



CHAPTER 4

RETELLING THE STORY OF THE YOUNG ADULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 3, the interpreted experiences of the co-researchers emerged and were developed by collaboration between the researcher and the co-researchers. Moreover, traditions that support the present interpretations of the co-researchers regarding their events were developed and identified.

Moen (2006:4) avers that: “As individuals are telling their stories, they are not isolated and independent of their context”. People’s stories cannot be separated from the social and cultural context. They are always connected with and influenced by the latter. Therefore, the narrative researcher needs to be aware of how the contexts of the co-researchers influence their interpretations. Müller (2005:10) mentions that the role of the researcher is “... to identify discourses and try to gain some understanding of how current behaviour is influenced by these discourses”. The traditions of interpretation within the present research were identified in chapter 3 by focusing on and developing specific interpretations of the co-researchers. Within chapter 3, I have tried to describe how the latter accorded the interpretations to their events and became aware of the traditions supporting their current interpretations. In the present chapter, I will attempt to gain a deeper understanding of their current behaviour, influenced by the identified traditions of interpretation. This understanding can be obtained through listening to co-researchers’ narratives as well as to the various social and cultural environments such as the literature, the art, and the culture of a



certain context (Müller 2005:10).

Moreover, the theological reflections of the co-researchers are also considered so as to gain an understanding of the influence of tradition of interpretation on their behaviour. Müller (2005:11) explains that the co-researchers' reflections on the religious and spiritual aspects are not "... a forced effort by the researchers to bring God into the present situation". I, as a researcher, cannot force the co-researchers to think about religious aspects of their narratives, but if they attempt to reflect on their experiences in the presence of God, I also cannot ignore their religious reflections. In the postfoundationalist approach, Van Huyssteen (1997:20) remarks that "... we relate to our world epistemically only through the mediation of interpreted experience ...". Religious reflections can also offer a context in which we can become aware of the deeper meaning of the co-researchers' current behaviour. Therefore, the researcher needs to make an effort to listen to and gain a deeper understanding of the co-researchers' religious understandings and experiences within God's presence (Müller 2005:10).

After acquiring an understanding of how the co-researchers' current behaviour is influenced by traditions of interpretation, their constructed interpretations will be deconstructed and reconstructed within the interdisciplinary framework. Through this process the co-researchers can make rational judgments with regards to finding alternative interpretations that can be integrated with their various experiences. Van Huyssteen (1997:15) comments on the meaning of 'alternative'; that it is "... the sense not of competing or conflicting interpretations of experience, but of complementary interpretations of the manifold dimensions of our experience".



Newly emerged alternative interpretations of the co-researchers' events are different from the previous interpretations. The alternative interpretations may satisfy the co-researchers while also satisfying various dimensions of their experiences. At the end of this chapter, the alternative interpretations will be identified.

4.2 THE INFLUENCES OF TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATION UPON THE CO-RESEARCHERS

Marshall and Rossman (1999:157) aver that "Alternative explanations always exist; the researcher must search for, identify, and describe them, and then demonstrate how the explanation offered is the most plausible of all". From the traditions of interpretation that emerged and were identified, I and the co-researchers discussed how the former influenced their behaviour. This process was practised mainly through the web-activity. I encouraged the co-researchers to reflect on each tradition of interpretation and these reflections of 'different voice givers'¹⁴ were also represented on the website. I expected that 'the different voice givers' could offer various interpretations from different angles.

Moreover, I also placed some easy-to-understand social and cultural disciplines and theological reflections, relative to the traditions of interpretation, on the website for the co-researchers to be 'heard'. Through their reading in these various disciplines, I hoped that the co-researchers might gain a deeper understanding of the traditions of interpretation and might be able to more easily recognise influences of the traditions interpretation. I will represent these works here and attempt to describe the

¹⁴ See, p. 55, 56.



influences of the traditions of interpretation upon the current behaviour of the co-researchers in order to gain a deeper understanding thereof. I will also bring the understanding of the traditions of interpretation into the present interdisciplinary work in order to deconstruct these. Within the interdisciplinary level, various social and cultural disciplines, interviews with relevant colleagues, and theological disciplines will be considered in order to find “... a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community” (Müller 2005:11).

The traditions of interpretation which were emerged in chapter 3 were 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.

4.2.1 ‘The church does not understand me!’

This tradition of interpretation can be connected with several emotions and behaviours of the co-researchers. One of the emotions that frequently emerged from the latter within this tradition of interpretation was the feeling of some kind of discrimination by the other church members who have Christian family¹⁵. The co-researchers interpreted their feelings of discrimination within the church in detail.

Happy: I feel the discriminative behaviour of the church members from very trifling

¹⁵ See p. 95-102



events. The church usually consists of family groups as a smaller unit. They mostly act as a family group and take care of each other even in the church. When I sometimes come late to the dining room of the church for the lunch on a Sunday, some of my friends who have Christian parents in the church can have lunch first because of their parents' help there. Moreover, if a person whose parents are a deacon or presbyter is absent from the worship time or some specific events, most church members express great concern about it. But in my case, they just think that they cannot do anything for me. They do not want to think about me seriously.

Happy remembered the very details concerning the feeling of being discriminated against in the church, which demonstrates that he is quite sensitive about the people who seem to lack understanding of his specific family background. For this reason, he was easily disappointed about people thus constructing the tradition rigidly.

Agape also mentioned a similar story.

A: I also feel the discriminative attitude of the church members in the church. When I look at the composition of the church, most of the cell leaders and ministry programme leaders are people who have Christian family. I think that the church members do not trust us who have non-Christian family. I know we sometimes cannot attend church and sometimes give up our responsibility because of the difficulties with non-Christian parents. But I think that the other members who have Christian family sometimes do the same things but for different reasons. They may be not enthusiastic about God or may depend on



their Christian parents too much. All of us have the same problem caused by different reasons. That is all. I do not want to be treated differently from other church members who have Christian family.

Agape is enthusiastic about God, and her work in the church includes leading a bible study group, being part of the worship team, leading a cell group, and so on. She says that while involved in these church activities, she sometimes feels the church members discriminating against her. She interpreted this feeling in terms of experiencing different responses from people who cannot carry out their work in the church. She argued that people sometimes cannot carry out their responsibilities in the church and they also advance different reasons for inadequate work. She might also have various reasons to do so other than her specific non-Christian family background. But she feels that the church members focus more on reasons that originate in a non-Christian family background. She agreed that this discrimination stems from the lack of understanding of the church members with regards to her specific non-Christian family background.

A: These days, I am trying to keep the balance between the faith life and the family. Sometimes people misunderstand this.

R: How do they misunderstand your efforts? Have they mentioned it to you?

A: Well...I have heard that 'when you experienced big trouble with your non-Christian family, you had an enthusiastic faith, but these days you seem to be changed...' from one of the church members.

R: How was your feeling when you heard the comment?

A: I felt not good. I thought that 'thus, should I always be in trouble? What is his



bias about me?' I think that he was too impatient.

R: Can you think about the reason why he is impatient about you?

A: I think that he has a limited understanding of me. Of course, sometimes I could meet a few people who try to understand my specific religious background, but I think that generally people do not have enough understanding of people, like me.

R: Have you ever tried to express your difficult situation to other people?

A: Um.... I rarely tell people of my difficulties in my family.

R: Is it also connected with your general thinking about people?

A: Yes, it is.

This tradition of interpretation also influenced the co-researchers' behaviour in that they avoid sharing their difficulties with other church members and their minister¹⁶. This influence was sharply demonstrated when I tried to include some people in our web-activity¹⁷. In the group meeting session, I suggested a plan to include some more people who have Christian family in order to give different voices to our research. I explained my intentions and all of the co-researchers agreed. A few days later, though, some co-researchers contacted me individually, and expressed discomfort with regards to my plan to include additional people in our research work. As a result of co-rejection by some researchers, I could include only a very limited number of persons who were accepted by all of the co-researchers as the different voice givers. We discussed this rejection by some co-researchers within the individual interview sessions which were carried out during the middle period of the

¹⁶ See, p. 98, 99

¹⁷ See, p. 99



research process.

R: Why did you feel uncomfortable about including some more people in our research work?

A: I needed people who can sympathise with us and can talk with us frankly.

R: Do you think that people do not talk frankly?

A: Normally, people pretend to understand us very well. I do not like the attitude of people. I was worried that they may act like this on the web-site.

Happy also rejected the inclusion of additional people in the web-activity.

R: Can you explain the reason why you rejected including other people in our web-activity?

H: I expected that so many stories about me and my family on the web-site would be written and discussed. If somebody who has very limited understanding of our specific background reads those stories, they could misunderstand me and my family. They also could say such things as ‘if I am in your situation, I can do.....’ I think that this kind of saying is meaningless and hurts me. They do not know anything about my pain that comes from my non-Christian family.

R: Have you ever heard the same kind of comment from people?

H: Yes, I have. ‘Your father should not treat you like that... I cannot understand your elder brother. Why does he act like that to you?’; these sayings hurt me very much.

R: Why do the comments hurt you?

H: I know that my family members are acting very rudely and irrationally towards



me because of my Christian faith, but I love them. They are my family. I can understand their emotions about me when I look at myself from my family's angle. I do not like the judgement being made about my family without enough understanding from them.

