has a close relationship with God, but she seems to be seen as not serious about Christian faith. When I am in trouble with father, she just keeps silence. My elder brother also has no religion, like father, thus he represents his discontent about my Christian faith badly. From time to time, he slaps me to interrupt my faith life.

R: What does your brother say about your faith life?

B: He also has the same reasons as father. I think that he exerts his authority as an elder brother. He had attended church but he gave up going there very soon. He sometimes tells me, 'I know how you feel these days. I also had gone to the church, but gave up going there for the sake of our family. I think that you also can do something for the peace of our family.'

R: How do you feel about your elder brother's words?

B: I do not agree with his opinion. I cannot give up my faith and I think that this is my way to love the family. I think that if I love my family sincerely I should pray for them and evangelise them. I would like to enjoy happiness and goodness in the presence of God with my family.

3.2.1.2 Happy's story of the past



Happy is twenty-six years old, male, unmarried, a university student, and still dependent on his father. He has a father, elder brother, and younger sister. His father and elder brother practise no religion while his younger sister is a Christian. His mother passed away while he was in high school; she too did not allow him to hold the Christian faith. At the present time, Happy is a cell leader and worship leader in the church.

I translated his document in which he described his religious history on the website and summarise it in order to represent it here.

I started attending the church when I was about fifteen years old. One of my friends suggested going to the church, and I just followed the friend to be with him. I enjoyed his company, thus in the beginning I attended for the simple reason of 'being with a friend!'. At that time, the church was the place for meeting people, like a general social group. I just enjoyed playing basketball and soccer after worship time, and the activity is the main reason for attending the church. Also, my parents did not interrupt my church activity, but sometimes my mother complained about my absence on Sundays.

In the relationship with friends of the church and in my attendance of worship services and bible study groups, I became aware of the reality of God and gradually began to accept God as my lord. Meanwhile, I recognised my divided life between the church and the family. When I am



in the church, I am just a normal Christian in the company of God, but at home I was just a scared person who is afraid of speaking about God. It was just like living in two worlds and this made me feel guilty. To overcome this divide in my life, I tried to continue my faith life in the home as well. I started to pray, to read the bible, to listen to the worship songs, and to have some time with God, even at home. This changed attitude made other family members feel uncomfortable. They sometimes complained about that and criticised my behaviour. On those occasions, I was easily dispirited.

When I was eighteen years old, my mother passed away suddenly. I felt disordered and had doubts in this difficult situation. ‘Why does this thing happen to me?’ ‘What can I do now?’... Moreover, to add to this difficult incident, we moved house to a place far from the church I attended. It took about one hour by the bus. In all these difficult situations, I seemed to feel as though I became far from my God. The feeling made me more painful. Within the painful times, God accompanied and consoled me. One day, God provided the transit fare for me who had no money for going to the church. On the long way to and from the church, God was my friend who encouraged me and I felt that His love was warmer than my mother’s. These wonderful experiences with God in the painful times did not allow me to go far from God, and until now it has been the prime motivator for me to be with God joyfully.

3.2.1.3 Reflection on the journey with Happy



Happy is seriously struggling with his family because of his Christian faith. He feels that he cannot enjoy his natural rights that he could possess as a member of the family. For instance, he is treated like a sinner in his family because he does not follow his father's direction prohibiting him from going to church. As I explained in chapter 1, the unique feature of the Korean family is affected by Confucianism. The Korean family places a high value on the harmony within the family and on obedience to the family head (mainly the father). Therefore, to maintain one's individual religion, which is definitely different from that of the other family members and is prohibited by the head of the family, can destroy the harmony within it. This can pose a serious problem for all the family members. His family members seem to think that he is the cause of the family trouble because of disobeying his father's instruction not to attend the church. They easily criticise Happy's attendance at church, interrupt his religious life and treat him badly at home. This exacerbates Happy's difficulties. During his telling the stories, I could sometimes see tears on his cheeks and hear his voice shaking; I could feel the depth of his sorrow.

Happy experiences some difficulties in the church as well. He seems to think that the church members cannot adequately understand his difficult situation at home, thus he hesitates to share his problem and ask for help from the church members. Actually, he was the most sensitive person among the participants in our web-activity. He seemed to feel uncomfortable when speaking of his family difficulties with other people at this stage. Through the continued story-developing conversations, I could recognise the reasons for his feeling of discomfort when telling his painful stories to other people.



Moreover, he perfectly expressed the conflict between two distinctly different worlds, the church and the family; the Christian and anti-Christian worlds. He explained that living in the two worlds made him more depressed and sorrowful. The remaining three co-researchers also spoke about the same problems and agreed with his perception of the dissension between two worlds. I suggest that because of the contrast of two worlds, they could recognise their uncomfortable and painful environments more easily than other Christians who have Christian family members.

3.2.2 Story teller 2 (Agape)

3.2.2.1 The story of Agape (A)

R: What is your concern these days as a person who has a non-Christian family?

A: These days, my parents' opposition against my Christian faith has been reduced, but they still complain about my going to the church. They look like people who live in a different world from me, thus I feel isolation in the family. Moreover, my thinking that 'there is nobody who can understand me' makes me feel lonely.

R: Can you tell me in detail about your parent's attitude to you?

A: Not only my parents but also my two sisters have already made a decision about me as 'The Church Girl'. They usually call me that when I am in trouble with my mother because of attending the church. For them I am a really strange and hardly understandable child and belong to the church, not the family. They even do not want to have general conversations with me.



R: How do you feel in the situation of your family?

A: I feel injustice and thanksgiving at the same time. Because of my family's attitude to me, I feel injustice and depression but I cannot ask for some help from anybody. On the contrary, when I recognise God's great plan for me, I can give thanks to my Lord.

R: Have you tried to overcome those difficulties in your family?

A: Yes, I have. For instance, I think that to complain about their unfair attitude to me and/or to create another difficulty with them may be another reason to blame Christianity. Also, I think that God does not want that kind of trouble with my family members. Thus, I am trying to be a good model as the one Christian in the family. I am trying not to complain about anything at home, to be a good daughter, to do the best in everything and follow my parents' instruction nicely except for going to the church, and so on.

R: Where did you get those ideas?

A: I heard some sermons from the church and several testimonies which are connected with my difficulties.

