
**THE IMPACT OF THE 2007 SYNOD RESOLUTION OF THE
DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH ON GAY MINISTERS: A
POSTFOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Maria Petronella van Loggerenberg, declare that the dissertation/thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Signed at Pretoria on 29 August 2014.

.....

(Mrs) MP van Loggerenberg

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Impact of the 2007 Synod Resolution of the Dutch Reformed Church on Gay Ministers: A Postfoundational Narrative Perspective.

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Abstract:

At the 2007 General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church a compromise resolution was accepted regarding homosexual members. This resolution, inter alia, requires of gay ministers to remain celibate as a prerequisite to be legitimated. This research is a qualitative inquiry to evaluate the impact which this resolution has on the lives of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Narrative and postfoundational perspectives were obtained by interviewing six gay ministers and/or candidate ministers as co-researchers, and also by engaging in dialogue with inter-disciplinary experts from Sociology, Psychology and Law.

This research traced the history of the Resolution, while the patriarchal and heteronormative discourses underlying the formulation were discussed. These discourses still sustain the Resolution. Interwoven in the Resolution are contradictions and double standards based on prejudice, leading to discrimination against gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. A literature study on prejudice and discrimination revealed many of the negative impacts these have on people on the margins of society.

A literature review on gay marriages suggested that gay unions and gay marriages were known from pre-modern times. With the changing of the socio-political climates since pre-modern times till today, attitudes towards gay unions/marriages seemed to have changed. A study of the biblical texts led to the tentative and incomplete understanding

that the Bible does not categorically say anything about committed, monogamous gay unions or gay marriages.

The focus of this research was to determine the impacts of the Resolution on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. From their stories certain themes revealing the impacts were co-constructed by the co-researchers and the researcher. According to a negotiated meaning-making process a fragile and incomplete understanding of the gay ministers' and gay candidate ministers' immense suffering due to their experience of rejection and humiliation by the DRC was formulated. This reiterated the Shame of being gay. In terms of the discrimination levelled against gay ministers, it could, according to the Constitution of South Africa, be regarded as fair. This research suggested that the fairness of the discrimination should be revisited.

Keywords

Dutch Reformed Church, homosexuality, gay ministers, gay candidate ministers, legitimation, prejudice, discrimination, gay marriages, the Constitution of South Africa, Practical Theology, Postfoundational theology, narrative.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
ABSTRACT	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	6
GLOSSARY	10
CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH	12
1.1 Introduction.....	12
1.2 Background	13
1.3 Research Problem.....	17
1.4 Research Questions.....	19
1.5 Research Objective	19
1.6 Conceptual framework	20
1.6.1 Postfoundational paradigm	20
1.6.2 Contextual practical theology.....	21
1.6.3 Pastoral care in the framework of a feminist theology of praxis	23
1.7 Research approach	24
1.7.1 Qualitative action research	25
1.7.2 Narrative inquiry.....	26
1.7.3 Participatory action research	28
1.8 Research design	30
1.9 Limitations and scope.....	34
1.10 Ethical considerations	34
1.11 Research structure	35
CHAPTER 2: WHEN TWO STORIES MET – NO, THREE.....	36
2.1 Introduction.....	36
2.2 My personal gay story	37
2.2.1 Early childhood influences	37
2.2.2 Moment of insertion	38
2.2.3 Becoming part of the gay community	39
2.3 The gay story of the DRC since 1986	46
2.3.1 The 1986 General Synod of the DRC.....	46
2.3.2 The 1999 Regional Synod of the DRC: Southern Transvaal.....	46
2.3.3 The 2001 Regional Synod of the DRC: Southern-Transvaal	47
2.3.4 The 2002 General Synod of the DRC.....	48
2.3.5 The 2004 Aasvoëlkop Conferences with gays and their parents	48
2.3.6 The 2004 General Synod of the DRC.....	49
2.3.7 The task team 2005—2007	50
2.3.8 The DVD: In conversation with gay Christians	50
2.3.9 The 2007 General Synod of the DRC.....	51
2.4 Reflection on our stories	55

CHAPTER 3: THE RESOLUTION: INTERPRETATIONS, POSSIBLE DISCOURSES AND NARRATIVES OF DISCRIMINATION	57
3.1 Introduction.....	57
3.2 Eight points of the Resolution	59
3.3 Reflecting on possible discourses.....	68
3.3.1 Prejudice and stigmatisation.....	69
3.3.2 The social construction of prejudice	71
3.3.3 The social construction of stigma	73
3.3.4 Tricks of stigma to defeat its targets.....	75
3.3.5 The impact of stigmatisation on gay people	80
3.3.6 Stigma and the Christian faith.....	84
3.3.7 Could prejudice change?.....	86
3.3.8 Feedback via facebook – a personal experience	89
3.4 Reflecting on the Resolution, its various interpretations and impact	93
CHAPTER 4: PERSPECTIVES ON CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATIONS ON GAY RELATIONSHIPS AND GAY MARRIAGES: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION	95
4.1 Introduction.....	95
4.2 Pre-modern times speak on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages	100
4.2.1 The origin of marriage.....	101
4.2.2 The Near-East	104
4.2.3 The Old Testament (600 -100 BCE?).....	105
4.2.4 Same-sex unions/marriages and the New Testament (70 CE)	111
4.2.5 Same-sex unions in pre-modern Europe (400 BCE – 1500 CE).....	116
4.2.6 Same-sex unions in the Greco-Roman world (400 BCE – 400 CE).....	116
4.3 Same-sex unions in medieval Europe (500 CE – 1500 CE).....	117
4.4 Modern times speak on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages	120
4.5 Post-modern times speak on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages.....	121
4.5.1 International discourse on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages.....	123
4.5.2 South African law speaks on gay relationships and gay unions/ marriages	127
4.5.3 The gay community speaks on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages	130
4.5.4 Presenting a case for gay marriages	146
4.5.5 What God has joined together.....	151
4.5.6 Inviting authenticity by coming in.....	157
4.5.7 The way of Christ for gay and lesbian couples.....	158
4.6 Reflecting on gay relationships and gay marriages	160
CHAPTER 5: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE RESOLUTION ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE GAY MINISTERS AND CANDIDATE MINISTERS.....	162
5.1 Introduction.....	162
5.2 Inviting my co-researchers to participation.....	163
5.3 Conducting the interviews	166
5.3.1 Individual interviews.....	166

5.3.2	Combined telling and retelling of stories.....	167
5.3.3	Brainstorming session by co-researchers	168
5.4	Dominant themes/discourses amplifying the impact of the Resolution.....	170
5.4.1	Obedient to my calling	170
5.4.2	The DRC acted as my panopticon.....	174
5.4.3	I'm in love (and a gay minister/candidate minister)	175
5.4.4	The Balancing of two constitutional rights	178
5.4.5	Coming out, going out.....	179
5.4.6	In a spiral of chaos/disillusionment.....	181
5.4.7	Rejection and Shame danced on my dreams.....	183
5.4.8	Keeping the wolf from the door.....	185
5.4.9	Depression my safe hiding place.....	186
5.4.10	Atheism my new faith.....	187
5.4.11	Promise at a death bed.....	189
5.4.12	Impact on my relationship.....	189
5.4.13	Knowledge my first ally against injustice	190
5.4.14	Staying in, hanging onto hope	191
5.4.15	I don't need the church	193
5.4.16	Authentic me coming in (see also 4.5.3.5)	194
5.4.17	A DRC congregation restored my dignity	202
5.5	Reflection on my retelling of their stories	203
5.6	Conclusion.....	207
CHAPTER 6: INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUES		209
6.1	Introduction.....	209
6.2	A foundationalist or universal perspective.....	209
6.3	A nonfoundationalist or diverse perspective	210
6.4	A postfoundationalist or transversal perspective	210
6.5	The process of transversal reasoning	211
6.5.1	Selecting the participants.....	214
6.5.2	Reading the stories of the gay co-researchers.....	215
6.5.3	Questions asked to each participant	215
6.5.4	The responses from the interdisciplinary participants	215
6.6	Conclusion.....	233
CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY.....		235
7.1	Introduction.....	235
7.2	Addressing the Research Questions.....	236
7.2.1	What is the history of the Resolution?	236
7.2.2	What discourses constituted and sustained the Resolution?	237
7.2.3	What are the implications, contradictions and interpretations of the terms in the Resolution?.....	238
7.2.4	What does the literature say with regards to pre-modern, modern and post-modern perspectives on gay relationships and gay marriages?	242

7.2.5	What are the impacts of the Resolution on the lived experiences of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?	250
7.2.6	What do experts from other disciplines say about the impact of the terms in the Resolution?	253
7.2.7	What are the impacts of the Resolution on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?	255
7.3	Validity of the research	255
7.4	Possible Contributions of the research	257
7.4.1	Research Contribution	257
7.4.2	Impact of the research on the local community	258
7.4.3	Impact of the research beyond the local community	260
7.5	Recommendations for Further Research	261
7.6	Conclusion	262
BIBLIOGRAPHY		263
APPENDIX I: CONSENT FORM		283
APPENDIX II: LETTER TO EXPERTS		284
APPENDIX III: CD-ROM WITH INTERVIEWS		285

GLOSSARY

The table below contains a list of Afrikaans expressions and acronyms with their meanings:

Word or acronym	Meaning
Algemene Kerkvergadering(AKV)	General Church Meeting of the <i>Hervormde Kerk</i>
B.Th	Bachelor of Theology
BA	Bachelor of Arts
Beeld	Daily Afrikaans newspaper
CSC	Christian Social Council
Curatorium	A body which controls and supervises training of theology students and appointments of lecturers in theology. Responsible for candidate ministers' approval to be legitimated.
Denmar	A Psychiatric clinic in Pretoria
Die Kerkorde	A book with regulations, principles, decisions of the DRC
Dominee	Afrikaans for 'Reverend'
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EU	European Union
FAMSA	Family and Marriage Council of South Africa
Gap year	A year after completion of school to decide on a career
Candidate Minister Legitimation	Final year theology student, not yet legitimated Approved by curatorium; after legitimation a proponent ready to be called to a congregation
Minister	A theology student who is legitimated and ordained in a congregation
General Synod	National meeting of the DRC, currently every two years
Gereformeerde Kerk	Afrikaans for 'Reformed Church'
GWF	Good Work Foundation
Hervormde Kerk	Afrikaans for 'Reformed Church'
Hoëveld	A region in central South Africa
ITD	Institute for Therapeutic Development
Kerkbode	Afrikaans Christian Newspaper of the DRC
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersexual
Moderamen	Executive committee of a synod
Moderature	Management committee of a synod
Moderator	Chairperson of a Synod
NGK	Dutch Reformed Church
NWU	North West University (South Africa)
Ossewa Brandwag	A former Afrikaans cultural organisation
Rapport	Sunday Afrikaans Newspaper
RCC	Roman Catholic Church

SDK	Service Commission of a Synod
Sinode	Afrikaans for 'Synod'
SKLAS(sinodale kommissie vir leer-en aktuele sake)	Synod commission of doctrine and current affairs
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UP	University of Pretoria (South Africa)
US	Stellenbosch University (South Africa)
Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk (VGK)	Traditionally multiracial congregations, part of DRC
Vrystaat	Free State, a province in South Africa
Weskoppies	A psychiatric hospital in Pretoria

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It was during the second part of November 2011 when I received a phone call from Professor Karin Calitz from the University of Stellenbosch (US). She specialises in Labour Law. At the time a gay final year theology student (Lulani Vermeulen) and her life partner of four years consulted with her in connection with a labour law issue. The Faculty of Theology required from Lulani to sign a document thereby committing her to celibacy. Of course, she could not sign the document, because she would not deny that she was in a relationship. This left the US Faculty of Theology with no choice but to deny her to be legitimated as a minister, purely based on the 2007 Resolution of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) on gay ministers (Algemene Sinode [NGK]2007b:8). This was also confirmed by Dr Coenie Burger, the chairperson of the US Curatorium, in an interview with *Kerkbode* (2012:13) when he referred to the Resolution.

The student (Lulani) enquired from Professor Calitz whether she could call upon the South African Bill of Rights which entrenches the individual rights of gay people. According to Professor Calitz, the South African Bill of Rights entrenches both the right to equality, including that no one should unfairly discriminate against someone on the ground of sexual orientation, (section 9 of the Constitution) and the right to freedom of religion (section 15 of the Constitution). When churches, which as entities are also entitled to freedom of religion, discriminate against persons on the ground of their sexual orientation by barring them from becoming spiritual leaders, the question is which of these two rights will take precedence (The Constitution of the RSA 1996:7, 8). During our telephonic conversation she asked me: "Please, Marietjie, isn't there anything that you can do to help this student?"

This request coincided with an e-mail which I have received from a final year gay theology student at Pretoria University (UP), asking advice as to whether he should sign a document committing him to celibacy. This student is celibate and has never before been in a gay relationship. His concern however, was that he considered it unfair

practice and discriminatory against gay theology students. The same was not required from unmarried heterosexual students¹. The mother of this student also consulted with me, anxiety trying to get the better of her due to the celibacy requirements of the DRC. When she left, she asked me to pray that her son would be able to abide by the "rules" for gay ministers in the DRC. "Please pray that he will always be content to live alone, never wanting to be in a relationship or that he will never fall in love with someone."

These two incidents, plus the similar situation of Mark Le Roux (Jackson 2012:3), another final year gay theology student at UP, to that of Lulani, moved me into writing this thesis. For the past thirteen years I have been involved in trying to deconstruct gay discourse, thereby trying to undo the injustice by the DRC levelled against gay Christians (van Loggerenberg 2008). This thesis is about my journey as a married, female, heterosexual, white South African Pastoral Therapist in a predominantly patriarchal society, a member of the DRC, as well as a member of the Reforming Church (gay church) in Pretoria, and my professional and personal relationship with gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. White Afrikaner Christian values and perceptions of gays propagated by these two denominations primarily permeate my arguments and counter arguments on various gay issues.

In this thesis the words gay and homosexual, referring to people who are cognitively, emotionally, spiritually and physically attracted to people of the same sex, will be used interchangeably.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The gay debate reached its zenith in the DRC during the General Synod of 2007 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007b). According to Botha (2005:25) the debate is mainly conducted from within the church, including the DRC, and is to a great extent maintained by homophobic discourse of Christian doctrines and of many church leaders. It seems that the one persistent challenge remains: intimate and sexual relationships and

¹ During the General Synod of 2013 it was decided that both homosexual and heterosexual students preparing themselves for the ministry in the DRC should comply with the same Christian-ethical standards for purposes of legitimation (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2013 [online]).

marriages between people of the same-sex. Although sodomy has been decriminalised in many countries, including in South Africa (see 4.5.2), Sullivan (2004:186) considers that to be totally different from permitting homosexual marriages. He considers agreement that an act is not a crime does not mean condoning that act. For the church to permit gay marriages seems equivalent to declaring that homosexual marriages are desirable and a noble condition to live in. It seems that most people in society do not share that belief. Pronk (1993:viii) considers homophobia (“the rejection of homosexuality or of homosexual behaviour because of some sense of fear surrounding the issue”) still to be widespread in cultures and in the majority of churches worldwide. Wink (1999:vii) confirms the homophobia in churches by writing: “Today the churches are undergoing fratricide over the issue of homosexuality, and the irony is that not just gays and lesbians, but the churches themselves, are likely to become the victims. The level of pure hatred, bitterness, close-mindedness, and disrespect is staggering...” Since 1999 when this phrase was written by Wink, there has been progress in terms of attitudes towards homosexual people, especially in the DRC after the 2007 Resolution. This Resolution opened up the possibility for gay friendly congregations to be created, and in fact did happen. The issue of homophobia is considered to be a moral issue. Considering that homosexuality is immoral, while, at the same time, rejecting gay people as dignified human beings also seems immoral. Homophobia erodes the core of biblical religion, because how can one love God, while rejecting one’s neighbour (Pronk 1993:viii, ix).

Although the South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the RSA 1996:7) protects gay people against discrimination, gay people still experience discrimination on various levels (Van der Westhuizen 2006:[1]). Fear of being discovered and losing their jobs is still governing gay people to a great extent. Good examples of this are the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers who have lost their jobs because of discriminatory regulations. The 2007 Resolution of the DRC condemns gay relationships (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007b:8), thereby either forcing gay relationships underground (often also with disastrous effects), or forcing the minister or candidate minister to resign. When a gay person has to conceal his/her identity all the time, it could happen that the only contact with other gay people is at gay clubs, gay bars, recreational rooms, public toilets and parks. The consequent loneliness, guilt, shame and fear may impact so negatively

on gay clergy that they leave the ministry and even the church (see 5.4.10). This may set them free to live truthfully.

Before the 2007 Synod meeting of the DRC the debate conducted in the South African media expressed the urgency for the DRC to review the Resolution on homosexuality. This reminded of a similar situation which unfolded in 1984 when the ministry of caring of the DRC requested Dr AH Botha of the ministry of caring of Southern Transvaal to prepare a presentation for the General Synod in 1986 (Algemene Sinode [NGK]1986:672). At the 1986 General Synod of the DRC it was decided that homosexuality should be seen as a deviate form of sexuality, while disapproving of gay practices and gay relationships as opposing “the will of God” (Algemene Sinode [NGK]1986: 672). The DRC applied Filadelfia in Christ (FIC), an organisation which claimed to reverse gay people’s sexual orientation, to reverse the sexual orientation of its members. According to Kruger (interview 2001), after a few years Filadelfia in Christ was losing support from church councils. Eventually, due to a lack of interest from the gay community, as well as a lack of success, this organisation was dissolved.

In 2002 the General Synod of the DRC moved away from the policy of 1986 when they accepted the recommendations which stated that the General Synod could not “...identify themselves any longer with the 1986 Synod report [on homosexuality]” and apologised for the pain and suffering it caused as a result of its “...prejudices and loveless behaviour of the past in alienating gay people.” This Synod acknowledged that there were significant differences of opinion within the Church regarding homosexuality and decided to postpone the formulation of a firm standpoint on homosexuality till the next General Synod of 2004 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2002:628).

The next General Synod at Hartenbos took place in 2004, where the recommendations were approved that all people, irrespective of their sexual orientation, are included in the love of God and that gay members should be accepted as equal members of the Church on the basis of their baptism and faith (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). They also conveyed an apology for the pain and suffering inflicted on gay people and their families, without formulating any firm standpoint on homosexuality. This caused much confusion amongst members of the Church. Individual members and Regional Synods distanced themselves from the decision of the General Synod of 2004 (NGK Sinode Hoëveld 2005; NGK Sinode KZN 2005; NGK Vrystaat 2005). Towards the end of 2005 the moderamen

of the General Synod of the DRC appointed a task team to do further investigations on the issue of homosexuality and to serve the Synod of 2007 with a report. Based on my professional experience with gay people, I was invited to serve as a member of the task team.

During the General Synod of the DRC (2007b:8) a compromise proposal which combined the two reports drafted by the task team members, led to the following principles with regard to homosexuality (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007b:8 – my translation from Afrikaans):

1. The Bible is our point of departure and in reflecting on homosexuality we are sincerely looking at ways to interpret Biblical values meaningfully within the context.
2. We accept the love of Christ as the only valid basis for relationships within the community of believers. All people are created in the image of God; the salvation in Christ is for all people and the Spirit was poured out on all believers. Thus we accept the human dignity of all people.
3. All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are included in God's love. They are, on the grounds of their baptism and their faith, accepted as members of the church of Christ. With membership we understand access to the sacraments, access to the incumbency and submission to the church discipline.
4. The General Synod reaffirms the decision of 2004 that, according to our understanding of the Bible, only the union between one man and one woman can be seen as a marriage.
5. The General Synod also affirms the decision of 2004 that both heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity should be condemned in the strongest terms.
6. The General Synod decides that, with the light that we currently have, homosexual unions and marriages cannot be accepted as an alternative for the marriage.
7. The granting of ministership is a function of the General Synod. The Synod decides that homosexual legitimates who lead a life of celibacy be granted ministership.

8. The General Synod acknowledges the discretion of local church councils to handle the differences on homosexuality in congregations in a spirit of Christian love.

These principles informed the Resolution of the DRC on homosexuality. With regards to gay ministers, it was thus decided that gay people could be legitimated as ministers, on condition that they remain celibate. This could be called selective celibacy and probably a last trait of Catholicism in Protestantism. Catholicism approved of sexual relationships in marriage which existed for procreation and not for recreation (Sullivan 2004:52). This viewpoint of the General Synod could be seen as a remnant of this idea about sex. Gaum (Oosthuizen 2007:[3]) supports this view by considering this to be a Roman Catholic tradition, not part of the reformed tradition and discriminatory against certain people. According to Gaum, celibacy cannot be expected from everybody. Scripture also supports this in Matt 19 and 1 Cor 7:37. One of the recent voices levelled against the decision of 2007 is that of Professor Louis Jonker, a member of the DRC lecturers' board at the US. In an interview with *Kerkbode* (2012:12) he expressed the opinion that it seems as if the decision of 2007 is not only impractical, but it is also an unacceptable view of human sexuality. *Kerkbode* (2012:13) reports an interview with Lulani Vermeulen where she focused on her calling as a minister and pleaded for dialogue on the issue of homosexuality. However, two days later Marlene Malan, a reporter for *Rapport* (2012:6), apparently misinterpreted Lulani in an article. According to Lulani what she said was warped by the reporter, thereby creating the impression that she would approach the court if she did not succeed. Lulani preferred dialogue at that stage. Later she clearly stated that she really did not intend to threaten the DRC. She would much rather solve the problem in an amicable manner.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The 2007 Resolution on the legitimation of gay ministers entails that intimate relationships, unions and same-sex marriages are prohibited, promiscuity are condemned and celibacy is prescribed. The condemnation of promiscuity is supported by gay ministers themselves. However, it is the ban on gay unions and gay marriages, and the precondition of celibacy for ministership that is perceived as discrimination and judged as unacceptable by the gay community. A gay medical specialist who regularly attends the gay church commented on the effect of the Resolution: "The Resolution

reinforces the Shame. How will we as gay Christians ever feel validated as human beings in the DRC?" Downs (2006:3, 4) explains how easily the Shame of being gay overwhelms homosexual people. A gay proponent, on the basis of this argument, expresses his concerns about applying for a minister post. What would happen if they became aware of his gay orientation? Would the congregation still appoint him?

Hans Küng, a renowned Swiss theologian, after thoroughly studying the four gospels in the Bible, suggested that God's will is man's well-being (Küng 1977:251). Based on this inference, I doubted whether the Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers has the gay ministers' well-being at heart. A few ministers seemed to be in agreement with me. According to Jonker, the 2007 Resolution requirements for gay legitimates reduce Lulani (and consequently all other gay legitimates) to her [their] sexuality (Kerkbode 2012:12, 13). Jonker considers the 2007 decision not only as impractical, but also as an unacceptable position on human sexuality. Muller views celibacy as an inhumane requirement (Germond & De Gruchy 1997:175). He compares it to the heavy loads which the Pharisees laid upon the shoulders of the people (Matt. 23:4, 13). Jonker (Kerkbode 2012:13) suggests dialogue between gay incumbents and legitimates and the DRC, as well as between the DRC and those who object to the legitimation of gays involved in intimate relationships. He proposes that the conversation should revolve around understanding what it means to be human, what meaning should be attached to human sexuality and how to understand marriage as a cultural institution.

In the proposed dialogue between gays and the DRC it should be kept in mind that it is not "us" and "they" as the example used by Van Wyk implied (Van Wyk 2012:23). By commenting on Lulani Vermeulen's situation, he referred to the court case between Johan Strydom (a member of the *Hervormde Kerk*) and the DRC congregation of Moreletapark. Strydom was dismissed as a lecturer at Moreleta because he is gay. Van Wyk asked the question whether a synagogue could take action against a Christian cleaner eating a ham sandwich. I consider this comparison to be invalid, because in Lulani's situation like in Strydom's situation, it is Christians in dialogue with Christians, and all members of the same denomination.

The research problem addressed in this thesis is rooted in the Resolution on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers and can therefore be defined as an evaluation of the impacts which the resolution has on them. When the Resolution was formulated and

approved in 2007, any discussion on the impact would have been premature and speculative at best. In fact, after the Synod of 2007 the gay issue disappeared from the agenda of the next DRC General Synod in 2011. Later, in 2013, it was back on the agenda of the General Synod, but the celibacy requirement for gay ministers and gay candidate ministers was reaffirmed (Alg Sinode [NGK] 2013 [online]). Five years after the 2007 Resolution, no research has been done to evaluate the impacts of the Resolution on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers in a scientific way. This research, therefore, aims at making a contribution in closing this research gap.

The problem guided me to ask the following research questions:

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary research question: What are the impacts of the Resolution on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?

Secondary research questions:

- What is the history of the Resolution?
- What discourses constituted and sustained the Resolution?
- What are the implications, contradictions and interpretations of the terms in the Resolution?
- What does the literature say with regards to traditional Christian perspectives on gay relationships and gay marriages?
- What are the impacts of the Resolution on the lived experiences of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?
- What do experts from other disciplines say about the impact of the terms in the Resolution?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to acquire an understanding of the lived experiences of the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers after being subjected to the implementation of the Resolution.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Thomas Kuhn (1970:66) argues that, whenever a paradigm can no longer address the problems people encounter, a new paradigm emerges to fulfil that need. This explains the transition from “modernity” to “post-modernity”. Karen Armstrong (2009:277) considers the 1960's as the beginning of the end of the Enlightenment project and the start of "postmodernity." Müller (2011:1) refers to this turning point as an epistemological transition. Although various concepts are used to describe this transition (modern to postmodern; positivistic to relativistic; fundamentalist to postfoundationalist), there seems to be consensus that there was a turning point. Taken-for-granted truths are called into question. The transition was from a modern paradigm where absolute, universal truths were self-evident to a postmodern paradigm where no foundations exist and where reality/truth becomes relative to the context. According to Kotzé (2002:16) the absence of an external reference point in a postmodern paradigm to help us differentiate between right and wrong introduces a sense of disequilibrium. Postmodernism evoked criticism and discomfort from especially within the church. Although it opened space for a diversity of opinions it lacked moral direction (Müller 2011:2; Veith 1994:16). As opposed to both modernism (foundationalism), as well as postmodernism (nonfoundationalism) Müller (2011:2) and van Huyssteen (1993:376) argue for a postfoundationalist approach of doing theology.

1.6.1 Postfoundational paradigm

Van Huyssteen (2007:5) views a postfoundationalist as a person whose human experience is shaped by a complex network of beliefs. Because we relate cognitively to our world, we want to understand and explain (hermeneutics) our world by interpreting our experiences, but also by critically evaluating them (epistemology). According to Müller (2011:2, 4) the postfoundational understanding of theology "puts the interdisciplinary aspect of research very much in the focus." The language of a postfoundationalist approach is transversal reasoning. He refers to Van Huyssteen who underscores that transversal reasoning is not about indiscriminately opening up or closing down to other viewpoints. It is rather about

“what it means to discover an epistemic space that allows for the kind of interdisciplinary critical evaluation that includes a critical self-evaluation and optimal understanding” (Müller 2011:4).

Within the postfoundationalist epistemology I resorted to transversal reasoning as a practical way of doing interdisciplinary work. This opened up the possibility to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Nevertheless, I constantly remained aware of the limits of dialogue between disciplines. “After rich resources have been shared, a postfoundationalist approach points back to the contextual, natural, interdisciplinary boundaries of our own disciplines” (Müller 2011:4).