Agape and Happy did not trust people to share stories with sufficient understanding regarding the specific religious background of the co-researchers. Their reaction appears to stem from negative experiences with people who have Christian family. Happy also expressed concern about people's judgment of his family members which also stems from a lack of understanding.

In developing the above experiences which are based on the tradition of interpretation that people who have Christian family cannot understand the co-researchers' specific family background, the co-researchers realised that they also have not tried to express their difficulties to other church members and/or ministers in their church; thus, the latter may lack understanding concerning these difficulties. After the emergence of this thinking, the co-researchers began to tell their own stories about their relationships with non-Christian family members. I believe that this is an important conversion resulting from our research process. In the beginning of the interview, the co-researchers spent most of the time complaining about other people who have Christian family and who lack understanding of the difficulties of the former. They seemed to feel that they are victims and powerless within their relationships with other people. However, when the co-researchers realised that they too have not attempted to explain and share their painful stories with people, they began to focus on telling their stories about their relationships with their non-



Christian family members. This conversion could offer the opportunity for the co-researchers to construct and deconstruct their stories of difficulty.

4.2.2 ‘Salvation of the family is my mission!’

This interpretation was common to all the co-researchers who frequently understood the salvation of their family as a responsibility given to them by God. This tradition of interpretation was expressed by the co-researchers’ unconditional self-sacrifice for their non-Christian family. Agape’s interview reflects this matter:

A: My mother and father always showed a heartless attitude towards me. When I was in high school, I still needed concern and care from my parents, but I could not ask for anything from them. For instance, when I wanted to ask my father to take me to school by car I could not ask him because I was afraid of his scolding regarding my faith life. He might blame me, ‘if you did not go to the church in the early morning, you would not be tired now and can take the bus.’ My mother always complained about my Christian faith and the church. My sisters also treat me as a psychopath and do not talk with me.

R: How were your emotions in the uneasy tension with your family members because of your Christian faith?

A: I had two opposite emotions such as ‘injustices’ and ‘thanksgiving’. ‘Injustice’ about my uneasy tension with my family, nevertheless I gave ‘thanksgiving’ to God. I thought that God allows this difficult situation because he has a great plan for me.



In this interview I wondered why Agape's family members treat her so badly because of her Christian faith. Thus, Agape and I discussed this. Before Agape accepted the Christian faith, her parents held high expectations for her. She was an exemplary student. Her school report maintained high levels while she was also an obedient student and daughter. Agape remembered this time as a happy phase of her life in her family. However, when she reached the age of puberty her parents' relationship became poor. They often clashed seriously with each other and her mother sometimes ran away from home. All these unstable relationships led to Agape's deviation from having been an exemplary student.

Agape remarked that she was able to feel comfortable in the church at the time and her faith influenced her to make positive changes in her life. She started studying again and her emotions became stable even though her parents still fought heavily. Agape interpreted this as follows: that her parents tended to view her as a sinner who was causing all the conflicts within the family. She thinks that they seemed to ascribe their faults to her and her Christian faith. Nevertheless, Agape has endured the unfair and negative attitudes of her parents and sisters towards her. She mentioned that it is her goal to show them a good model as a Christian. She believes that this could represent an opportunity during which her family might think about Christianity positively.

Happy also mentioned similar reasons to Agape regarding an unconditional endurance. He construed this as meaning that God wants to save his family through him; thus, he needs to overcome his suffering for the sake of the salvation of his family.



H: In my case, I could realise many more things that God gave to me within the difficult tension with my family. If I give up my Christian faith because of the suffering caused by my family, it means that my trust in God can also be a meaningless thing. I trust that God's love for me will always continue even when I am in a serious and difficult situation anywhere. Therefore, I should trust God's love and his power in the sufferings and it can help me to overcome the troubles.

R: How can you be sure about God's love?

H: When I worship him, when I listen to his words in the sermon, and when I praise him, I receive the conviction of God's love. I am sure that the troubles with my family will be solved by keeping my faith.

From the interpretation of Happy and Agape, it seems clear that their faith in God and their conviction with regards to God's plan to save their family is their source of motivation to endure the sufferings caused by their difficulties with non-Christian relatives.

Green Temptation thought differently about the salvation of her family.

R: Have you ever heard that you have a responsibility to try to spread the Gospel to your non-Christian family?

G: Yes, I have.

R: Do you agree with the saying?

G: Yes, I do. I also think that I should lead my family to God.



- R:** Why should you lead them to God?
- G:** I think that the most difficult people to evangelise are one's own family. My family knows me well, even the bad aspects of me. When I was younger, I thought that if I cannot evangelise other people, I also cannot spread the gospel to my family. These days, my thinking has changed. Nowadays, I think that if I have a passion for the evangelisation of people, I can also find an opportunity to spread the gospel to my family.
- R:** What made your thinking change?
- G:** I just gradually realised it through my faith life. I think that God caused me to change.
- R:** How does your changed thinking influence your attitude towards your family?
- G:** In previous days, I was too sensitive about my non-Christian family who disturb my faith life, and complained about my non-Christian family background. On the other hand, these days I am trying to understand my non-Christian family from their viewpoint. Thereupon, my family also has shown a tolerant attitude towards Christianity.

In the interviews with the above three co-researchers, I suggest that the co-researchers' strong faith in God has influenced them to endure their difficult situations in the family. Conversely, their difficulties with non-Christian family, the difficult relationship with them, and their conviction regarding the salvation of their family have functioned as a motivating power to strengthen their faith. From the interactions, it appeared that the co-researchers were still powerless in their family situations.



Green Temptation has displayed a different attitude to Happy and Agape concerning the issue of the salvation of non-Christian relatives. She did not consider her family's salvation seriously, but she mentioned that God had changed her thinking concerning the issue. Even though Green Temptation does not act like Happy and Agape who are enduring 'suffering' unconditionally in their families, she also agreed that God wants to save her non-Christian family.

On the website, they have shared with each other their stories with regards to the responsibility for their own family's salvation and their unconditional endurance for this purpose. Blue Bell read those stories of the other co-researchers, and mentioned the issue in the individual interview session.

R: When did you feel that you should carry the gospel to your family?

A: I do not have a friendly relationship with my parents. My parents rarely interrupt my life and we do not have enough communication. Thus, I did not think about the salvation of my parents seriously. In this year, my family has experienced some difficult problems, and in the difficult situation I felt that spreading the gospel to my family would be needed. If they know about God, like me, they may overcome the difficulties more easily. Moreover, after reading the other co-researchers' stories on the web-site I have had more confidence about this.

R: Does your changed thinking influence your behaviour towards your family?

G: In the evangelisation programme of the church, I selected my parents as the people to whom I want to spread the gospel. These days, I am praying for their salvation.



- R:** Are you satisfied with your changed thinking and attitude towards your parents' salvation?
- G:** Well... I think that it is needed and I should think about my parents' salvation. But, it is difficult.
- R:** What is difficult for you?
- G:** After I felt the necessity about the salvation of the family, the difficulties with my parents were becoming more serious. (smiling)
- R:** How does the trouble become serious?
- G:** My parents do not interrupt my faith life directly, but they ask me to do something only on Sundays. For instance, they usually ask me to take care of my younger brother [10 years old] on Sundays. Therefore, I need come to home earlier from church for my younger brother. If I come home late, my parents become angry with me.
- R:** What do you think is the reason why your parents' interrupting your faith life is getting serious?
- G:** I think that Satan seems to try to shake my decision to spread the gospel to my parents.

Blue Bell's thinking about the salvation of her family was stimulated by the other co-researchers' stories. She also tried to spread the gospel to her parents and her difficulties in the relationship with parents were becoming severe. She thought that these two changes were connected with each other; thus, she also needed to be patient during these difficulties, for the purposes of the salvation of her parents.

The research interviews for the present thesis have been carried out over a period of



about one and half years. During the time between the interviews, the interpretations of Agape and Happy on this specific issue had changed by the end of the interview period.

4.2.3 ‘We live in two worlds!’

The co-researchers often tell their stories within the contrast of the two worlds which were represented by the non-Christian family and the church. In comparing the characteristics of these two worlds, the co-researchers tended to feel pains in their difficult situations easily¹⁸. Happy expressed this response:

H: In the church, I feel happy in the presence of God, but when I come back home, I meet a perfectly different world. Talking about good things inside of me to other people can help me to identify these easily and to remember them longer. Therefore, I really need to share my happiness and blessings from God which were given in the church with somebody in my home. But...it is impossible. If I could share those things with my family, my faith life would be more fruitful. However, even I cannot pray, read the Bible, and praise God with a voice in my house. It causes me to have a passive mind with regards to expressing my faith to my family.

Happy felt that he lives in two completely different worlds. Happy interpreted this in the sense that he tends to be passive with respect to expressing his faith and his religious experiences naturally at home. Of course, if he expresses his experiences in

¹⁸ See, p. 111, 112.



the presence of God he may again encounter conflict with his family; thus, he might worry about it. However, in the above interpretation, Happy expressed regret that he could not share positive emotions and blessings with his family because of their different world views.

A: When I look back, the most serious time with my parents, I was always in tension between the church and the home. When I attend the service of the church, I cannot be sure whether I can attend this service again or not. This tension in the church made me focus on God much more than the family. At home, I was... a 'mad' person..... (She kept silence for a while.) In the time, I seemed to live in the completely different world alone. I could not find any common denominator with my family. What I was the most afraid of was that my parents never smiled at me. When my father found me reading the Bible in the room, he threw the Bible away and was really angry with me. When I try to attend the early morning service of the church, my mother blocks the gate to prevent me from going to church. They always watched me. I was really afraid of my parents' behaviour to me. Thus, my other problems such as the stresses from the study and friends were beyond my concern. Only keeping the faith was my main mission.