R: Can you tell me the content that you heard?

A: For the duty of the Christian regarding the non-Christian, the Christian should do well by showing a good model to the non-Christian. Some Christians witnessed to their experiences: such as when they have endured all difficulties for Jesus, finally all their family members are suddenly converted. I also heard that when somebody refuses to attend the ancestral rites and declares God's lordship loudly in front of their family, there was an amazing miracle in which all the family members met God and they turned to Christianity. Thus, sometimes I felt that I also should act somewhat bravely to make big changes



in my family.

R: What is your brave action for your family? Not complaining about anything and being a good girl for your parents? Or doing some kind of brave actions to persuade your family members to be a Christian?

A: Both of them. I usually obey my parent's directions and try to be a good daughter, but about my faith as a Christian I do not make any compromise.

R: Have you really acted like that, bravely?

A: Yes, I have (smiling). I have tried to express my faith and my love for God in very unsuitable situations to act bravely.

R: Did it work on your family?

A: No. it did not work. My parents regarded me as a mad girl (smiling again).

R: Why are you smiling?

A: I think that I was too young to think and to act rationally. I was under the influence of a passing emotion.

R: Do you want to act bravely again?

A: No, I do not want.

R: So, what do you do as regards keeping your faith as a Christian at home these days?

A: I am trying to act more nicely than the usual girl who is my age, but do not make any compromise about my parent's instructions to interrupt the attending of the church and keeping my Christian faith life.

R: How successful was your effort to do everything nicely and to try being a good daughter? Did it work?

A: At first it seemed to be effective, but with the lapse of time it has gradually become difficult to be patient.



- R:** Can you tell me a bit more about your difficulties?
- A:** My parents' asking about me has been getting more demanding. They want many more things from me than from my sisters. It is becoming a big burden for me.
- R:** Do you still think that your efforts to act like a nice daughter are still effective for you and your parents?
- A:** No. These days, I feel I should act differently. I think that I am already an adult, but I am still dependent upon my parents financially. Though I am a different person from previously, my parents still treat me and interrupt my faith life just the same as before. I think that this is the result of my unconditional endurance.
- R:** How do your parents interrupt your faith life in spite of your efforts to be a good daughter until now?
- A:** They still use my faith as a weapon to threaten me. If they find anything bad in my attitude at home, they still threaten to refuse permission to attend the church.

3.2.2.2 Agape's story of the past

Agape is a twenty-five year old woman. She has a mother, father, and two older sisters all of whom are not Christian and do not follow any religion, but her father tends to have a Buddhist propensity because most of his relatives are Buddhist. He also grew up under that influence. Agape is a cell group leader in her church, and is studying theology at present.

Below is the summary of Agape's story of her past.

I remember that I started going to the church when I was about ten years old. One of my closest friends was a Christian. I went to the church at her invitation. During that time, I was not a good student. I enjoyed playing with friends much more than studying. Strangely, I woke up early in the morning, thus I could attend Sunday services in the church. My mother was pleased about my change because she thought the church was making her daughter more diligent.

My early teenager years were not normal. I enjoyed being with friends much more, and loitered outside with these friends. Moreover, the relationship between my mother and father was bad. They fought with each other often, sometimes my mother left home because of the trouble with my father. The environment of my family made me more and more depressed and unstable. I remember that I sometimes sobbed in bed before going to sleep. I still attended the church, but it did not affect my life. The church was just a place to be with friends.

In those days, I met with Jesus and was born again through the acceptance of Ephesians 2:8~9 in a small bible group. From that time on, I was no longer just a spectator during the worship time. The relationship with God was extremely important for me. I did not want to lose it, thus I held onto God desperately. I started to be an enthusiastic follower of God. Unfortunately, my parents still fought badly and it made our family



insecure. When I was at home, it was like war, thus I began to enjoy being at the church and felt some kind of security at the church. I thought that the church is the place in which God stayed longer and more often than in my home. For this reason, I spent more and more times at the church. I guess that my dichotomous thinking that divides my life as the church and the home comes from that time.

With my changed attitude about the church, my parents began to interrupt my faith life. I was not comfortable at home. Especially, my mother seriously criticised me. Whenever she saw me, she constantly shouted and criticised me and the church such as; ‘If you love being in the church, just go out from my house!’, ‘Does your church feed and clothe you?’, ‘Does your church teach you to disobey your parents?’ All those words hurt me very much, but I could not give up my faith and love for God.

3.2.2.3 Reflection on the journey with Agape

Agape told about the difficulties mainly connected with her family. She feels some kind of isolation at home, and she pointed to the reason being the different world views of her and the other family members. This is similar to Happy’s story.

She also commented about her response in overcoming the isolation within her family. She tried to be a good daughter so as to recompense them for her having her own faith, which causes much trouble in the family, and sometimes she tried to act bravely to express her faith to her family.



In particular, she told an interesting story of how she listened to the successful and special witnessing of some other Christians through the sermon or tape recorder. She envied their successful stories; thus, she also tried to act like them. Through this story, I could perceive her willingness to share good things as a Christian with her family and love for her family. Her interpretation of the story is that it was brave but childish behaviour. When she looks back at herself during the time that she focused on the relationship with God too much, she feels that she misunderstood what good faith is about. She thought that when she heard words such as ‘mad about God’ from her family, when she proclaimed God’s presence at any time, in any place, and when she endured all the difficulties in the family without any complaining, such behaviour could represent great faith in God. Currently, she thinks about equilibrium between love for God and care for the family.

She also worried about her unfamiliar feelings with respect to maintaining her faith life which can be done at home privately, such as reading bible, singing a hymn, thinking about private events from a Christian perspective, getting advice for private problems, and so on. Because of these concerns, she is also concerned about her marital life in the future. She said that she really wants to have a beautiful Christian family, but it seems to be difficult because of her ignorance about how to act as a Christian at home and how to teach the children as a Christian mother. I think that she lacks the knowledge of how and what she can do for her individual faith life at home. Generally, in the Christian family, children can learn about faith from their parents in a natural manner, but in the case of Agape, to find examples may be difficult. Therefore, I suggest that she may tend to focus on the sermon and other



open Christian sources more than other Christians with Christian family members.