In the next sections I have indicated how contextual practical theology, as well as a feminist theology of *praxis*, guided the process of pastoral care that was practiced in this research.

1.6.2 Contextual practical theology

De Gruchy (1994:2) emphasised that theology is not only a cognitive activity. One does theology by engaging in certain contexts and situations. This was the goal of Schleiermacher, the father of practical theology (Bons-Storm 1998:8; De Gruchy 1994:4). In designing the curriculum used at many Faculties of Theology ever since, he held the opinion that all theological studies (philosophy and history) should form an organic whole to guide the clergy in their task of doing practical theology. Unfortunately, theology was fragmented into sub-disciplines with Practical Theology as one of the sub-disciplines (De Gruchy 1994:4). Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991:15-25) argue that no one does theology from a position of neutrality. Aspects like faith-commitments, moment of insertion, social-ecclesial analysis and theological reflection form part of a model of doing theology. In other words, we do theology from and through the context. Doing theology emerges from, and is inspired by the context. Bons-Storm (1998:14) views practical theology as “the study of faith lived in context”. In accordance with Bons-Storm Müller (2005:72) considers postfoundational practical theology as re-discovering the basic forms of practical theology: doing theology through the context. According to Müller (2005:74, 78) the minimum requirements for a Postfoundationalist Practical Theology to reflect in a meaningful way on the experiences of the presence of God, should be locally contextual, socially constructed, directed by tradition, exploring interdisciplinary meaning and pointing beyond the local. He sees Postfoundational Practical Theology as a way of understanding “within the hermeneutical approach”, but also beyond hermeneutics to form a metaphor for Practical Theology. Müller argues for an understanding which

includes the local context as one of the hermeneutical circles, but which also develops from within and from the local context. Although Müller (2005:75) considers himself to be generally in agreement with the basic philosophy of hermeneutics, he developed feelings of “unrest” about the practice of Practical Theology based on the hermeneutical paradigm, especially due to the lack of emphasis on the socially constructed nature of knowledge and the seemingly lack of real contextual outcomes. He opted for a *narrative* Practical Theology.

According to Bons-Storm (1998:16) both male and female practical theologians start their theological reflection by asking what the gospel means for the world today. She considers practical theologians working from a feminist perspective to give more attention to the specific contexts in which people live, and also to the power imbalances among people. Should these contexts consist of unjust social structures, the goal of contextual practical theologians would be to transform these structures, as well as to transform the attitudes and policies that perpetuate and reinforce them (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Peterson 1991:10). Since my own moment of insertion, I became aware of injustices in the form of discrimination done towards gay people and I embarked on a journey to transform attitudes and policies that were perpetuating these injustices. Through the current research I developed a better understanding of the injustices levelled against gay ministers and gay candidate ministers by, amongst others, the telling and re-telling and reliving of their own stories.

Bosch (1991:423) views "the poor and the culturally marginalised" as the primary conversational partners of contextual practical theology. In this research the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers of the DRC as a culturally marginalised group formed my primary conversational partners within the context of contextual practical theology. Dominant cultural discourses like patriarchy, homophobia and heterosexism have marginalised the gay ministers. Members of the DRC, being in a position of power but also bound by the requirements of the Resolution, excluded gay ministers and gay candidate ministers conditionally as part of the body of Christ in the DRC. At the 2007 Synod, concessions were made with regards to gay ministers in that they could be granted ministership if they remain celibate (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007b:8). Although the gay issue was not on the agenda of the 2011 General Synod of the DRC, contentious issues like living together and baptism were treated with a general attitude of

love and reconciliation. Niemandt (*Beeld* 2012:13) affirms this attitude of the DRC when he metaphorically refers to the Confession of Belhar as a new story of the DRC which can help the church towards a new beginning. Belhar proclaims God as a God of righteousness. According to Niemandt this new story could enable the church to protest in the name of the Lord where minorities are suppressed and where the identities and the rights of people are trampled upon. Whereas this new attitude applied to people of different race groups, it apparently did not apply to gay ministers. In terms of practical theology, I stood on the side of righteousness and inclusion.

1.6.3 Pastoral care in the framework of a feminist theology of praxis

Feminism became associated with a movement for the liberation of women (Keane 1998:122, 123). Feminist theology is seen as a reaction against the marginalisation of women in the church. Feminist theologians critique almost all areas of church life which has denied or distorted women's identity as the image of God. Bons-Storm (1998:7) considers theorising on practical theology and the construction of new knowledge at the end of the 20th century to have been mainly in the hands of men. During the same time Ackermann (1998:78) regards the dominant model for practical theology in South Africa to be a result of a male, reformed world where the voices of women, the poor, children and all marginalised groups were not heard. Feminist theology does not only aim at liberating women, but also men by transforming religious structures. Together men and women will be able to shape reality in such a way that all people's humanity is affirmed in a "just, loving, liberating and healing praxis" (Ackermann 1994:199). This would also do hope with the gay ministers whose stories have been marginalised and their humanity degraded. Ackermann (1996:34) suggests that a feminist theology of praxis should be understood as: "critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable reflection on the theories and praxis of struggle and hope for the mending of creation based on the stories and experiences of women/marginalized and oppressed people."

When the stories of the experiences of these groups are told, it raises issues that are sources for theorising on liberation and healing. Healing forms the core of a feminist theology of praxis. According to Ackermann (1998:80) healing takes place on a personal, a political and a social level. Ackermann proposes that the victims (in this context the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers) have to grieve their losses by telling their painful stories because they are entitled to justice. Mann (2003:2-7) values

the victims telling their stories, because it reconnects them to a sense of being able to influence their own lives, while starting to trust their own knowledge and judgement again. Ackermann (1998:80) also proposes that the perpetrators (in this case the DRC leaders) have to acknowledge, confess and repent in order to find healing from their homophobic ideologies, guilt and lost humanity. Those with the privilege and power must be willing to hear the pain and the suffering of the "others" and to act in response. Healing takes place in the interaction between people, not only in words of apology formulated at a synod meeting. Daily living and faith are intertwined. As Ackermann (1998:83) puts it: "For healing *praxis* to be truly restorative, it has to be collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion".

Within a frame of a feminist theology of *praxis*, this study is guided by the need to acknowledge the pain and injustice done to gay ministers and gay candidate ministers, as well as the longing of the human person for wholeness. In hearing the pain, the injustice, the brokenness, as part of the body of Christ, I had an ethical responsibility to try and mend God's creation. In my journey with gay ministers and gay candidate ministers I kept in mind that any steps towards healing were "practical, tentative and provisional, and therefore always demanded critical reflection" (Ackermann 1998:84).

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH

In positioning myself as a researcher within a postfoundationalist epistemology, I conducted my research journey with social construction and narrative discourses as a conceptual basis for my qualitative research (Müller 2005:79; Clandinin & Connelly 1994:416). This approach seemed to be congenial with my research aims, while it embraced the co-creative nature of the narrative. I thus moved away from a modern quantitative value-free research approach with, as its principal interest, "probabilistic certainty" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:4; Sears 1992:65), while embarking on a qualitative narrative inquiry into the lives of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. I opted for participatory action research (McTaggart 1997:29), because it offered me the possibility to develop a balanced relationship between the co-researchers and myself, thereby avoiding exploitation. Participation also invited the co-construction of meaning.

1.7.1 Qualitative action research

Zuber-Skerritt (1997:5) refers to Grundy and Kemmis who view action research as research where all actors in the research process are equal partners involved in every stage of the research. The kind of involvement requires “symmetrical communication” where there is no hierarchy, but communication by all participants on equal terms.

According to Schwandt (1994:118) qualitative inquiry is profoundly concerned with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying. Ways to address these concerns are the philosophies of interpretivism, philosophical hermeneutics and social constructionism. In order to understand the world one must interpret it. Schwandt views the task of the inquirer as to clarify the process of meaning construction, and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of co-researchers. He reminds us that these interpretations will already be a construction of the inquirer of the constructions of the co-researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) affirm this, but also emphasise the role of values in an inquiry when they define qualitative research as:

...an emphasis on processes and meaning that are not rigorously examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of enquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

Sears (1992:65) views qualitative research as “an inquiry into the personal worlds of others and if one is fortunate, also as a journey into oneself”. Discovering *the* Truth is not part of their expectations, but rather aspiring to convey the various truths held by others. Within the social constructionist paradigm, meanings are interpreted through inter-subjective understanding of people’s life stories which they construct within the context of their particular language and culture. Through this research I co-constructed a better understanding of the impact of the Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers through the telling and re-telling and re-living of their stories. This required of me not only to free myself from objectivity, or to manage my subjectivity, but to turn toward a participatory mode of consciousness (Heshusius 1994:15). According to Heshusius this involves a somatic, nonverbal quality of attention which

requires the letting go of the self. At the core of a participatory mode of consciousness is the recognition of kinship and therefore also of ethics. This approach aims at removing alienation and separation between the knower and the known.

With regard to the interaction between people in the social construction of meaning, Heshusius (1994:15-19) postulates that if we, as researchers, intend to free ourselves from objectivity and want to manage our subjectivity, we need to fundamentally reorder our understanding of the relation between self and other (and therefore, of reality) and turn toward a participatory mode of consciousness.

1.7.2 Narrative inquiry

Narrative research methodology houses multiple ways of representing lived experience discursively, regardless of the level of literacy or education, or formal occupation of the participant. It is a method of insight, imagination and imagery which allows the illumination of individual life perceptions (Fox 2008:335). Some of the methods described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994:419-421) to gather field texts (data) could be oral history, annals and chronicles, family stories, photographs, research interviews, journals, autobiographical writing, letters and conversations.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000:50, 60) describe their terms in thinking about narrative inquiry as a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. On the one dimension lies temporality (past, present and future), while the personal and the social along a second dimension. A third dimension represents place or situation. Narrative inquiry tends to begin with experience as expressed through lived and told stories, plotted along these three dimensions. As narrative enquirers we meet ourselves and our co-researchers in the past, present and future, and all of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures. Through telling and retelling of their stories, people reaffirm them, modify them and create new stories. During my research journey with my co-researchers the telling, retelling and reflections on the retellings often led to modification and reaffirmation of their stories. The purpose of narrative research is to explore the experiences and the meaning making processes of people. It is an effort to understand how people think, act, relate and live through their stories in the context of everyday living. Narrative research is interested in how people embody their lived experiences in

stories, giving meaning to events. People are seen as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives (Clandinin & Connelly 2000:40, 41).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994:416) distinguish between the story as a phenomenon and the method of inquiry into the experience of people's lives. The phenomenon is called the *story*, while the inquiry is called the *narrative*. People thus live storied lives, while narrative researchers describe such lives, collect the re-collections, and write narratives of experience. Clandinin & Connelly (2000:20) emphasise the dialogical nature of research when they say:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people's lives...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.

Clandinin & Connelly (1994:418) consider it as a difficult but important task to retell stories "that allow for growth and change." There is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a life story. As researchers we are constantly engaged in this process. One of the starting points is the researchers' own narrative of experience. Ballard (1994:22) considers stories as important, relevant, valid, meaningful and generalisable as any other writing that is referred to as research. McCance et al. (2001:350) discuss two forms of narrative analysis as seen by Polkinghorne (1995). The first one is paradigmatic analysis of narrative where stories move to themes that can cut across the stories, characters or settings to produce general concepts. The second form is narrative analysis which uses plot to bind together the individual experiences, thereby creating the context for understanding meaning. A combination of the two forms appears to be the best option. The paradigmatic analysis complements the content analysis, while a narrative created through narrative analysis provides deeper insight and understanding of the problem. In this research my co-researchers and I have also opted for a combination of the two forms (see 5.4). Organising their stories into themes helped us to gain a deeper insight into the content of their stories, while narrative analysis provided us with a deeper insight into the problem (e.g. immense suffering).

1.7.3 Participatory action research

McTaggart (1997:1, 2) underscores the inherent political character of all research methodologies which defines a relationship of advantage between researcher and the researched. Participatory action researchers seek to redefine this often privileged relationship. McTaggart views participatory action research as a merger between participatory research and action research. It denotes a reminder that "it is participants' own activities which are meant to be informed by the ongoing inquiry, not merely the future research directions of external researchers". According to McTaggart (1997:3) authentic participation means sharing the way research is conceptualised, where participants take ownership in becoming responsible agents in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practise. Tandon (1988:13) confirms this when he describes participation as authentic when participants play a role in setting the agenda, collecting the data and when they have control over the use of outcomes and of the whole process. Participants' feelings and everyday life experiences are considered as major sources of knowledge (Reinharz 1992:182). I embarked on this journey provided that the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers would be willing to become co-researchers. It struck me how confident they were of the possibility that their lived experiences could form a knowledge base towards a better understanding of the effects of the Resolution.

Participatory action research is relational, and can be described as a collective, self-reflective inquiry. Its aim is firstly to be to the advantage of the participants and secondly to improve the validity, rationality, justice, quality, respect and ethics of the research practice (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988:5). Jennings & Graham (1997:173) suggest that the process of action research is itself constituted through its own discourse. By unmasking subordination, silenced voices and the marginalisation of groups of people, the action researcher dictates the terms of discourse and the relations of power. In this research the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers were empowered through the telling of their stories. As the action researcher uses categories that are familiar within the discourse, other possibilities are silenced. Kotzé (2002:8) rightfully urges the

researcher to ask ethical questions of accountability: Whose knowledges² are these? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? Who benefits by these knowledges? Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?

At the onset of my journey with the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers I could not predict or anticipate what needed to be done or where the journey would lead. This stressed the need for flexibility in the approach. McTaggart (1997:27) refers to Kurt Lewin's description of action research as proceeding in a "spiral of steps," each consisting of planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action. Continuously, through our participatory journey, we have repeated this process through our conversations and reflections.

The issue of research is a sensitive issue in the gay community, because many gay people experience that research is being done *on* them instead of *with* them (McTaggart 1997:29). Participation rules out exploitation of the researched (McTaggart 1997:6). During every call I have made to a gay minister or gay candidate minister, I was invited to do research *with* them and all declared themselves willing to participate. I then called reverend André Muller of the Reforming (gay) church, asking him whether the research project would carry his approval. He enthusiastically answered in the affirmative. I also called Judy Kotzé (a gay proponent of the DRC and member of the 2007 task team) from *I am inclusive ministries*³, to inform them of our intended research project, offering my support should anyone of them want to embark on this journey with the gay ministers. Judy was delighted and offered me all their support. I interpreted this as proof of mutual trust and loyalty from the wider gay community. It also indicated a research gap with regards to the impact of the Resolution on gay ministers. There was no question of any gay minister being exploited, because they and I knew that all of us had already benefitted in the past from our mutual involvement (Van Loggerenberg 2008:164).

² Knowledges in a postmodern paradigm refer to interpreted, socially constructed realities within a specific context with specific political and ethical implications (Kotzé 2002:9).

³ *I am Inclusive Ministries* is a Gospel Centred church who empowers individuals to live a life in reverence to God and service to its community

During the research process I continually fostered and nurtured an awareness of power relations. Through an approach of openness, mutual disclosure and shared risk, I abandoned control. In embarking on this journey, the gay ministers and candidate ministers and I were taking the same risk of being ridiculed and rejected. This enhanced a feeling of collaboration instead of an "us" and "you" perception. Together we decided on what issues to be explored and what remained to be said. Consequently the distinction between the participants and me disappeared to a great extent. According to Reinharz (1992:181) these are requirements of participatory action research. Participatory action research is also concerned with changing individuals, as well as the culture of the groups, institutions, and societies to which they belong (McTaggart 1997:31). It represents a correction of the status quo (Reinharz 1992:175). Although the aim of this research study was not to change the Resolution, it could not be ruled out as a possibility.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

Rubin and Rubin (1995:42) consider the research design as being about planning whom you are going to ask, what you are going to ask and why. One should keep in mind what one intends to learn, but the exact detail of the questions could change as the research interviews developed. Qualitative interviewing design is flexible, iterative, and continuous. The following steps were thus tentative and preliminary:

Step 1: Finding conversational partners

Having been part of the gay community for more than ten years, and having gained the trust of the gay people (Van Loggerenberg 2008: 21-23), it was not difficult to find gay conversational partners who were willing to act as co-researchers. I invited the following groups of people to participate:

- Three gay candidate ministers who studied theology at the University of Pretoria (UP), the University of Stellenbosch (US) and North West University (NWU), who have been denied to be legitimated
- A gay, celibate minister in the DRC who had been legitimated
- A retired, gay celibate minister from the DRC
- A gay, former DRC minister who was forced to resign.

Although it was important for me to guard the anonymity of the gay co-researchers, four of the six wanted to be made known in the research report. Only the two ministers who preferred to remain celibate chose pseudonyms. This shows the sensitivity of gay ministers, especially when they preferred to remain in the ministry. Fear of being exposed as being gay and the possible discrimination that would follow govern this sensitivity and vulnerability.

Step 2: Proceeding in a spiral of steps

This part of my research journey consisted of continuous planning, reflecting and evaluating our actions as conversational partners. All of the participants, including myself, engaged in telling and re-telling of our own stories, thereby not only becoming co-researchers of the research story, but also re-authoring our own lived experiences by re-telling and re-living them. In researching and writing narratives of experience Clandinin and Connelly (1994:418) comment:

[t]here will always be a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story.

In listening to the stories of the participants, narrative principles prevailed. I was respectful, non-judgemental, while only asking questions out of real curiosity from a not-knowing perspective (Morgan 2000:2). The participants remained the experts of their own lives (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:1). I was also aware of the power of language, because language is not innocent. In the postfoundational narrative paradigm it was appropriate to use neither proscriptive nor prescriptive language (Griffith 1995:124) but transversal language (Müller 2011:3) which provides a “responsible and workable interface between the disciplines”, and thus also between paradigms.

In reflecting on religious and spiritual aspects like experiences of the presence of God, God-talk was facilitated in many ways. I listened to cues, like depression, anger, suicide, etc., or I introduced God-talk by asking related questions, for e.g. “What went through your mind when you heard the news of the legitimation? May I ask if you talked to God then? Was God there, listening, or was He/She also listening to the story of the DRC? What emotions did you experience at the time? Was He/She sometimes just there for you? Was He/She sad? Did He/She comfort you? Did you comfort Him/Her? What was

it like at the time? What effect did this whole story have on your relationship with God? Who would be least surprised about this development? What do you think God would say in this case? How would He/She have handled it? Why? If you could swop positions with the DRC, what would you want to say to God? What do you think would He/She have answered back? Does God know about your plans to commit suicide? As a researcher it was imperative to validate the participants' God-talk.

During the process of interviewing I shared my own story about God with the co-researchers, but took care that it did not take priority over the stories of the co-researchers. Sometimes it helped to feel that they were not alone: it is, for example, ok to be mad at God.

Step 3: Research agenda

The research agenda was negotiated with my co-researchers. Steps included a literature study, the telling and retelling of their stories and mine, reflecting on the retelling of their stories and by engaging in interdisciplinary dialogues. Experts from Psychology, the Law, and Social Work were asked the following four questions which were adapted from an article by Müller (2009b:6) on interdisciplinary work in the context of HIV and AIDS:

- When reading the stories of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers, what are your concerns?
- What do you think is your unique perspective on these stories?
- Why do you think your perspective would be understood and appreciated by people from other disciplines?
- What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline might not be taken seriously?

In order to determine whether somebody is an expert in his /her field, I used autobiographical reviews, but also local newspapers and radio talk shows, and public opinion.

Postfoundationalist rationality, with its language of transversal reasoning, places the focus on interdisciplinary dialogue with other sciences where theology will be an “equal

partner with an authentic voice in a postmodern situation” (Müller 2011:3). Each discipline, however, has its own limitations as far as dialogue is concerned. I allowed Practical Theology to guide me.

Step 4: Reflecting on my personal narrative with the gay participants

At the onset of this research journey with my conversational partners, I already had my own story, my own lived experiences connecting me to the research problem. My story was also constructed within a certain social context and woven together by certain events, as well as by certain discourses or beliefs. Doing research within a postfoundational framework I was open to listen to the stories of my co-researchers and freed my own discourses to the possibility of being deconstructed and my lived experiences to be re-authored. Reinharz (1992:194) suggests that learning in any research project should occur on three levels: the level of the person, the level of the problem and the level of the method. Although changing the researcher is not a common goal in feminist research, it is a rather common consequence.

Step 5: Reporting the research

Winter (1997:26) asks the question: "who are action research reports written for?" She views three audiences as important. Firstly: our co-researchers; secondly our colleagues in other institutions or in other areas in the same institution. Thirdly, we write for ourselves. The process of writing involves clarifying and exploring ideas and interpretations. Therefore writing up a report is an act of learning. "When we read what we have written, we find out what, in the end, we have learnt" (Winter 1997:27).

In feminist research, Reinharz (1992:258) regards researching and utilising the researcher's personal experience and voice as a distinguishing feature. Weingarten (2000:391) encourages us to use personal stories to write ourselves into the text. She uses her own personal stories about her dying mother and her relationship with her daughter to illustrate and generate meaning in therapy and academic work. White (1997: 4-10) also shares how he uses personal events and stories in therapy, especially to emphasise the value of re-telling of stories. For this reason, I also wrote in the first person, while sharing my personal experiences and interpretations.

Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) consider conversation (language and communicative action) a part of the hermeneutic struggle to reach understanding with those with whom we are in contact. In this context it refers to all the participants who entered into a dialogue with one another. According to these two authors, understanding does not mean that we will ever completely understand each other. We only understand through dialogue what a person is saying within a particular context. This understanding never holds over time. Understanding is thus a process "on the way." We only understand descriptions and explanations, but not events, because no understanding can ever exhaust all the meanings of events. As such, when writing up the research, I always had to bear in mind the tentative, incompleteness of understanding.

As the participants and I journeyed, we developed tools to report the journey. While telling and retelling our personal stories and reflecting on the interpretations and new meanings we have constructed, we primarily communicated through the taking of notes during interviews, e-mails, text messages and telephone calls. Every action was negotiated. It was transparent and respectful. Documents and conversations were treated as confidential.

1.9 LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

The impact of the Resolution was explored on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers in the DRC only, although it is acknowledged that many other people or groups of people may have been impacted by the Resolution. This limitation is not seen to reduce the quality, validity or relevance of the research. It just falls outside of the scope of this research.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Kotzé (Kotzé et al. 2002:25) considers participation as a helpful value and practice in doing ethicizing research in our quest for new knowledges. Guiding our ethicizing search for new knowledges should be the idea to live in ways that will be to the good of all, and not only benefitting some at the expense of others. Applying these ideas to the context of my research it would mean to consider my co-researchers and all the participants as equal partners of the research, while protecting their identities where requested. All the people referred to by name in this research study either gave permission for their own names to be used or used self-chosen pseudonyms. Both the co-researchers and the

three interdisciplinary participants gave written permission that their names or pseudonyms could be used. It is important to note that where co-researchers referred to people in their stories I also obtained the permission of those people to use their names in the research study. However, it should be kept in mind that the views described by the co-researchers are interpreted views and not necessarily the views of the person(s) they referred to.

1.11 RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The research report was structured in the following chapters:

Chapter One: Contextualising the research journey and the Resolution on gay ministers.

Chapter Two: The history of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers: When two stories met – No three.

Chapter Three: The Resolution: interpretations, possible discourses and narratives of discrimination.

Chapter Four: Perspectives on Christian traditions of interpretations on gay relationships and gay marriages: a practical theological deconstruction.

Chapter Five: A narrative exploration of the impact of the Resolution on the lived experiences of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers

Chapter Six: Interdisciplinary dialogues with experts from Social Work, Psychology and Law

Chapter Seven: Interpretations and reflections on the research journey

CHAPTER 2: WHEN TWO STORIES MET – NO, THREE

The only duty I have is to love – Albert Camus

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As humans we live our lives in stories which we create by linking certain events together according to a specific sequence and across a time period (Morgan 2000:5). We give meaning to our life stories by constantly interpreting our experiences, determining which are more and which are less important. The more important events are privileged over others and are then developed into dominant stories. Our choices in determining which life events should be storied and how they should be storied, as well as the meaning we attach to our stories, are shaped by societal discourses through language in a specific context (Freedman & Combs 1996:43; Hare-Mustin 1994:20).

According to Hare-Mustin (1994:19) discourses are taken-for-granted systems of statements and practices that share common values and that sustain a certain world view or certain beliefs. White (1991:28) underscores the importance of power/knowledge relationships in meaning making and also the real effects that stories have on the shaping of people's lives. Some dominant stories are beneficial to us, while others are problem-saturated. Because our stories are socially constructed and maintained by belief systems, problem-saturated stories and the discourses that sustain them can be deconstructed and re-authored into alternative stories. Collins & Mayblin (2003:5) refer to the work of Derrida, a French philosopher strongly associated with the term deconstruction as undermining our existing beliefs about "texts, meanings, concepts and identities". Applying this idea of deconstruction, White (1991:22--30) "exoticized" the familiar through externalization, thereby deconstructing taken-for-granted, internalized discourses. Externalization opens the possibility for unique outcomes (events standing outside of the power of the problem story or the discourse) to emerge. As a consequence, new stories often come to the fore helping people to re-author their realities. Both the DRC and I have a gay story as one of our dominant life stories. Although we have both, since the onset, perceived our stories to be problem-saturated, I presently hope that we together, and especially with the help of gay ministers and gay

candidate ministers sharing their stories, will eventually be able to re-author our stories in order to celebrate diversity.

Our stories developed over time, initially independently from each other, until they met by chance in 2001. To my knowledge, the gay story of the DRC was officially constructed in 1986 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986:672). Guided by the narrative metaphor of externalizing discourses and deconstructing their truth claims (White 1991:27; Freedman & Combs 1996:47; Morgan 2000:45), I view both the DRC and myself as being on the same side -- in a power relationship with the gay discourse. Together we are grappling with the deconstruction of the discourse on homosexuality, thereby trying to alleviate the pain and the injustices that have been levelled against our gay brothers and sisters in Christ. For this meaning-making process to comply with the most basic essence of caring to be found in a community of faith, Gerkin (1997:103) reminds us that we should apply all of our lived experiences to “the ultimate context of meaning contained in the Christian Gospel”. This can only happen through our stories. He borrows the term “fusion of horizons” from Gadamer, a twentieth century philosopher, applying it in this context as a metaphor to explain the trimetric connection of our stories (Gerkin 1991:19). Gadamer (1975:273) views our hermeneutical horizons as a limitation to our vision. He sees understanding as a constant process of interpretation, where historical and contemporary horizons are constantly fused in making new meaning. Gerkin (1986:63) considers this process of “fusion of horizons” not only as the coming together of my story with the Christian story of God, but also as a conversation on a horizontal level between persons representing not only different viewpoints, but also certain commonalities. He warns that these conversations will not always be cordial, because at times certain viewpoints will be contested, emotions stirred and vested interests brought to light. Over the last decade I have experienced these intricate facets of the meaning-making process in the gay debate. But how have the DRC and I developed our respective narratives and what “fusion of horizons” has taken place thus far?

2.2 MY PERSONAL GAY STORY

2.2.1 Early childhood influences

I grew up during the sixties on a cattle farm in the Northern Cape. Many vivid memories of a happy and care-free childhood still form part of my identity stories. My parents were

well-grounded people, belonging to the *Gereformeerde Kerk*. My birth order position placed me in the middle of five children with seven years between my immediate older brother and me and four years between my younger sister and me. Both my parents shared with us their love for reading, while challenging us to become critical thinkers. When I was only five years old my mother sent me to a farm school in order to help save the scarcely attended institution from closing down. I shared a big room with five other girls and only went home once every three weeks. In her enthusiasm my mother had taught me to read and write before I entered school. This resulted in me being promoted to Sub B (Grade two) at the age of five. Consequently, the academic difference between my sister and me increased with two years. In many aspects I grew up as an only child, who had to start fending for my own rights at a very early age.