In contrast to the two worlds, the church and the family, Agape felt loneliness and focused on her faith life much more, in order to overcome the stress stemming from the tension with her parents.

Happy and Agape's common influence, from the tradition of interpretation that they



live in the two worlds, was to separate themselves from the family and the church. Of course, their family acted negatively with regard to Happy and Agape's Christian faith. However, within the perspective that they live in two different worlds, at home, they merely hid their faith and way of thinking and did not attempt to communicate with their family in order to narrow the gap. Moreover, in the church, the co-researchers tended to think of themselves as being powerless because of the specific non-Christian family background

4.2.4 To have a non-Christian family means to have many disadvantages for my faith life

This tradition of interpretation emerged from the various interpretations of the co-researchers in the light of the other traditions of interpretation considered above. In the interview with the co-researchers, they tended to think of their life in a bisected world¹⁹. In this manner of thinking, the co-researchers complained of so many disadvantages as a person with non-Christian family. Thus, I suggested comparing the advantages and the disadvantages of a Christian family with those of a non-Christian family on the web-site. In the discussion regarding these comparisons, the co-researchers still tended to talk about the disadvantages of a non-Christian family and the advantages of a Christian family. The co-researchers did not want to focus on the opposite: they seemed to feel powerless within their relationship with people with a Christian family.

¹⁹ I identified this way of thinking as a tradition, 'we live in two worlds!'



Vision²⁰ (V), who is one of ‘the different voice givers²¹’, wrote a story after he had read the co-researchers’ stories of disadvantages of people with a non-Christian family.

V: After reading the above stories, I realised that people with a Christian family can have more advantages than people with a non-Christian family. I could also realise that people with non-Christian family can be hurt by these. I feel sorry about this. Nevertheless, have you ever thought through these problems in reverse? For instance, people with Christian family must attend all the worship time and church meetings by force of their Christian parents. They cannot have enough opportunity to think about their own autonomous faith life; as a result they sometimes fall into temptation easily.

Vision attempted to convert the stream of thinking where the co-researchers focus on the disadvantages of people with non-Christian family by representing the disadvantages of people with a Christian family. Unfortunately, nobody responded to Vision’s suggestion. I also tried to ask about the disadvantages of people with Christian family.

R: Have you ever experienced negative feelings from a Christian family?

A: When I was young, everything within the Christian family looked good without any reason. With the passing of time, a blind faith, such as the unconditional pressures to make their children attend church and/or to have

²⁰ Vision is a pastor of the Presbyterian Church.

²¹ See, p. 55, 56.

Christian faith, does not look good these days, but I am still envious.

Agape mentioned some negative features of people with Christian family, but she considered that she is still envious of them, even though she thought that a Christian family had influenced their faith life negatively.

Happy also expressed the emotion of envy towards people with Christian families.

H: While I wrote my previous story, I remembered a story. Even though we are talking about having Christian family and having non-Christian family with the same values, I still think that having non-Christian family gives me more disadvantages than having Christian family. I have been envious of the people who have Christian family from the beginning of my faith life. I have wanted to get the help of Christian parents in my faith life. To listen to the Christian history, the newest Christian news and the church's news and to get advices from a Christian perspective, from Christian parents, these things have been my strong desire. Somebody who has Christian family would say that these things are not important or they also have difficulties in their family life, but I think that they are complaining of their blessings.

Happy commented that people with Christian family complain about their blessings. In this section I have concentrated on the co-researchers' 'emotions of envy' and their comment about people with Christian family that 'they are complaining of their blessings'.



4.3 RETELLING THE STORY OF YOUNG ADULT CHRISTIANS WITH NON-CHRISTIAN FAMILY

In the early interview sessions the co-researchers frequently spoke of their difficulties that stemmed from the lack of understanding by other Christians (with Christian families) as regards the co-researchers' non-Christian family background in particular. The co-researchers also tended to focus on their painful stories concerning the relationships with their non-Christian family members. Thus, most of the traditions of interpretation discovered through the story developing process tend to support the co-researchers' negative and powerless emotions concerning their faith life.

After identifying the traditions supporting the co-researchers' interpretations of the problems in their faith life, I tried to stimulate discussion regarding the influences of these difficulties on their painful interpretations. While speaking about these influences, the co-researchers began to focus on telling stories about the relationship with their non-Christian family members and their own faith life.²² They attempted to understand their non-Christian family members and to search for other interpretations that could reveal the value of their faith life.

In retelling the stories of young adult believers with non-Christian family members, I will represent their newly emerged stories in terms of their interaction at the

²² See, p 126.



interdisciplinary level.

4.3.1 Deconstructing of the co-researchers' stories

In discussing the influences of the traditions of interpretation that 'The church does not understand me!' and 'To have non-Christian family means to have many disadvantages for my faith life', the co-researchers began to realise that they too had not attempted to express and/or to adequately share with other Christians their own difficulties, concerning non-Christian family members, with regard to their faith life. The co-researchers tended to prejudge and/or presume to understand other Christians' thinking about those who have non-Christian family members in terms of the few clues that emerged during their interaction with other Christians who do have Christian family members. I asked whether the co-researchers have had any opportunity to express and/or share their own difficulties (with non-Christian family members) with other Christians who have non-Christian or even Christian family members.

R: Have you ever expressed and/or shared your difficulties with your non-Christian family members with anybody in the church?

H: Yes, I have. I expressed my difficulties in order to explain the reasons why I cannot attend the church meetings or why I cannot take responsibilities regarding work in the church.

R: What was the response of the person who listened to your difficulties?

H: They said that they can understand my difficulties....but.... (Happy remained silent for a long time at this point).



- R:** What are you thinking about?
- H:** I am thinking about their responses. I cannot remember exactly how they responded to my sharing.
- R:** If you cannot remember their responses, how can you know that they cannot understand your non-Christian family background sufficiently?
- H:** I can only remember that they did not show serious interest in my difficulties.
- R:** How did you know that they do not show serious interest about your difficulties?
- H:** They usually said that ‘I can understand your pains in the non-Christian family, but God will help you to overcome those difficulties’. That was all.
- R:** Was it not enough for you?
- H:** No, it is not enough.
- R:** What response did you want from other Christians with Christian family?
- H:** Of course, I know that God is helping me and will give me the power to overcome my difficulties with my non-Christian family members but I did not want to listen to the advice. I think that to give advice that is too general, without any effort to know how we feel and how we think in the non-Christian family, means they are not concerned about our difficulties. To give general advice is just an attempt to bypass the uneasy conversation with me. I do not need a serious answer that can solve my problem. I know that my difficulties have no definite solutions. I just want someone who can listen to my painful stories and can feel sympathy with my sufferings.
- R:** Yes, I see. You mean that you just want to share your stories with somebody. Is that right?
- H:** Yes, I do.



R: Do you think that to have someone who can share your stories can help you to feel more comfortable within the difficult situation with non-Christian family?

H: Yes, I think so.

R: Have you ever tried to find someone who can share your painful stories?

H: No, I have not.

R: Why have you not tried to find someone?

H: Well..... I just guess that other Christians cannot understand my difficult situation with non-Christian family members.

Happy wanted someone who could share his difficulties stemming from his non-Christian families, but he did not attempt to find such a person through expressing and/or sharing his painful stories. Actually, he has tried to explain his difficult family background to other Christians a few times, but he was soon disappointed and gave up sharing his stories with other Christians who do have Christian families. He presumed that other Christians do not evidence sufficient understanding regarding his specific non-Christian family background because of their responses when sharing his stories. In response to my question regarding how he can be sure about the lack of understanding showed by other Christians who have Christian families, Happy could not express an adequate answer to support his assumption about other Christians. Finally, Happy realised that he really needs someone who could share his painful stories and feel sympathy with him, but he too quickly gave up finding such a person. Thus, Happy started to feel the necessity to share and express his painful stories with other Christians who do have Christian families.

The other co-researchers also hold similar prejudices with regards to other Christians



with Christian family. Agape, Blue Bell and Green Temptation have not shared their painful stories, not even with Christians who do not have Christian family members. I asked about the reason.

R: Why did you not share your difficulties with Christians with non-Christian family members? I think that if you share your specific stories with them, you could get really good support from those who could share their painful stories and feel sympathy with you very well.

A: Well, I do not know. When I see those who have non-Christian family members, I feel sympathy with their difficult situation easily. I think it is enough.

R: Enough what? Can you explain it in detail?

A: Enough to feel and to know their difficulties with their non-Christian family.

R: How can you know their feelings and difficulties without talking with each other?

A: We have similar family background, thus I think that they also have similar difficulties with me.

R: Can you be sure of that?

A: Yes, I can.

The co-researchers rarely narrate their painful stories to other believers with Christian family members or those with non-Christian family members, but when this point emerged, the co-researchers began to feel that they tend to complain about the lack of understanding showed by other Christians without sufficiently sharing and expressing their own specific stories. The co-researchers also began to realise



that they need to share their painful stories with other believers who have non-Christian family members in order to help them effectively.