3.2.3 Story teller 3 (Green Temptation)

3.2.3.1 The story of Green Temptation (G)

R: Have you experienced any difficulties in your faith life in respect of your non-Christian family?

G: Not so much. These days my mother is starting to permit my individual faith life as a Christian. She does not interrupt going to the church. Nevertheless I feel envy of other Christians who have Christian family.

R: About what do you feel envy?

G: I also want to have a service time at home with family, to enjoy faith life with my brother, and to share all the goodness in the presence of God with them but those are impossible at the moment. Because of these reasons sometimes I am disappointed.

R: If your family turn to Christianity, how would you feel?

G: I think that everything will be good.

R: Can you tell me in detail about the good thing?

G: Um... Especially, when my faith is weakened my parents can support me as a Christian.

R: What does weakened faith mean?

G: Sometimes when I feel some difficulties in my life such as worries about the future, but at times I forget to pray for it. At that time, if my parents were Christian they could pray for me and advise me in a Christian perspective. I



think that my faith could be stronger through those supports from Christian parents.

R: Have you tried to evangelise your family?

G: Yes, I have. But they have not accepted Christianity. It makes me sad. I really want to share all the goodness and great love of God with my family.

3.2.3.2 Green Temptation's story of the past

Green temptation is a twenty year old female university student. She has a mother, father, and younger brother. Her father and younger brother do not follow any religion while her mother is a Buddhist. Her mother sometimes goes to the Buddhist temple and from there she receives some directions for the sake of her family but is not such an enthusiastic follower.

I summarise her story of the past below.

I cannot remember when I started attending the church. It would be from about ten years old. My mother sent me to the church and there I enjoyed playing with friends and eating food and receiving the Christmas presents the church supplied. Recently my mother said that she sent me to the church with some offerings. I think that she thought that Christianity is a religion for people in need of good influence. Thus, she sent me to the church even though she is not a Christian.

At that time, I just attended the church to play with friends and my faith



was not serious. When we moved to a home far away I stopped attending the church. In my fifteenth year, I accidentally damaged a friend's diary. I was really sorry about that and expected her to get angry. Strangely, she did not become angry and suggested that if I go to church with her, she would forgive my mistake. Thus, I went to the church with her on Sunday without any hesitation, and miraculously she led me to a church about which I was curious. When I sometimes passed by the church, I could hear some laughing sounds, a pretty song being sung, and happy talking. After all, I had attended the church for a longer time than the friend who led me to there.

In the church, I studied the Bible and understood the reality of God much more. Previously I thought that God was far away from me, but realised that God is always with me and in me. I was also aware of God's love for me and the answers to all my prayer. During that time, my family experienced some financial difficulties and I learnt to lean on God much more. From that time my mother started to interfere in my faith life. When I returned home late from church, mother treated me badly. She usually did not comment about my late homecoming, but she always expressed displeasure, only on Sundays. I really felt sore about my mother's changed attitude towards the church, but I did not want to stop going to church. I experienced difficulties between my mother and the church.

3.2.3.3 Reflection on the journey with Green Temptation



Green Temptation also experienced problems with her parents because of her Christian faith. Because of those difficult memories, she could easily demonstrate sympathy with other co-researchers. At present, her parents are beginning to allow her to follow an individual faith life as a Christian, but she is struggling with her willingness to evangelise her family. She wants to enjoy and share the goodness of the presence of God, but her family do not yet accept Christianity. Because of their different worldviews and different matters of interest, she feels some kind of isolation at home and realises the requirement to transmit the gospel to her family.

In the church, she expressed some envy towards Christian friends with Christian parents in the same church. When she sees the parents praying for their children in the church, she feels depressed. She wants to experience interest and love from her parents and feels sure that this could help her to establish her faith more fruitfully.

3.2.4 Story teller 4 (Blue Bell)

3.2.4.1 The story of Blue Bell (B)

R: Can you tell me about your difficulties as a Christian who have non-Christian family?

B: I do not have such big troubles with my parents because of the Christian faith. I have small troubles with my family.

R: What makes you feel that you have small difficulties with your family?

B: From other co-researchers' stories. I think that my trouble with my parents is not serious compared with theirs. When I was in high school, I sometimes



returned home late because of spending some time in the church. At that time, my father was upset about my late home coming from the church, thus he blamed me and the church, but that was all. He did not repeatedly interrupt my faith life.

R: Can you tell me more about your less serious troubles with your parent?

B: I am preparing to get a job. Sometimes, my father pushes me to study instead of going to the church. Father thinks that to go to the church is wasting time. My mother also express displeasure when I cannot be with the family over the weekend because of going to the church.

R: How do you feel about the negative attitude of your parents?

B: In fact, I am not seriously concerned about my parent's objections to my Christian faith. They are not Christian, thus they cannot understand me. However, when my sister takes part with my parents and blames me together with them, I am huffy about her strange behaviour. I cannot understand how she can do like that. She is also a Christian.

R: How does your family's attitude affect on your faith life?

B: These days, my father is quite sensitive about my study. He sometimes persuades me dexterously. He said that 'I do not want to interrupt your faith. After getting the job, you can go to the church again; thus you should do your best in your studies now.' Because of his persuasion, sometimes my determination is shaken.

R: What are you determined about?

B: Faith life such as attending the Bible study group, other activity groups in the church and some more worship time which makes my faith life more fruitful.

R: How do you know your determination for the faith life is shaken by your



father?

B: In fact, I tried to reduce attending those activities in the church, but I realised it was not a good decision for my faith. I think that if my parent were a Christian, I would not need to be in the confusion.

R: You said that your father focuses on your study much more these days, and you feel that he seems to persuade you about something dexterously. What does the word ‘dexterously’ mean? Do you think that your father has any intentions?

B: Yes, I think so. He seems to try to persuade me to interrupt my faith life and/or to make me stop attending church.

R: How did you recognise your father’s intentions?

B: I sometimes feel that his words may be right after a conversation with my father. Thus, occasionally I sometimes do not attend the worship time or bible meeting because I have more time to study, but I could realise that it is not effective for my study. Even though I can gain some more time for study from absence from church, I usually waste my time with something else. Therefore, I can see that the reason for lacking study time is not spending time in the church but managing my time.

R: Have you told your father this?