The memories of World War II and its aftermath were still very fresh in the minds of my parents. My father's being a member of the *Ossewa Brandwag* imprinted on us a political awareness. Wikipedia (2013a [online]) describes the *Ossewa Brandwag* as a South African organization that resisted the participation of South Africa in World War II. I believe the values and influences instilled in me during my forming years have empowered me for and have given me the courage and motivation to stand up against injustices – such as those being levelled against gay ministers and gay candidate ministers in the DRC.

2.2.2 Moment of insertion

My first in-depth encounter with a gay person was in July 2000. Francois, my hairdresser at the time, confronted me with the following question: “Am I going to hell because I am gay?” His question disrupted my perception about gays and caused disequilibrium in my mind. I believed the way to salvation and to heaven (Heyns 1988a:216) was to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour – something that Francois claimed he had done. According to the Christian doctrine on salvation (Disciple's Study Bible 1988:1685; Berkhof 1941:269), as fruits of God's redemption of sin, redeemed human beings were to repent from their sinful ways to become true followers of the Lord. At the time it was a practical problem for me, how Francois could deal with this "sin" of homosexuality. I started to contemplate the possibility that repentance from the "sin" of homosexuality would neither make him a better Christian nor change his sexual orientation. Berkhof (1941:231) regarded sin as a moral evil. I could not equate being homosexual with being immoral. Browning

(1996:145) refers to R. Niebuhr's idea of sin as unbelief and the loss of faith in the supportive providence of God. At that stage, I sensed that Francois' homosexuality had nothing to do with sin, but I had no scientific ground to stand on. In an interview Jackson (2002:11) enquired about my viewpoint on the church's claim that gays should convert themselves. My response was: "How do you convert yourself from the colour of your eyes?" Myers and Scanzoni (2006:57) affirmed this inherent nature of one's sexual orientation. They shared the story of a gay Christian woman who compared the statement that she had chosen her sexual orientation to being told that she had chosen the colour of her eyes.

Talking to Francois had changed my perception about gay people. Instead of allowing appearances like fancy clothes, ear rings, highlights in his hair and his amusing stories to form my perceptions, I saw a human being like myself. I started to hear his pain and suffering, his anxiety, his struggle and his desperation. In the past I never really listened to gay people. I did not use to make eye contact with them. I never heard them. Instead, I resorted to the confessional approach of practicing theology; apparently making it so easy to have all the ready-made answers about gay people. According to this approach to Practical Theology, the Bible is the core source and yardstick for doing theology (Wolfaardt 1992:6, 7). Context is taken into account only with regard to the application of the predetermined confessional truth from the Bible. My indifference towards gay people started haunting me. Could it be that either my ignorance or my interpretation of certain verses in the Bible was becoming a stumbling block in loving my gay neighbour? Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:17) refer to this locating of our pastoral responses in the lived experiences of individuals as the moment of insertion. Atwood (cited in Kotzé 2000:1) refers to these moments as

definite moments, moments we use as references, because they break our sense of continuity, and they change the direction of time. We look at these events and we can say that after them things were never the same again.

2.2.3 Becoming part of the gay community

At the beginning of 2001, apart from my hairdresser I knew no other gay person on a personal level. The gay community is a closed community due to the rejection they experience from society. Because they have been hurt so often, they don't trust easily,

especially when they hear that you are "from the church". Thus, I was regarded with much suspicion when I first started to attend services at the Reforming (gay) Church. Rev André Muller, who constituted the gay church more than twenty two years ago, once remarked: "We carefully watched you and waited for you to leave, but you didn't. You kept on coming until we knew that you were sincere." Today, thirteen years later, they have completely accepted me as one of them. They know I am here to stay. But it has been a long journey to get to this point.

A year after the incident with Francois, I started my studies in Pastoral Therapy at the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD). Not only did these studies help me to develop my thinking about gay people, but they also provided me with opportunities to start doing counselling with gay Christians. During my year of internship (2001) at ITD it just so happened that almost every client of mine was gay. Once I started talking to gay Christians, I soon realised that the context plays a dominant role in doing theology (Wolfaardt 1992:12). My Ph.D studies at the University of Pretoria, and especially my exposure to postfoundational literature (Müller 2011; Van Huyssteen 2007) further established my idea of doing theology in context. Although my thinking about gay people started to change, I was still far from either understanding gay people or having internalised my new thinking. Thirteen years ago talking to gay clients left me confused. I increasingly felt that the perception of gay people created by the Bible, as I used to interpret it, did not correlate with the special people sitting in front of me, sharing their painful stories with me. Initially my strong evangelical background made the door wide open to Fear trying to trick me into believing that I was on the wrong road, busy doing care with people whom the Bible rejects. It felt as if I were being torn apart. I struggled to fuse my existing biblical horizon with my newly discovered horizon through the stories of gay Christians.

During May 2001, I hesitantly shared my new awareness of gay people with a DRC Bible study group that gathered at my house. This was received with much suspicion, and even aversion. Then I started to immerse myself in literature on homosexuality. The news spread that I was doing research with gay people and that I was considering a different viewpoint from that of the DRC at the time. Quite a few ministers came to talk to me, trying to persuade me to "love the sinner but to hate the sin".

My first client during my internship at ITD happened to be a gay person. Simon was diagnosed with depression, anxiety attacks, and schizophrenic episodes and referred to us by FAMSA (Family and Marriage Council of South Africa). According to him he was on his way to be institutionalized at Weskoppies, a psychiatric institution in Pretoria. These dominant problem-saturated stories (Morgan 2000:7) were increasingly gaining the upper hand, trying to convince him that suicide would be the only way out of his misery. During our second interview he told me that he has never told anyone before that he was gay. I helped him to come to terms with his gay orientation. A couple of months later he was transformed from a shy man wanting to commit suicide to a confident young man with dreams for his future. This journey with Simon evoked the following question within me:

What society have we created that a person would be willing to be institutionalised just because he was too scared to live according to his gay orientation?

A person who had a profound influence on my journey with gay people was Johan van Zyl, a gay ex-*Hervormde Kerk* minister. I met him in August 2001 while he was holding the position of receptionist at the salon where my hairdresser, Francois, was working. Johan held three degrees in theology at the time (*cum laude*), had been head boy in matric, dux learner and just recently divorced from his wife, also a *Hervormde Kerk* minister. He agreed to assist me with my research with gay people. Through my journey with Johan I became acutely aware of the injustices levelled against gay people by the church.

On Sunday, 26 August 2001, my supervisor at ITD invited me to attend a service at the Reforming (gay) Church to be held in the building of the Andrew Murray congregation of the DRC. The message was one of love and forgiveness towards those who reject them because of their sexual orientation. The exposure was overwhelming to me. Confusion and doubt again tried to convince me to end my journey with gay people. I went home and read Romans 1 and saw how eternal life was passing me by, because of the possibility that I could be misinterpreting Romans 1. I stood under the same curse as those committing the sins of homosexuality. Pieter Cilliers' book, *'n Kas is vir klere (A closet is for clothes)* gave me some comfort, because he (a minister himself) also struggled with Romans 1 (Cilliers 1999:171). I recall many sleepless nights at the time,

praying to God for guidance. Fear and loneliness became my co-travellers, while the voices of injustice kept me awake at night.

I still only knew a few gay people and decided to look up the word “gay” in the telephone directory. Fortunately “OUT” was then still called “Gay and Lesbian Organization.” They granted me an interview and after a lengthy visit to their premises and conversation with one of their female researchers many of my preconceived ideas about gay women were deconstructed. After this encounter, I attended a number of seminars and conferences on homosexuality (UNISA, *Skuilkrans* DRC congregation in Pretoria and *Driehoek* DRC congregation in Vanderbijlpark). Apart from the information I gathered at the conferences, the stories of gay Christians stuck with me. These stories contained elements of immense struggle, self-rejection, and suicidal thoughts. Once they had taken the brave step to “come out” the struggle normally changed location, from internal to external.

Foucault (Halperin 1995:29) considers the closet as the product of complex relations of power. Being in the closet protects oneself from all sorts of social disqualifications. At the same time it is also a way of yielding to the social imperative imposed on gay people by non-gay-identified people. This protects gay people from the necessity of acknowledging the knowledge of their homosexuality. Foucault (Halperin 1995:30) also warns that coming out is not a purely liberating experience, freeing oneself from power relations. On the contrary:

To come out is precisely to expose oneself to a different set of dangers and constraints, to make oneself into a convenient screen onto which straight people can project all the fantasies they routinely entertain about gay people, and to suffer one's every gesture, statement, expression, and opinion to be totally and irrevocably marked by the overwhelming social significance of one's openly acknowledged homosexual identity. If to come out is to release one from a state of unfreedom that is not because coming out constitutes an escape from the reach of power to a place outside of power: rather, coming out puts into play a different set of power relations and alters the dynamics of personal and political struggle. Coming out is an act of freedom, then, not in the sense of liberation but in the sense of resistance.

Although this process of coming out was normally associated with anxiety and trauma for the whole family, it was also associated with a tremendous sense of freedom and relief,

and of living in truth (see also 5.4.5). Often coming out had dire consequences for gay people. Their stories touched my heart and moved me into action. It also helped to convince me that my doing care with gay people was in line with the will of God, because I was seeking my gay neighbour's wellbeing (Küng 1977:251).

During September 2001 a report on homosexuality served before the Southern Transvaal Regional Synod (see 2.3.3). Most of the recommendations were accepted. At the time I was still unaware of the proceedings of the regional Synod. Sunday evening, 30 September 2001, I decided to call Dr André Bartlett. During the early 90's he had been a minister at my local congregation of Monumentpark and we had been friends ever since. He was delighted when I told him about my changed viewpoint on homosexuality. I also learnt about the commission on homosexuality of the Southern Transvaal Synod, of which he had been the convenor. He paid me a visit the following morning, bringing with him a copy of the report. It was the first time that I felt I could really speak to someone from the DRC who was not condemning my involvement and empathy with gays. We were both excited and discussed how we could combine our efforts to eliminate injustices levelled against gay people in the DRC. In using Gadamer's metaphor in terms of our respective gay viewpoints, this could be seen as an important fusion of horizons taking place between Dr Bartlett and me. At the time, with the loads of information I had to interpret, I really needed conversations on such a cognitive level to help me in my processing. At the beginning, this process was a very lonely one and in my interaction with Dr Bartlett I found a sense of emotional grounding. He was a leader in the DRC who not only embodied the ideals I had at the time, but also helped me to mobilise my vision for gay Christians, especially through activities on regional and national Synod levels (See 2.3.3; 2.3.5).

As time passed I came to know more and more gay people. As the editor of our local church magazine at Monument park congregation, I reviewed a book: *The Truth Shall Set You Free* by Sally Lowe Whitehead. It must have been the first time ever that anything on the topic of homosexuality was written or discussed in our congregation at Monumentpark. The church council and some members of our congregation were upset. One of our ministers ordered me never to publish anything on homosexuality again. His words, "you have to keep quiet", almost silenced me. It was the first time I had to face a possible confrontation with the church. Fortunately, I can say today – thirteen years later

– that the attitude towards gays in Monumentpark congregation is slowly changing for the better. During November 2012, I arranged for a group of gay vocalists from the Reforming church to sing in our church during the serving of Holy Communion. That morning I really felt convinced that God had a sense of humour. After the vocalists had performed, they were served separately with the Holy Communion – by the same two DRC ministers who had previously told me to “love the sinner but hate the sin” and “to keep quiet”. Reverend André Muller was sitting next to me. I bent over and whispered to him: “Look André, history is happening here before our eyes!” The two of us were overcome with emotion. On a special request from the Monumentpark congregation, the same group of vocalists was to participate again during a later event in February 2013.

On 17 April 2002 during our Bible study meeting, I invited Johan van Zyl to tell his story to the group. I expected 25 people and requested the use of a venue at my local church. This was denied, because the church council was uncomfortable with the idea. We gathered at my house, but a minister from our local congregation attended the meeting in a kind of supervisory capacity. Johan was an eloquent speaker, and his story increased the empathy with and understanding of gay people. One man asked Johan: “How on earth did you manage to keep your faith?” Johan replied: “I know I am saved by the grace of God through the death of his son Jesus Christ alone. Rejection by the church does not equate rejection by God.”

Apart from the value that this meeting had for the Bible study group, it also meant a great deal to Johan. For the first time he had a voice. In spite of his nightmares the night before in fear of being rejected by the group, he experienced a great measure of acceptance and respect. He was able to tell his story, which was not only a story of suffering and loss, but also one of faith and victory and hope. This corresponds with the way Ackermann (1994:199) views the aims of feminist theology, namely that “all people’s humanity [will be] affirmed in just, loving, liberating and healing praxis”.

After this event I increasingly became involved in the empowerment of gay people and their families, for example by either entering into therapy with them or by arranging interviews with the press in order to share their stories in public (Jackson 2002:11; S 2002:11). I also became witness to many situations of “coming out”, be it a father coming out to his children, a daughter coming out to her parents, a husband or wife coming out to their respective heterosexual marriage partners, a minister coming out to

his congregation, etc. What I experienced in those days, and quite often even today, by journeying with hundreds of gay people through their stories, was my constant exposure to the trauma of pain and anxiety brought about by the fear of rejection. According to Herman (1992:2) both witnesses and victims are subject to the language of trauma. She considers it difficult for an observer to remain clear-headed and calm, or to grasp the whole picture at once. One also struggles to find a language that conveys a complete picture of what one has seen or heard. Herman also indicates the credibility risk taken by those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed. "To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma (see 3.3.1) that attaches to victims." I can still remember how difficult it was for me when I started listening to the gays' painful stories, to convey those stories accurately to other members of society. Once I managed to convey what I have witnessed, I was stigmatized. Proof of this were the amount of hate mail and the number of unpleasant telephone calls and visits I received from church leaders trying to persuade me of my mistaken witnessing. At the task team, after having watched the DVD (which I have made with the gay community) together, I observed how touched the members were and how difficult it was to talk about what they have witnessed (see 2.3.8). It was as if the knowledge of the painful stories of gays became a presence in our midst. In agreement with Maturana and Varela (1998:245), who claimed that "once we know that we know, we cannot deny to ourselves or others that we know," we could never deny our knowledge of the painful stories of gay Christians. However, even while knowing that, we knew, it would not always be easy to verbalise our experience. Even for me in this thesis, in order to relate the interviews I had had with gay ministers and candidate ministers (see chapter 5), I sometimes had to allow for some time to lapse before I could find language to convey what I had witnessed. At times, feelings of disempowerment and hopelessness almost got the better of me. This experience resonates strongly with a model representing witnessing positions, developed by Weingarten (2000:396). According to this model there are four witnessing positions: unaware and disempowered, aware and disempowered, unaware and empowered, and aware and empowered. In my quest with gay people I gradually moved from a position of being aware, but disempowered to a position of becoming increasingly more empowered. This evolved through my continuous participation with gay people, but also through my participation with the DRC on gay issues.

Along with my growing awareness of all the painful injustices levelled against gay people, I was also introduced to the unfamiliar world (to me) of gay relationships. In the thirteen years in private practice I have counselled hundreds of gay couples. This part of my work opened my eyes to and convinced me of how important it was for a gay person to be in a loving same-sex relationship (see 4.5.3). It unveiled some of the typical problems gay couples need to conquer in order to have successful relationships. I was also taken aback by the great number of gay relationships which had been well established for decades without the knowledge of society.

2.3 THE GAY STORY OF THE DRC SINCE 1986

2.3.1 The 1986 General Synod of the DRC

During 1984, on request by the ministry of caring of the General Synod (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986:672), the ministry of caring of Southern Transvaal commissioned Dr AH Botha to prepare a presentation on the DRC's policy on homosexuality. At the time, the only church organization rendering services to gay people, Filadelphia in Christ (FIC) was based at the Silverton congregation of the DRC in Pretoria. (Ironically, this DRC congregation is where the Reforming or gay church is currently having their services every Sunday evening since 2010). Kruger (interview 2001) from OUT, a gay organization in Pretoria, recalled that the aim of Filadelphia was to assist gay people to change their sexual orientation. Due to a lack of interest from the gay community, as well as failure to succeed in their aim, many church councils started to withdraw their support to FIC. At the time, the church considered it of the utmost importance that any assistance to gay people should be biblically accountable.

The recommendations accepted by the 1986 synod of the DRC were, *inter alia*, that “[i]n the light of the Bible homosexuality should be seen as a deviate form of sexuality” and that “[g]ay practices and gay relationships should be disapproved of, because (they were) opposing the will of God” (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986:672).

2.3.2 The 1999 Regional Synod of the DRC: Southern Transvaal

During November 1999 the Service Commission of the Synod of Southern Transvaal (SDK) assigned a study commission under the supervision of the Synod commission of doctrine and current affairs of Southern Transvaal (SKLAS) to rethink the position of the

church on homosexuality with a view to reaching out effectively to gay people (NGK Suid-Transvaal 1999). Dr Bartlett was the convenor of this commission consisting of eight people, including amongst others also Rev André Muller from the Reforming (gay) church.

The assumption of the study commission was that the assignment implied that the current viewpoint of the DRC was not sufficient and needed to be reconsidered. The DRC was not alone in this quest, because this discourse was conducted worldwide with a willingness to look afresh at homosexuality and to consider new research (Anthonissen en Oberholzer 2001:8).

The commission's method of research included a literature study and exegesis of relevant scriptures, as well as conversations with gay people. The focus was on their lived experiences, especially within the church. The commission's point of departure was to talk *to* gay people and not *about* them.

2.3.3 The 2001 Regional Synod of the DRC: Southern-Transvaal

During 2001, the commission served the Regional Synod of Southern-Transvaal with a report containing the following recommendations:

- *The Synod accepts the report of the study commission as a conversational document. It is left to the study commission to reflect on the most effective way of improving the discussion on homosexuality on synod level.*
- *The Synod points to the decisions of the General Synod that faith in the Holy Trinity and his revelation in the Scriptures should be seen as the only requisite for membership of the church of Jesus Christ (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1990:7).*
- *Homosexual people should not on the basis of their orientation per sé be excluded from the community of the holy and from the opportunity to serve in the interest of the Kingdom (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986: 363).*
- *The Synod binds him to continued reflection before he will pronounce whether homosexuality should be seen as a symptom of the abnormal broken reality or as a variant of normal sexuality.*
- *The Synod regretfully acknowledges that the church and her clergy have often acted with a lack of understanding and empathy towards gay people.*

Almost all the recommendations of the report were approved by the Synod (NGK Suid-Transvaal 2001).

2.3.4 The 2002 General Synod of the DRC

In 2002, during the General Synod of the DRC held in Pretoria, they slightly changed their position on homosexuality. Recommendations were accepted stating that the General Synod could not "...identify themselves any longer with the 1986 report [on homosexuality] and apologized for the pain and suffering it caused as a result of its ...prejudices and loveless behaviour of the past in alienating people. A gay theology student, Rudie, insisted on attending the 2002 Synod meeting with me. Many of the church leaders were curious about my companion and were eager to meet him. Eventually, this led to him being "outed" on the front page of a *Sinode Bode* (Oosthuizen 2002:1), the official daily newspaper published during a General Synod meeting of the DRC. Consequently, he had to appear before the Curatorium and had to cancel his studies. At this point the General Synod acknowledged some important differences of opinion on homosexuality. Therefore, they decided to postpone the formulation of a firmer standpoint till the next General Synod to be held in 2004 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2002:628). It was at this General Synod, where I was invited to attend as an observer, where our two stories officially met. This gave me an opportunity to personally meet several church leaders. I was also requested to share some of my experiences with gay people during the smaller group discussions.

2.3.5 The 2004 Aasvoëlkop Conferences with gays and their parents

At the beginning of 2004, I was co-opted onto the still active study commission for homosexuality of Southern Transvaal. We started to plan a conference for gay Christians at the Aasvoëlkop congregation where Dr Bartlett was a minister at the time. The idea was to welcome gays for the first time on the premises of a DRC congregation. Then, for the rest of the day we would discuss the positives and the negatives of the Southern Transvaal report on homosexuality. I marketed the conference amongst the gays in the *Reformerende kerk*. This led to more than one hundred gays attending the conference on the 15th of May, 2004. I still recall the anxiety some of them expressed just by the thought of entering a DRC building. One person wrote me a letter about a nightmare he had had prior to the conference. In his dream, just as he was about to enter the building, people started shouting at him, belittling him and eventually chasing

him away. This illustrated gay people's deep-seated fear of rejection, especially by the church. The day was very successful in terms of attendance as well as participation. Practical recommendations were put in writing. Unfortunately, most of these remained in the files.

Nevertheless, it was a ground-breaking initiative and opened the door to better communication between gays and the DRC. This conference was followed by a highly successful conference at Aasvoëlkop congregation with the parents of gay children. Some of the recommendations from gays at the conference were both interesting and sad, for example that the DRC should educate her members in terms of reading the Bible (specifically the so called gay texts) in context. After so many years very little has come of that recommendation. These texts are still a stumbling block for many church members in their thinking about gays and their acceptance of gay relationships.

2.3.6 The 2004 General Synod of the DRC

Before the Hartenbos Synod I received a phone call from Dr Willie Botha, the secretary of the General Synod at the time. He requested me to attend the Synod meeting at Hartenbos, provided that I would contribute by sharing my experience with gay Christians in the smaller discussion groups. It was also at this Synod where Dr Cassie Carstens moved everyone with his story of his gay son (Greeff 2005:16). I believe this made such a huge impact on the people that the General Synod of 2004 voted overwhelming in favour of accepting the recommendations, that all people, irrespective of their sexual orientation, should be included in the love of God. Consequently, gay members should be accepted as equal members of the church on the basis of their baptism and faith (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). Once again the church apologized for the pain and suffering caused to gays and their families, but still begged a firm standpoint on homosexuality, as well as on homophobia. I was of the opinion that the DRC was in a process of changing positions. They had already accepted the innateness of homosexuality, but could not yet accept the gay person unconditionally.

The process of changing positions without a clear standpoint formulated on homosexuality confused many members of the DRC. This led to a number of regional Synods distancing themselves from the decision of the General Synod of 2004 (NGK Sinode Hoëveld 2005; NGK Sinode KZN 2005; NGK Sinode Vrystaat 2005).

2.3.7 The task team 2005—2007

Towards the end of 2005 the moderamen of the General Synod of the DRC appointed a task team to do further research on the phenomenon of homosexuality. The task team had to serve the General Synod of 2007 with a report. I was co-opted as a member of the task team consisting of 19 members. Dr Herman Carelsen acted as facilitator, Dr Ben du Toit as convener and Dr Willie Botha as scribe. Sixteen other members were co-opted on the strength of their perceived knowledge in the fields of theology and homosexuality. It soon became clear that all sixteen members held different views on a variety of gay issues. Eventually they divided in two broad groups. Both groups were sympathetic towards gays, but they strongly differed on the point of gay relationships. Dr Potgieter chaired the one group and Dr Bartlett the other group. After two years of thorough research and deliberation on the gay issue, the task team served the General Synod of 2007 with two separate reports, representing the respective views of the two groups (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007a:140-241). These two reports were based on two different sets of discourses informing the two groups of the task team (see 3.1).

2.3.8 The DVD: In conversation with gay Christians

At the task team I was always thinking of ways to make the voices of the gay people heard. At Heron Bridge, where we gathered every three months or so, it was not possible to bring a number of gay people along. Still, it was important for me to think of a way to bring gay Christians to the workshop, but through a different medium. Therefore, with the help of the gay community, I decided to make a DVD where the gay people could tell their stories themselves. We negotiated a number of goals that we wished to achieve through the stories on the DVD. Firstly, on a cognitive level, we wanted the task team members to understand the possible side effects of the Synod's Resolution on real people. Secondly, on an affective level, we wanted the task team members to experience that the church is hurting gay people. Thirdly, on a practical level, we hoped to set the church in motion. When the DVD was shown to the members of the task team, they were visibly moved by the stories. This was in accord with the view of Professor William Loader, a renowned Australian theologian, as to the best way to change perceptions on homosexuality. When I asked him this question during a seminar he answered: "stories, stories, stories" (Loader 2012).

Before the 2007 General Synod of the DRC, we duplicated the DVD and sent it to all of the registered delegates.

2.3.9 The 2007 General Synod of the DRC

The atmosphere during the gay debate was loaded (Jackson 2007:7). In spite of the two separate reports people on the task team learnt to respect one another. This was reflected in the language, and consideration for the others' viewpoints, which seemed refreshingly different from previous Synod meetings. Clearly the knowledge of and empathy towards gay Christians had increased. Burger (2007:14) confirmed this when he wrote in *Beeld* that the empathy was tangible.

Laurie Gaum's appeal against his dismissal as gay minister of the DRC would serve the following day. Expectations were expressed that the outcome of the gay report would have an influence on Laurie's fate the following day. The two co-chairpersons of the task team (Dr Bartlett and Dr Potgieter) jointly presented the consensus part of the report, after which each briefly presented his side of the differences in the report. Various speakers delivered a series of excellent arguments for or against gay relationships. Eventually, the ten moderators of the ten regional synods of the DRC worked out a compromise proposal (Jackson 2007:1) overnight. The meeting of the ten moderators was facilitated by Dr Janse van Rensburg. The compromise proposal was presented to the two co-chairpersons of the task team for their comments. After they had studied it they decided on a settlement. In a telephonic conversation which I had with Dr Potgieter (2013) he confirmed both the procedure and their joint decision to go along with the compromise proposal. According to Dr Potgieter he remarked at the time that this was not a final chapter in the debate on homosexuality, but only a "cease-fire". The next day the proposal was accepted by the General Synod. The compromise proposal entailed a combination of the two reports and led to the following Resolution on homosexuality (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007b:8):

1. The Bible is our point of departure and in reflecting on homosexuality we are sincerely looking for meaningful ways to interpret biblical values within context.
2. We accept the love of Christ as the only valid basis for relationships within the community of believers. All people are created in the image of God; the salvation in

Christ is for all people and the Spirit is poured out on all believers. Thus we accept the human dignity of all people.

3. All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are included in God's love. They are, on the grounds of their baptism and their faith, accepted as members of the church of Christ. Membership to our understanding is inclusive of access to the sacraments, access to the incumbency and submission to the discipline of the church.

4. The General Synod reaffirms the decision of 2004 that, according to our understanding of the Bible, only the union between one man and one woman can be seen as a marriage.

5. The General Synod also affirms the decision of 2004 that both heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity should be condemned in the strongest terms.

6. The General Synod decides that, with the light that we currently have, homosexual unions and marriages cannot be accepted as an alternative for marriage.

7. The granting of ministership is a function of the General Synod. The Synod decides that homosexual legitimates who lead a life of celibacy be granted ministership.

8. The General Synod acknowledges the discretion of local church councils to handle the differences on homosexuality in congregations in a spirit of Christian love.

For the first time in the DRC, the discretion of church councils was acknowledged and they were allowed to decide, in a spirit of Christian love, how to handle differences with regard to homosexuality (Oosthuizen 2007:2; Jackson 2007:1). Jan-Jan Joubert (2007:11) called point eight a "master move."