In the web-activity, I asked the co-researchers what they wanted to share with other Christians, both with Christian and non-Christian families. From this question, the co-researchers began with a focus on their difficult relationships with non-Christian family members.

The co-researchers experience a particular relationship with their non-Christian family members because of their Christian faith which results in an uneasy tension owing to religious conflict. In order to understand this tension between the co-researchers and their non-Christian family members, the cultural and religious background of the Korean family and society needs to be considered first.

4.3.1.1 Christianity within Korean society

As I mentioned in chapter 1, Korea embodies a unique multi-religious society. Various religions coexist in Korean society and religious harmony and uneasy tensions simultaneously exist among those religions. Kim (2002:154) mentions the positive social influence of religious pluralism since “Korean society displays a dynamism that has enabled the adoption of various religious cultures, both Eastern and Western”. He also insists that Korean people can live in harmony within these multireligious cultures with regard to their individual lives as well as the larger social context (Kim 2002:170). Of course, Korean people have the advantage of choosing their own religions freely and of adopting any religious cultures for their individual



faith life, but this is quite a narrow viewpoint which does not take into account the social and cultural background of Korea.

C S Kim (2002:156) refers to the spirituality of Koreans as a harmony of various forms of belief. Over time, Korean spirituality has developed a harmony with a mixture of various religions such as Buddhism, Shamanism, Taoism and Confucianism. In the harmonisation of the various religions, Korean people have created a unique spirituality which is open to various forms of belief. According to a report of the Government Information Agency (1996:97), 75.3% of Korean people have shown a receptive attitude towards various religions: this proportion responded that all the religions have their own truth and they can accept that. However, only 14.9% of Korean people responded that there is only one religion which embodies the truth. From this statistical result, the Government Information Agency (1996:98) deduces that there is a low possibility that social conflict might occur as a result of exclusive religious conflict. However, we need to focus on the 14.9% of Korean people who believe that only one religion possesses the truth. Their belief is quite strong and opposes the opinion of the other 75.3% Korean people who indicate a receptive attitude regarding the various religions. The proportion of 14.9% is small, but their strong belief holds the possibility of provoking the antipathy of the larger portion of the Korean people. Therefore, we cannot simply say that there is a low possibility of religious conflict in Korean society.

Even though Korean society displays a generous attitude and makes an effort towards the harmonisation of and equilibrium among the various religions, Christianity has been considered a unique religion which does not harmonise with other religions.



The major doctrine of Christianity is that only God is the truth which can save his people; thus, Christianity does not agree with any other religions which insist they also hold the truth to save the people. The unique doctrine of Christianity which is quite different from the common religious attitudes of Korean society can be easily found in the Bible.

“For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (1 Ch. 16:26 New International Version). “Declare what is to be, present it- let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour, there is none but me” (Isa. 45:21). “You shall have no gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).

Christianity accepts only one God as the Lord. Because of the strong doctrine of Christianity which does not want to harmonise with other religions, Korean society tends to view it negatively.

Moreover, Korean people tend to consider Christianity as a religion which originated from a foreign culture. Korean people place a high value on the preservation of their own culture. According to the report of the Government Information Agency (1996:163), 96.8% of Korean people think that the traditional Korean culture should be preserved even within the current trend towards globalisation. This report indicates the strong desire of Koreans to maintain their own traditional cultural inheritance. Therefore, Christianity, which was newly imported from western culture, is extraneous and hardly acceptable within Korean society.



In terms of the influences of the general attitude of Korean society upon Christianity as mentioned above, an uneasy tension and conflict exists between Christians and non-Christians, including the irreligious people in Korean society. I could identify these tensions in the interviews with the co-researchers.

H: My father sometimes talks with relatives about the negative aspects of Christianity.

R: How do they talk about the negative things of Christianity?

H: Christians ignore the power of the parents. Christians know that God is their real father. Christians only focus on the church not on the family. Something likes that...

R: Do you agree with their opinion about Christians?

H: I can agree with some of their opinions, but not all. God is everything for Christians, but we also place a high value on our own family in order to obey God's will. If a Christian is a really good follower of God, he/she can also take care of his/her family very well. People just ignore this point and focus on the few mistakes which some Christians have made.

The religious tension and conflict within Korean society is not related to religious conflict among the different religions but concerns tension/conflict within the relationship between Christians and non-Christians who hold negative views regarding Christianity. Within this Korean social situation, the co-researchers sometimes mention the negative social view towards Christianity.



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 place the same values on both of them, the church and my family. I think that I am acting and managing my time just like a normal person, but my parents do not agree. They seem to make it a pretext for interrupting my life.

Green Temptation mentioned that she acts and manages her life and the relationship with her family just like a normal person. But her parents complain about her faith life, which appears to focus on her own life and relationship with her family, more or less in the same way as they complain about her church life. In other words, the general social opinion in Korea is that Christians usually set much more importance on the church than their individual lives and their relationships with their families. Therefore, Green Temptation mentioned that she is making an effort to focus on her own life and accept both her faith life and her family so as to prevent a misunderstanding regarding the former. Thus, she expressed the effort as trying to live like a 'normal' person. In her words, 'a normal person' points to general people who have negative views about Christianity. Blue Bell also mentioned 'a normal person'.

R: Have you ever tried to explore your faith?



B: Yes, I have. When I was in high school, I started to give tithes to God. One day, my father found out it and he was really upset about it and blamed the church. He blamed the church just like normal people who are anti-Christianity. I tried to explain the meaning of tithing and God, but he did not agree with it.

Blue Bell mentioned that her father blamed the church just like a ‘normal person’ who is anti-Christianity. Green Temptation and Blue Bell who both mention ‘a normal person’ demonstrate how the negative view of Korean society affects their faith life and tension with their parents.

The negative views of Christianity within Korean society in daily life are not very overt, but the unique, exclusive doctrine of Christians and their passion for God is sometimes criticised by the public when the negative issues concerning Christianity emerge. While I was writing the present thesis, a major issue in Korean society occurred regarding Christianity when 23 Christians who had travelled to Afghanistan for the purposes of outreach were kidnapped by armed Taliban on October 2007, and finally two men, including a pastor, were killed by them. The rest of the Christians were set free in the end, but the news brought about a bitter criticism of Christianity within Korean society. I do not have any intention of simply supporting the Christians’ situation nor of judging the bitter criticism of Korean society regarding Christianity. I also do not intend to evaluate the condition of Korean missionary work. I merely wish to illustrate how Korean society responds to and evaluates Christianity.

The general public opinion concentrated on the fact that these Christians had travelled to Afghanistan in order to carry out missionary work in spite of the Korean



government issuing a warning of danger with regard to visiting the country. The public hardly showed sympathy for the captured people who were also Korean, even in the case of the two murdered by the Taleban. Blaming Christianity and evaluating their missionary work negatively emerged from this event as a major social issue.

I translated the report of Kum (2007: para. 1-4) on this issue as follows:

When the released people from the Taleban were exhibited at the port of entry, a man who is in his twenties was captured by the police. He had planned to throw eggs at the survivors. The event shows the cold eyes of Korean people about the Taleban event.

The nature of the event in Afghanistan was that since the ‘armed Taleban kidnapped guiltless civilians and murdered some of them’, the Taleban should be judged and blamed.

Nevertheless, there was not only a blaming of the Taleban but also of Christianity and the church in our society, for the above reasons. The community of Christians was criticised for sending people to Afghanistan to carry out service even though the government had given notice that it was dangerous to travel in the area.

From this event in Afghanistan, fierce debate emerged in Korean society. In particular, under each of the news articles regarding the said event, a number of people posted negative commentary on the Internet blaming Christianity.



Furthermore, a major argument developed concerning the mission work of the church, as to the purpose of the people who visited Afghanistan: for service or spreading the gospel? Most of the people in Korea wanted to know the exact purpose of the visit to Afghanistan. According to the report of the Government Information Agency (2006:131), 66.2% of people think that a religious philosophy does not hold a dominant position in comparison with other philosophies or ethics. For a number of Korean people, a religious philosophy is merely one of many philosophies and systems of ethics in the world. Therefore, to determine whether the purpose was 'for service or for spreading the gospel' was an important issue in order to judge the people who had visited Afghanistan. The public opinion held that if the purpose is only that of service, the behaviour of the people who visited Afghanistan could be accepted and their mistakes forgiven, but if there was any intention to spread the gospel under cover of the service rendered, their mistakes could not be accepted and therefore they should be blamed. Because these Christians had visited Afghanistan for their own benefit, they should take responsibility for the unfortunate incident.

The Afghanistan event represents the position of Christianity within Korean society. Even though Korean people enjoy the right to choose their own religion freely and there is major growth in the church in Korea, Korean society does not exhibit any positive attitudes towards Christianity. Moreover, such an attitude in Korean society influences the negative evaluation of the co-researchers' parents regarding the Christian faith of their children.

4.3.1.2 Dual attitude of Korean society towards religion



Korean people are not forced to choose a certain religion and government guarantees freedom of religion, even though some negative attitudes regarding Christianity exist in Korean society. Christians can erect a church anywhere and conduct services anytime. Nevertheless, Korean people tend to enforce the same religion within one family. Eun (2001:163) explains this unique tendency of the Korean family as ‘religious homogeneity’²³. Therefore, we can say that Korean society adopts a dual attitude concerning religion. Even though people may have the freedom to choose a religion for their individual life, they still experience limitations when their family follows a different religion from that of the individual’s choice. Of course, most families preserve religious homogeneity, but we need to focus on the few who practise different religions from that of their family. Although it is common for people to follow the same religion as that of their family, those who adhere to a different religion might be easily marginalised and isolated. It does not matter whether they are Christian, Buddhist or irreligious, a major concern and stress would exist within their family because of the difference in religion.