B: Yes, I have, but he did not agree about it. He still complains about my Christian faith.

3.2.4.2 Blue Bell’s story of the past

Blue Bell is a twenty-four year old female with a mother, father, two younger sisters,



and one younger brother. Her siblings attend the church at present, while her mother and father attended the church for a while, but do not attend any longer.

I summarise her written story of her past below.

My mother accompanied her mother to church before her marriage. She said that she was enthusiastic about attending church at that time. After my mother's marriage with my father, they continued to attend church for a while, but they suddenly stopped going there because of some disappointment in the church. They did not tell me about the problem in the church in detail, but they seemed very disappointed about the church. Anyway, they do not attend any church and do not follow any religion at the moment.

Sometimes the ancestral rites have been conducted in my home, and my mother usually bows down and invokes the ancestors' blessings in front of the table on which the food for the ancestors is set. Whenever I see the scene, I am afraid about the life that has parted me from God. Actually, I started going to the church with my mother when I was young. Sometimes I can remember that I sang a hymn sitting alongside my mother in the church. After my mother ceased attending the church, I continued until now. In the beginning of my faith life, I enjoyed listening to the sermons which have so many interesting stories about Jesus, in the Sunday-school. For me, God was a strong and faithful helper.



3.2.4.3 Reflection on the journey with Blue Bell

Blue Bell responded that she does not experience serious difficulties with her family with regards to maintaining her Christian faith. It seems to me that her parents display a more liberative attitude towards their children.

Blue Bell interpreted certain difficulties about maintaining her faith life as a person with non-Christian family members. She feels that her faith might be more easily weakened than that of other Christians because of her parent's interference in her faith life. Her parents allow her much more freedom with respect to her Christian faith life than the parents of the other co-researchers, but Blue Bell feels that her non-Christian parents are shaking her faith. She wants to be spiritually supported by her parents, like those of the other Christians with Christian parents. She mentioned that if her parents prayed for her and supported her spiritually, her faith in God might be better than it is now.

3.3 GIVING VOICE AND EMERGING TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATION

From the experiences interpreted by the said co-researchers, the story of the now can emerge. For the next stage, the researcher will develop this 'now' of the stories in collaboration with the co-researchers in order to gain a deeper understanding of the interpretations that the latter have given to their experiences. For effective

collaboration with them, the researcher needs to be interested in their interpretations from their perspectives (Müller 2005:10). Actually, the present stage entails giving a voice to the co-researchers to tell their stories more fully.

Bruner (1991:6, 7) points out two features of narrative, ‘Particularity’ and ‘Intentional state entailment’. He explains that people give interpretations to the particular events that occur to them so as to represent their intentional states, which are engaged with their beliefs, will, values, and so on. Thus, when the researcher focuses on the meanings and effects of the co-researchers’ interpretations, their intentional states can emerge. Van Huyssteen (1998a:7) also refers to the intended states as tradition(s) which support the interpretations that people accord to events. He comments that “... we relate to our worlds through interpreted experience. As such we have no standing ground, no place for evaluating, judging and enquiring, apart from that which is provided by the context of some specific tradition(s)”. Therefore, when the researcher focuses on the interpretations by the co-researchers and the meanings and effects of those interpretations, the story of the action will gain thicker understandings in which we can recognise traditions that influence the current interpretations of the last-mentioned.

Moreover, the intentional states (traditions of interpretation) cannot fully predict any acts of people in the future, but can show us how they interpret the events that happen. Bruner (1991:7) avers that: “... the intentional states in narrative never fully determine the course of events, since a character with particular intentional states might end up doing practically anything”. The now of the story has a deep connection with the past and gives effect to the future of the story at the same time.

Thus, we can to some degree expect the future of the story through the story of the now and the past within the presumption that the person holds the same tradition(s) of interpretation. However, the tradition(s) of interpretation is never fixed. It always holds the possibility of being altered by the time and context. Therefore, if we can discover a certain space to interpret the story of the now differently, our stories could possess potential possibilities to be changed for the future.

Müller *et al.* (2001:86) remark that the contribution of the researcher in the story developing process is “... to reflect, facilitate and wait until the plot emerges. It is more than just to be a scribe. It is like being the assistant for someone who is writing an autobiography.” The researcher attempts to reflect on the interpretations of the co-researchers in order to find meanings and effects and to attempt to collect those findings for a broader understanding of the story of the action. Hence, I have attempted to compile the different meanings and effects of the co-researchers’ interpretations through collaboration with them and to wait for the emerging plot. Thereafter, I expect that I and the co-researchers can recognise tradition(s) which influence the current interpretations of the latter regarding their experiences. Once the tradition(s) of interpretation is/are identified within the story developing process, co-researchers can recognise their problematic stories from a different angle which may lead them to opportunities to reinterpret their event with the aim of developing their preferred story of the future.

In order to develop the interpreted experiences, we mainly carried out conversations on the website – which I created for the more effective collaboration with and among

the co-researchers¹². We also conducted several individual as well as group interview sessions simultaneously with the web-activity in order to stimulate the active participation of the co-researchers in the web-activity and allow reflection on our progress.

The traditions of interpretation that were developed from the collaboration with the co-researchers are as follows;

- 1) 'The church does not understand me!'
- 2) 'Salvation of the family is my mission!'
- 3) 'We live in two worlds!'
- 4) To have non-Christian family means to have many disadvantages for my faith life.

I will describe the identified traditions of interpretation that emerged first and then relate how the tradition was developed from collaboration with the co-researchers.

3.3.1 'The church does not understand me!'

During collaboration with the co-researchers, a tradition of interpretation that frequently emerged was that people with Christian family members lack an understanding of those with non-Christian family members. This tradition of interpretation emerged mainly with respect to Happy and Agape. They felt that the

¹² See p. 51, 52 for more information about the web-activity.



lack of understanding towards them sometimes causes people to discriminate between the two groups.

I will represent the stories of Happy (H) and Bluebell (B) here in order to demonstrate how the tradition developed.

Happy's story

R: Have you ever told and/or been counselled about your difficulties in your family with other church members?

H: Yes, I have. It was not for help but for comforting my mind.

R: What is the meaning of your saying just for comforting your mind?