In the five years after this Resolution was accepted this "master move" resulted in quite a number of so-called "gay friendly" congregations within the DRC. In an interview with Rev Pienaar (2007:3) I expressed the opinion that the Resolution restored the dignity of gay people. It was, however, only afterwards through conversations with gay people that I realised how ridiculous and consequentially insignificant they found the Resolution. Conditional acceptance to them equals no acceptance at all. Obama (2013), the 44th president of the United States of America, reiterated this perception in his second inaugural speech by saying "no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free."

On 5 December 2012, I called Dr Janse van Rensburg (Janse van Rensburg 2012) and asked him to recall his memories of that specific historical event. The conversation was in Afrikaans. He gave me permission to take notes, which I later translated in English. I e-mailed the translated version of our conversation to him upon which he added comments and returned it to me via e-mail. His recollections were as follows:

The Synod of 2007 took place within the DRC's Season of Listening. The values underscored by the Season of Listening were teachability, openness, empathy and trust. These values impacted on the debates during the General Synods of 2007 and 2011 -- especially on the debate on homosexuality in 2007. The gay debate caused a division in the DRC; therefore we invited all the synod attendants to meet the evening before the gay debate. A large number of people attended this meeting during which we tried to reiterate the values of the Season of Listening.

The following day during the debate the usual attitude of animosity was replaced by one of respect and empathy. Forty people presented their different viewpoints on homosexuality. The usual stereotyping was gone. There were excellent theological arguments, but the division was clear. In the spirit of the Season of Listening we reached the first common ground when Professor Malan Nel from the University of Pretoria suggested that the ten regional moderators should meet. He proposed me to be the facilitator. I met with Professor Danie du Toit from the University of Stellenbosch, as well as with the ten moderators of the respective regional Synods, discussing the differences as well as the commonalities entailed in the two reports from the Task team. In the little time we had we argued about the theological principles on which we agreed.

The church is serious about her marriage theology. Marriage is only between one man and one woman.

The church is serious about her gay members. The church should be a place of home-coming for them.

The decision on clerical positions in local congregations rests with the local church councils, except for ministers.

Ministers are legitimated by the various members of the Curatorium and not by the local congregational councils. No minister, gay or straight, may be involved in an extra-marital sexual relationship. Straight ministers may get married, while gay ministers may neither be in a relationship nor get married, because this is only preserved for straights.

My personal viewpoint is that this is unfair towards gays, because it causes tension in terms of the feasibility of the Resolution. The Resolution excludes gays from being in any relationship. People refer to the Resolution as a compromise Resolution. As far as I am concerned, I have not facilitated towards a theological compromise, but towards formulating a viewpoint on gays for the DRC. The most important part of the Resolution is that for the first time in the history of the DRC the church has taken a decision based on where we are at this point in time in terms of the process of accommodating gays in the church. It is not a decision based on dogmatic principles. I believe that local church councils should decide on their own about every aspect of gay members.

(A couple of weeks after the Resolution Dr André Bartlett addressed a meeting in Stellenbosch held by members of the gay community. He assisted people in interpreting the Resolution.) I consider it a negative consequence of the Resolution, that in a way it concludes the process. The Resolution should not be seen as a finished or completed product, but as an on-going process. This Resolution is not a sustainable decision. In spite of the positive attitude and overwhelming vote for the so-called compromise Resolution at the 2007 Synod, the DRC should have carried on with the process (Janse van Rensburg 2012).

These remarks by Dr Janse van Rensburg plus the current dilemma with gay ministers and gay candidate ministers either having to remain celibate or be denied legitimation calls for an in-depth perspective on the Resolution as well as on discourses resulting in and sustaining the Resolution. Apart from the aforementioned voices, many other voices from within the church are asking for a revisit of the Resolution (Müller 2012:13; Jones 2013:8; Punt 2012:3; Jonker 2012:3). In an article written in *Kerkbode* (Oosthuizen 2013:3) Dr Bartlett, one of the co-chairpersons of the 2007 task team on homosexuality, reiterated the weight of the legitimation issue on his conscience. According to him the 2007 Resolution was a compromise in order to obtain general approval for and acknowledgement of full-membership privileges for gay persons. There was always the understanding that in the long run the position of gay legitimates would become unbearable, and should be handled by the DRC. In the same article Oosthuizen mentioned a letter written by a number of church members sent to the moderamen of the Western and Southern Cape, requesting that the issue of church membership for gay people should again receive attention on the highest level. Dr Gerber, general secretary of the General Synod of the DRC, confirmed the request from the Western and Southern

Cape moderamen. He also expressed the hope that the conversation on homosexuality would take place within the framework of human dignity (Oosthuizen 2013:3).

2.4 REFLECTION ON OUR STORIES

In this chapter I have described and interpreted the history of the development of both my gay story and that of the DRC. Interwoven with our stories is also the interpreted gay story of God. We have experienced many fusions of horizons (see 2.2.3). Winter (1997:27) regards the process of writing to involve clarifying and exploring ideas and interpretations. Therefore, writing up a report is an act of learning. "When we read what we have written, we find out what, in the end, we have learnt." In reading what I have written in this chapter, I realized that both the DRC and I have come a long way in terms of socially constructing and re-authoring our dominant gay narratives. We have departed from a witnessing position of being unaware and disempowered. Through participation with gay Christians we have learnt about their fear of rejection, their painful stories, their hopes and dreams. The increased awareness has changed our perceptions about gay people. It becomes visible when I revisit not only my own participatory process, but also the participatory process of the DRC. Borrowing the term from Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) we could name these processes our hermeneutic struggle to understand gay people. They consider conversation (language and communicative action) a part of the hermeneutic struggle to reach understanding with those with whom we are in contact. In this context it would refer to all the participants who enter into dialogue with one another. According to these two authors, understanding does not mean that we will ever understand each other completely. We only understand through dialogue what a person is saying within a particular context. This understanding never holds over time. Understanding is thus a process "on the way". We only understand descriptions and explanations, but not events, because no understanding can ever exhaust all the meanings of events. Anderson and Goolishian (1988:380) refer to Hans Lipps who states that any linguistic account carries with it a "circle of the unexpressed". This means that no communicative account, no word, is complete, clear and univocal. As such, when writing up the research, I bore in mind the tentative, incompleteness of understanding. This applies not only to the understanding of the phenomenon of homosexuality, especially gay relationships, but also the role which societal and religious discourse like dogma and prejudice play in participation with gays and in considering

specific contexts of gay people. I understand dogma (meaning and insight) as that which forms the official belief system (Heyns 1988b:351), in this context of the DRC, which can only be changed once the paradigm (see 1.6) has changed. Van Loggerenberg (2008:144-149) suggested a model which illustrates the inversed relationships amongst these four dimensions: dogma, prejudice, participation and context. It seems that where participation increases, gay prejudice decreases and *vice versa*. The more contact with gay people and the more their stories are heard, the less prejudiced people become towards them and the discrimination against them decreases. The more exposure to a person's context, the less entanglement there seems to be in rules and regulations of dogma. As the shift in the direction of protagonism and inclusion increases, dogma becomes reduced to one single rule: Love.

In the next chapter I have addressed the Resolution of 2007 in terms of the discourses informing the line of reasoning, and the contradictions and interpretations thereof. Discourses of patriarchy and heteronormity based on prejudice and leading to stigmatisation and discrimination have been explored as having contributed in constituting the Resolution, but which are also sustaining the Resolution.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESOLUTION: INTERPRETATIONS, POSSIBLE DISCOURSES AND NARRATIVES OF DISCRIMINATION

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ (Gal 3:28)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

During 2007 the two groups of the task team submitted two separate reports to the General Synod (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007a:140--231). These reports were socially constructed and influenced by the respective underlying belief systems of the task team members and by numerous discourses on homosexuality. These discourses represented both congruities and differences. At the General Synod, after having heard all arguments for and against homosexuality, the meeting decided not to vote at that point, but requested the ten moderators of the Regional Synods to meet during the evening. The purpose was to reflect on both differences and agreements to see whether they could compile a single set of recommendations from the two task team reports. This meeting was facilitated by Dr Janse van Rensburg (see 2.3.9). The new set of recommendations consisted of eight points and was approved the following day by the General Synod of 2007 (Algemene Sinode 2007b:8). It became known as the compromise Resolution of the DRC on gay people (Janse van Rensburg 2012).

Some regarded this Resolution as a ground breaking decision with point eight as a “master move” by accommodating different interpretations by church councils for approaching gay people (Joubert 2007:11; Oosthuizen 2007:2; Jackson 2007:1). Unfortunately, this leniency was later found to be contradictory in terms of the different interpretations of the DRC’s official viewpoint regarding gay relationships. For many gay ministers its requirements would be unobtainable, unbearable. At first glance the Resolution gave the impression that the church had made progress in her approach to gays: the human dignity of all people was acknowledged, and all people were included in God’s love and accepted as members of the church only on the grounds of their baptism and their faith in Jesus Christ regardless of their sexual orientation. Unfortunately their inclusion was still conditional. Therefore, gay people were of the opinion that not much had changed (Cilliers 2011:412, 413). Their reasons were the attachment of unequal value to straight and gay relationships, the contradictions and

ambiguities contained in the report, and especially the requirement of gay ministers to remain celibate. According to Cilliers, the Resolution was merely a reformulation of the previous stereotypical expression of accepting the gay person but not the deeds. There was no trace of unconditional acceptance. Nelson Mandela (1994:750, 751) wrote: “if one’s freedom was obstructed in a lawful life it took away your dignity and self-respect, resulting in living a life in chains”. Now (6 October 2013), six years after the 2007 Resolution, the General Synod of the DRC was meeting again, amongst other things to discuss homosexuality. A number of past efforts to unite a polarised membership on challenging matters had resulted in compromise decisions. Jean Oosthuizen, a previous reporter of *Kerkbode*, expressed his scepticism about the success of compromise decisions, for example those made on Belhar, the Devil, and Homosexuality (2013:3). He would much rather see the DRC guiding her members to restore the dignity of all people, including their homosexual members. Professor Niemandt, the moderator of the General Synod, expressed the hope of getting a process going by which the DRC would be able to rethink the decision of 2007, which required the celibacy of gay ministers (Oosthuizen 2013:3). Müller (2013:12) invited the General Synod of the DRC to be a prophetic voice amongst their ecumenical partners by challenging them to favour the value of human dignity more than establishing a consensus on the celibacy issue of gay ministers. Evidently, all past calls in favour of gay relationships as a demonstration of human dignity were to little avail. On the 10th of October 2013, six years after the 2007 approval of the Resolution, the General Synod of the DRC voted to uphold the Resolution of 2007 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2013 *online*). One change was brought about at point five which now included heterosexual theology students in terms of their Christian-ethical behaviour. The General Synod again asked for forgiveness for objectifying gays by talking *about* them and not *to* them. They also expressed their intention to treat all people equally in terms of human dignity (Jackson 2013b:3). Immediately after the Synod’s decision became known, I called a few of my co-researchers. They were of one accord that the outcome, particularly the words of Prof Niemandt (Jackson 2013:3), had increasingly become hollow. The Synod’s decision did not evoke their emotions anymore, not even anger. It became meaningless, something to ignore. They had lost all hope. On the other hand, the decision affirmed the importance of this research study.

In this chapter I discuss each of the eight points of the Resolution in terms of the abovementioned concerns, thereby aiming to formulate possible underlying discourses that might have informed the General Synod decisions of both 2007 and 2013. Such discourses would seem to be instrumental in constructing dominant problem-saturated narratives of discrimination against gay people and especially gay ministers. I also explored the impact of dominant narratives of discrimination against gay people that emerged from the Resolution.

3.2 EIGHT POINTS OF THE RESOLUTION

The Bible is our point of departure and in reflecting on homosexuality we are sincerely looking at ways to interpret Biblical values meaningfully within the context.

At the beginning of my research in 2012 I requested my co-researchers to reflect on the eight points of the Resolution. After having read this first point, one of them launched a spirited flow of questions such as: What part of the Bible? Which translation? Have they taken the evolutionary process of the canonisation of the Bible into account? What context? According to whose interpretation? What values? Who is benefitting? Is it meaningful? To whom? What is the effect on gay Christians? What insights of renowned scholars of the so-called biblical texts on homosexuality have they considered? When I asked the person where all those questions were coming from, inside or outside of the body, the reply was: “From inside.” “May I ask, where about?” “From my spinal cord.” “What released them?” I asked. “The anger and the pain burnt them out, like a malignant tumour”. “What were the seeds of the anger and pain?” “The prejudice, the stigmatisation, the stereotyping and the injustice... The DRC has double standards, because they do not apply the same biblical values to straight theology students in terms of their relationships. They discriminate against us.”

Rev Muller (see 5.4) also had concerns about the wording of the first point:

The above formulation of the Resolution creates the impression that what follows has already withstood the Biblical soundness test. The problem is that this statement is too vague; what does it mean? Does it imply a literal interpretation and a direct application, without acknowledging the textual context and cultural differences, or does it take into account the historical-cultural context? Remember, both “liberal” and “fundamentalist”

are using the Bible as their respective point of departure, but they may arrive at completely opposing viewpoints.

Saying that they are “sincerely looking at ways to interpret” would mean that they would be willing to revisit their long established convictions about what the Bible supposedly was saying about homosexuality. They would not just look for confirmation for what they have always believed was the only right answer. They would also refrain from just trying to defend the results of their exegesis, and ask in all sincerity if there could possibly be another way to approach or interpret these texts (see 4.2.3; 4.2.4). If they were sincere, they would be willing to walk the extra mile by doing another thorough exegesis of the concerned texts – in a way that could possibly bring the opposing sides together.

People using the phrase “biblical values” in the context of dealing with gay church members, often create the impression that by accepting gay members, one would inevitably infringe upon “biblical values”. My feeling is that “biblical values” should actually be looked upon as “traditional values”. There is nothing that Christian gay brothers and sisters do that would compromise true biblical values, since they also live by those values. The formulation of this phrase as it stands at the moment creates the impression that biblical values and the values of Christian homosexual people are two different sets of values (Muller 2013).

Even if the formulation of this first point of the Resolution sounded like an honest and sincere point of departure, the concerns and questions that followed clearly indicated a power imbalance. It seemed that the Synod was informed by a patriarchal discourse of power. Monk et al. (1996:35) suggest that discourses are social practices and organised ways of behaving. In human communities what can be said, and who may speak are issues of power and determined by discourse. Therefore, a discourse often has a prescriptive function. Within a patriarchal discourse those in power decide and prescribe on behalf of and to those without power. In this case it would be the DRC prescribing to gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Foucault (1994:119) emphasised that discourse has the potential to produce knowledge. He argued that “effects of truth were produced within discourses, which in themselves were neither true nor false”. Power had the potential to determine truth claims. It had an influence on how knowledge was created, but also on the marginalisation of “alternative” knowledges. Claims to knowledge are always contextual (Jennings and Graham 1997:168). In chapter 5 of this thesis it was suggested how the knowledges of gay ministers had been marginalised

within certain contexts. Hare-Mustin (1994:21) affirms how dominant discourses sustain the privileged position of those in power, while the marginalised discourses contest the privileged position of those in power and speak for those who are often regarded as inferior. This can be done by challenging the knowledge claims of those in power.

Knowledge is socially constructed in an intersubjective way through discourse and language (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:377). This is portrayed by the carefully formulated terms in the Resolution. According to Kvale (1992:35) language and knowledge do not copy reality, but constitute it. Reality is a social construction through language by interpretation and negotiation of meaning. In this case the “negotiated meaning making” took place in the absence of the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers concerned and thus reiterated the power imbalances. In this point of the Resolution, the “we” (the ten moderators) certainly did not include gay Christians when they were drawing up the eight points of the Resolution. Power imbalances led to a Resolution that discriminated against gay people. At the 2013 General Synod meeting in Port Elizabeth, those power imbalances were acknowledged by the moderator, Dr Niemandt. He apologised for having treated gays as objects by excluding them from continuous debates *about* them instead of including them in their deliberations (Jackson 2013:3).

We accept the love of Christ as the only valid basis for relationships within the community of believers. All people are created in the image of God; the salvation in Christ is for all people and the Spirit was poured out on all believers. Thus we accept the human dignity of all people.

Rev Muller expressed the following concerns:

If the love of Christ were embraced as the only valid basis for relationships in the Church, all people should unconditionally be welcomed in the Church, because Christ would never reject anybody who wanted to be with Him. How sincere could this statement be, if gay believers were only accepted (tolerated) to a certain point? They were welcomed as long as they “appeared normal” and blended in with the rest. They should preferably remain single and celibate and not request to get married or to baptise their adopted or biological children. Gay people suffered a gross attack on their dignity by being shunned from church life. A basic understanding of exercising dignity was to ‘do unto others as we would have them do unto us’. This Golden Rule, as set by Christ himself, was certainly not being applied in this case (Muller 2013).

This point also contained a contradiction in that, by accepting the love of Christ on the one hand as the only valid basis for relationships, the added precondition in point seven of celibacy for gay ministers on the other hand, overruled it. The point stated that all people were created in the image of God and should thus be treated with human dignity. If gay people were created in the image of God, and the human dignity of all was accepted, why would they rob gay people of their human dignity by denying them meaningful loving relationships? If the Spirit worked in all believers, why not take their witnesses seriously? Why invalidate the presence of the Holy Spirit in gay believers? *Imago Dei* as the intention of God with humankind, embodied in Jesus Christ and fulfilled in the eschatological new creation, was realised through relationships (Grenz 2006).

The General Synod's decision on banning gay relationships could possibly have been informed by a heteronormative discourse implying that gay relationships might harm the dignity of gay ministers, or the dignity of the DRC, or the intention of God when He created man in his image. This would mean that they still regarded gay relationships as sinful, as an abomination before God. This prejudiced perception of gay relationships stigmatised gays and led to discrimination.

All people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are included in God's love. They are, on the grounds of their baptism and their faith, accepted as members of the church of Christ. With membership we understand access to the sacraments, access to the offices of deacon, elder and minister and submission to the church discipline.

This sounded like a beautiful statement. But what did gay ministers say? Why would the church still reserve a separate way of dealing with gay church members and gay clergy? According to this point in the Resolution, all gay people were included in God's love, but it seemed that from the DRC's side this inclusion was conditional. The added requisition – “as long as you are not in an intimate loving gay relationship” – made it conditional. According to the church ordinance, all positions in the church were of equal value

(Kerkorde⁴ [NGK] 2013:2). Why then the exception with regard to gay ministers? Barnard (2013:123) considered conditional acceptance as “tantamount to rejection”, regardless of the excuses used to justify it. It seemed that God’s love for gay people and the love of the DRC were not the same. What was meant by “God’s love” in this point? Was it contained in his saving grace? Who decided on what grounds someone should be disciplined? Why should a gay minister in a loving, monogamous, intimate relationship be disciplined? From a gay person’s perspective he/she had done nothing wrong. What about straight, unmarried ministers who could also be in similar relationships? Was this then not a case of applying double standards? Then, surely, the prevailing discourse was that gays were lesser, unequal members of the DRC, worthy of being denied, belittled and dehumanised. They were still being looked upon as an embarrassment to the church. This again could only lead to further stigmatisation and discrimination.

The General Synod reaffirms the decision of 2004 that, according to our understanding of the Bible, only the union between one man and one woman may be regarded as a marriage.

Rev Muller gave his views as follows:

It is the prerogative of the General Synod to have its particular understanding of the Bible, that marriage can only be between one man and one woman, but in the meantime the world is marching on: gay marriages have been legal in SA since 2006 and other major countries have joined, of which the USA, England and France are the latest. The General Synod may cling to its viewpoint, but will eventually discover that as a church it has lost its relevance in yet another aspect of modern people’s lives (Muller 2013).

Where the Resolution mentions “our” understanding of the Bible, to whom does it refer? Does it only refer to straight members’ understanding, or is it inclusive of gay members’?

⁴ *Die Kerkorde* is a document published by the DRC containing rules, guidelines and functional decisions of Synod meetings of the DRC.

There were no gay representatives present during the formulation of the Resolution. Therefore, it seems that the exclusion (again) may be due to power imbalances in the DRC. Gays were merely left out with the usual discrimination and looked upon as lesser members of the DRC, just because they were of a different sexual orientation. The Bible, with its pre-modern knowledge base, was used as a scientific handbook for today (Du Toit 2000:14, see also 4.2.3). On this basis, gay people are still being excluded from “holy matrimony”, causing them a double-bind: they are not allowed to marry nor have monogamous, loving, intimate relationships (see 6.3.3). This shows a complete disregard for scientific evidence of how people become homo- or heterosexual. Through a lack of insight gay ministers are being banned to a life of loneliness and possible depression and various kinds of anti-social behaviour (see 5.4).

The General Synod also affirms the decision of 2004 that both heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity should be condemned in the strongest terms.

This point of the Resolution may sound fair, but it remains vague in terms of defining promiscuity. In terms of both homo- and heterosexual relationships, how many sex partners are considered to be promiscuous? Does it exclude all sex outside of marriage? What about unmarried, straight people (including ministers) who are in sexual relationships? Again, there is no way forward in terms of relationships for gay people, because they should not get married, but they should also not have sex outside of marriage. Even if they would marry, their marriages would not be recognised within the DRC -- and their relationships would be treated with suspicion and resentment. The fact that they are grown-up human beings with needs of intimacy, attachment, belonging, and also sexual needs, is being disregarded. Again, this discursive position of the DRC, which seems to be based on prejudice, leads to discrimination against especially gay ministers and the stigmatisation of their relationships.

The General Synod decides that, with the light that we currently have, homosexual unions and marriages cannot be accepted as an alternative for the (Christian) marriage.

This point in the Resolution creates an impossible situation. It completely disregards the human nature to belong, to attach, to be with someone, not to be isolated. On 1 December 2006, the option of marriage became possible for the gay community in South

Africa when the Civil Union Act was endorsed by the President (South Africa 2006). However, the DRC still does not endorse this law. The question could be asked: How does the DRC regard gay unions? What meaning do they attach to these unions? In disregarding the legality of gay marriages (see 4.5.2), it seems the DRC wants to take ownership of the institution of marriage by elevating themselves above the law. In doing so, the DRC denies gay people their humanity. Their innate needs are belittled and degraded, as if they were lesser human beings, not worthy of human dignity and not entitled to the human rights endowed upon them by the South African constitution (The Constitution 1996:3, 7). The rejection of gay relationships in the Resolution also indicates the power of the hetero-normative discourse. According to Blumenfeld (1992:15) this portrays heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. Hillier and Harrison (2004:81) view “[g]lobalising discourses around gender and sexuality, which are supported by the church and the state, as sanctioning heterosexuality and certain types of masculinity and femininity, while constituting non-heterosexuality and other ways of performing gender as unacceptable”.

The granting of clergy status is a function of the General Synod. The Synod decides that homosexual legitimates who lead a life of celibacy may be granted clergy status.

The discursive position taken in this point of the Resolution seems to indicate that the DRC regards the incumbency of clergy as being of a higher status than that of ordinary members. According to the church ordinance all church members and their offices are equal (Kerkorde [NGK] 2007:16). Wink (1999:41) indicated that the Old Testament regards celibacy as abnormal, while 1 Tim 4:1-3 refer to celibacy as a heresy. However, there are also some New Testament texts, as well as Jesus' own example, that seem to point to celibacy in a favourable manner (Matt. 19:10--12, Rev. 14:3--4; Acts 21: 9 and 1 Cor. 7:7). It should be noted that 1 Corinthians 7:7 acknowledges celibacy as a gift from God, while the Resolution of 2007 seems to imply the conviction that celibacy is a choice. According to Wink (1999:41), this argument legislates for celibacy as a category and not as a divine calling. Many questions regarding the nature of celibacy could be asked, for example: *How do you define celibacy? How do you control it? Is it merely sexual abstinence, or does it include desire as well?* Ghandi (Caplan 1987:274) says, “...so long as the desire for sexual intercourse is there, one cannot be said to have attained...

control over his sexual organ... His speech, his thoughts, and his actions all bespeak possession of vital force.” Vital force refers to orgasm. Has the DRC not taken note of the disastrous consequences of celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church? In 2011 Philadelphia archbishop Cardinal Justin Rigali resigned amidst accusations of a cover up of a long running priest sex abuse scandal (Newser 2011[Online]). The emphasis on celibacy actually reached its pinnacle during the Middle Ages when the medieval church embraced the monastic ideal as the “Christian’s higher calling” (Grenz 1990: xvi). Those who could not reach this spiritual ideal could confess to the celibate priest about their sinful passions. I am just wondering: should the DRC continue with its inducement of gay ministers into celibacy, would they also consider introducing a confessional practice with a celibate minister to listen to the confessions of gay ministers who have failed to abide by this superior ideal? According to O’Loughlin (1995:44), “celibacy is a classic example of how an idea from one period, if it gets lodged in law, can become self-perpetuating and eventually be seen as an ideal”. My impression was that after the many sex scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis declared that celibacy was open for discussion. The Vatican’s secretary of state, Archbishop Pietro Parolin, said celibacy was not part of the church’s dogma, but of its tradition (Bruton 2013 [online]). It seems that even the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) as a whole has now entered into an open discussion on the pros and cons of celibacy.

Apart from the RCC’s doings, also on this point of the Resolution the DRC seems to be applying double moral standards. They are expecting something from gay ministers which they would never expect from others. Has the DRC taken into account the possible psychological, social and spiritual impact this may have on gays (see 5.4)? In their formulation of point 7, have they considered some personal witnesses of gay people, or the research of excellent scholars of theology on the interpretation of the so-called gay texts in the Bible, or the research done by the medical profession (see Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007 Agenda)? The DRC expects from gay ministers to disengage, disembodiment themselves from their physical, emotional and spiritual needs – just because they are gay. This automatic disqualification of gays-in-relationships from becoming ministers is also a disregard for God’s calling (see 5.4) them into his service. Aren’t they abusing the Bible to justify their fear of gay people, putting their arguments above their submission to God’s commandment of neighbourly love? Or was there another kind of fear informing the decision-making process at the General Synods of

2007 and of 2013? Was it perhaps the fear of dividing the church and losing some members?

Other troubling thoughts are: “Why do the DRC even allow/accept gay students as theological students, why not refuse them from the start? Wouldn’t it be more ethical, albeit discriminatory, to at least provide for alternative career possibilities to justify their training?” (See 5.4). Of course, the best option would be to treat all students, gay or straight, as equals.

After having discussed this point of the Resolution in the group, we concluded that the dominant discourse of prejudice towards gay ministers with its consequential unfair discrimination and stigmatisation seemingly still prevailed. Especially point 7 of the Resolution has devastating consequences for gay ministers and gay candidate ministers (see 5.4).

The General Synod acknowledges the discretion of local church councils to handle differences on homosexuality in their congregations in a spirit of Christian love.

Cilliers (2011:413) considers this point to be a cowardly decision. The DRC does not want to take responsibility for the handling of her gay members, but abdicate it to local congregations. It leaves room for confusion and for the real matter to be ignored. What is the message of the church, if some congregations accept gay relationships and the others don’t? Gay Christians tell me that this decision fills them with anxiety and uncertainty of how they may be treated and accepted in a specific congregation. Their constant fear of rejection and humiliation is therefore being sustained by this point of the Resolution. Cilliers is adamant that this avoidance of the church in taking a firm stand in terms of gays in the church cannot be perpetuated indefinitely. More and more young people are coming out of the closet. They do not accept the stereotyped views of the church, but they do need its formal structures.