Eun (2001:163) avers that there is strong religious homogeneity within the Korean family; thus, there is a low possibility of religious conflict because of the different religions within one family. Christianity in Korea has a short history of about 120 years during which it has grown rapidly, both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, even though no exact statistical reports are available as yet because of the short Christian history, we can easily expect that there will only be a small number of families who inherit the Christian faith from generation to generation as well as a rapid growth in Korea. This means that great numbers of people convert to

²³ See, p. 1, 2.



Christianity in the middle of their life. Some people who convert to Christianity will practise the same religion as their family, while others may not. If the enormous growth of Christianity in Korea continues into the future, more people will need to face the tension within their relatives because of the different religions. Therefore, we cannot ignore the religious tension/conflict within the family and consequently we need to focus on their difficulties in the non-Christian family.

4.3.1.3 Confucian family

In terms of the dual attitudes found in Korean society concerning religion, attempts to maintain religious homogeneity within the family can be explained by the Confucian characteristics within the Korean family. Moreover, the oppression and sanction exercised by the co-researchers' parents on their children who follow different religions to them can be explained.

In the individual interview session, Happy mentioned the Confucian influence of his father and brother's behaviour towards him.

R: What is the main reason your non-Christian family reject your Christian faith?

H: They usually say that Christianity is too aggressive and causes one to neglect one's own family. Therefore, the time of my homecoming is too late and I place priority not on my parents' word but on God's word.

R: What is your opinion about this? Do you agree with it?

H: No, I do not. I think that it comes from Confucian thinking. My father usually says that 'gods can exist, but father has the same position with other gods.



Therefore, you should do the same thing to me that you do to your god. You are attending the church very well, but you are not doing well at home. Do your best like you do in the church! When our family has sacrificial rites, you do not bow down in front of our ancestors. Thus, I am embarrassed very much because of your rude behaviour’.

In another interview session, I asked about Happy’s brother.

R: The previous time you said that your elder brother even slaps you to make you to stop going to the church. Can you explain his behaviour towards you?

H: He has the same reason as my father as I mentioned previously. He is in the same situation as my father. He places higher value on the family than other groups such as the church. Therefore, he seems to feel that to attend the church too many times can cause neglect of one’s own family and thus ignore one’s father’s authority.

Green Temptation also told a similar story to that of Happy.

R: Have you ever heard from your parents the reason they do not agree with your Christian faith?

G: Yes, sometimes they do complain about my Christian faith.

R: What was the reason?

G: First of all, my parents are really uncomfortable with my late homecoming. They think that this is the result of neglecting self-management. Secondly, they usually complain about spending insufficient time with my family. They seem



to think that I place more value on attending church than being with the family.

Other co-researchers, Agape and Blue Bell, also mentioned similar reasons which they heard from their parents. To sum up their interpreted stories with regards to the reason of their parents' objections to the co-researchers' Christian faith: a late homecoming that seems to neglect the co-researchers' own private life as well as their placing greater value on the church than their own family cause their parents, especially their fathers, to feel that their own power as a patriarch in the family is being ignored.

In Korea patriarchy and Confucianism go hand in hand. "Confucianism came to Korea with the advent of Chinese writing: it became firmly planted in Korea when Korean scholars became proficient in this literature" (Lew 1970:30). The Chinese literature includes Confucian philosophy which has influenced Korean social and political doctrine in terms of the basic ethics and philosophy adopted by Korean scholars who held high positions in Korean society. Thus, this influence has resulted in Confucianism being regarded as both a religion and a major philosophy within Korean circles. In the modern Korean society, the religious function of Confucianism has been weakened but its ethics and philosophy continues to influence Korean society broadly as a basic philosophy. In particular, the Confucian doctrines of 'Jang-yu-yu-sö' (長幼有序²⁴) and 'Hyo' (孝²⁵) have given room for the strengthening of patriarchal rights²⁶ (Shin 1998:131). Kim (1991:98) points to one of the unique

²⁴ 長幼有序: One of the moral rules given to the Five Human Relations. There is a hierarchical order between the younger and the elder.

²⁵ 孝: Filial piety.

²⁶ The patriarchal right means that "... a patriarch has the absolute power to control



characteristics of the Korean family as being ‘the paternal family’, in other words that the surname, heritage of and responsibility for the family are inherited through the paternal line by descent (Kim 1991:98). Therefore, a father who has inherited all the rights of his family as a patriarch can wield strong power and responsibility with regards to his own family. If there is no father in the family, the first son can assume the said power and responsibility.

The patriarchal right that is one of the characteristics of the Korean family system is strengthened by Confucian traditions that focus on the order of generations and on the respect for the elderly person. In addition, the patriarchal right is the major principle adhered to in the Korean family system, even in the present day. From the background of the unique Korean character of the paternal family, we can understand the parents of the co-researchers’ attitude to their children. Even though the co-researchers are already adults, they still fall under the influence of their parents, especially the authority of their father. Nevertheless, when their children adopt the Christian faith which is a different religion from theirs, the parents might feel that their power over these children is threatened.

Moreover, adopting the Christian faith which is hardly congruent with other religions and places a universal value on obedience to God’s word can present a major dilemma for the parents. I argue that the effort of the parents to maintain religious homogeneity within their family can also be understood in terms of the influence of the Confucian patriarchal rights. For different religions to co-exist within the family, the implication is that different sets of values and behaviour patterns among the

his own family” (Shin 1998:131).



family members will exist. Especially, when the wife and children adhere to a different religion to that of the patriarch, the man who carries the responsibility to maintain harmony for the sake of a well controlled family, as its patriarch, might find this difficult.

Furthermore, with the increase in the numbers of nuclear families in modern Korean society the relationship between the parents and the children has intensified. Within this intense relationship, the parents tend to think of their children as the other self who can realise their own desires. This thought pattern of the parents regarding their children has caused over-expectations and strict control over their children (Kim, 1991:113). The patriarchal right, the intense relationship between the parents, and the children within the modern nuclear family, have provided a reasonable foundation for the aforementioned over-expectations and the strict control over their children. As presented in the story of Green Temptation above, her parents frequently worried and complained about her late homecoming. Green Temptation interpreted this as denoting that her parents were concerned about her self-management. Agape and Blue Bell also interpreted their situation similarly. Green Temptation and Blue Bell are students while Green Temptation is preparing for an examination for the purposes of employment; thus, the co-researchers' situations suggest a reason why their parents are deeply concerned for the studies of their children. Hence the parents complained that they spent too much time in church. Agape and Blue Bell expressed discontent regarding this negative attitude of their parents. They felt that their parents' sensitive response regarding their studies was just a pretext for disrupting their Christian faith life. They thought that besides spending time in church, they also spend their time meeting with friends, watching television, shopping and so on, but



their parents usually only complain about their spending time in church. They mentioned that this is just one of the ways in which parents express their objections to their children's Christian faith life.

4.3.1.4 Korean Familism

I discussed Korean familism and its influences upon Korean society in chapter 1. One of the unique Korean family characteristics that can be identified in terms of 'Korean familism' is that it places greater value on the family than on the individual. Cho (1985: 83) refers to the concept of 'Korean familism' as "... the basic element of the society [which] is the family not [the] individual, and the family always has preference over any other social group ...". Shin (1998:128) insists that the Korean familism has been influenced by Confucian traditions that place an emphasis on patrilineage, respect of elders, filial piety, ancestral worship, and the continuity of the patrilineal family. According to the interpretation of Shin (1998:128) with regards to the Confucian influences on Korean familism, D C Kim (2002:111) adds the influence of the egoistic competition between the nuclear families in modern Korean society. With the industrial development of modern society, the inclination to Korean familism has emerged more strongly. In the modern industrial capitalist society, the family is important as a basic unit within a situation of social competition. Therefore, in order to gain greater benefits within such competition, the family needs to focus on developing its own values as well as attempting to protect its basic social boundaries.

Within the influences of this type of familism, to believe in the Christian faith which



is different from the family's traditional religion and places greater value on God and the church means that the behaviour may damage the relationship of a firmly united family group.

4.3.2 An alternative story of 'keeping the faith'

It has been demonstrated that the Confucian philosophy, patriarchal family system and Korean familism within the modern Korean nuclear family, especially the broad social antipathy towards Christianity, all influence the co-researchers' Christian faith life to the extent that these cause difficult tension/conflict in the relationship with their non-Christian family. The difficulties the co-researchers face with regards to their Christian faith are more complicated since these are connected with various social and philosophical issues in Korea and are greater than I had expected at the beginning of the present research. In terms of the complicated difficulties of the co-researchers, Happy interpreted his difficulties of the faith life as the problem of 'Keeping Faith':

H: These days, our painful stories are shared and discussed in the small meetings and the Bible training groups of the church. Within the time, people usually say that they can understand our difficulties, but I have found that they only know the painful stories superficially. If I did not attend this research interview, I would still ignore their lack of understanding and remain silent. But, now, I can try to tell my stories to other Christians without any pretext.