H: Most people show a very general response to my difficult situation. Such as “if you can overcome this difficult time, your family will be saved,” “do not worry about it too much. God loves you, thus he will help you....”. In fact, I know and also agree with their saying. It is really good words, but I already know it. I do not need that kind of advice. I need a person who can comfort me.

R: Do you think that the people respond to you by giving advice?

H: Yes. Even though they tried to support me, it cannot help me practically. Those words are too general and it means that they just respond generally without special attention to me.

R: Can you find any reason why the people react too generally about your situation?

H: They may not understand my situation properly and some people know that they cannot give any practical help to change my situation, thus they just



respond too generally about my asking.

R: Do you have any evidence of that?

H: Even though they know my difficult situation, they often misunderstand me. For instance, when I am absent from the worship time or group meetings of the church because of the conflict in the family, the church members tend to think that I am making excuses for myself.

R: How did you know that the church members think like that?

H: They easily say that “your faith is weakened these days!”, “you should overcome your difficulties and focus on your faith life much more. Then, God will save your family as well.” These sayings do not help me but rather hurt me. They do not understand how I feel deep pain about my family and how really this is a big burden in my faith life. Sometimes, I need to focus on the family rather than the church. That’s all. It does not represent weakness of my faith. I think that everyone sometimes acts like me, even if they have Christian family. When they have special events or some problems in their family, they also might be absent from the church activities. In this case, nobody thinks that they are excusing themselves.

Happy commented that he often faces a lack of understanding by church members with regards to his special family background which can cause discriminatory treatment within the church context. His interpretation was that church members tend to focus much more on people with Christian parents.

Bluebell’s story



- R:** You said that your father, especially, does not like your Christian faith. Can you tell me more about it?
- B:** My father usually says that to have Christian faith is meaningless. He thinks that to have a religion is fine, but to spend time for it is a meaningless waste.
- R:** How do you feel about your father's opinion?
- B:** When my father speaks like that, I have no response. If I respond to explore it, my father may think that I am a mad girl.
- R:** Have you ever tried to explore your faith?
- B:** Yes, I have. When I was in high school, I started to give a tithe to God. One day, my father found out and he was really upset about it and blamed the church. He blamed the church just like normal people who are anti-Christian. I tried to explain the meanings of tithe and God, but he did not agree with it.
- R:** How did you feel in this situation with your father?
- B:** I sometimes have similar troubles with my father these days as well. In the difficulties, I cannot find any answer as to how I can act and explain about God and my faith. I am in confusion and depressed.
- R:** Have you ever tried to get some help for the confusion and depression from any Christians in the church?
- B:** Yes, I have talked about this trouble with my father to other group leaders or friends several times, but I felt that they cannot understand my situation fully and my speaking is heard as being something like making excuses. I did not want to be shown as a weak person, thus, I do not speak of my troubles with my father any more.
- R:** Have you ever heard that you are making excuses or that you are a weak person from the church members?



B: No. I just felt it from their face and/or not good atmosphere when I talk about the trouble.

R: How do you recognise the church members' thinking from their face or the atmosphere?

B: I can just feel it. There is no sign of it practically, but I can feel it. In other words, I may want to be seen like a strong person who can manage all difficulties herself.

Bluebell also mentioned the lack of understanding of the church members concerning her specific family background; thus, she tends to avoid sharing her difficulties, even though she needs some help to receive some ideas and/or support regarding the difficulties with her father. Her interpretation was also that she could be viewed as a weak person who makes excuses when she speaks about her difficulties in the family.

Agape referred to discriminatory treatment among church members. This is the same opinion as that of Happy. For instance, a person who has Christian parents may enjoy special attention from the ministers of the church and can easily hold a major position (cell leaders, worship leaders, and so on) in the church. Agape said that "I have limitations to manage my time freely for a position in the church compared with other members, but it does not mean that I do not have the ability to take it [the position]. If church members consider my uneasy situation and if they have a deep understanding of me, I could fill the position beautifully."

Because of the lack of understanding of the church members and the discrimination within the church, the co-researchers seem to feel isolation and be easily depressed.



They also tend to repress speaking about their uneasy family background with other church members, which is likewise connected to their rejection of including other members who do have Christian relatives in our web-activity. In particular, Happy expressed a strong rejection in this regard. He said that the people who have Christian family members cannot fully understand the family background and pain of the co-researchers with respect to this, thus, it might disturb our feeling of security in conducting the conversations.

As the process of story developing progressed, co-researchers began to express their difficulties concerning their families to other church members. At the beginning of the research interview, they commonly said that they rarely speak of their difficult situations with other church members; however, they have evidenced some changes in this respect. Co-researchers sometimes expressed their difficult emotions, with regards to their families, to one other in the church¹³. They even discussed their difficulties with the family at a small group meeting as one of the topics. Agape (A) told me about her experience of the discussion within the small group meeting.

R: Can you tell me about your experience in the small group meeting?

A: Yes, I can. We told about our general personal faith life, and one co-researcher started to tell about our research work. From this point onwards the topic about problems of faith with regards to non-Christian family emerged for discussion.

R: What was the main concern in the discussion?

A: We mainly compared the positive and negative aspects of having Christian

¹³ The co-researchers are attending the same church. See p. 49.



family and having non-Christian family.

R: What was the reason for comparing these?

A: We, the co-researchers, started explaining our research work with you. Actually, we really feel proud and comfortable with this research. It gives us a really good time to think and to tell about our difficulties. In the discussion time, we tried to describe our troubles with our non-Christian family, and other members also stated their difficulties within their Christian family.

R: What was their story?

A: Well, it was just general things that they usually say.

R: What is the general talk about them?

A: Um... it is too general. They usually say that they also have difficulties with their Christian family members. For instance, their parents exert high pressure on them to attend the church. Sometimes they do not want to attend the church and the high pressure sometimes disturbs their faith life. Something like that...

R: I think that you seem to be uncomfortable with their opinion. Don't you agree with them?

A: Yes, I agree with them. But, I think that they are just complaining about their parents even though they have a really good background for their faith. They said that "I understand your situation and your difficulties, but..." again and again in every interpretation of our difficulties. I think that they really do not understand our difficulties.

R: What is your clue which indicates that they really do not understand people with non-Christian family members?