To some people this point of the Resolution may seem a huge step forward, but it still entails an element of conditional inclusion. Some gays have reported anxiety, because of a lingering feeling of not being good enough, not accepted everywhere in all congregations of the DRC. Their acquired hesitance, a constant, internalised policing

(see 5.4) of their whereabouts, keep them on the alert for possible rejection. While some people at Synod level may have done an exhaustive study on what it means to be gay, the general knowledge of people in congregations is often very limited on this subject. This situation creates polarisation between leadership and ordinary members, because members expect guidance from their leaders on moral issues. Where the guidance seems vague, members often react by reverting to foundationalism as a reaction against the relativism of postmodern thinking. This is where postfoundationalism with its language of transversal rationality could play an important role by “splitting the difference” between the two paradigms (Van Huyssteen 1999:251, 264). Postfoundationalism offers an option for the development of meaningful dialogue between the sciences and Christian theology – something which neither foundationalism nor postmodernism can accomplish on its own (see chapter 6).

3.3 REFLECTING ON POSSIBLE DISCOURSES

After much deliberation with my co-researchers on the eight points of the Resolution of the General Synod of 2007 and possible discourses that had been guiding them in their formulation of the compromise Resolution, we tried to understand what the dominant discourse or problem-saturated story actually was that gay ministers and gay candidate ministers now were dealing with. It seemed that none of the power of all the possible discourses that had served to construct meaning and create knowledges about gay ministers was life-giving (Kotzé et al. 2002:21). Rather, it culminated in narratives of prejudice and stigmatisation. By using prejudice and keeping the shame and stigma of homosexuality alive the Resolution rather seemed to perpetuate the discrimination against gay people. Due to paradoxical communication (Watzlawick et al. 1967:211) it also placed the gay ministers in a “catch twenty-two” or a double-bind situation (see 6.3.3).

The problem-saturated narrative of prejudice and stigmatisation in the Resolution and its impact on human dignity necessitated my embarking on a literature study, firstly by exploring the nature of the above-mentioned narratives and how they impacted on gay people. I focused my exploration on the power of knowledge obtained through discourse and noted how it shaped people’s lives and relationships in a very real way.

Foucault’s ideas on power and knowledge (1980) made me aware that all knowledges and life practices were embedded in power relations. These shaping powers and their

effects on people's lives and knowledges were not innocent, as they mostly proved to act to the advantage of people who would benefit and to the disadvantage of those who would suffer (see 5.4).

Kotzé and Kotzé (2002:203) were of the opinion that when a pastoral practice was not aiming to redress these issues in both the counselling process and in public, political-cultural and societal contexts, the counsellor would be “[shying] away from an important ethical commitment”. Ackermann (1991:96) called for “justice, peace, healing and wholeness for all in partnership”. Therefore, I considered it important to participate with my co-researchers (the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers) in redirecting the impact of the Resolution to socio-political and cultural discourses. This would then, according to Jacobsen (1994:150), be “an ethics of justice” and would challenge amongst other issues the discrimination levelled against gay ministers.

3.3.1 Prejudice and stigmatisation

One of my earliest recollections of my journey with gay people went back to 2002, when a gay minister of the DRC (see 5.4) came to me for therapy. On arrival he parked his car, but did not get out. After a while, I went outside to see what his problem was. I walked up to his car window. He opened it hesitantly and asked, “What are you going to do to me?” I responded instinctively, saying, “Just get out of your car and I will show you.” He seemed taken aback, but he got out. We had never met before, but I asked whether I could hug him. There, under the white stinkwood tree in my garden, we just stood there, hugging. Soon both of us were sobbing. After a while we disentangled the embrace and introduced ourselves properly for the first time. A series of fruitful therapeutic conversations followed. At the conclusion of the therapy, we reflected on what he regarded as having been especially helpful to him. According to him, he could not recall much of what had taken place during the sessions. However, he declared that my willingness to touch him and hug him that first day under the tree would stay with him for the rest of his life. He perceived it as the first time any heterosexual person from the church was not treating him like a leper. This remark really brought me under the impression of the power of stigma and shame, and how a community of Christians could often unknowingly contribute to the growing pain of its members. As my journey with gays proceeded, I was constantly reminded of how negative the impact was of powerful discourses on gay people's identities. At the beginning of my Ph.D research, one of my

friends from the gay church for example remarked on the eight points of the Resolution as “reinforcing the stigma and consequent shame”.

Such stories, where gays were made to feel as if they were committing a shameful and immoral act just because they were gay, were common. In fact, a DRC-leader even asked me once whether I actually touched “them”, as if gayness was something infectious that could rub off. The reiteration of prejudice and stigmatisation by means of such experiences not only enforced the shame, but created categories of “us” and “you” or an “othering” (Benton 2008:316). According to Derrida (1984:116), “every culture was haunted by its other”. The existence of an “other” was seen as important in the development of a social and cultural identity (Cromer 2001:191). Sadly, the idea of dividing society into insiders and outsiders also featured in the church (Allport 1954; Cromer 2001). This perception of “otherness” held by members of the DRC towards gay people underscored my responsibility to offer the gay community my services of pastoral care. If it were really important to me to follow the example of Christ, I felt I should treat our gay outsiders with an all-embracing love, welcoming them unconditionally within the church community. I am also the church.

As a pastoral care-giver working within the framework of the feminist theology of praxis, I had a responsibility to heal God’s creation and in particular gay ministers, by unmasking the practices of prejudice and stigmatisation. Ackermann (2005:386) described a feminist theology of praxis as a critical Christian theology alert to the challenges not only women had to face in their traditions and religious institutions, but all marginalised groups. She considered this kind of theology as being concerned with the tension between theory and praxis. It also touched on what we believed and how we applied the things we believed. Our actions as “doers of the Word” should manifest in embodied contexts, with real people involved in real life-giving change. Thus, my theology of praxis should always be critical and self-reflective, continuously asking what I was doing to change those practices levelled against gay people in the church that were dehumanising and stigmatising. In this context, I considered it of the utmost importance to explore the nature and effects of prejudice and stigma in terms of the position of the DRC on gay ministers, in order to embark on real life-giving change.

3.3.2 The social construction of prejudice

In a postfoundational, social-constructionist, narrative metaphor meaning is negotiated over time through social and also interdisciplinary interaction (Freedman & Combs 1996:22, 23; White 1991:27,28; Van Huyssteen 1997:129). This includes aspects of reality like our beliefs, social customs, habits, and attitudes such as prejudice. These aspects of reality are constructed through language and maintained by narratives. They represent interpreted meanings without any essential truths. The latter does not refer to the relativistic slogan for postmodernism, “everything goes”, but requires the “best or strongest reasons available to support the comparative rationality of one’s beliefs within a concrete socio-historical context” (Freedman & Combs 1996:22, 23; Van Huyssteen 1997:129). In my discussion on how the meaning of prejudice is socially constructed, the above-mentioned metaphors will be interwoven.

The word *prejudice* was derived from the Latin noun *praejudicium* with the classical meaning of ‘previous judgment’ or ‘premature decision’ (Marchant and Charles 1952:433). Initially, it was generally used to refer to a precedent or judgment based on previous decisions and experiences. Since then, the word *prejudice* had undergone some change (Allport 1954:6). According to Allport in English it acquired the meaning of a *premature* or *hasty judgment*, and in more recent times, the idea of favourableness or unfavourableness was added. *Prejudice* (having a prejudice or being prejudiced) could then mean making a premature judgment of someone and basing it rather on negative or positive feelings than on any actual experience of either the person or situation. Pettigrew (1975:x, 245) defined prejudice as “an affective, categorical mode of mental functioning that involves rigid prejudgment and misjudgement of human groups”. He suggested that much of the discrimination due to prejudice was based on the monopolising powers of those in governing positions.

Allport (1954:9, 20, 25) considered the forming of categories or generalisations as necessary for the thinking process of humans. He viewed personal values as a type of categorisation which could easily lead to prejudgment. Evidence and reason often conformed to value categories. According to Allport, not all prejudgements were prejudices. He distinguished between ordinary misconceptions and prejudices on the grounds of reversibility when exposed to new knowledge. Allport considered a prejudice as being emotionally resistant when threatened with contradiction. This was evident in

the different attitudes of DRC congregations towards gay Christians: some accepted gay people as well as their relationships the way they were, while others stood firm in their ban on their relationships. The latter probably felt threatened in the face of contradiction of their prejudices. In terms of prejudice, Allport (1954:29--67) introduced to his arguments the concepts of in-groups and out-groups. He did not consider in-group loyalty to automatically imply out-group hostility. "Hostility towards out-groups helps strengthen our sense of belonging" (Allport 1954:42). He viewed the familiar as preferred to the unfamiliar, which he regarded as of less value and less good. He opposed the view of Sumner (1906:12) who believed that there was a direct correlation between positive sentiments towards the in-group and hostility and hatred towards the out-group. According to Brewer (1999:430), "most contemporary research" supported the view that in-group preference and out-group hostility were reciprocally related. However, in concluding her research on in-group love and out-group hatred she shared Allport's view of allocating psychological preference to how in-groups were formed (Brewer 1999: 441, 442). He found that positive attitudes of attachment and loyalty played a bigger role in the formation of in-groups than negative attitudes towards out-groups. In-group perceptions and discriminatory behaviours against out-group members were rather motivated by the desire to develop and maintain good relationships within the in-group than by negative attitudes of exclusion. In congruence with Allport according to Brewer, in-group love did not necessarily precede out-group hatred. But she did express concern that the very factors giving weight to attachment and loyalty might create fertile ground for antagonism and distrust towards outsiders. These forces were considered to exert more power in highly segmented, hierarchically organised societies, which often happened to be the case between the DRC and the gay community.

Allport (1954:14) distinguished different degrees of negative action varying in intensity between low and high. The first is antilocution, where people use derogatory language and hate speech. He considered this as prejudice, because it reflected stereotyping based on preconceived judgments. Secondly, when the intensity of prejudice was raised, detrimental distinctions and avoidance of the disliked group would follow. This would eventually lead to discrimination in terms of educational privileges, political rights and employment -- such as the DRC's denying of gay ministers rights to be legitimated. Under conditions of heightened emotions, as in countries like Russia, Pakistan, Malaysia, North, West and Southern Africa, prejudice frequently led to violent attacks or even

extermination (Human Dignity Trust 2013). Prejudice and stereotyping (often originating in a kernel of truth) lead to stigmatisation (Allport 1954:200; Goffman 1990:12; Cox et al. 2012:427--430).

3.3.3 The social construction of stigma

The term *stigma* originated from the Greek language and was originally used to signify a distinguishing mark or blemish placed on the bodies of slaves, traitors or criminals (Goffman 1963:1). Recently its meaning became more complex. Ackermann (2005:388) indicated that our understanding of stigma would vary due to different historical and cultural contexts. Broadly, she explained, stigmatised persons were viewed as of lesser value, blameworthy and to be feared because of being different (see 5.4). Consequently, stigmatised individuals were rejected and excluded on grounds of reasons that often had no bearing on them.

Goffman (1990:12) characterised stigma as a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity.

Stigma is an illuminating excursion into the situation of persons who are unable to conform to standards that society calls normal. Disqualified from full acceptance they are stigmatised individuals. Their image of themselves must daily confront and be affronted by the image which others reflect back to them (Goffman 1990:13).

According to Goffman (1963:2) virtual social identity refers to the identity society ascribed to someone by categorising the person according to assumed or anticipated attributes based on first appearances. Society then transformed these anticipations into normative expectations, which they then presented as justified demands. It was only when they realised that their demands had not been met as the person in question clearly possessed a different set of attributes to what society had expected, that they came to know his/her actual social identity. According to Goffman (1990:12), space could only be formed between a stranger's "virtual social identity" and "actual social identity" after the individual had entered the midst of society, and disrupted the projected stereotype or identity. Even then, according to Goleman the power of stereotypes lay in the tendency of people to remember more readily instances that supported the stereotype and discount instances that challenge it (1996:157).

According to Ackermann (2005:388), the reason for finding it difficult to grasp the concept of stigma formation, was the variety of factors being present in the process, like social, cultural, religious, political, gender and ethnic factors. Cox et al. (2012:427- 430) consider stereotypes and prejudices as possible causes for stigma and depression. They postulated that stereotypes were activated by people expressing their prejudice and thereby causing stigma and depression in the targeted person or group of people. According to Cox et al. (2012:429), stereotypes were a cognitive link between two social or personal concepts that were not defining features for one another. Stereotyping then was the application of a stereotype by accepting an inferred characteristic for another person. In the context of this dissertation, an example would be to consider all gay men as paedophiles, or as hairdressers, or as being HIV positive. This would merely indicate a total lack of knowledge about gay people. The philosopher Albert Camus (2010:107) noted in this regard, "...[Y]ou always get exaggerated ideas of things you know nothing about." This corresponded with the viewpoint of Cox et al. (2012:430) that stereotypes were mostly inaccurate, oversimplified, fixed overgeneralisations of a person or a group of people. It was possible for a stereotype to grow in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.

According to Herek (2009:32) although heterosexuals' attitudes towards sexual minorities have changed during the past two decades sexual minorities continue to experience discrimination and hostility. Sexuality and sexual stigma are socially constructed (Herek 2009:33) and presents itself as a cultural phenomenon with structural and individual manifestations. Structurally sexual stigma, or heterosexism, broadly refers to negative regard, inferior status, and to a degree of powerlessness ascribed to anyone who does not apply with heterosexual behaviours. It is an ideology which assumes that heterosexuality is the only accepted sexual orientation. Sexual minorities therefore become invisible, and are depicted as problematic, unnatural, abnormal, should explain themselves and deserve discrimination. Against this background of heterosexism, individuals experience stigma in at least three ways: enacted stigma (shunning, ostracism, violence, etc.), felt stigma (efforts to avoid feeling the enacted stigma, like concealing a gay identity), and internalized stigma (accepting sexual stigma as a part of his/her value system, manifesting in heterosexuals as prejudice and in homosexuals as self-stigma).

3.3.4 Tricks of stigma to defeat its targets

Stigma used many ways and means to trick its targets, in this context the gay ministers, into believing that they were helpless and deserving of being excluded from the insider group. It was important to emphasise that not everybody who was stigmatised reacted in the same way. Some had more resilience than others. According to Watzlawick (1993:13) we badly needed the unhappiness brought to us when things in our lives were not perfect. He asked: “What or where would we be without our unhappiness?” Seligman examined the target group of prejudice and oppression through his model for learnt helplessness (Seligman 1998:29). He was interested in the impact of and consequent human reaction to loss in general – rejection by those we have loved, failure at work, etc. People who were on the receiving end of prejudice and stigmatisation reacted in different ways to discrimination. Some blamed themselves for failing, while others blamed outside factors. Seligman was curious as to why people reacted so differently to rejection and adversity. It became clear to him that the attribute of resilience in the face of defeat was not always an inborn trait, but could be acquired. Some people did not prevail, while others managed to pick themselves up and rebuild their lives.

In chapter five we will see how these stories of gay ministers have unfolded, from being rejected and severely hurt by the DRC, into often more triumphant stories of resilience and human will. The work of Watzlawick and Seligman offers a scaffolding of hope to me and to the gay ministers, especially when I further explored the ways and means applied through stigma in defeating gay targets.

3.3.4.1 Stigma uses metaphors associated with homosexuality in order to reinforce and legitimise stigmatisation.

Freedman and Combs (1996: [1]) considered metaphors as having a powerful influence on our thoughts and actions. They found numerous metaphors assigned to gay people. Words like “moffies”, homo’s, dykes, paedophiles, sissy boys, fags, butch females, are all metaphors that reinforce and legitimise stigmatisation. Franklin (1998:1--8) investigated assailants’ self-declared motivations for their assaults on gay and lesbian people. She referred to literature that suggested some motives for these assaults, such as being a form of male bonding, proving their heterosexuality, and purging themselves from secret homosexual desires. After having interviewed three assailants, Franklin conceptualised

violence against gays not in terms of individual hatred, but rather as an extreme expression of cultural stereotypes regarding male and female behaviour. According to Franklin, heterosexism was used as a tool to maintain gender dichotomy. Any male or female who acted outside of the dominant culture's discursive prescriptions for male and female behaviour, were labelled as a "sissy", a "fag" or a lesbian and thus subjected to bullying and often physical attacks. The fear of being ostracised as gay, even if you were not gay, put pressure on all people to conform to the societal prescriptions of appropriate gender behaviour. In doing so our society's hierarchical gender structure of heterosexual hegemony was maintained and stigmatisation of homosexuality reinforced and legitimised.

3.3.4.2 Stigma is based on lies (Ackermann 2005:389, 390; Cox et al. 2012:430).

Stigma uses language of prejudice and misunderstanding, thereby creating a metaphor of undesirability. Goffman (1990:12) called this an undesirability of the other as having a "spoiled identity". He (Goffman 1963:19) considered the discrepancy between one's actual identity and one's virtual identity as spoiling one's social identity. According to Goffman (1963:3), stigma reduced individuals with certain undesirable attributes that were incongruent with their stereotypes – for example, what they believed a "normal heterosexual should be" – to "tainted, discounted" human beings. Until we start engaging with such strangers and allow them to disrupt the stereotypes of identity that the community had projected onto them, it would not be possible to put a distance between this "virtual social identity" and their "actual social identity". This concept concurred with the ideas of William Loader (2012) on changing societal perceptions of homosexuality. He expressed the value of sharing gay people's stories with a heterosexual society. In my model for deconstructing gay discourse (Van Loggerenberg 2008:144) I illustrated the inversed effect of participation on prejudice. Participation had the potential for unmasking the lies that led to prejudice and stigmatisation, also against gay people.

3.3.4.3 Stigma thrives on silence, denial, guilt and fear.

Hundreds of gay people told me how they had tried, from a very early age, to hide their true selves in order to retain their parents' love. Downs (2006:11) underscored this with his reference to many gay people's early recollections of children's cruelty to them in their childhood years. Fear of rejection for being different often caused gays to

deliberately change their behaviour in order to fit in. Early abuse by peers and the fear of rejection by parents had engrained in them a very strong notion: *There was something about me that was disgusting, aberrant from the norm, and essentially unlovable*. Quite often parents, in spite of knowing the moral values of their gay children, are silenced by denial, guilt and fear, and disempowered by stigma. Very recently, a father whose son had come out threatened to shoot both the son and his boyfriend should they set foot on the farm. Ironically, what the son actually craved for was his father's love, affection and tenderness (Downs 2006:13). It was the same fear of rejection that made it difficult for DRC ministers to mention the word "gay" from the pulpit. In doing so the silence was maintained, the truth about homosexuality never reached the ears of the congregation and stigma was perpetuated. During our 2013 Easter sermons in a session for prayer requests I asked one of our ministers sitting next to me whether I could request the congregation to pray for an end to discrimination against gays. He replied, "Do you really want to risk using *that* word?" In saying this he momentarily applied fear to silence me.

3.3.4.4 Stigma links cultural taboos like human sexuality to homosexuality.

In cultures where open discussion on sexual matters hardly ever took place, anything concerning sexual matters was considered to be impure and treated with suspicion (Ackermann 2005:388). Promiscuity and earlier association of HIV/AIDS with homosexuality complicated cultural attitudes towards gay people. The sexual deed between two people of the same sex was met with aversion and considered to be unnatural, dirty, shameful and sinful (see 4.1).

3.3.4.5 Stigma uses subtle injunctions, confusing double meanings and self-reflexive paradoxes to entangle gay ministers in a double bind: "You may..., but you may not" (see 3.2; 6.3.3).

The concept *double bind* was introduced by Gregory Bateson and his collaborators (1956: 253) when they considered a theory of schizophrenia. They hypothesised that the effects of paradox in communication could induce schizophrenic behaviour. The characteristics of paradoxical sequences of interpersonal experiences were coined as double binds. Bateson et al. (1956:254) demonstrated a classical example of a double bind through the following passage from *Mary Poppins* (Travers 2010:85, 86), a children's book about an English nanny. *Mary Poppins* took the two children, Jane and

Michael, to a little gingerbread shop owned by Mrs Corry, a tiny old woman with two large daughters, Fannie and Annie.

“I suppose, my dear” – she turned to Mary Poppins, whom she appeared to know very well – “I suppose you’ve come for some gingerbread?”

“That’s right, Mrs Corry,” said Mary Poppins politely.

“Good. Have Fannie and Annie given you any?” She looked at Jane and Michael as she said this.

“No, Mother,” said Miss Fannie meekly.

“We were just going to, Mother —” began Miss Annie in a frightened whisper. At that Miss Corry drew herself up to her full height and regarded her gigantic daughters furiously. Then she said in a soft, fierce, terrifying voice:

“Just going to? Oh, indeed! That is very interesting. And who, may I ask, Annie, gave you permission to give away my gingerbread —?”

“Nobody, Mother. And I didn’t give it away. I only thought —”

“You only thought! That is very kind of you. But I will thank you not to think. I can do all the thinking that is necessary here!” said Mrs Corry in her soft, terrible voice. Then she burst into a harsh cackle of laughter. “Look at her! Just look at her! Cowardy-custard! Crybaby!” she shrieked, pointing her knotty finger at her daughter.

Jane and Michael turned and saw a huge tear coursing down Miss Annie’s huge, sad face, and they did not like to say anything, for, in spite of her tininess, Mrs. Corry made them feel rather small and frightened . . .

Bateson (1956:253--254) explained the double bind in this excerpt as follows:

When Mrs Corry says, “Have Fannie and Annie given you any?” she indicates that this is a context in which to have given gingerbread to the children would be rewarded and not to have given gingerbread might be punished. The daughter Annie tries to alibi for not giving gingerbread and Mrs Corry promptly punishes her. This is not – was not – that sort of context at all, for her next question is, “Who gave you permission to give away my gingerbread?” But this is by no means all. Mrs Corry creates an untenable situation not only in the area of her daughters’ right or duty to act, but also with regard to their thinking. She behaves in a way that is frightening and causes the girls not to think. But at the same time she expects them to be extremely thoughtful and to read her mind, which is impossible because she switches context on them as far as the expected and proper course of action – giving or not giving gingerbread – is concerned.

But as soon as Annie tries to defend herself by saying, "I only thought..." mother introduces her second switch of context: Annie is now suddenly told that she is not supposed to think, for mother can do all the thinking that is necessary. And finally mother extends the double bind into the area of her daughters' emotions. Mrs Corry first conveys her cold anger to her daughters and indicates that the matter is dead serious. This implies that they had better realise their guilt and show regret. But after having driven her daughters to tears, Mrs Corry changes her soft, terrible voice into a shriek and ridicules Annie for letting herself be frightened and calls her a coward and a cry baby.

According to Watzlawick (1978:99,100), the example above demonstrated a series of double binds which encompassed the whole range of human activities, that is to say thinking, feeling and acting. He considered paradox as the Achilles' heel of our logical, analytical, rational world view. Although all of us had been exposed to double binds that might have caused isolated experiences of trauma, most of us were fortunate enough to remain sane. However, Watzlawick's (1967:213) concern was double bind exposures that were "long-lasting and gradually (became) a habitual expectation". Where children's exposure to double bind was such that it caused them to perceive that what was happening to them also happened to everybody in the universe, it could not be considered as isolated trauma, but rather as a pattern of interaction. A double bind could not be regarded as a cause-effect relationship, but rather as a self-perpetuating vicious circle or pattern of communication. According to Watzlawick (1967:211--213), the essence of the double bind consisted of three ingredients: Firstly, two or more people were involved in an intense relationship where one of them, or two, or all experienced a high degree of physical and/or psychological survival strain. In the current context, the gay ministers and candidate ministers were dependent on legitimation in order to complete their studies and apply for posts in the DRC. Secondly, a message was conveyed that asserted something, then another message asserting something related to the first, but the two were perceived as mutually exclusive. This meant, for example, that if the two messages were instructions the recipient should disobey in order to obey. The Resolution expected from the gay ministers not to be promiscuous, but also not to be in a relationship, let alone getting married. In order to obey the one instruction, namely not to be promiscuous they had to disobey the other instruction, namely not to be in a relationship or to get married. Thirdly, without the option to comment or withdraw, the recipient of the message had to stay within the frame set by the message. He/she had to

react to it, but could also only react in a paradoxical way. If, for example gay ministers should get married, they would be punished for not living a life of promiscuity. If they would live a life of promiscuity they would be punished for not getting married first, which they were not allowed to do. They would then be punished for correct perceptions, and labelled as “bad” for suggesting that there was a discrepancy between what they saw and what they “should” have seen. This is exactly what happened when gay ministers were asked to resign from their positions (see 5.4). They were punished because they did not react appropriately according to the discrepancies in the double bind as formulated in the Resolution.

3.3.5 The impact of stigmatisation on gay people

Many heterosexual Christians, guided by relationships of knowledge and power, accepted biblical discourses or stereotypes as “the truth” and applied those stereotypes as justification for rejecting gay Christians and their relationships (Van Loggerenberg 2008:31). This rejection often took place because of the stigmatisation of gay people. Ackermann (2005:388) considered the effects of prejudice and stigmatisation to be of greater importance than to merely understand the concepts. This consideration corresponded with the aim of this study, because the focus of my research was on the impact of the 2007 Resolution on gay ministers. Considering the dire consequences of its formulation, it seemed that prejudice had prevailed. At least, a better understanding of the effects of stigmatisation had the potential of highlighting the ignorance, prejudice and misunderstanding that often fuelled it (Ackermann 2005:388).

Stigmatisation could lead to discrimination. Allport (1954:14, 15) noted that people’s actions towards a group they disliked did not always correlate with how they thought or felt about the group. Two people could be prejudiced towards a group, but while the one could keep his feelings to himself the other would engage in practices of discrimination. These practices could vary from antilocution (negative talk about a stigmatised person; derogatory or hate speech), avoidance and exclusion to physical attacks and extermination. Antilocution could have a negative impact on the identity of the person and give way to more harmful prejudice. Avoidance could cause more harm due to the resulting effects of isolation, and by paving the way for more harmful acts like exclusion. Exclusion could lead to discrimination by denying the prejudiced group equal access to opportunities and services, like what was happening to gay ministers in the DRC. In

extreme cases of prejudice and discrimination it could lead to physical attacks and extermination. These consequences of prejudice could evoke tremendous fear and denial and eventually silence the targeted person or group of people.

Marlene Botha, a gay DRC minister who came out only after I have conducted my interviews with the six gay ministers in this study (see 5), reported painful incidences of stigmatisation and discrimination after she had resigned as a minister (Botha 2013). For three years previously she had been employed as the primary school youth worker at her local DRC congregation. Parents trusted her through many weekends' activities to take care of their children and to teach them. All of a sudden, after her homosexuality had become known, parents started to ignore and avoid her, for instance in restaurants. Parents would go out of their way to prevent their children from even looking at her and her partner. She perceived their behaviour as if she, in their eyes, had suddenly turned into a paedophile. Even a friend of her remarked as follows on homosexuality: "It is like being a paedophile, or a rapist. But be assured that Christ will forgive you, because he has set all people free." Marlene perceived their changed reactions as if she had become a danger to them.

Ackermann (2005:389) considered internalised stigma as the most difficult to deal with since it invaded a person's identity. On the same basis, many gay Christians internalised these patriarchal discourses and homophobic ideas, which landed them in enormously painful struggles with themselves, society and with God. Herek (1998: 909) regarded internalised stigma as "an individual's personal acceptance of sexual stigma as a part of her or his own value system and self-concept". This person would accept the negative attitudes of society as justified. Consequently, his or her self-perceptions would be congruent with those stigmatising responses of society. This would lead to negative attitudes towards the self and his or her own homosexual desires. In my practice, I have often experienced the negative impact of internalised stigma and homophobia on gay relationships, especially in terms of the intimacy between partners.