R: What was the other Christians' understanding of your painful stories?

H: They tend to understand our difficulties as those that we can address through



our faith life such as temptations to weaken our faith. Thus, they seem to think that our difficulties with non-Christian family can be overcome through focusing on the Bible and the prayer. But, for us the difficulties are a really important problem which is about losing or keeping our Christian faith. The difficulty with our non-Christian family is not some part of our faith life but our whole faith life.

R: How do other Christians talk about your difficulties with your non-Christian family?

H: They usually view the problem in terms of the level of maturity of one's faith. People whose faith is weak cannot overcome the problem with non-Christian family and people whose faith is mature can They generally encourage me by saying that 'your faith is mature, thus you can overcome the problem with your non-Christian family'.

R: How do you feel about the general response of other Christians?

H: Those who have Christian family seem to have an advantage over me with a non-Christian family. That kind of attitude does not help to overcome my faith problem.

In the position of the co-researchers' experience of difficulties with their non-Christian family, to believe in the Christian faith which is a different religion from that of their family means to be in opposition to the patriarch's authority and ruling, contrary to their parents' expectations, and to face social prejudice regarding Christianity. Within these complicated situations, the co-researchers are struggling with maintaining their Christian faith.



4.4 RETELLING THE STORY OF ‘SUFFERINGS’

During the interview sessions in the present study, the co-researchers usually shared their painful stories with respect to their non-Christian family. These concerned their sufferings stemming from maintaining their Christian faith life and efforts to evangelise their non-Christian family. The co-researchers experienced suffering because as Christians they oppose the family’s religious identity. While listening to the stories about the suffering of the co-researchers, I wondered whether God really wants his children to suffer in life. The interpretations of some of the co-researchers with regards to this question suggest that God allowed the suffering to strengthen them and to cause their non-Christian family members to become Christians as well. On the other hand, other co-researchers interpreted this as Satan causing the sufferings as a temptation in order to destroy their love for God, and added that their non-Christian families are used by Satan as a means to do so.

Whatever the interpretations of the co-researchers regarding their sufferings within the context of non-Christian family, they tend to respond to the sufferings with unconditional endurance. Within the difficult relationship with non-Christian family members, the co-researchers chose to merely remain silent and continue to endure the suffering in order to prevent even greater difficulties with their non-Christian family members and also to embody a good Christian model for the evangelisation of their non-Christian family members. Most of the co-researchers did not consider any other options to overcome the suffering.

I asked about their general response to the sufferings with their non-Christian



families.

R: What makes you endure all the suffering with your non-Christian family members?

A: At first, I could not endure the unfair and wrong attitude of my family towards me. But after I realised God's love and plan for me, I tried to endure all the suffering within my family.

R: When did you realise God's love and plan for you?

A: When I accepted God as my only one Lord in my life.

R: Actually, did God let you know that you should endure the suffering that stems from the difficult relationship with your non-Christian families?

A: No. God made me realise his love and the power with which I could endure the suffering.

R: Um...I see now. So, can you be sure that God really wants you to sacrifice within the difficult relationship with your non-Christian families?

A: Well..... I did not think about it. I do not know.

R: Can you tell me where you get the idea of unconditional endurance of the suffering?

A: Um..... I think I have got the idea from some sermons in the services and some religious books.

R: How did they offer advice for your suffering?

A: In order to evangelise my family I should be a good Christian model in the house. I thought that if my family also held a Christian faith all the troubles would disappear. Thus, I tried to understand their negative attitude towards me and to be a good daughter and a good sister by an obedient and gentle attitude



towards my family.

R: Was it effective?

A: Well...I am not sure about it. Actually, I did my best, but....(she kept silence for a long time).

R: What do you think?

A: I am thinking about whether my efforts were really effective or not.

R: Now, do you find the answer?

A: Not exactly. I think that my efforts seemed to be not quite effective. Even though I was trying to be a good daughter, my parents usually disrupted my faith life much more. They seemed to use my efforts as a weakness in the sense that I could not resist their unfair attitude.

R: Have you ever explained your intention regarding the endurance?

A: No, I have not.

The other co-researchers have indicated a similar response to their suffering, although most of them are not sure of the effectiveness of their responses to their suffering. Even though the co-researchers have done their best in this regard, they still feel powerless and marginalised within their family.

4.4.1 Deconstructing the story of ‘suffering’

Their faith in God and the conviction of God’s love and plan amongst the co-researchers is the motivating power for them to endure the suffering within their non-



Christian family²⁷. However, the co-researchers merely maintain silence in their family relationship without any effort to solve the unfair and negative attitudes of their non-Christian family members while they endeavour to endure the suffering. Agape and Happy began to alter their opinions towards their suffering during the latter half of the research interview process.

A: With the passing of time, being unconditionally patient in the conflict with my non-Christian families has become more difficult. Thus, these days I sometimes complain and resist the unfair and rude attitude towards me. Some could say that my faith has weakened and my prayer is not enough, but....it is not.

R: What has caused you to change these days?

A: I am already an adult. I think that my parents should accept my physical and emotional changes and respect them, but they still show the same attitude towards me and still disrupt my faith life. It makes me harder.

Agape complained that she is in the transition period of adulthood; thus, she desires a changed relationship with her parents, but they continue with the same attitude towards her faith life. I suggest that Agape's response, to maintain silence, and her unconditional patience to overcome her suffering within her non-Christian families could be causing this lack of communication. Agape did not attempt to overcome the conflict with her non-Christian parents with sufficient conversation or interaction in the relationship with them, in order for all the relatives to gain a deeper understanding of each other. She tried to overcome the difficult situation by

²⁷ See, p. 128, 129.

remaining silent and enduring the uncomfortable situation.

4.4.2 Emerging adulthood and the family relationship

Arnett (2000:469) focuses on people between the ages of 18-25 and identifies this period as an 'emerging adulthood'. This period has been extended in modern industrial society and is considered an important one during which to prepare for adulthood.²⁸

As I already mentioned in chapter 1, Korean people usually live with their parents before marriage. Generally, the young adults may live independently for a very short period or none at all prior to their own marriage even though they are economically independent. Moreover, owing to the influence of the Confucian patriarchal family interference in the life of the young adult might occur more frequently.

The co-researchers are in the period of emerging adulthood and face conflict/tension in the relationship with their non-Christian families. They also desire to live independently from their parents physically and emotionally, but they are nevertheless still under the strong influence of their parents. This fact may present a major stress for the adult believers.

On the other hand, the co-researchers also feel intimate and secure within the family relationship. We know that usually the family relationship is the most intimate and comfortable relationship among the other social relationships in which people

²⁸ See, p. 49, 50.



connects with each other. However, if there is conflict/tension within such a relationship, people may be seriously affected.

A: When I think back to the most difficult period with my parents, I think that I was in deep sorrow. My study gradually became more difficult at school, yet I could not get any emotional support from my family. At the time, I was really envious of other Christian friends who have Christian families, because they can get good support from their Christian parents. When I opened the gate of my house, I could feel the coolness of my family immediately. I really wanted to have Christian parents who could pray for me and support me. I cried so many times while experiencing sorrow I was really lonely.

H: I could not understand their rejection of my Christian faith. I did not cause any trouble in the family and I am rather a good son and a good sibling: the only reason is that my Christian faith brought such major trouble and disconnection in the family relationship.

The co-researchers interpreted their painful relationships with their non-Christian parents as follows. They felt that they experience difficulties with their family because of their Christian faith, and that their family therefore display negative attitudes towards them, which causes them to feel sorrow in their family relationships. The co-researchers desired a family relationship in which they could feel comfortable and secure. However, the parents of the co-researchers expressed uncomfortable emotions regarding their children who believe in a different religion to theirs and who do not follow their parents' expectations that they will throw away their



Christian faith.

Kim (2001:144) refers to Confucian filial piety as obedience and respect for the parents' will. Even though the children do not agree with their parents' will, to obey is the duty of the children. Obedience to and respect for the parents constitutes the fundamental ethics of Korean family relationships. These ethics of filial piety tend to focus on only the duty of children towards their parents. The parents' request is lopsided when obedience and respect to their children is required even though the former's will is wrong. The demand for absolute obedience in filial piety can be found frequently in the traditional fables. An example of the traditional Korean tale is the story of Simchung, who was a girl who lived with her old and blind father. One of the monks advised her that if she gave an offering of three hundred bags of rice to Buddha, her father would be able to open his eyes. Unfortunately, she was really poor; thus, there was no way to cure her father's sight nor even to live. One day, Simchung was asked to become a human sacrifice in order to calm the rough seas for a merchant. As compensation for her sacrifice, people promised to donate three hundred bags of rice, exactly the same amount as the offering to Buddha. Finally, Simchung made a decision to be that human sacrifice and threw herself into the sea. Most of the people were impressed by this and Simchung's great filial piety. Kim (2001:145) evaluates this tale as an example of expecting the excessive filial piety of the children to be admired. Therefore, within the relationship between the parents and the children the lopsided duty of such piety is forced on the children and when this duty is not carried out the relationship will be placed in jeopardy.