A: They did not try to understand us. They just focused on their difficulties. If



they really understood us, they might focus on our stories much more so as to gain a deeper understanding about our situation, but they did not.

R: How was your feeling concerning their reactions? Were you disappointed?

A: No, I was not disappointed. It was just a general response as usual. I have seen the response often. I know that people usually focus on their problems much more. But we tried to share our painful story with them. If they really understand us, they should focus on our stories much more. They seemed to think that our difficulties are just the same as theirs.

R: Do you think that your stories are more painful than theirs?

A: Yes, I think so.

R: Why are your stories more painful than theirs?

A: Their difficulties with their Christian family are not about losing faith, but ours are about losing faith and retaining it. If we cannot overcome these difficulties, we could lose our faith in God.

Agape thought that people with non-Christian family members face a more difficult situation with their parents than those with Christian family members. She heard about the negative aspects of having Christian relatives, but she thought that this was merely a complaint because such believers lack an understanding of living with a non-Christian family.

3.3.2 ‘Salvation of the family is my mission!’

The four co-researchers share a common interpretation with regards to this tradition of interpretation. They think that the most valuable expression of their faith for their



family is to evangelise their family members. This tradition of interpretation is connected with the co-researchers' unconditional self-sacrifice in their family. For the sake of their important mission in the family to spread the gospel, they try to endure all the pain caused by their family members because of their Christian faith.

Here are the stories of Agape (A) and Green Temptation (G).

Agape's story

R: Can you tell me about your painful story with your family?

A: I usually feel lonely at home in trying to keep my faith life. The most painful thing is the severance from the family. My family made a decision about me as "the church girl" and they just cut off conversation with me.

R: Have you ever tried to find any solutions to solve this problem with your family?

A: Yes, I have. I really have considered it seriously. I tried to find any answer that might give a solution for my lonely faith life at home by reading the Bible and religious books, listening to sermons, praying to God, and so on.

R: What solution have you found?

A: I have discovered my mission to evangelise my family from the Bible and sermons of the pastor.

R: Can you tell me in detail what you have learnt from it?

A: I have recognised that God wants the salvation of my family through me and this can offer the solution to all these troubles with my family. Moreover, I want to share all the good things that I have in the presence of God with my



family.

R: What do you do for the salvation of your family?

A: I am trying to endure my parents' unfair treatment of me without any complaint. I am also trying to be a good model as a Christian. I hope that my family can feel my changes and God's love through me. Once they feel it, I am sure they can accept God as the lord of their life.

R: Does it help?

A: (smiling) I feel that it becomes more difficult to endure everything with time. Actually, I do not endure all the unfair treatment from my parents these days. Time has changed and I am already an adult. Nevertheless, my parents still use my unconditional endurance to interrupt my life and my Christian faith. I think that their attitude towards me should change as well, so as to respect my identity as an individual person.

Agape interpreted her situation as follows: that to evangelise her family is her mission from God; thus, she needs to endure the unfair treatment of her family and be a model as a Christian. In fact, she has endured much unfair treatment. Because of her Christian faith, her parents frequently ignore her needs and refuse to communicate, which can occur between parents and children. Agape has also not expressed her uncomfortable feelings concerning their unfair treatment but endures it in order to utilise this as an opportunity to maintain her faith and spread the gospel to her family. I suspect that her unconditional endurance without proper communication with her family to express her needs and opinions could cause an uneasy relationship with them which could disrupt a deeper understanding of each other.



Agape also experiences this negative aspect of her unconditional endurance these days, but she still thinks that the salvation of her family is an important task for her.

Green Temptation's story

R: Why don't your parents allow your Christian faith? Have you ever heard the reasons from your parents?

G: They usually complain about my late homecoming, and spending too much time at the church. They think that I focus on the church much more than on our family.

R: Do you really think that the church is more important than your family?

G: No. I do not. I just put the same value on both of them, the church and my family. I think that I am acting and managing my time just like any normal person, but my parents do not agree. They seem to make this a pretext to interrupt my life.

R: Why do your parents try to interrupt your life by wilfully referring to your Christian faith?

G: I think that it is Satan's temptation to disturb my faith.

R: Where did you get the idea?

G: When I was in trouble with my parents for my Christian faith, a person whom I knew personally in the church advised me, "Do not fall into Satan's temptation!"

R: Did you agree with the person's advice?

G: Yes, I did. I did not say anything about my difficulties to him, but he suddenly said it to me. Thus, I realised that now is the time to overcome Satan's



temptation. Because of the advice, I could overcome the trouble that I was facing with my mother. After that time, I decided simply to think about the troubles with my parents. I made the decision that “I can follow God’s word and can show a good attitude to my family at the same time!”, “when my family accept God as their lord, my troubles at home will be solved.”, “I want to share advantages which can be gained in obeying God, thus, make an effort to evangelise my family.” And so on.

Green Temptation believes that the salvation of her family is needed to overcome her difficulties with them. She interpreted the troubles with her family as a temptation in that Satan attempts to shake her Christian faith.

Happy reflected on the story of Green Temptation on the website.

I also thought that a non-Christian family is a big wall which I should overcome. I sometimes saw people who throw away their Christian faith because of the troubles with their non-Christian family. When I saw them, I realised that to keep my Christian faith is really tough. I did not want to be like those who could not overcome their difficulties. In the beginning of my faith life, I was just busy with my faith, but I became seriously considerate towards my family over time. I sometimes felt that the family looked like Satan, like that of Green Temptation. For me, the family was really a big mission to overcome so as to keep my Christian faith. These days, I also find it difficult to evangelise my family, but I think it is a really important mission in my



life.

Happy also described his life at home as he appears to be a sinner. His rights as one of the family members can easily be ignored. Even though he may have something to ask his parents and may want to complain about something at home, he must suppress his needs because of his Christian faith. He also experienced being slapped by his father and brother as an expression of their disappointment. He said that his father and brother thought that he disobeyed his father because of his Christian faith and that this is destroying the peace of the family. I wondered how he still endures the unfair treatment of his family. Happy answered my questions by saying that “I trust God’s endless love, thus I cannot cut off my relationship with God because of the troubles with my family. Furthermore, if I give up my Christian faith, I am afraid that my family could lose the opportunity to be saved.” Actually, he placed more value on the salvation of his family than his own suffering.