This internalisation of stigma amongst others resulting from the double bind (see 2.3.9; 6.) could lead to a disbelief in one's own lovability (Watzlawick 1993:98). This often surfaced in gay relationships. In the following passage, Ronald Laing (1970:18) provided us with an example of the dilemma of the double bind or paradoxical logic in relationships:

I don't respect myself
I can't respect anyone who respects me.
I can only respect someone who does not respect me.
I respect Jack
Because he does not respect me
I despise Tom
Because he does not despise me
Only a despicable person
Can respect someone as despicable as me
I cannot love someone I despise
Since I love Jack
I cannot believe he loves me
What proof can he give?

According to Ackermann (2005:390), to become a victim of stigma due to circumstances beyond your control, was unfair and tragic. The impact could range from unhappiness to severe emotional implosion, like what happened to Bertus (see 5.4). D'Augelli (1998:201), Bontempo and D'Augelli (2002:364—374), Cacioppo et al. (2002:407; 2006:140) indicated that developmental opportunity loss, self-doubt, institutional victimisation and direct attacks increased adjustment difficulties and could possibly lead to mental health impairment. D'Augeli refers to the study of Bradford et al. (1994), which reported mental health problems to be common among 17—24 year old lesbians. According to the study, 62% received counselling, 93% of those at university had emotional problems with parents due to their sexual orientation, while 31% of gay male youths attempted suicide. Figures for high-school students attempting suicide ranged between 6% and 10%.

From the abovementioned consequences of stigma we could probably deduct that, in the context of this study on the impact of the Resolution on gay ministers, stigma was a severely dehumanising factor. Stigma also denied the reality that we as Christians were created in the image of God (Ackermann 2005:391). In Genesis 1:26 we read that God created human beings that resemble himself. This would mean that God created human beings as equals with an innate dignity and with the intension that they should live life abundantly and within respectful relationships. In Psalm 8 the psalmist sings about the dignity of 'man':

What is man that you think of him; mere man that you care for him? Yet you made him inferior only to yourself; you crowned him with glory and honour. You appointed him ruler over everything you made; you placed him over all creation...

These words supported many definitions of respect as a core aspect of human dignity. The European Union (EU) Charter of Fundamental Rights declared human dignity inviolable and should be respected and protected. It was enshrined in the preamble of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "... whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family (was) the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". The dignity of each individual was also enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa as the highest human value (1996:3). Unfortunately, a constitution or a law did not always guide or determine human behaviour. According to Van Loggerenberg (2013:16), if one person claimed to be treating another with human dignity, it should be experienced as such; otherwise the words would be empty and the behaviour questionable. The DRC said they loved their gay members and they wanted to treat them with dignity, but the gay ministers experienced a discrepancy between their words and their deeds (see 5.4; Cilliers 2011:412).

At the heart of the gay debate in the church lay the identity of gay people: Were they viewed as an abomination, deserving of being stigmatised and labelled as less worthy human beings and less worthy members of the church, unless they negated their most basic needs, which were to love and to belong? Or were they viewed as members of the DRC, equal in human dignity?

As human beings created in the image of God, Ackermann (2005:391) believed we would want to live fulfilled lives experiencing respect, love and happiness. We would defend ourselves against destructive forces, like what Carlos Vigil from New Mexico had tried to do. Since third grade he had been teased because of his sexuality. As a bullied teenager of 17 he became involved in Youth and Government, where he tried to push for stronger anti-bullying laws. Sometimes, however, even gay people like Carlos could succumb to these destructive forces and be driven over the edge. On the 13th July 2013 he committed suicide after he had described himself on the social media network Twitter as "a loser, a freak and a fag" (Morgan: 2013). His suicide note read:

I'm sorry to those I have offended over the years. I was blind to see that I, as a human being, suck. I'm an individual who is doing an injustice to the world and it's time for me to leave.

Please don't ever feel sorry for me, or cry – because I had an opportunity at life and that opportunity is over. I'm sorry that I wasn't able to love someone or have someone to love me.

I guess it's the best though, because now I leave no pain to anyone.

The kids in school were right, I'm a loser, a freak, a fag and in no way is that acceptable for people to deal with. I'm sorry for not being a person that would make someone proud.

I'm free now. Xoxo.

3.3.6 Stigma and the Christian faith

Jackson (2013:9) considered the Christian church as an instrument of reconciliation. However, Gill (2007:1) pointed out that, although the church viewed itself as such, it had frequently also been an instrument of exclusion and stigma. Moore (2007:83) reiterated this view when he said, "Those whom the church professes to love (the church) often succeeds only in burdening and alienating". Allport (1966:447) reminded us that the most vicious and shameful persecutions and inquisitions of the past occurred within religious contexts. He also indicated "a well-established fact in the social sciences" that church people were more prejudiced and less tolerant in terms of race, ethnicity and non-conformity than secular people. Küpper and Zick (2010:63) have the notion that a negative attitude towards homosexuals is the most obvious and blatant prejudice that is legitimized by religion. They reported research to measure prejudice against homosexuals, by using positively worded statements that pointed towards equal rights and issues of morality. Negative attitudes towards homosexuals are expressed by a rejection of these two positive statements, namely

- It is a good thing to allow marriages between two men or two women.
- There is nothing immoral about homosexuality.

According to their findings negative attitudes towards homosexuals rise very clearly with religiousness. This was also my personal experience. Some church people were more subtle by proclaiming "to love gay Christians, but to hate their sins". Their sins would

then refer to their loving, monogamous relationships. And their denying the right of relationships was alienating them from the church. In South Africa our apartheid history and our patriarchal society (for many years sanctioned by the church) were good examples of Gill's and Moore's views. According to Moore (2007:83) in the West it was still mostly the homosexual men as a group who found themselves most alienated from the church. This was due to the extended time of reiterated biblical and cultural ideas or discourses such as the problem-saturated dominant gay narrative of the church. Many of these discourses were constructed in a patriarchal society and were homophobic by nature. Rich (cited in Poling 1996:128) defined patriarchy as the power of the fathers; a familial-social, ideological-political system in which men determined the role women would or would not play. Also due to the inferior position of women in society, the biggest humiliation for a man was to be treated like a woman. This still accounts for the stigmatising of gays, especially because of the perception of heterosexual people that gay men wanted to be women and gay women to be men; they did not comply with the societal prescriptions for "natural men and women".

After having discussed the devastating reality of stigmatising, we should ask ourselves the question: *How should people of faith deal with stigma?* What could possibly be done, especially by the DRC, to eradicate this degrading of human dignity? Ackermann (2005:391) reminded us that theological statements had practical implications. A number of theological statements were made at the 2004, 2007 and 2013 General Synods in terms of gay people's inclusion in the DRC. This study suggested strongly that the conditional acceptance of gay ministers in terms of their relationships was based on prejudice. This prejudice consequently led to underscore the stigmatisation of gays in the church. Ackermann (2005:391) proposed that the church should confront the sinful nature of stigma, thereby also help people to find hope in scriptures and in our traditions. This would enable us to convey God's grace, mercy and compassion to gay people.

According to Neuger and Poling (1997:39) traditional theology considered sin in individualistic terms as meaning "to miss the mark", with consequences of alienation and separation from God or neighbour. Where the roots of sin were originally considered to be pride or disobedience, sin was later understood to be a violation of a relationship or the abuse of power against another. Ackermann (2005:391) considered stigma as a sin in individual as well as relational contexts. She considered it as totally alien to the loving,

merciful and forgiving nature of God. It was against what he intended for the world. John 3:16: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life” implied that God embraced all of creation through his mercy and love. Stigma, breeding prejudice and judgmental attitudes, denied gay people the privilege to worship God in the DRC without the fear of being judged and rejected. It seemed as if the DRC decided who was acceptable to God and who was not. Paul warned us in Romans 2:1 against prejudice, “For when you judged others ... you condemn yourself.” We as Christians living through the Spirit of God should rather focus on becoming more like him. Apparently, something precisely of this nature became visible during an event at the 2013 General Synod of the DRC. Du Toit (2013:6) described what he had perceived to be happening between a gay organist and the other delegates at the meeting. One person claimed that he also had “such people” (gay people) in his study, and after they had prayed to God for healing, they were all delivered in the most wonderful way. The organist, after having listened to this story, jumped up declaring that his human dignity had never been so violated before and ran out of the Synod building. Later, however, he returned to serve them with the most beautiful organ music. Du Toit viewed this moment as loaded with something so intensely wonderful that he wept. He perceived the organist becoming like the Father embracing the delegates with his arms spread wide open. While being the very subject of studies to follow, he became at that moment a channel of love and peace and comfort.

3.3.7 Could prejudice change?

Considering the immense impact and nature of prejudice and consequential stigmatisation, it seemed important to briefly discuss the possibility of prejudice change.

Regarding the decision of the General Synod of 2013, there was still an obvious difference of opinion on homosexuality (Jackson 2013b:3). After having worked through all the in-depth studies on homosexuality, there should not be a single person in the debate who could truthfully claim not to know about the pain of gay people that could directly be linked to rejection by the church. Yet, many members in the DRC were still certain that gay relationships, especially where gay ministers were concerned, were against the will of God. Van Huyssteen (2007:5-8) expresses the notion that we relate cognitively to the world in terms of interpreted experience. These experiences are “events of interpretation” which are contextual, temporally and spatially situated. This

notion of rationality undermines the notion of certainty and universal truths. Once people *knew that they knew* (Maturana and Varela 1998:245), they should react to the call to “adopt an attitude of permanent vigilance against the temptation of certainty”. According to Maturana and Varela, our knowledge of knowledge implies an ethical awareness of our biological and social structure as human beings. This ethical awareness originated through human reflection. Knowing that we constituted our world with others, we should, in conflict situations with people with whom we would like to remain in co-existence, keep in mind that his/her certainty is as legitimate as my own. In order to resolve conflict, Maturana and Varela (1998:246) suggested opting for “a broader perspective, a domain of existence in which both parties fit in the bringing forth of a common world”. In this common world that people were to create together, the authors considered language as the vehicle for bringing forth this world of co-existence. Consequently, every human act had ethical meaning because of its constituting a human world.

Pettigrew (1975:x) was of the opinion that the emotions of prejudice were formed in childhood, while justifying beliefs were constructed later. He considered it more difficult to change deep feelings about someone than changing intellectual beliefs. According to Allport (1954:12, 486), certain programs designed to change prejudice were successful in changing beliefs, but not in changing attitudes – two aspects of prejudice which he considered as important. Goleman (1996:156) underscored this view when he described prejudices as a kind of emotional learning which occurred early in life. This made reactions of prejudice difficult to eradicate completely even though they would feel, as adults, that their behaviour was wrong.

Allport (1954: 40) supported the dictum that “it [was] easier to change group attitudes than individual attitudes”. He referred to studies where whole communities, whole housing projects, whole factories, or whole school systems were made the focus of change. When leaders were involved, new norms were created, thereby influencing individuals to conform to the new norm. Applied to our current context of gay ministers in the DRC, I believed that we needed strong and brave leaders who would not be governed by fear and who would stand up for justice in order to heal the gay community. Cox et al. (2012: 430) supported the view of individuals being loyal to the values of the group, but found it to be easier to create a new stereotype than to change an existing one. I, for example, made an attempt at doing this in a letter to *Kerkbode* (Van

Loggerenberg 2013:16), referring to the often heard cliché that the church loved gay people but hated their sins. Aiming to introduce a new stereotype, the letter suggested, if at least the first part of the cliché were true, then the church would actually be in a love relationship with gays. A few people called afterwards saying that they had never thought of the relationship between the church and gay people in this way. In terms of eliminating discrimination, Pettigrew (1975:245) distinguished between functional changes and changes in attitudes. He considered equal opportunities for all as an imperative regardless whether everybody's attitude (in our context, towards gays) had changed or not. "Equality need not wait until man has goodwill toward all..."

In a meta-analytic test of intergroup theory, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006:751) found that intergroup contact reduced intergroup prejudice. They referred to a request by the US Social Science Research Council to Robin Williams, a Cornell University sociologist to review research on group relations in the context of intergroup contact. The publication of Williams, *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions*, (1947) which followed *inter alia* contained an initial formulation of intergroup contact theory. He noted four circumstances under which intergroup contact would maximally reduce prejudice, namely in circumstances of similar status, interests, tasks, and when the situation was conducive for personal intimate intergroup contact. Allport (1954: 261--281) supported this opinion of Williams that certain conditions during intergroup contact may facilitate change in prejudice. He formulated those optimal conditions as equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and the support of authorities, law or custom. Although the intergroup contact theory was initially devised to improve racial and ethnic prejudices, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006: 766) determined that it could also be extended to contact between other groups, like in this context, gay and straight people. According to Pettigrew and Tropp, those optimal conditions as formulated by Allport were not prerequisites, but served as facilitating conditions enhancing positive contact outcomes between groups. In their meta-analysis of 515 studies involving 250,000 participants in 38 countries, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006:751) examined the impact of intergroup contact on prejudice. They found that intergroup contact reduced prejudice by increasing knowledge about the out-group, reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and by increasing empathy with the out-group. In terms of engaging with the "other", Heshusius (1994:205, 210) argued for a participatory mode of consciousness. Between the DRC and the gay community as stigmatised group, there existed power imbalances. In order

to become aware of and resolve unequal power relations in participation, Heshusius suggested that it was necessary to gain knowledge of both the other and the self by letting go, at least temporarily, of the self and becoming one with the other. In this context, it would mean to embody the pain stigma caused to gay people. According to Heshusius (1994:209), it is only when one could imagine their lives as worthy for oneself and one's children that one would (in our context) be able to extend oneself somatically, let go of one's ego and merge with gay people. The question could be asked if the absence of a true participatory mode of consciousness (i.e. embodied knowledge and understanding of gays) did not lie at the heart of the slow process of change in the DRC.

Over the last decade we had noted how DRC members' engagement with gay people (albeit episodically and gradually) resulted in changing perceptions towards gay people (see also 2.4). Although the DRC seemed to be changing her attitude about gay people by moving very gradually towards a more inclusive policy on gay members, the lived experiences of gay people and sympathetic members of society were often quite to the contrary. This could be explained by feedback received by me on Facebook.

3.3.8 Feedback via facebook – a personal experience

On the eve of 16 March 2013, I sent an e-mail to all my research participants to have a close look at the eight points of the Resolution in terms of contradictions and possible discourses that informed the General Synod during 2007, and to give me their feedback. On Sunday morning 17 March 2013, I received an e-mail with an attachment of comments from SW (see 5.4). He received these comments from his Facebook friends after posting the eight points of the Resolution on his Facebook wall. It was still early and with ample time left for the Easter service at Monumentpark congregation, I decided to read through the more than one hundred comments SW (one of my co-researchers) had sent me. While reading, I had an unusual experience.

I felt disengaged, as if I wanted to shield myself from all the vicious attacks on my church, the DRC. Was this really how people out there felt about the church? Most of the comments were written with so much disgust that I could not repeat it here. What I heard in the comments were the anger, the pain, the disillusionment with the DRC's rejection of gays, their lack of love and unconditional acceptance and inclusion, their lack of insight in spite of all the research done on homosexuality. The respondents (mainly

heterosexuals) perceived the Resolution as contradictory, hypocritical and as “crap”. Consequently, every respondent had already severed his/her ties with the DRC. It felt as if these respondents were attacking me, because I was part of the task team and the compromise decision. Could I have done more in 2007? That evening at the Synod when the Resolution was compiled by the ten moderators it was virtually out of our hands. I drove to the church service with a heavy burden crushing my chest.

The two ministers at Monumentpark held a special Easter service. With suitable solemn faces they took turns in reading from the Scripture. The passage was from John 17 about our unity in Christ. The congregation sang hymns about the love of Christ and the freedom we received through Christ’s crucifixion. It all felt superficial. There was no unity, no love, and no freedom while the gay Christians were still not accepted unconditionally. I took the rejection of the whole gay community upon myself and I felt to escape physically from the church building. But there were many people and I was sitting in the middle of the pew. I had no choice but to stay put.

I wrestled with God. Where was his love then for the gays in the church? What about his unity with his gay children in the passages that Rev Gustav read from John 17? Why was it taking so long for their freedom to break through? I felt deserted by God. Although I knew the two ministers of our congregation very well, I also felt detached from them. I had journeyed with them for many years. They kept on saying to me the time was not right for me to share gay people’s stories with our local congregation. When would it be the right time? Did they know how the gay people were hurting? Although they did grant the gay vocal group permission on two occasions to sing at our services (and even served them with Holy Communion once), there was still no connection. All of a sudden I knew: this would be my last day in the DRC. For a split second I thought of my funeral service and the funeral service of my husband. Who would bury us? For twenty two years Monumentpark was our spiritual home. Desolation drove me to tears; it ran warmly over my cheeks and chin. Then I remembered that I was on duty after the service for serving tea and coffee. I had to pull myself together and had to be strong and composed for another hour. I had to pretend that everything was fine. But I knew that day, 17 March 2013, was my “funeral” in the DRC.

A sudden smile stopped the flow of tears on my cheeks. I thought of my gay brothers and sisters in Christ at the Reforming church. I felt their warmth and their love and

unconditional acceptance of me as a straight woman. Every Sunday evening when I joined them they embraced me with their love. I have never felt so lonely there as I was feeling that morning in 'my' church. How was it possible to feel so alone after a relationship of twenty two years? So rejected? So not-well? So un-belonging? So un-attached? Maybe it was the gay stigma that people over years had tagged me with? According to Herman (1992:2), by speaking publicly about the atrocities we had witnessed of what victims had to face, we were inviting the same stigma that they [gays] were carrying onto us. Maybe it was not the other people; maybe it was me? I had changed. Maybe the research, the engagement with gays, the awareness of their pain and rejection had also traumatised me? Weingarten (2000: 400) wrote that "hearing the distress of others may produce one's own psychological distress". Maybe I had grown accustomed to the warmth and the love and the touch of gay people? I just knew that like gay people I needed to live in truth. The pretence was suffocating me. I would leave the DRC. I was exhausted. Disillusioned. Sad.

The two ministers in front of me sat with stark faces depleted of joy. This was a serious business, this religious thing. It was Easter, after all. Maybe that's what I had grown accustomed to: the joy when the gays worship the Lord, when they sing about what God had done for them in Christ. Maybe I was missing their sincere holding-on to Christ as their only anchor in life and in death, their honesty, their lack of pretence, their sincerity and powerlessness, their vulnerability.

The service was nearing its end. We were singing about our freedom in Christ through Jesus' suffering at the cross. I was so filled with pain, I could not sing. Then a group of nursery school children shuffled into the liturgical space. They were so innocent, so sincere. They sang about God's love and how precious and special we were to God. And I believed them...

Rev Gustav concluded the service with a well-known Franciscan blessing:

*May God bless you with a restless discomfort
About easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
So that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.
May God bless you with holy anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.*

May God bless you with the gift of tears

To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish,

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness

To believe that you really can make a difference in this world,

So that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

At the time, I perceived those words as hollow and empty, evoking my anger and dismay.

With my heart a little lighter I served the tea. I was amazed at how many people greeted me by my name. I did know many people there. Did I still belong? I was not sure. There was no one I could share my feelings with. No one gave me a hug. No one seemingly wanted to be hugged by me. When they asked how I was, I simply replied: "fine." At the gay church I would not get away with such a flippant answer. They were far too sensitive towards me for that. Then the mother of a gay son came to talk to me. Most of the people had gone by then. She was safe. She told me about her neighbour's gay son who had shot himself the previous week. Apparently his parents were so ashamed of him being gay, that they had been hiding him for thirty five years. He was not allowed to work, but had to stay in the house and do the chores. At fifty five he just could not hide from the world anymore and he took his own life. "God, what was happening to me? What are you trying to tell me?" I was confused. Maybe my work in the DRC was not done yet. How could one in any case 'be done' with one's mother? Maybe it wasn't about me at all. Maybe it was all about God's journey with his gay children in the DRC? I had to be obedient and patient, while continuing to tell the stories of gay people, especially gay ministers. I should not despair, even in the face of a deep sense of alienation, rejection, stigmatisation similar to what gays were suffering. Maybe my body was reacting in a similar way than the gay people's bodies to Shame and Stigmatisation? Maybe this was a kind of *non-describable, non-accountable, somatic* knowing, where I extended my body to include what I had come to know *so that I could dwell in it* (Heshusius 1994:20). According to Heshusius, the validity and significance of this kind of knowing were denied in traditional quantitative research, thereby repressing a participatory mode of consciousness and restricting our understanding of the other and of ourselves.

3.4 REFLECTING ON THE RESOLUTION, ITS VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPACT

The previous chapter showed how different stories had merged resulting in the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on homosexuality. In this chapter I focused on the eight points of the Resolution, the way in which they were formulated and how their implied meanings were consequently challenged. Possible discourses were considered that could have informed the DRC in formulating this Resolution. It revealed how the power of those discourses as dominant problem-saturated narratives of prejudice and stereotyping had led to stigmatisation and discrimination. It highlighted the social construction of these problem-saturated narratives and their impact on gay ministers. The eventual reflection on the possibility of prejudice change especially referred to the ideas of Maturana and Varela on conflict resolution. It seemed, if the DRC were to take the ideas of Maturana and Varela (1998) seriously, the challenge for bringing about the necessary perceptual change on both sides would be an ethical one. An effort would be necessary in order to find a domain for co-existence, where both the DRC and its gay ministers would work together in creating a common world. This would require a serious reflection on the need to require a better knowledge of the other, but also of oneself. The following story from *The Sufis* (cited by Maturana & Varela 1998:249, 250) demonstrated the concept of creating a common world:

The story was about people living on an island who longed to move to another land for a better life. But they could neither swim nor sail. Therefore, some of them refused to think of alternatives to living on the island. Others tried to seek solutions for remaining on the island without having to consider crossing the waters. Some of them started to reinvent the art of sailing and swimming. From time to time, the following conversation would take place between them and their students:

"I want to swim to the other land."

"For that you have to learn how to swim. Are you ready to learn?"

"Yes, but I want to take along my ton of cabbages."

"What cabbages?"

"The food I'll need on the other side or wherever it is."

"But what if there was food on the other side?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm not sure. I have to bring my cabbages with me."

"But you won't be able to swim with a ton of cabbages. It's too much weight."

“Then I can’t learn how to swim. You call my cabbages weight. I call them my basic food.”

“Suppose this were meant to be an allegory and, instead of talking about cabbages we were talking about fixed ideas, presuppositions, or certainties?”

“Hmmm... I’m going to bring my cabbages to someone who understands my needs.”

Shah 1971: The Sufis. New York: Anchor Books, pp.2--15

The next chapter focuses on gay relationships and gay marriages. It relies primarily on literature while interweaving the narratives of gay people and the narratives of the DRC in order to contextualise the meaning-making process of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4: PERSPECTIVES ON CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATIONS ON GAY RELATIONSHIPS AND GAY MARRIAGES: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION

Homosexuality is a burden that homosexual people are called to bear, and bear as morally as possible, even though they never chose to bear it...It is a burden most obediently and creatively borne in a committed love-partnership with another.
(Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians and personal correspondence*)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

On the topic of same-sex marriages, Sullivan (2004:46) considers the Christian Coalition as the most powerful opposing organisation involved. Its opposition is primarily based on religious and scriptural grounds. Grenz (1990:202) supports Sullivan's viewpoint. According to him three factors have determined modern attitudes to homosexuality: the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), the New Testament writings and the Natural Law tradition which originated from Plato and Aristotle. On a practical level this viewpoint is being affirmed daily, when I am listening to South African radio talk shows (like those on RSG) or by reading my local newspaper's (Beeld) letter column (Gaum 2012; Jackson 2006a:5). Subsequently, this is also the focus of this study which emanated directly from the Resolution of the DRC in 2007 (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007:8) on gay ministers, especially point seven stating that celibacy is a precondition for the granting of ministership. This Resolution was, with one additional point, affirmed during the 2013 General Synod meeting of the DRC (see 3.2). It thus seems that discourse on gay relationships and gay marriages is primarily socially constructed by the Church, thereby denying gay people, specifically gay ministers, their right to loving relationships where they can experience the sense of belonging.

As human beings we have a fundamental need to belong (Myers and Scanzoni 2005:21; Johnson 2008:6; Bowlby 1977:201). According to Myers and Scanzoni (2005:14, 21) we thrive in close, committed and supportive relationships. "To frustrate our need to belong is to unsettle our lives." Rogers (1999:27) links human relationships with our relationship with God by describing marriage as a way of teaching God's desire for human beings, because it mirrors what God expects our relationship with Him should be. According to Rogers gay and lesbian Christians are also part of the body of Christ and as such should also be incorporated into the wedding feast as a symbol of their

fellowship with Christ. Human (2007:16), uses emotional terms when he writes about the many sides of love and sexuality, and man's inability to describe the ecstatic experience thereof completely. He refers to love and sexuality as a heavenly experience, which gives meaning and happiness to life. According to Human, sexuality brings life fulfilment and is a basic need which craves satisfaction – just like eating and drinking. He views the fruits of regular sexual satisfaction as energy, vitality and life enjoyment. Furthermore, he underscores the importance of a person's continuous satisfaction of this need in order to remain healthy in body and soul as a complete human being. Sexuality is not only a physical need, but also an intimate longing for the total being of the other, a letting go of the self. Mattmann (2006:109) describes how sharing his sexuality with his partner fully opens himself to intimacy. They move beyond physical nakedness to a place of tenderness and closeness where wounds are healed, and where comfort and security breeds trust. In this intimate experience of lovemaking Human (2007:16) sees the interweaving of love, death and religiosity due to the abandonment of the self as a kind of death experience. While reading this almost poetic description of love and sexuality, it was difficult for me to understand how the DRC could find it so impossible to realise that such needs and desires for fulfilment are also experienced by gay people, and in the context of this study, by gay ministers. All ten of the moderators who formulated the compromise decision were white, heterosexual, middle-aged males, married at the time and had probably experienced this marital bliss. This lack of grasping the needs of gay people probably contributed to their discriminatory Resolution of 2007 and its affirmation in 2013.

In a feedback session on the 2013 General Synod of the DRC held at Universiteitsoord congregation and chaired by Dr Gustav Claassen, Dr Pieter de Wet asked Dr Claassen: "Would you agree that the DRC General Synod of 2013 in her renewed decision to ban those gay ministers who are not celibate from being legitimated blatantly voted for discrimination?" (See 3.3.1). Dr Claassen replied with a simple: "Yes" (Claassen 2013). Consequently, gay ministers still find themselves in an impossible situation due to, amongst others, the requirement of celibacy entailed in the Resolution. At the 2013 General Synod of the DRC a decision was taken to do further research on gay relationships and gay marriages (Alg Sinode [NGK] 2013 [online]). It seems as if the DRC is really struggling with regard to its policy on gay relationships and gay marriages.