Furthermore, within the rapidly changing modern society, this lopsided duty of



obedience to and respect for the parents within the Korean family relationship may pose problems between the children and their parents. In spite of the betterment of the woman's social and family position and the children's acceptance of this new-generation value, men in the family still retain the conservative traditional family ethos. (Cho & Oh 2001: 280) The present generation of children is changing rapidly along with the more modern society. The children want more freedom and wish to form their own identity. Nevertheless, the parents tend to hold traditional family ethics in order to control their own family. This generation gap can cause family conflict / tension.

4.4.3 To be an adult!

The co-researchers still live with their parents physically, remain under their influence emotionally, and continue to depend on their parents economically. Nevertheless, the former want to be 'adults' who can enjoy freedom as regards their chosen faith life. Arnett (2000: 477) distinguishes the concept of emerging adulthood from that of young adulthood:

The young people who are in the emerging adulthood see themselves as gradually making their way into adulthood..... They are still in the process of obtaining education and training for a long-term adult occupation, whereas the majority of people in their thirties have settled into a more stable occupational path.

The young people who are emerging into adulthood are in a period during which they



need to prepare to live as independent ‘adults’ physically, emotionally and financially. However, the young people cannot be identified as being adults as well, because they are not independent of their parents in these realms. In particular, the co-researchers felt that economic independence is the most important aspect of being an ‘adult’ with her/his own religious freedom.

B: It is difficult to insist on independent religion in my family, because I cannot stand on my own feet economically and emotionally. I think that the economic independence is more important.

R: If you can stand on your own feet financially, are you expecting that your parents’ disruption of your faith life could be diminished?

B: Yes, I think so. I regret my economic dependence, thus, I cannot insist on my individual faith life strongly.

R: Do you have any story to confirm your idea?

B: For instance, while I was preparing for the examination for employment, I worked at a part-time job. One day I stopped the part-time job in order to study more intensively instead. After a while, my father’s harassment regarding my attending church became more serious.

A: These days, my faith life in the family is becoming more comfortable.

R: What makes your faith life in the family more comfortable?

A: I have a part-time job at the moment, thus, I can be financially independent from my parents. I think that the economic independence influences my parents to reduce their disruption of my faith life. (She was smiling.)



H: These days, I am making my own income from my job. It enables me to have economic independence and to spend less time with my family. As the result, the stress that comes from the harassment from my father because of my religion has lessened.

While I was conducting the present interviews, some of the co-researchers obtained part-time employment. From their experience of partial economic independence, they seemed to feel that this positively influenced their family difficulties to some extent.

Arnett (2000:472) explains that in the process of reaching for adulthood, young people need to establish a stable residence, finish school, settle into a career, and marry. Economic independence alone is not an essential condition of becoming an adult. When the co-researchers achieve stable independence emotionally, economically, and physically, they can be considered as being 'adult'. Moreover, I believe that to reach adulthood, the co-researchers need to attempt to deal with the difficult relationship with their family members by facing it rather than avoiding the problem in order to make their family life more comfortable,

4.4.4 Family conflict

Within family life, conflict and difficulties among family members inevitably occur. (Garland 1999: 148) Therefore, family conflict is basically a normal and omnipresent event in normal family life. Kim (1993:39) mentions, with acute insight, that to solve



family conflict means the termination of the family structure. For this reason, she (Kim 1993:39) insists that we need rather to focus on conflict management than a solution to the conflict.

Kim (1993:113) reports in her research into family-conflict-management methods, that when the children reach the age of university students, the parent-child relationship experiences the greatest family conflict. Kim (1993:113) also mentions that the family conflict, which emerges in the parent-child relationship, strongly stems from a relatively higher authority. To obey and respect the higher authority within the family relationship stems from traditional family ethics, but for the young adult children who have adopted new modern family values, this authority cannot be easily accepted. Thus, greater potential for family conflict exists in a family with young adult children who are in the emerging adulthood period.

Furthermore, an interesting result emerges from Kim's research. When conflict is present in the parent-child relationship, different response methods are utilised to manage this according to the origins of the conflict. When the origin of the conflict relates to resources, especially money for personal expenses and living expenses, 39.7% of respondents use the method of mutual agreement while 32.1% utilise the method of obedience to resolve the family conflict in the parent-child relationship. In contrast with this result, when they hold opposing opinions in the parent-child relationship 52.7% people use the method of evasion while 18.2% people employ the method of obedience for dealing with the family conflict (Kim 1993:119-121). With regards to conflict about resources, the fact that a high percentage of people use the method of the mutual agreement is remarkable. It indicates that Korean family



relationships are gradually evolving from traditional obedience in the parent-child relationship. Nevertheless, in terms of conflict with regards to the opposing opinions in the family, most people still prefer the method of evasion in this conflict. The co-researchers of the present study also mostly use the same method in an attempt to resolve their conflict with their non-Christian parents.

Kim (1991: 183) insists that when the family members are able to express their own understanding, concern, respect, and thanks in a frank manner, the family relationship can be more meaningful and intimate. Within the family conflict, if the family members can express their own opinion, emotions, and expectations the family can reduce the conflict and manage it more effectively. However, the co-researchers in the present research usually do not express their own opinions and emotions during the conflict with their non-Christian family. They keep silent and try to endure the pain caused by the conflict. Moreover, most of the co-researchers are fatalistic in considering the pain stemming from the family conflict. Hence such reflections can result in negative effects on their faith life.

H: Sometimes, people asked ‘why are your family members still non-Christians since you have been a Christian for a long time?’ In the early stages of my faith life, I thought that I was really sinful; thus, God gave me this suffering to train me to be a more mature disciple of God.

A: When I think back, the suffering caused by the difficult relationship with non-Christian family has made my faith life stronger. Sometimes I think that God may know the necessity of the suffering for my insufficient faith, thus, he



permits it.

G: I think that God gave me the non-Christian family in order to evangelise them.

Such fatalism about these sufferings induces a sense of guilt regarding their insufficient and weak faith.

4.4.5 ‘Sufferings’

The response of the co-researchers with regards to the suffering stemming from the difficult relationships with non-Christian families, maintaining silence and their unconditional endurance raises two questions for me regarding this suffering. The first is, ‘Does God really want the co-researchers to suffer?’ The co-researchers’ struggle within their non-Christian families seemed to be really painful to endure. I felt that they are abused by their parents because of their Christian faith that differs from the latter’s religion. ‘Does God really want a painful life for his/her children?’ The second question asked, ‘Did God really give the suffering to the co-researchers in order to develop their weak faith?’ or ‘Do God really permit Satan to test the co-researchers’ faith?’ The co-researchers frequently interpreted their sufferings in the research interview sessions in this manner. But, when I listened to their interpretations I felt that God is too cruel and unfair to us. Some people have non-Christian families; thus, they are experiencing difficulties in various forms. However, some people have Christian relatives and they can continue their faith life happily. I cannot identify any reasonable grounds for God’s choosing the people who are



supposed to endure suffering in their faith life.

Dreyer and van der Ven (2002:3) mention the most direct and simple answer that most religious people offer: “My suffering is a divine destiny. God has decided to have me suffer this pain or that loss.” These are typical reflections when people suffer. But these interpretations cause new problems. ‘Is it really God’s intention for me to suffer? Is it right and fair? What is the reason to choose me to suffer?’ (Dreyer & van der Ven 2002:3). The traditional interpretation of these questions is that “... suffering has been associated with the concept of justice” (Van Hooft 1998: 13). God created the world by an order in which each creature fulfils the Creator’s will (Anderson 1994:30). Therefore, the suffering in our life is “... the result either from a human violation of the supernatural order or a divine response to such a violation” (Van Hooft 1998:13). Therefore, sufferings can be understood as punishment for sin. This view can cause further problems, such as ‘is God really cruel? Is the punishment fair?’

In spite of the above questions regarding suffering, the most frequently agreed issue in this respect is that we cannot completely eliminate suffering from our life. Thus, the current view of it is that that we sometimes face incomprehensible and unavoidable suffering; however, we should accept it as a part of our life or see it as a good thing in some way (Van Hooft 1998:13). Yet another problem regarding the current view of suffering is to accuse God of not being powerful or loving enough to prevent all the suffering in the lives of human beings and their world (Dreyer & van der Ven 2002:4). God created our entire world and rules over it. God can also control all creation which is evident in his/her creation of the world. There is no part which



God's power cannot reach. Dreyer & van der Ven (2002:9) refer to the fact that "God's calling activity is directed towards 'enjoyment' of the Kingdom of God though He "calls" and "draws" history by the strength of his promises and prescriptions." The nature of God's intention for his/her creations was that they should enjoy the Kingdom of God, which God promised and maintains even to the present day. In doing so, how can God permit the incomprehensible and uncontrollable pain of the human beings who love him/her? To this question, modern theology answers as follows: "... God is not the final Organiser and Stage manager of nature and history but the One who calls the world to his/her aims" (Dreyer & van der Ven 2002:9). We have the responsibility to respond to God's calling to enjoy this world in which we live. Within the suffering in our life, therefore, we should focus on, not the judgement of the suffering, but the fulfilment of God's purpose in the calling.

4.4.6 Alternative story of 'Hatch out!'

In the suffering that stems from their difficult relationship with non-Christian family members, the co-researchers generally responded to these difficulties with unconditional endurance which has caused them to feel victimised and powerless. The original purpose of this unconditional endurance was their sense of responsibility to evangelise their non-Christian family members. However, by the end of the research project some of the co-researchers displayed an altered attitude in this regard.