The co-researchers experience an uneasy tension with their non-Christian family members because they practice a different religion to that of their family and/or disobey their parents who are trying to undermine their children’s faith life. In the uneasy tension within their family, the co-researchers tend to choose the solution that they should endure all the pain caused from the tension in order to evangelise their family. Most of the co-researchers also believe that God’s plan is to save their family through them. Therefore, they carry the responsibility to endure all this pain without any complaint and to be model disciples of Jesus. The co-researchers expect that their family members will recognise God’s love and the advantages of that love through their behaviour and/or changed attitude in their lives.



3.3.3 ‘We live in two worlds!’

In the collaboration with the co-researchers, they often compare two worlds in terms of the Christian and non-Christian worlds. These two worlds can be identified as the two contexts in which they live, the church and the family. In each, the co-researchers feel opposite emotions and confusions which connect with each other.

This tradition of interpretation emerged mainly from the stories of Happy (H) and Agape (A).

Happy’s story

R: You said that you should consider both the church and the family; thus you sometimes experience difficulties between the two fields. Can you explain a little bit more about your difficulties between the two fields?

H: I have something to do in both fields, as a son and as a member of the church. For instance, when I need to make a decision to take a role in the church, I need more time than other members. I cannot spend too much time in the church because I should consider my family at the same time. If I spend too much time at the church, I might be a major problem to my family again and it is going to disturb my faith life seriously. On the other side, I also do something more at the church. Unfortunately, most of the church members do



not understand this, and they just ask me to make the decision quickly. If I hesitate to make the decision for a while or if I try to explain about my situation at home to refuse the role, the church members tend to think that my faith is weak and/or I am not interested in taking the role.

R: How do you feel in the situation?

H: When I try to consider both at the same time, the church and the family, I tend to be marginalised in the two worlds. I seem to live in two perfectly different worlds.

R: What is the meaning of being marginalised in the two worlds?

H: At home, I hold a different worldview from my family. I sometimes want to share great love from and thanks to God with my family, but it is impossible. If I do that, they would think that I am mad. (smiling) On my family's side, I am really unacceptable and a strange person. At the same time, in the church I am also something different from other Christians. Most Christians attend the church with their family. It makes me experience some kind of isolation in the church.

Happy believes that he has a different worldview from that of his family, such as a Christian worldview as opposed to a non-Christian one and added that the large difference between the two worlds causes him to feel his difficult situation more intensely. Happy also experiences isolation in the church and at home. In the church, he feels that other people tend to misunderstand him, with his specific family background. At home, his family tend to treat him as a strange person who does not fit in with the family. He is a Christian while also living in a completely non-Christian context at the same time. In such an ambivalent position, he seems to



experience complicated emotions.

Agape's story

On the website she reflected on Happy's story above. I read her reflection there and asked her some questions in the individual interview with her.

A: I really sympathise with Happy's story. I also experience some difficulties between those two worlds. In my case, it made me really happy to know God and to be in his presence. This is one of the major reasons that I enjoy staying in the church much more than at home. I thought that I could feel God's presence much more in the church. On the other hand, my parents were experiencing a negative relationship at that time. There were always big conflicts between my parents at home and it caused me to feel uncomfortable to be with my family. Actually, these two worlds made me to experience opposite emotions at the same time and the opposite emotions caused me to focus on the church life much more. These days, I realised that I focused on the church life too much, thus, I am trying to strike a proper balance between the church life and the family life.

R: Can you tell me in detail how you feel about the two worlds these days?

A: I still feel uncomfortable in the two worlds. Even after experiencing difficulties with my family, I should smile in the church. Of course, I do not mean that I pretend to be happy in the church. I am really happy in the church and in God's presence but I am still struggling in my mind with the pain from



the trouble with my family even though I am in the church. This contrast of feelings makes me sad.

R: The struggling in your mind makes you sad. You interpreted that being in the two worlds makes you uncomfortable. Does the uncomfortable feeling come from your sadness?

A: Um... Actually not. The uncomfortable feeling comes from my worrying.

R: What do you worry about?

A: When I am in the church, I am worried about what time the worship or group meetings will finish. If the finishing time is delayed in the church, my time of homecoming also is delayed. In the situation, I am worried about having trouble with my parents again because of arriving home late. Sometimes, I also worry about my parents while in the church. There is the possibility that my parents may call the pastor to complain about or blame the church. They also may come to the church only to very rudely fetch me from the church to go home.

R: Have your parents ever acted like that?

A: Yes, they have. One day, my father was really upset about my Christian faith and he suddenly made a call to the pastor of my church to blame me and the church. I was really embarrassed about my father's behaviour.

R: Did your pastor mention the event to you?

A: No, he did not mention it to me at all. When I apologised about the incident to my pastor, he said that it was fine and that he was worried about me. But, I really worry that this might happen again.

Agape feels sadness, caught between the two worlds. She experiences opposite



feelings in them. Her interpretation was that the major differences between her feelings within the two worlds cause her to be easily depressed and to focus much more on her church life. In the church, she feels peace and joy in God's presence, but experiences a sense of instability and discomfort because of her parents' conflicts and her family's unpleasant attitude towards her which stems from her Christian faith. Therefore, she tends to think that she can maintain her faith life through attending the worship and spending much more time in the church. This has caused even greater difficulties with her parents. These days, she is trying to strike a balance between the church and the family, but believes that it is difficult to manage two utterly different worlds at the same time.

Happy and Agape described the serious contrast between the two worlds. They remarked that they tend to be depressed and experience confusion easily because of the contrasting feelings. Green Temptation and Bluebell also mentioned this difficulty.

3.3.4 To have non-Christian family means to have many disadvantages for my faith life.

This tradition of interpretation frequently emerged within the interviews. In fact, this can be connected to each of the above traditions of interpretation such as the discrimination in the church that stems from the lack of understanding about their non-Christian family background, unconditional endurance of the discomfort at home in order to evangelise their family and the confusion and sadness that they feel in the two worlds. When I begin to focus on these disadvantages which the co-

researchers interpreted as effects of the above traditions, many more disadvantages emerged, which stimulated discussion. Therefore, I needed to identify this tradition of interpretation separately.