A possible reason for the DRC's struggle in making a policy change on gay relationships and gay marriages could be the slow process of change in societal discourse on sexuality and on marriage. Dreyer (2006:445) considers this process to be neither a clinical nor a rational one, but a process where different levels of humanness are interwoven. Rationally people may debate on the Biblical contexts, while on a spiritual level they may ask what it is that God wants. On a psychological-emotional level aspects like personality, own experience, attitudes and fears come into play. More contact with gay people could speed up this process (see 3.3.1.6), because, amongst other things, it probably would reduce the fear of the "other". On asking a mother and member of the DRC about her opinion on the reluctance of the DRC to make room for gay relationships she confirmed the fear and ignorance when she answered: "Maybe a different problem-saturated story also influenced the prejudices of the ten moderators when they compiled the Resolution. They could be governed by ignorance and fear that also govern parents and ministers who have to guide their congregations, especially the younger members. Their own prejudice based on ignorance fed their fears of "the wrong example, the wrong friends and the wrong influences" as if their own children were concerned. How does one break through this wall of resistance, especially when fear is trying to convince church leaders to accept that about 60% of older members may consequently decide to leave the DRC? This could also leave the DRC in a financial crisis. How does one empower the DRC and her members in order to prevent damage on a larger scale?"

Halperin (2002:9) and Dreyer (2008:499) consider discourse on sexuality to be socially constructed (see also 3.1) which has the potential to change through time as a result of changing interpretations within different societal contexts. The 2007 and 2013 Resolutions of the DRC on gay relationships and gay marriages seem to be informed by a patriarchal hetero-normative discourse on sexuality. McLean et al. (1996:13) refer to patriarchy as dominant masculinity which maintains its power through being unexamined and thereby creating the illusion that its values are universal. Those who do not conform to the values are seen as inferior, a belief which justifies exploitation, oppression and exclusion (see also 3.3.1). In 2007 the ten moderators involved in constructing the final Resolution were all heterosexual male members. Pease (1997:22-28), expressed his concern about the reluctance of heterosexual men's groups to neither acknowledge themselves as a privileged group nor to acknowledge the relationship between the oppression of women and of gay men and consequently their basic homophobia.

Weinberg (1972) coined the word homophobia and described it as an irrational fear of gay people, which often translates into violent punishment, deprivation of their human rights, and sometimes even death. Blumenfeld (1992:15) used a different term to refer to prejudgement of homosexuals: heterosexism. This expanded meaning refers to “both the belief that heterosexuality is or should be the only acceptable sexual orientation and the fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex”. Dreyer (2006:446) prefers the term homophobia to heterosexism, because of its common use; although a positive aspect of the latter is that it takes the focus away from the oppressed (Dreyer 2006:446). In the context of this thesis I prefer the term heterosexism, because it also accentuates the absolutisation of the hetero-normative discourse which portrays heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. According to Hillier and Harrison (2004:81) “[g]lobalising discourses around gender and sexuality, which are supported by the church and the state, sanction heterosexuality and certain types of masculinity and femininity, while constituting non-heterosexuality and other ways of performing gender as unacceptable”.

According to Butler (1999:24) hetero-normative discourse should be challenged. Foucault (Falzon 1998:9, 52) held the viewpoint that no particular social ordering will infinitely remain the same, because of constant “resistance, revolt, struggle against socially imposed constraints, renewed dialogue and the transformation of social forms”. In a conversation with Gilles Deleuze (Foucault & DeLeuze 1972:10) Foucault says:

...homosexuals have now begun a specific struggle against the particularized power, the constraints and controls that are exerted over them. Such struggles are actually involved in the revolutionary movement to the degree that they are radical, uncompromising and non-reformist, and refuse any attempt at arriving at a new disposition of the same power with, at best, change of masters.

This resonates with the viewpoint expressed by Gaum (2012) during a radio program on RSG (Radio Sonder Grense) when he said:

*“In the church the time is **now** right for parents of gays to say the suffering is too painful. Change must come **now**. The nonsense concerning the whole gay issue must stop **now**.”* (My emphasis).

Foucault (Falzon 1998:53) sees the change agent as the concrete, resisting, embodied human being, who is free and has the power to act. Although our freedom is shaped and directed by our social contexts, we are also able to revolt and to go beyond socially imposed constraints, constantly creating new ways of being. According to Foucault, freedom in the dialogical process means to challenge and to transform social forms of life. What is important to note, is that in doing this, the freedom of others can in turn be constrained. Therefore, liberation movements can create new forms of domination and of oppression (Falzon 1998:53). Those constraints should again be challenged by the human being who is free to resist and to act. Foucault sees freedom of the human being as an on-going task. In dialogue between the DRC and her members on homosexual relationships, this aspect should be kept in mind. The aim of the General Synod of the DRC of 2013 to reach consensus (rather than compromises) on difficult issues like homosexuality within the church could be a feasible and beneficial process, provided that all the parties (i.e. also gay ministers) should participate in the dialogue. Kotzé et al. (2002:18) caution that participatory ethics requires the taking into account of power imbalances between participants. “Consensus often continues the domination of the oppressor.” At the 2013 General Synod Niemandt apologised for talking on behalf of the gay community (Jackson 2013a:9). Foucault ridiculed representation and considered speaking on behalf of someone else as an indignity and in this context it could be regarded as a double repression of the homosexuals (Foucault & Deleuze 1972:5). This principle was something which I constantly tried to keep in mind during my journey with gay people. Whenever I was invited to talk “about” gay “issues”, I invited a gay person with as a co-presenter (see van Loggerenberg 2008). Jackson (2014b:5) writes in *Kerkbode* that the DRC is facing a fundamental choice in terms of gay people. According to a member of the Moderamen, Dr Janse van Rensburg the choice is between an overarching theology of grace and the drawing of boundaries (Jackson 2014b:5). Dr Claassen suggested the DRC follows a theology of grace.

In this chapter I offer arguments and counter-arguments on gay relationships and gay marriages in order to challenge the patriarchal, hetero-normative constraints of the 2007 Resolution. In doing so I explore how different times in history and different social contexts influenced interpretations on sexuality and homosexual relationships. Schillebeeckx (Hilkert 2005:380) argues that all authentic understanding should be done by creating a historical frame of reference which acknowledges the differences from the

past and their claim on us, and that this claim may differ from our contemporary cultural frame of reference. He thus claims the necessity of reinterpretation of all understanding. In order for a text or a tradition to survive, Schillebeeckx considers as a requirement an on-going, new appropriation of its meaning in different historical contexts (see also Otto 2007:58). Nürnberger (2009:297) affirms this by calling for adaptability in our approach to ethical norms and values in an ever changing world. Gerstenberger (2002:17) reminds us that even the great scholars of our discipline were “children of their time” (see also du Toit 2000:61). Although he does not want to discard the Old Testament and considers it to remain a dialogue partner when deliberating on issues of life and faith, he draws our attention to scholars today reading specific ideas into texts. Dreyer (2008:504) considers it necessary to investigate the social dynamics of sexuality, marriage and religion and the meanings attached to them in different eras in order to understand the changes from biblical times to the present day. Consequently, I visited resources of pre-modern, modern and post-modern times, allowing the various voices to speak on the issue of marriage and same-sex unions. Interwoven is the impact of the societal discourse of the time on gay people. When referring to ‘pre-modern’, ‘modern’ and ‘post-modern’, it implies both periods of time and philosophical systems (Veith 1994; du Toit 2000; Hoffman 2008).

4.2 PRE-MODERN TIMES SPEAK ON GAY RELATIONSHIPS AND GAY UNIONS/MARRIAGES

Thomas Oden, a Christian scholar, was one of the first to arrange the above-mentioned periods of time and philosophical changes chronologically (Veith 1994:27). He considered the pre-modern time to last from the beginning of civilisation to the fall of the Bastille in 1789. In the pre-modern time of Western civilisation people believed in the supernatural. They believed in God, or in many gods (Veith 1994:29). Du Toit (2000:14, 15) emphasised the importance of noting that almost all religions originated from this period. Therefore, the ground texts of these religions as found in the Old and New Testaments and in the Koran also came from this period. It would then be impossible for the authors of, for example the Bible, to possess the knowledge from modern and post-modern times to guide them with interpretations and explanations of events. In the context of this dissertation the biblical texts on homosexuality as well as the cultural

tradition of, for instance marriage, should be interpreted by acknowledging differences in culture from pre-modern times to today.

4.2.1 The origin of marriage

The meaning of marriage has undergone huge changes since the earliest available evidence of its origin, which research suggests to have been about 4,350 years ago (Coontz 2012:22; Ridgwell [2012 Online]). Anthropologists believe that prior to the institution of marriage, families were constituted by loosely organised groups. The size of a group could be approximately thirty people, with more than one male leader who shared more than one woman, and children. The children belonged to the whole community. As hunters started to settle down in agrarian civilisations, their societies needed more stable arrangements. The first recorded wedding ceremony between one man and one woman dates back to about 2350 BCE in Mesopotamia. During the following centuries marriage as an institution evolved and became accepted amongst the ancient Hebrews, Greeks and Romans. Back then neither love nor religion was the motive to get married. The purpose was much more to make the woman the property of the man in order to ascertain biological heirs for him. The ancient Hebrews allowed men to satisfy their sexual needs with several wives, prostitutes, and even teenage male lovers (Boswell 1995: xxi, 173; Greenberg 2004:147, 177). Many cultural and religious traditions linked male responsibility with male leadership, authority, and control (Browning & Rodriguez 2002:36). Aristotle for example compared the relationship of a father to his children to that of a monarch to his subjects who have no constitutional rights – a form of nomic patriarchy which uses the prerogatives of authority to enhance the exercise of responsibility (Browning & Rodriguez 2002:36, 37).

With the rise of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe, religion became involved in marriage. A marriage could be legally recognised once it received the blessings of a priest. Marriage was endowed with soteriological power (Dreyer 2008b:501) and became widely accepted as a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church by the eighth century. In 1563 at the Council of Trent, marriage as a sacrament was written into canon law. Although this step improved the plight of women, they still had to obey their husbands as heads of the house (Weldon 2012 [online]; Cooper 2014).

Romantic love as a motive to get married only came into the picture during the Middle Ages (Coontz 2000:22). The story of sir Lancelot who fell in love with King Arthur's wife, Queen Guinevere, is well documented (see Bulfinch 1796–1867). Love changed the nature of marriage, because it gave women more leverage instead of just living to serve their husbands. Romance and love also moved the men to serve their wives. The notion that the man dominated in the marriage was officially legalised when the first colonists came to America. The woman would give up her identity by accepting the husband's surname. This only started to change in America in 1920 when women could also vote. Marriage then became a union of two full citizens. The concept of the husband owning the wife took a long time to change. It was only as recent as 1976 that marital rape was legally recognised in America. In both the USA and in South Africa marital rape was criminalised in 1993 (Wikipedia 2014b [*online*]). Coontz (2012:22) considers the idea of marriage as a "private relationship for the fulfilment of two individuals" as fairly new.

According to Coontz (2000:10–15; 2005a:81–82; 2012:22; Anderson et al. 2002:3) marriage has seen more changes in the past 30 years than in the last 5000 years. How marriage was defined and how it was structured has changed many times over the centuries. Anderson et al. (2002:3) consider the psychological revolution of post-modern times as having had a profound impact on marriage. Coontz (2012:22) highlights a number of changes, for example how the emphasis of the motive to get married shifted from money, property and pro-creation to love and personal fulfilment. Parent's right to choose a partner for their children, and childhood marriages were eliminated. Divorce was also legalised. Marital rape was criminalised. Women's rights to own property was recognised. The dowry system and polygamy were eliminated. Women were allowed to retain their own surnames after getting married. Contraception was legalised, while the number of unmarried couples living together increased. Those changes have been fundamental changes. If so many fundamental changes could take place over time, why does it seem so difficult to accept another shift towards gay marriages, especially while the majority of gays wanting to get married are motivated by love and a need for personal fulfilment? Dreyer (2008: 501, 502) holds the opinion that, if sexuality is viewed as a social construct and thus soteriologically indifferent, marriage as an institution should also be viewed as a social construct and should be de-sacramentalised. Although Protestant theology has de-sacramentalised marriage, it is still viewed as an institution that reflects the kingdom of God. The Roman Catholic Church viewed it as a sacrament,

while the Reformers rejected the idea of marriage as a sacrament. According to Martin Luther (Fudge 2003: 323–325), “Marriage is a civil affair...it has nothing to do with the church...” He argued that nowhere in the Bible did Christ or the apostles take an interest in marriage, apart from a few exceptional cases in the Pauline letters. Luther also could not find any support in Scripture to support the notion that the marriage ceremony was a divine institution. Although Luther argued for a secular nature of marriage, he did not wish to separate marriage in general from religion and God. Luther strongly opposed the imposition of clerical celibacy by referring to it as a “wanton wickedness” and “devilish tyranny,” which no bishop had the right to require. According to Luther, “(S)alvation...is more important than the observation of tyrannical, arbitrary, and wanton laws that are not necessary to salvation or commanded by God”.

Grenz (1990:19) takes us back to creation when he reflects on the basic purpose of our existence as sexual creatures and on marriage. According to him the dynamics of bonding plays a fundamental role in this human phenomenon. He views the second creation story in Gen 2 as a depiction of the “most powerful relationship between sexuality and bonding”, which finds its expression throughout the two Testaments in the family and in the church. In Gen 2:18 God says it is not good for the man to be alone; He would find a suitable helper for him. God wanted to create a suitable bonding partner for the man, another human being, not merely a sexual partner, but one that suits him in all dimensions of his existence, to deliver him from his solitude. Germond (1997:197–202) affirms this with his interpretation of the creation account of human beings. According to him the creation narratives, for example, report procreation as a blessing and not as a command by God or as a function of sexuality. Should we read procreation into the text, we could also read a strong supposition of vegetarianism as the norm in Gen. 1:29. Germond views the purpose of human sexuality much more as an expression and enrichment of human relationship, distinguished by companionship, equality and mutuality. Another interesting remark by Germond is that the passage is much more concerned with the similarities of the human partners than with their differences. They are different from all other creations and can therefore become “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” Furthermore Germond underscores how heterosexist assumptions are sometimes read into biblical texts about marriage. One such example is found in Mark 10:2–9 where some Pharisees tested Jesus on his view on divorce. The answer

which Jesus gave was a comment on the indissoluble fellowship of marriage and not on the goal of our creation as sexual beings.

Boswell (1995:9) underscores the difficulty, almost an impossibility, “to map onto the grid of pre-modern heterosexual relationships what modern speakers understand by ‘marriage’”. Could we really say that any pre-modern arrangement was equivalent to what we understand of marriage today? If that serves for heterosexual marriages, certainly it should also serve for homosexual relationships and marriages. Eskridge (1993:1421, 1422) underscores how a social constructionist history emphasises the ways in which marriage is ‘constructed’ by society over time. According to him, same-sex unions/marriages have been a valuable institution for most of human history and most cultures have known about it all along. He considers ‘exclusions’ from the institution of marriage as reflecting larger social power relations. Thus, the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage is how society expresses its persecution of sexual minorities, like all the LGBTI⁵ people. The quest to acquire marriage as an option for LGBT people is considered as resisting the power of that stigma (see 3.3.1.2). According to Eskridge (1993:1485), just like marriage is socially constructed, so is morality. “Just as there is no essential definition of marriage as different-sex, so there is no essential reading of the Bible that is anti-homosexual.”

4.2.2 The Near-East

Human (2007:17) argues that a variety of periods, nations, cultures and languages belong to the Near-Eastern world of antiquity. This caters for a variety of descriptions and expressions of sexuality and homosexuality. The cultural space where we discover those concepts of sexuality is in Egypt, Canaan, Syria and Mesopotamia. Human (2007:37) noted that homosexuality and homo-erotic acts were known and practiced in the Near-Eastern world of antiquity, without any moral or religious judgement. De Villiers (2007:48-50) provides us with such an example in the Gilgamesh epoch (between 1200 and 1100 BCE) where erotic sexual experiences between Enkidu and Sjamhat, and then

⁵ Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex

also homo-erotic experiences between Enkidu and Gilgamesh are described. The relationship between the latter is described as a close friendship, as soul mates, which became so perfect that it excluded women.

According to Otto (2007:58-60) the Near-East of antiquity had no systematic guidelines on ethical norms and values. Especially in Mesopotamia with its complex world of gods, the normal was considered as the norm and was as such socially acceptable. In Egypt and Mesopotamia it seems from iconographies that already in the third century BC homosexual contact were considered as known practice. After a visit to Pompeii, Botha (2007:68-87) realised how different the world of antiquity was compared to our world today. Although the sexual (also homosexual) images explicitly portrayed on crockery may seem familiar to us, the meaning which those people attached to it was completely different from how we understand sexuality and eroticism today. According to Botha, nakedness and passionate sex were celebrated without any feelings of guilt as something to be proud about. Women were seen as inferior and incomplete, while the ideal body was that of a well-built man. They did not differentiate between heterosexual and homosexual desire. The male body was the biggest source of temptation. Practices that were considered to be “against nature” were acts executed as a consequence of excessiveness and a lack of self-discipline (see 4.2.4.2). Self-control was considered to be one of the highest virtues. Botha (2007:82) indicates that the early Christians established the idea of marriage as a sacrament. This developed along with the idea that sex was something dirty; genitals were ugly and should be covered with clothes. He points out that those ideas were not the ideas of the Romans, Greeks or Jews of antiquity. When comparing the approaches to sex of the people of Pompeii, for example, to the changing ideas of early Christians, it is clear that perceptions regarding sexuality and eroticism are culturally and historically bound, and therefore contextual (Botha 2007:68).

4.2.3 The Old Testament (600 -100 BCE?)

De Villiers (2006:4) acknowledges that the Christian condemnation of homosexuality has mainly been based on traditional interpretation of biblical texts. He indicated a number of implications for those who rely on the Bible for moral guidance. We are confronted with many problems due to the differences between the context of Israel of antiquity and our modern, secular, free-market technologically-driven society of today. According to De

Villiers, problems such as the moral implications of modern technology, like cloning, artificial insemination, the atom bomb, etc. cannot be solved by searching for moral guidance in the Bible. The Bible speaks about different times and different problems. A good example is the prohibiting of charging interest on loans in Deut. 23:19. At the time it made good sense because of the exploitation of poor people by means of usurious interest rates. Some biblical guidelines like the ones concerning issues like the death penalty, slavery, or the position of women in the church have become irrelevant or totally unacceptable in society of today. According to De Villiers, fundamentalism does not take into consideration the time lapse between Israel of antiquity and the present time.

Vardy (1998:202, 203) expresses the opinion that the Bible portrays “homosexuality” as a “freely chosen activity”. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a suggestion that attraction to someone of the same sex is due to genetics (epigenetics⁶) or background of the individual concerned. According to Vardy the lack of knowledge about sexuality (homosexuality) radically undermines the usefulness of the biblical material to guide us in terms of conduct today. In the Old Testament there is no condemnation of lesbian behaviour, while the condemnation is unambiguously directed at male homosexuality. The Old Testament offers four texts that seem to refer to the issue of homosexuality: Gen 19:1–29; Judges 19; Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13. Keep in mind that the word “homosexuality” was only coined in 1869 by Benkert as a scientifically neutral medical term to describe people who are exclusively or predominantly sexually attracted to their own sex (Grey 1992: xiii).

4.2.3.1 How do we read and interpret the Old Testament?

According to Gerstenberger (2002:16) all texts of the Old Testament “are deeply woven into the world of the ancient Near East” and as such cannot be interpreted meaningfully

⁶ According to Prof Michael Pepper, a world renowned scientist, director of the Institute for Cellular and Molecular Medicine and professor in the Department of Immunology at the University of Pretoria (SA), *Epigenetics* is the process in which chemical changes are made to genes, which leads to them being switched on or off (gene expression and gene repression). Sometimes epi-marks (the chemical changes responsible for changes in gene expression) from the unborn child's parents are not properly erased – this can lead to “variations” in the person's genetics. “Variations” do not refer to mistakes, but rather to differences from what is perceived to be the norm by society. Such variations can lead to high cholesterol, cystic fibrosis, diabetes or homosexuality. The factors that caused variations in gene-expression were present before birth; therefore it is not a conscious decision and was out of the person's control (Van Zuydam 2014 [online]).

without taking into consideration the cultures and religions of the neighbours of ancient Israel. Otto (2007:58) also indicates the importance of accounting for the cultural historical background of the Old Testament texts on same sex relationships in our interpretations. Instead of applying the texts anachronistically to our current contexts, he underscores the views of Gerstenberger by suggesting a thorough study of the cultural historical contexts in order to understand the biblical texts. Gerstenberger (2002:16, 17) holds the view that just as archaeological findings made a valuable contribution to knowledge of the theologies of the Old Testament, the “counter-voices” from neighbouring cultures should also be heard. Theologians like Boswell (1994) and Greenberg (2004) also support this view. Consequently, when interpreting Old Testament texts on homosexuality, the influences of neighbouring cultures and religions of antiquity should be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, this does not always happen in Christian communities, probably because of the ‘official-theology’ discourse which often dominates the interpretation of texts (Gerstenberger 2002:16). According to Gerstenberger the biblical texts have no absolute claim to validity and should not be read as a uniform norm of faith. He considers any belief in God to be limited to a specific group of people. Apart from this, Gerstenberger (2002:17) highlights the extreme openness of Old Testament texts to the cultures and religions of the ancient Near East. This has implications for how we read the Bible.

The process of reading the Bible and interpreting its texts is called the hermeneutical circle (Germond 1997:189, 190). This means that when we read and interpret a biblical text, we should be aware of the assumptions and messages implicit in the texts. The people who wrote the Bible understood what they wrote from their cultural perspectives and assumptions. But, as twenty-first century readers, we also have to be aware of our reading into the text our own assumptions and perspectives, for example our gender, age, class, nationality, sexual orientation, denominational allegiance and our scientific knowledge on certain issues. The message of the text challenges the reader’s perspectives and assumptions. Theologians on the task team who served the General Synod of 2007 with a report on homosexuality (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007a:147) pointed out that in a sense it was impossible to interpret a text without allowing for the subjective influences of the reader’s scientific knowledge and insight. They expressed the idea that the more readers knew about the context in which the Bible was written, the more they realised how little they knew. Therefore, they urged readers to be more

modest in their claims to exact and final knowledge of concepts regarding the lived experiences of people more than 2000 years ago. The hermeneutical circle is an on-going process of examining both one's own assumptions and the assumptions of the Bible authors (de Villiers 2006:3). Germond regards a hermeneutic of suspicion as central to the hermeneutical circle, because it sensitises the reader's awareness of the two different sets of assumptions playing a role in Bible reading. Knowing this, everybody using Bible texts to support their point of view should be extremely careful how they read and interpret the selected texts. Nobody has to be reminded of the destructive ways in which the Bible has been used in the past, where personal assumptions were allowed to dominate the interpretation process, for instance to justify colonialism, slavery, patriarchy, apartheid and homophobia (Vardy 1998:204; Germond 1997:190). Critical questioning of those assumptions led to new insights and a more effective reading of the Bible. According to Germond (1997:193), it was through questioning those assumptions that people got a better understanding of the Bible's central message of all people being equal, sharing a common dignity. When we read the Bible in order to understand its message in terms of homosexuality, it should be important to us to also apply the hermeneutic circle of interpretation.

In my interpretation and discussion of the texts in the Old Testament, I would then take into account the assumptions and messages of the authors of the texts as researched and interpreted by various authoritative Christian scholars and theologians, as well as my own assumptions mainly formed over the past thirteen years of my journeying with gay people.

4.2.3.2 Reference to specific texts

At this point I have to ask the question: What does the Old Testament say about homosexual relationships and /or marriages? Apparently, it says nothing. Myers and Scanzoni (2005:129) agree that the Bible has little to say about same-sex behaviour, but much more about God's concern for justice, the poor and caring for creation. They consider the Biblical texts to offer "no powerful and irrefutable arguments against gay marriage". Groenewald (2007:104, 105) agrees that the Old Testament is silent about homosexual relationships and/or marriages. According to him, there are four passages in the Old Testament that could vaguely refer to homosexuality. The first one is the well-

known story of Sodom and Gomorra in **Gen 19: 1–29**. In the following passage Martin Luther identified homosexuality with the sin of Sodom, by referring to:

The heinous conduct of the people of Sodom as extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.

Luther 1961:255.

In the story of Gen 19:1-29 Lot received guests. Later the evening some of the citizens insisted on having sex with the two men in order to humiliate them. Groenewald (2007: 104, 105) questions the use of this text as a reference to homosexuality or sexual orientation. The situation actually refers to rape – an act which is categorically condemned. De Villiers (2006:5) also concedes: the story of Sodom and Gomorrah deals with rape and inhospitality and as such is totally irrelevant to the debate on gay relationships and marriages. Otto (2007:61) points out that in both the Old Testament and in the Near-East of antiquity homosexual rape was considered to be a terrible transgression. The second text which Groenewald refers to is **Judges 19**. It also deals with humiliation and rape – which is also condemned on ethical grounds. The other two Old Testament texts referred to by Groenewald are **Leviticus 18:22** and **Leviticus 20:13**. These two texts are part of the purity codex, which lay down the death penalty for sexual intercourse between males. The aim of this was to safeguard the identity of Israel with respect to other nations. Groenewald is of the opinion that the exegesis of these texts points to married men wanting to get involved in the temple prostitution practices of the Canaanites. There is no evidence of homosexual relationships, but much rather of married men committing adultery. Obviously, it would be unethical to condemn all homosexuals or all heterosexuals because of these texts. Germond (1997: 217-219) describes three types of Mosaic Law, namely the ceremonial or cultic, the ritual and the moral law. In Israel these three were intertwined, which makes it difficult for Christian churches to unravel the one from the other. According to Germond, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are part of the Holiness Code which is concerned with ritual purity. Because of the association of these rites with pagan fertility rites, Israel might have considered

homosexuality as *toevah* (idolatrous practices). Germond interprets the underlying assumption of these restrictions as that God discriminates between people, especially in terms of who may gain access to his presence. Christ's crucifixion and resurrection defied these assumptions. Of course, restrictions like bestiality, rape and incest are morally wrong because they violate others.

Vardy (1992:204) refers to the huge distance between the biblical writers and the situation today. He considers it impossible to translate prohibitions from antiquity to our time. In my journey with gay people I have never come across one person who would want to condone rape or temple prostitution. On the contrary, gay people fall in love just like straight people and their courtship often follow a similar route than those of their straight counterparts. The gay Christians of the Reforming Church which I frequent, whether they are in relationships or married, are outspoken about the aspects of exclusivity and respect that they consider being cornerstones of their relationships (see 4.4.4.4). Unfortunately, even gay relationships may fall prone to societal problems like adultery, substance abuse and family violence. Consequently, gay people may also end their relationships or file for divorce -- just like heterosexual people do (see 4.4.4.2).

In the Old Testament we find one of the most touching descriptions of a relationship between two men. In **2 Samuel 1:26** we read how king David expressed his love for Jonathan who died on the battlefield: "I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan; how dear you were to me! How wonderful was your love for me, better even than the love of women." Wolmarans (2010; see also Boswell 1981:238, 239; Boswell 1995:137; Openshaw 1997:121) asks whether David was merely mourning the loss of a friend, or was their love for each other homo-erotic. In 1 Samuel 18-20 we may learn more about their relationship.

Saul's son Jonathan was deeply attracted to David and came to love him as much as he loved himself...Jonathan swore eternal friendship with David because of his deep affection for him. This is expressed clearly in 1 Samuel 18:1 where we read, "... (T)he soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." He took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, together with his armour and also his sword, bow, and belt" (1 Samuel 18:1-4). According to Wolmarans (2010) the gifts which Jonathan gave David could be seen as an expression of love, because that is what lovers do. Wolmarans draws our attention to similar expressions of erotic love in

The Song of Songs (1:7) between a man and a woman. He also indicates the correlation between 1 Samuel 19:1 and Gen 34:19 where the same Hebrew phrase was used verbatim to express sexual desire: "...Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted greatly in David," and, "So the young man ...delighted in Jacob's daughter".