A: These days, I feel that to endure all the difficulties one-sidedly and just to wait



for changes in my parents is not the right solution for my suffering because of the deep valley in the relationship with my parents. Previously, I have heard that when I love my non-Christian parents and show them my unconditional endurance, they will be evangelised at last. But I think that it is not right.

R: Why do you think that the solution that you heard of in the past is not right?

A: In the past and in the present, I still find myself incapable to withstand the confusion and cannot solve any problems within my non-Christian family. I do not like it. When I began my faith life, the salvation of my non-Christian family was the only purpose in my faith life. I have heard and learned it. But, with the passing of time, I can still agree that to evangelise my non-Christian family is an important mission to me; however, I feel that I cannot consider that to be true for myself now. To say so again, the timing of the salvation of my non-Christian family cannot be accelerated or delayed because of my efforts.

R: So, do you think that you do not need to make any effort for the salvation of your non-Christian family?

A: No. I think that I can still make my best effort.

R: What kind of effort is needed for the salvation of your non-Christian family?

A: Um.... The continued effort to change my family...

R: Can you explain about the continued changing of your family in detail?

A: Previously, I thought that salvation is the most important mission in my life, but these days I think that the other parts of my life are also important. I cannot throw it away. I should live these parts of my life together. Therefore, I need to focus on the salvation of my non-Christian family and my life as a student, as a daughter, and as a human being at the same time.



R: If you could give any advice for other young adult Christians who have non-Christian families, what would you say to them?

A: The idea that we, Christians, should make sacrifices for the sake of our non-Christian family's salvation would be a big burden that may disturb our faith life and other life again. I think that it is a better idea not to take too much responsibility for our non-Christian family except to pray for them. If we, Christians who have non-Christian families, focus too much on our sacrifice for them, there might be important misunderstandings after they have been evangelised. We could turn the glory and thanks to ourselves because of our suffering and sacrifice for non-Christian families. We cannot bring about their salvation in Jesus. Only God can do it. Only God can make the plan and manage their salvation.

Agape's concept regarding the salvation of her non-Christian family has evolved. She accepted that the salvation of her non-Christian family is not her responsibility but is under God's plan and power. She said that she can only make the effort to pray for her non-Christian family and needs to create a balance between her faith life and the other parts of her life.

Happy also told of his changed attitude with regards to his non-Christian family.

H: These days, I feel more comfortable with my non-Christian family.

R: What makes you more comfortable with your non-Christian family?

H: The conviction of God's intention and promise that God always leads me to the right road and will protect me. It makes me more comfortable these days.



- R:** Did you not trust God's plan and intention for you previously?
- H:** I think I did not seriously have the conviction previously, especially concerning my non-Christian family. Thus, I tried to make an effort to evangelise them myself. These days, I am still sometimes impatient with my non-Christian family, but the conviction about God soon makes me comfortable.
- R:** How did you get the conviction about God's plan and good intention?
- H:** These days, I can observe the changed attitude of my non-Christian family towards my Christian faith life. I sometimes have the opportunity to introduce the Gospel to my family. Previously, I could not do it nor could I even read the Bible at home. These days, my family still have a negative attitude towards my Christian faith, but I can feel they are changing now.
- R:** Do you think that the changed attitude of your non-Christian family is according to the plan God made?
- H:** Yes, I think so. Actually, I think that our family is in the process of the plan God made for our family. I love reading the story of Joseph in the Bible. When he experienced abundance in all aspects of his life, his family changed. I think that if I can also be abundant in my life, my family will change and will become Christians as well.
- R:** What efforts are you making for this abundant life?
- H:** I know that I cannot be supported in my faith life like other Christians because of having non-Christian family. I cannot control it, but I can endeavour to have a deeper faith life than other Christians. I am also making an effort in the other aspects of my life such as study and work.



Happy also felt the necessity to focus on his own faith life as well as the other aspects of his life even though his background, a non-Christian family, cannot be changed. By trusting God's plan and good intentions for him, he could feel satisfied in his present life. Dreyer & van der Ven (2002:43, 44) contend that our attitude towards suffering in the pastoral care context should be as follows:

Our task is not to discern whether or not evil has an ontological origin. We need to accept the reality of tragic events, of chaotic experiences, of injustice, violence and crime. The assumption will be that our challenge is not to explain the link between suffering and evil. Rather our challenge in pastoral care is a hermeneutical one: the task to interpret and understand, to strengthen the courage to be, and to foster growth and hope.

To identify suffering as an evil temptation or as God's plan and to make a decision to merely endure all the pain is not our task regarding the fulfilled life that God really wants for us. We need to understand our suffering and to accept it as a part of our life. By understanding and accepting suffering we should encourage ourselves to grow and to nurture hope for the future. For so doing, we need to create a balance between the "... resignation to things that are inevitable; resistance against injustice and looking for solutions to solvable problems and, in all things: striving for, and directing ourselves towards the great vision of justice, peace and enjoyment" (Dreyer & van der Ven 2002:14, 15).

In unchangeable suffering such as having a non-Christian family who exhibit negative attitudes to Christianity, it is possible for us to easily forget God's original



intention for human beings in the creation. Of course, the co-researchers cannot dispose of their non-Christian family nor escape from the conflict with them, but they need to focus on God's intention for their life, peace and enjoyment. To give up finding solutions to the suffering too soon, by evasion or remaining silent, and to accept a painful life as God's plan will not result in peace and enjoyment. It appears that this situation is like being placed in an eggshell in which the co-researchers can forget the outside world's troubles and their own responsibilities as progressive beings. However, the eggshell is too small for them now. They cannot move actively and freely inside it, but they are still growing towards 'adulthood'. Now is the time to hatch the egg and come out to meet with the bigger world in which God has prepared a peaceful and enjoyable life for them. To accept suffering as a part of their life, to try to understand it much more in terms of seeking solutions and to make consistent efforts for a peaceful and enjoyable life might help to hatch the eggs and to connect with the outside world.

4.4.7 Alternative story of 'We are not powerless!'

During the research interviews, the co-researchers frequently spoke of the many advantages of other Christians who have Christian families, comparing them with their own disadvantages. The co-researchers seemed to feel envious towards other Christians with such relatives. Happy expressed his envy as: 'they are complaining of their blessings' when reflecting on the other Christians' interpretations in which they were also experiencing difficulties with their Christian family.²⁹ His interpretation indicates how he feels powerless in the relationship with other Christians who have

²⁹ See, p. 136.



Christian family.

Towards the end of the research interview sessions, Blue Bell reflected one of the traditions given by other co-researchers in the discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of non-Christian family members. The tradition emanates from the discussion concerning ‘people who have non-Christian family usually have a weak faith and easily give up their faith life’.

B: I do not agree with what was said. Of course, I think that I sometimes become weak in keeping my faith because of my non-Christian family, but when I think about the leaders in the church the weak faith is not connected with having non-Christian family. Most of the church leaders whom I always respect are persons with non-Christian family. The non-Christian family background can influence the individual faith life somewhat, but it is not the major reason for a weak faith. I think that the non-Christian family background can be a good stimulation for growth.

Blue Bell interpreted the non-Christian family background as stimulating growth within the faith life. She said that before the present research interview, she had not realised that the church leaders whom she respects as being good models for the faith life also have a non-Christian family background³⁰. Thus, when she read their stories on the web-activity she was really astonished to discover this. After Blue Bell’s opinion emerged in the web-activity, I tried to focus on the stories about the church activities of the co-researchers.

³⁰ The church leaders are two of the co-researchers in the present research.



- A:** I sometimes feel lonely within my specific family background, but I am sure that it is some kind of specific training course that can strengthen me. Even though I am still young, in the position of a church leader I can have an ardent mind towards my group members who have a similar family background to me.
- R:** Can you tell me in detail how your attitude for the group members differs from other church leaders who have Christian family?
- A:** The most important difference is that I can sympathise with their painful non-Christian family background easily and sincerely. I think that it is really important for people like me. To understand the painful stories and sincerely sympathise can comfort people who are experiencing difficulties with their non-Christian family. I am also trying to understand their difficulties even though these seem to be really tiny things.

When Agape is in the position of a church leader, who can take care of other people, she is no longer a powerless person. She can influence other people and can offer help because of her unique experience within the context of a non-Christian family background.

4.5 SUMMARY

In chapter 4, I presented the manner in which the identified traditions of interpretation that emerged in chapter 3 influenced the co-researchers' behaviour and thinking, through listening to the co-researchers' narratives as well as their various social and cultural contexts and theological reflections. Moreover, through the



process of deconstruction and reconstruction, the traditions of interpretation that emerged within the interdisciplinary conversations in order to find alternative interpretations are different from the present ones and offer themes which satisfy the various dimensions of the experiences of the co-researchers.

The alternative interpretations that emerged through the work of deconstruction and reconstruction can be summarised in two stories, 'Keeping the faith' and 'Hatch out!'. The painful stories about the suffering that the co-researchers are experiencing with their non-Christian families are not merely a part of our faith life but represent the efforts of the co-researchers to guard their faith against social prejudice towards Christianity and against the authority that stems from the Confucian family system. Within the seriously painful stories, the co-researchers usually respond by remaining silent and with unconditional endurance. Now is the time to hatch the eggs in which the co-researchers feel powerless by understanding their difficulties with greater depth, accepting them as a part of their faith life, and attempting to find solutions which can render their life consistently happy and enjoyable.