I present the stories of Agape (A) and Happy (H) which were told on the website.

Agape's story

R: How does your non-Christian family background affect your faith life?

A: I do not have any person who can give practical advice about my faith life at home. Therefore, I usually use more trial and error in my faith life than people with a Christian family. I have heard that in the Christian family, the family member's pray, support each other and give advice in God's way. If I could have a Christian family such as them, my parents could pray for me and guide me in God's way to help with my difficulties. At home, I look like a normal person, who is not a Christian. Sometimes I find myself acting, speaking and thinking like a non-Christian, but there is nobody who can touch my private life at home. Therefore, I need to be sensitive about God for myself much more than other Christians in order to keep my faith. Of course, God always watches me and guides me, but I need someone who can support me to keep the faith more fruitfully nearby me.

To help the other co-researchers' understanding, I will use a metaphor.

When we walk on a snow-covered road, it is easier to step on the footprint of someone. If there is no such footprint, we could fall into the thick snow and/or



our shoes and shocks could become wet while we do not recognise the depth of the snow. For me, I look as if I walk in the perfectly white snow on which there is no footprint I can follow.

Agape interpreted her difficulties with non-Christian family members as follows: She pointed out that she does not know of a practical means by which to continue her private faith life, such as how to pray, how to behave and how to think about her difficulties. She thought that if she had Christian parents they could guide her to live a fruitful faith life at home. She could learn about maintaining her faith in the church, but she thought that it is not enough to continue her faith life at home.

Happy concurred with Agape's story. He mentioned that he too does not know how to behave and respond with regards to so many practical issues in his private life. He admitted that his knowledge about enjoying faith life is very limited; thus sometimes he cannot be sure about his faith life, as to whether he is doing well or not.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, Korea is a multi-religious society in which there is sensitive competition between the various religions. Therefore, the Korean government endeavours to maintain neutrality between them. Of course, Koreans enjoy the freedom to choose their religion, but conversely this means that nobody can force people to follow a specific religion. To support a specific religion and to express the principles thereof in public is considered as transgressing our common ethics in this society. This is the reason why Korean people can hardly discover any role models for their faith life and why co-researchers are concerned about the limited knowledge in their private faith life. Happy said that he is sometimes worried



about his future marital life. He really wants to have a beautiful Christian family in the future, but he sometimes cannot be sure whether he can lead his family members well in God's way, because he does not have any experience of Christian family life.

Here is another story told by Happy.

Happy's story

I also think that our faith life can be affected by our non-Christian parents. Even though a person has a really good level of faith, he sometimes cannot attend the worship and keeping his faith life can be disturbed because of his parents. I think that those who have Christian parents have really good advantages for their faith life. Of course, this may be my prejudice about people who have Christian parents, but I think that people who are in the very beginning of their faith can be very much affected by their parents regarding their faith life.

Happy also inferred that to have Christian parents would provide more advantages for maintaining his faith life than having non-Christian parents. Green Temptation expressed envy toward people with Christian parents. I now describe Green Temptation's story on the website.

Green Temptation's story

I had a vague fantasy about a Christian family. I also had some kind of



misunderstanding about my non-Christian parents. I sometimes complained that if my parents were Christians, my faith life would be different from now, all my difficult problems come from my non-Christian parents, I am the only person who can pray for the whole family...it makes me too tired, it is too much, and so on.

One day, I saw a scene on the television in which the parents were praying for their children. I envied it greatly. I also heard that parents' praying for their children can cause their children to be blessed. I really wanted to have Christian parents who can pray for me. Actually if I had Christian parents, our family could pray together for each other and for difficult family problems and we could overcome our difficult problems more easily.

Green Temptation particularly focused on Christian parents praying for their children. She thought that not having Christian parents to do likewise is a major disadvantage for her. When she wrote this story on the web, the other co-researchers were sensitive about it and started to discuss this issue. Agape and Happy mentioned similar stories to that of Green Temptation, but Bluebell disagreed. I will present Bluebell's reflection in this regard below.

Bluebell's reflection

When I read the other co-researcher's stories, I find some parts difficult to understand. It is as though, if we have Christian parents praying for



their children, we can be much more blessed. I think that this is the same complaint as saying, “if my parents have enough money to offer me more good quality educational environments, I could succeed to enter a better university than the present university that I am attending.” Of course, the praying of parents is important, but it is not necessary for our blessing. I think that one’s relationship with God is more important.

After about two months of writing this reflection, Green Temptation showed some changes in her opinion and wrote about this change on the web.

It is a long time since I visited here.

These days, I have thought about my faith life. I think that I did not experience big difficulties with my non-Christian family because my faith life was not enthusiastic. Recently, I have also experienced some difficulties with my family related to my faith life.

I said that to have non-Christian family did not previously affect my faith life. But I want to change my opinion now. The change came from observing my younger brother’s faith life. He just started attending the church recently. I led him to the church. He usually asks me to wake him on the Sunday morning, but my effort to awake him does not work and he usually rises too late to attend the worship. When my brother wants to sleep some more, my parents ask me to leave him to have more rest. I think that if my parents were Christian, they would try to awake him

with me.

I think that to keep my faith is not under my control, but under God's control. God responds to the parents who are praying for their children. Moreover, if a person can pick up a good religious habit from their parents, it could help his/her faith life more fruitfully.

Bluebell changed her mind after two months to agree with the other co-researchers' opinion because of her experience with her younger brother. She also agreed that certain disadvantages can exist for those with a non-Christian family. Within this tradition of interpretation, the co-researchers are depressed and feel powerless.

3.4 SUMMARY

Within this chapter, the problematic stories of the co-researchers emerged. They are struggling with their non-Christian family members in their quest to retain their Christian faith. The co-researchers also experience isolation in their relationships with other church members and their family members. They also display a strong willingness to share with their family every good thing which they obtain from their Christian faith, but their families do not accept this.

From the developing of co-researchers' problematic stories, by means of giving voice to the co-researchers to narrate the meanings and effects connected with these, I could identify four traditions of interpretation of the co-researchers.



- 1) 'The church does not understand me!'
- 2) 'Salvation of the family is my mission!'
- 3) 'We live in two worlds!'
- 4) To have a non-Christian family means to experience many disadvantages for my faith life.