In 1 Samuel 20 we read how Jonathan and David met in the field, very similar to the lovers in the Song of Songs (7:12) who met in the vineyards. In those days it was custom for lovers to meet in the fields where they would make love (Wolmarans 2010). In Samuel 20:17 we again read that Jonathan loved David "as he loved his own soul". This could serve as witness of his deep love for David. After Jonathan had learnt that his father wanted to kill David, they met again in the fields; they kissed each other and wept together. This may be interpreted as the behaviour of lovers who are to be separated soon (Wolmarans 2010). Wolmarans also indicates the analogy between the covenant which they made between them (1 Sam. 18:3 and 20: 16) and the covenant found in the Song of Songs, but there in the context of erotic love between a man and a woman. According to Boswell (1995:137) the texts use the same word which is used for a marriage covenant elsewhere in Hebrew scripture (e.g. Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14), perhaps also suggesting that this relationship might be triangular, involving God.

When trying to interpret the kind of relationship between David and Jonathan, one should take into account the socio-cultural context. According to Foucault (Falzon 1998:46), the socio-cultural context determines and regulates moral codes of sexual relationships. In *The history of sexuality* (Foucault 1978:92) Foucault characterises the social field as a network of "mobile, shifting, unstable relations between forces" constantly in tension. Although the Bible mentions many relationships between David and women, it seems that his relationship with Jonathan was superior to that with other women (Boswell 1995:137). An evaluation of this relationship should also consider that it was shaped by the various unstable societal forces of its time.

4.2.4 Same-sex unions/marriages and the New Testament (70 CE)

The New Testament did not represent a homogeneous world, but rather a mix of Greek, Roman, Jewish and early Christian influences, especially in their viewpoints on sexuality and the human body (Steyn 2007a:147; Loader 2004:). Germond (1997:220-225) views three New Testament texts as traditionally having been interpreted as prohibiting

homosexual activity: **Romans 1:26-7, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10**. Germond (1997:220, 221) treats 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 together, because they pose similar challenges in terms of translation and interpretation. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 the words *malakoi* and *arsenekoitai* are translated in most English versions of the Bible as homosexuals, sodomites, male prostitutes. *Arsenekoitai* also appears in 1 Timothy 1:10. In both these texts the words appear as part of a catalogue pointing to persons who are “unrighteous” (1 Corinthians 6:9) and “ungodly and sinners” (1 Timothy 1:10). The meaning of the two words is not immediately clear; therefore different Bible translations differ on its meaning. According to Germond (1997:221) some refer to homosexual perversion, homosexual offenders or those who are immoral with boys (referring to pederasty). It seems that modern commentators merely refer to those texts as the passive and active partners in male homosexual relationships. Germond (1997:224) considers *malakoi* as merely meaning “licentious persons”, while the translation of *arsenekoitai* is much less certain. In translating the latter the context is important. If translated as “males in bed” it is a neutral term, but if translated as “men who fuck” it employs a sense of sexual immorality. Germond considers the decisive point against translating *arsenekoitai* in terms of homosexuality the absence of the word in contemporary and Patristic discussion of homosexuality. Certainly early Christian communities would have used the word in their discussions of homosexuality had they understood it as meaning “sodomites” or “homosexuals”.

Du Toit (2007a:284) considers **Romans 1:26, 27** as the *locus classicus* for the Biblical evaluation of homosexuality. According to De Villiers (2006:12), it cannot be denied that the texts in Romans are morally condemning all homosexual deeds. He refers to Potgieter (Potgieter & Van Huyssteen 2002:100) who assumes that Paul in Romans 1: 26, 27 had to be aware of permanent gay relationships and is therefore also condemning their deeds. Again, it should be considered that Paul’s condemnation would also be permeated by his own assumptions on sexuality formed by the tradition of his time. The neighbouring cultures were known for their sexual promiscuity. Temple prostitution (both gay and straight) was regarded as idolatry that might pose a threat to Israel’s yearning for an own moral and religious identity. Sexual purity would distinguish the Israelites and the early Christians from surrounding heathen nations. The sexual discourse of the time was to bear children and any diffusion of the sex roles would be seen as negative (De Villiers 2006:12). Today it would still be questionable if a mere awareness of gay

relationships (possibly like that of Paul) without present day scientific knowledge would be helpful in any way to really know and understand people in homosexual relationships. Like many people today, maybe Paul has never had the privilege of getting to know any gay people in person who were in committed relationships. Even in our society today, specifically in the DRC, it is common for many theologians to be “aware of” gay relationships but for various reasons, like tradition, still cannot understand or accept new knowledges of homosexual relationships.

Pronk (1993:272) views the condemnation of homosexuality in the letter to the Romans as part of a larger whole in which Paul argues that nobody (Jews and Gentiles alike) are pardoned for their sins. In Romans 1:18-3:20 Paul describes how all humanity stands guilty before God. In Romans 3:21-4:25 Paul explains how God pardons sinners through their faith based on the death of Christ. Du Toit (2007:285) indicates that Paul shows in Romans 1:18-23 how the nations rebelled against God and substituted him for idols, while Romans 1:24-32 describes God’s reaction to this rebellion. The key words to properly understand the function of the homosexual references in these passages lie in the language of inversion. The inversion happens on three levels: the cognitive (exchanging the truth of God for the lie), the devotional (v 23) and the moral (vv. 24-32). People’s exchanging God for idols represents a radical moral inversion. Although the process of decay is inevitable, the personal judgment of God is included in the process of decay in that He “hands the nations over” to their own sinful passions. Du Toit (2007:288) views the mentioning of homosexuality in this context as a good example of the inversion process. Initially, when Du Toit wrote this article (2003), he took a strong stance with Paul’s inclusion of both the constitutional gay people (born gay) and heterosexual people who engaged in homosexual activities. When Paul condemns homosexuality, the terms “natural” and “unnatural” play a crucial role. According to Du Toit’s initial understanding of these passages, Paul considered homosexuality also as “against nature”.

Gay men and women respectively tell me it is against their nature to be with someone of the opposite sex. In terms of this *contra naturam* argument, it seems we may rightfully ask: against whose nature? In the closing statement of his article, Du Toit (2007b:295, 296) writes how his mind has changed on the hermeneutics of Romans 1:26, 27:

After critically reconsidering my position on this sensitive matter for quite a number of years, I can still endorse the essence of the foregoing article today. It seems, however, advisable to modify my strong stance on the inclusive nature of Paul's indictment. A key question would be whether his first-century Roman readers would not spontaneously have understood the reference to people who acted "against nature" as implicating (or in the first instance implicating) heterosexuals who engaged in homosexual activities, since these were the obvious people who inverted their natural disposition. A positive answer would imply that we should at least be more modest in our expectations to exactly determine the scope of Paul's censure.

Potgieter and Van Huyssteen (2002:97-104) reject the *contra naturam* argument. According to them Paul used the word *fusus* in the context of behaviour and not in the context of a person's birth or heritage. They interpret the meaning of the word in its ancient context as referring to a person's human nature as sinful, imperfect, and broken. Sexually it would refer to the natural differences between men and women. These two authors are of the opinion that Paul in Romans 1 does not only condemn pederasty and sex orgies, but also the continuation of the old lifestyle of the Roman Christians before their conversion. They were thus acting "against their nature" as converted Christians. According to Pronk (1993:277), Paul uses the example of homosexuality to illustrate the wrath of God against the Gentile world, because he probably viewed homosexual behaviour as a typical example of paganism. It may seem as if Paul viewed homosexuality as "non-normal" and as such considered it as unnatural (*para phusin*) behaviour for believers. Paul does not consider the non-normal as morally unnatural but as a sign of unbelief. We should keep in mind that Paul did not have all the scientific knowledge about homosexuality that we have today. In Romans 1:28 Paul refers to people who engaged in "unnatural" behaviour because they did not believe anymore. In our context today this argument would not be able to hold water, because the gay ministers are not unbelievers. They have not turned their backs on God. On the contrary, God is their only anchor in life (see 5.4). Where someone did turn his/her back on God it was as a result of the DRC rejecting him/her and not in order to commit homosexual acts.

Martin (1996:130, 131), a gay New Testament scholar, expressed some of his ideas on the interpretation of the Bible as follows:

Any interpretation of the Bible that hurts people, oppresses people, or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation, no matter how traditional, historical, or exegetical respectable. There can be no debate about how the fact that the church's stand on homosexuality has caused oppression, loneliness, self-hatred, violence, sickness, and suicide for millions of people.

Nowhere in the four Gospels in the life of Jesus Christ do we find any reference to homosexuality. In Matthew 19:11-12 Jesus talks about marriage and divorce. He makes the comment that it is not possible for everybody not to marry; only for those to whom it was given. The three categories of people named by Jesus are those who were made so by birth, those who were made so by man and those who chose on behalf of the Kingdom of God not to marry. According to Potgieter and Van Huyssteen (2002:92, 93) the problem is that we do not know what Jesus is referring to. They are of the opinion that Jesus is talking about marriage and not about homosexuality, although they do concede that all three categories could imply homosexuality. What is important is that Jesus shows empathy and a non-judgemental attitude towards people who are different (Alg Sinode [NGK] 2007:148). In the New Testament Jesus and his theology of inclusion stands in stark contrast to the condemnation and loveless treatment which gay people, especially gay ministers, often have to endure in the church (see 5.4). Germond (1997:203) puts it clearly that the redemption (or condemnation) of gay people does not depend on how you or I interpret the Bible. We are saved by grace alone (see also Muller 1997:176). In terms of unconditional love and inclusion in his engagement with people from all walks of life Jesus sets an example to his followers of all times. Jesus challenged categories of exclusion, especially those based on the purity system. He lived in a world where strict demands for ritual purity created large groups of marginalised people, such as menstruating women, lepers, the blind, the physical disabled, eunuchs (castrated men), children, Gentiles, tax collectors, prostitutes, murderers, etc. Jesus proclaimed that these marginalised groups also belonged to the Kingdom of heaven. He did not only use words of inclusion, but also acted upon those words by touching the marginalised. It is interesting that quite a number of people have asked me with reference to my engagement with gay people: "Do you touch them?" Jesus includes the excluded in the new community of faith (Germond 1997:207).

Steyn (2007b:200) considers the reinterpretation of the law by Jesus as resulting in a paradigm shift. The shift was from a religion based on the law to a religion based on

personal relationships. Instead of being bound by the prescriptions of the law, the focus now is on guidelines towards a love relationship with God. Therefore, according to Steyn, it can be accepted that in the New Testament we primarily have a theology of a love relationship between God and man, which is enabled by the redemption of Jesus Christ. Steyn refers to Colossians 2:8 where Paul warns against believers being carried away by arguments based on legal rules and regulations and not on Christ.

4.2.5 Same-sex unions in pre-modern Europe (400 BCE – 1500 CE)

Boswell (1995: xxix) indicates that there is very little to read about female homoeroticism in Europe of antiquity. There are a few accounts of lesbianism in late ancient Rome, even of permanent unions or couples in lasting relationships. Towards the late middle Ages male authors started writing more about lesbian relationships as they felt less threatened by them than by male same-sex relationships.

4.2.6 Same-sex unions in the Greco-Roman world (400 BCE – 400 CE)

Veith (1994:30, 31) considers the ancient Greek society with its mix of pagan mythology and classical realism as morally decadent. According to him they institutionalised infanticide, slavery, war, oppression, prostitution, and homosexuality. Greek culture not only tolerated homosexuality, but also encouraged it. In the Greek military they reasoned that soldiers who were in a homosexual relationship would fight harder to defend their lovers. Plato also believed that women were inferior and the highest love would be found between men. Germond (1997:222) reminds us that we live in a society which distinguishes clearly between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour. Neither Greek nor Roman law or religion considered homosexual eroticism as of less value or different from heterosexual eroticism. Both Greek and Roman societies merely assumed that adult males would be interested in sexual relationships with males and females. Although we may debate whether homo-eroticism was “natural”, the dominant discourse of those times was that it was part of the natural order. Sex was considered as a social and not a moral issue. Boswell (1995:54) writes that heterosexual relationships had to be legally distinguished, especially to determine the status of offspring and the disposition of property. Normally, this would not have been the case with homosexual relationships.

According to Boswell (1995:53-107), four types of same-sex relationships existed during these times showing some parallels to heterosexual unions. The first type of same-sex relationships was the exploitation of males owned by other males as an act of aggression in the form of rape after a war was won, and an ordinary use of slaves. References to these social customs are usually found in poetry, graffiti and fiction. The second type of same-sex relationships was homosexual *concubinage*. The purpose of a concubine was to satisfy the male's sexual needs before marriage. During the wedding festivities the concubine was officially dismissed from his duties. Often marriage contracts specified that the husband may not have concubines of either gender in the house. The third and most common type of same-sex unions was that of lovers. This refers to a relationship between two women or two men who were drawn to each other by affection, passion, or desire, with no legal or institutional consequences in terms of property, status and household. The fourth type of same-sex relationships known in the ancient world was that of formal unions. These publicly recognised relationships entailed a change in status, and were comparable to heterosexual marriage. Sometimes these same-sex unions used the same customs and forms of heterosexual marriage, as the poet Martial described at the beginning of the 2nd century:

*The bearded Callaistratus married the rugged Afer
Under the same law by which a woman takes a husband.
Torches were carried before him; a bridal veil covered his face,
Nor was the hymn to you, O god of marriage, omitted.
A dowry was even agreed on. Does this not, Rome, seem
Enough? Do you expect him also to bear a child?*

Boswell 1995:80

Another example of a public ceremony between two males was the marriage between the emperor Nero (54-60 CE) and a man named Sporus. They got married in a solemn ceremony with a dowry and a veil, and the emperor lived with Sporus as his spouse (Boswell 1995: 80).

4.3 SAME-SEX UNIONS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE (500 CE – 1500 CE)

Boswell (1980:187) claims that “a considerable body of evidence ...suggest that homosexual relations were especially associated with the clergy”. According to Eskridge (1993:1452) Boswell based his claims on information acquired during his research on

medieval Christian liturgical collections. Boswell (1980:187, 188) reports some of the rules contained in the forerunner of the Rule of Saint Benedict (the code by which most medieval monks regulated their existence) were apparently made to regulate and discourage homosexual behaviour, for example all the monks had to sleep in the same room, with the abbot's bed in the middle of the room. Later Saint Benedict added a rule that a light had to be kept burning during the night and all monks had to sleep with their clothes on. The young men had to mix with the older men, but were not allowed to sleep side by side. Boswell reminds us that the regular clergy were bound by vows of celibacy and that efforts to prevent sexual activities could be seen in the light of assisting them to keep their vows.

In early medieval Byzantine society Boswell (1995:218) states that same-sex unions were commonplace. Eleventh century Byzantine Law⁷ makes it clear that same-sex unions were not only well-known, but also perfectly legal.

Boswell (1995:221-223) reports of the Roman custom of forming a union with another male by declaring him a "brother" thereby legalising the union apparently persisted until the early Middle Ages. In terms of inheritance, should a man who desires such a union be married to a woman, he could not draw up a document making his estate common with his "brother", because his wife and children could not be made common property. The assumption would be that such a union would be legal in the case where none of the two men were married to a woman. Boswell (1995) and Eskridge (1993) report various examples of same-sex unions during the Middle Ages. Both authors convey the story of Sergius (Serge) and Bacchus who were Roman soldiers and male lovers during the fourth century (Eskridge 1993:1420; Boswell 1995:145). They were persecuted for their Christian faith and Bacchus was tortured to death. After the death of his lover, the faith of Sergius faltered, but returned after Bacchus appeared to him in a vision. Bacchus promised him to be reunited after death in heaven. Consequently Sergius also died as a martyr. During the Middle Ages their relationship was considered an example of a

⁷ **Byzantine Law** was essentially a continuation of Roman Law with Christian influence, however, this is not to doubt its later influence on the Western practice of jurisprudence. Byzantine Law was effectively devolved into two spheres, Ecclesiastical Law and Secular Law. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Accessed on 31 May 2014.

companionate marriage, based upon agapic love and mutual respect. Another example reported by Boswell (1995:234) was about Basil I, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty who ruled the Byzantine Empire from 867-1156⁸. Apparently he was twice involved in ceremonial unions with other men. Once, a wealthy widow in Achaia asked him to enter into a ceremonial union with her son, John, in return for her generosity bestowed on him during his trip to Greece. When Basil became emperor he sent for the son and granted him intimacy. Boswell (1995:246) also reports of a twelfth-century Slavic prayer book which includes “one of the most impressive versions of the same-sex union ceremony”.

During the Middle Ages, as was the case in antiquity, very little was written on female homoeroticism. Boswell (1995: xxix) cites accounts of lesbianism in late ancient Rome, and lesbian couples involved in lasting relationships in high medieval religious orders. According to Boswell, during the late Middle Ages male writers who were “disturbed” by male homosexuality found it less threatening to write about female homosexuality, because of a probable assumption that they were not really sexual.

From the fourteenth century on, a new discourse depicting homosexuality as “the most horrible of sins” gained power in Western Europe (Boswell 1995:262, 263). According to Boswell, the reason was not clear, but apparently the author Dante contributed to the discourse. As punishment he placed sodomites in the highest rung of purgatory just outside the gates of heaven and on top of the list of sinners to be cleansed. Soon thereafter many Italian states started to legalise punishment for homosexual acts. Even Thomas Aquinas, who did not consider homosexuality as a bigger sin than other sins, had to recognise the popular feelings about homosexuality due to the deep-seated prejudice against same-sex eroticism.

⁸ Date incorrectly cited in Boswell 1995:234

4.4 MODERN TIMES SPEAK ON GAY RELATIONSHIPS AND GAY UNIONS/MARRIAGES

One of the first Christian scholars to chronicle the intellectual revolution which took place after the Middle Ages, was Thomas Oden (Veith 1994:27). According to him the modern age lasted precisely 200 years: from the fall of the Bastille in France (1789) to the fall of the Berlin wall (1989). During this period the power of the Roman Catholic Church and of Christianity were diminished, while the rights of man and human reason were replacing God. The trust in human reason gave rise to Marxism, promising an earthly paradise through socialism. These philosophical changes gave rise to changes in art, music and literature. This new period was called the Renaissance or Enlightenment.

Although historians differed on why this intolerance towards gay people had started to develop from the fourteenth century, Corbet (Germond & de Gruchy 1997:165) views the social and political change in Europe as reason for the intolerance. Christianity came under pressure from both the Muslim and the ‘heretic’ and a need arose to find a scapegoat for the decline of the old order. Various groups became marginalised: Jews, Muslims, lepers, witches, heretics, usurers and homosexual people. Boswell (1980:270) ascribes the intolerance in part to the quest for intellectual and institutional uniformity. One such an example was the collections of canon law combining Roman civil law with Christian religious principles in order to standardise clerical supervision for moral, ethical and legal problems. Due to such measures gay people increasingly lived their lives less openly. During the modern era, one could often only learn from paintings (Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci) or literary works about the lives of gay people. Jorif (2013) suggests that Leonardo Da Vinci encoded his own homosexuality in his painting *The Last Supper*. “The androgynous figure inserted into one of the most sacred images of Catholic theology attests to the artist’s attraction to the youth who’s pictured here.” An example of a literary work is *Gay rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the work of Richard Bruce Nugent*, which gives some insight in the life of black gay people during the 1920s in Harlem. According to Stokes (2003:908), Nugent lived “his same-sex desire more openly and certainly more vigorously than the other queer members of the Harlem set”. Sullivan (2004:30-45) reports examples of deviant marriage patterns which developed in countries like China, Africa and the USA. He makes special note of an

English emigrant worker in Philadelphia, Mary East, who lived with her wife for 34 years, the only catch being that Ms East was living undercover as James How.

According to Hare-Mustin (1994:25), in the modern paradigm masculinity is largely defined by the male sexual drive discourse. This patriarchal heterosexual discourse, consisting of a set of prescribed personality and behavioural characteristics associated with heterosexual men, expects and endorses male domination. Men and women who do not comply with the conventional masculine or feminine view of their gender are not considered real men or women. Stereotyped perceptions of gay men and lesbian women depict them as not masculine or feminine in personality and behaviour. Hare-Mustin points out that domination and power conflicts are eroticised by the male sexual drive discourse. The man, for example, who has no or little interest in dominating women or competing with men, challenges the male sexual drive discourse. This could still play a role in how patriarchal church leaders view gay people and their relationships. Fortunately, the Stonewall riots in 1969 proved to be the beginning of the end for this period in which gay people were forced to remain in “closets” and either suppress their identity or live it underground. The patrons of a gay bar, the Stonewall, fought back for two days and two nights against the police (Grey 1992:175). This riot permanently transformed gay consciousness. It also gave birth to the Gay Liberation Movement. According to Grey, Gay Pride and Gay Power were born that weekend. On 15 December 1973 the American Psychiatric Association announced their decision to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), thereby acknowledging that homosexuality is not a mental disorder (Du Plessis 1999:31). Besen (2003:61) considers the Stonewall riots and the removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder as revolutionary changes that paved the way for a major shift in public opinion on homosexuality.

4.5 POST-MODERN TIMES SPEAK ON GAY RELATIONSHIPS AND GAY UNIONS/MARRIAGES

Postmodernism, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, is described by Doherty (1991:40, 41) as representing a move away from the most “hallowed” principles of modernism. He depicts postmodernist writers as concerned about language, but much less certain about its meaning. Deconstruction, the literary movement of postmodernism, dismisses structuralism “as a vain attempt to demonstrate the existence of an absolute

reality beneath language”. Postmodern social scientists reject the view that any social theory can make claims to validity outside of a specific historical context and value system. Foucault (1994) considered these explanatory theories as instruments of social power and inherently imperialistic. Feminist family therapists and feminist theologians forced family therapists to examine the patriarchal structures embedded in the larger social system. Constructivists like Paul Watzlawick (1967) and Freedman and Combs (1996) insist that reality is a social construction. Within this postmodern paradigm of social constructionism family therapists like White (1991) and Epston (1997) believe that perceptions constructing people’s stories can be deconstructed. They also believe in the possibility that this may lead them to a re-authoring of their stories, their lives and their relationships. Hoffman (1990:7) believes that we look at reality through different lenses that influence our interpretation of reality. She considers the value of a gender lens as exposing established assumptions in psychological theory that have been taken for granted (i.e. being gay is a pathology, or homosexual behaviour is *per sé* perverse). Throughout this chapter I have indicated how perceptions on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages have changed along with changing historical contexts. Pronk (1993:232,) for example, states that since the 1990s a fundamental change has occurred in the Western concept of nature regarding the debate on Romans 1:26, 27. This explains why biological and other causal explanations (see 4.2.3) for homosexuality are increasingly playing a role in the moral debate on the acceptability of homosexuality.

In the postmodern era it also increasingly happens that well-known theologians defend gay relationships/marriages in public. In an interview with Christiane Amanpour on the CNN television channel (2014) Rev Mpho Tutu, Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s daughter, asked the question: “How can we legalise love?” She pointed out that through history society have tried to legalise it in many ways like through the banning of inter-racial marriages, the banning of marriages between people of different social or economic statuses and the banning of marriages between people who are educated and those who are uneducated. This was to no avail. She then further asked: “How do we think the banning of marriages between people of the same sex was going to work?” She considered the banning of same-sex marriages as the last bastion in the efforts to legalise love.

It was not only well-known theologians who defended gay marriages in public, but institutions, including governments from a variety of countries started to debate gay people's rights.

4.5.1 International discourse on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages

During the past decade in different countries all over the world, numerous changes took place affecting gay people's rights, especially their right to marry. Some of these changes were in support of gay people getting married, while others involved the banning of gay relationships and gay marriages. On a panel discussion at the fifth annual Woman in the World conference Nadeau (Nadeau 2014 [online]) reports, in Africa 38 countries currently constitute homosexuality as illegal. The panel consisted of Williams, a film director, Byarugaba, coordinator for the civil society coalition of human rights and constitutional law and Tugbiyela, an artist and filmmaker who is part of The Solidarity Alliance for Human rights. Due to the blame that the church has to take in anti-gay sentiments, Williams believes "the solution has to start with the church". Tugbiyela values the work done by missionaries in Africa, but "they push a message that biblical law is above civil law". In terms of the impact of homophobia on gay people, Byarugaba said that gay people have been dehumanised, because the church has presented them as evil people.

The most recent country to ban gay marriages was Nigeria, one of the 38 African countries with laws to prosecute homosexual people. Tenthhs of gay men were already arrested in terms of the new law signed on 7 January 2014 by President Goodluck Jonathan. Gay people who get married face a jail sentence of up to 14 years, while support for gay organisations may result in up to 10 years imprisonment (Beeld 2014 [online]).

In Uganda, a law demanding life imprisonment for people being gay was passed by parliament in 2013 but still awaited the signature of the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni. He signed the anti-gay law on the 25th of February 2014 (Karimi and Thompson 2014 [online]).

This resonated with anti-gay laws passed by Russia's lower house of parliament on June 11, 2013. Although Russia decriminalised homosexuality in 1993, these laws were seen as part of an effort to promote "traditional Russian values" and to raise the birth rate in

Russia (The Guardian, 2013 [online]). Worldwide, these draconic laws came under heavy criticism.

John Kerry, USA secretary of State, expressed the USA's deep concern about anti-gay laws. According to Kerry, people had the right to live in freedom and equality. Nobody should be persecuted because of who they were or whom they loved. He called this law a "dangerous" restriction of freedom for all Nigerians (DelReal 2014 [online]).

Currently, as far as the rest of the world is concerned, seventeen countries are allowing same-sex couples to get married (Freedom to marry 2014 [online]). Those countries are the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, France, Brazil, Uruguay, New Zealand, and Britain (England and Wales). The United States and Mexico have regional or court-directed provisions enabling same-sex couples to marry. Many other countries provide some protection for same-sex couples.

The first country to end discrimination against same-sex couples was the Netherlands. They legalised same-sex marriages on April 1, 2001. Their laws require that at least one member of the couple should be a Dutch national or living in the Netherlands. Two years later on February 13, 2003 Belgium followed suit. Belgium marriage laws stipulate that only same-sex couples who are free to marry in their own country may be married in Belgium. In 2006 their parliament passed a law which allowed co-parenting for same-sex couples. On July 3, 2005 Spain legally ended the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage. Despite serious opposition from the Catholic Church, the majority voted in favour of the law. Like in the Netherlands, Spanish laws also stipulate that at least one partner should either be a Spanish citizen or have legal residency in Spain. In July 2012 Spain's constitutional court ruled gay marriage as a constitutional right based on the two forces of freedom and equality, and it could not be repealed.

Soon after Spain, on July 20, 2005, Canada passed a gender-neutral civil marriage act, without any residency requirements. This means that same-sex couples, for example from the United States, could get married in Canada. Canadian leaders supported full marriage as opposed to civil union legislation, because the latter would violate the equality provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They also confirmed that an extension of the right of civil marriage to gay people would not infringe

on religious freedoms. South Africa (see 4.4.3) was the first country in Africa to pass a law (30 November 2006) allowing gay people to get married (South Africa 2006). The Scandinavian countries already allowed gay people to enter into civil partnerships since 1995. Norway approved a gender-neutral bill on January 1, 2009, and Sweden on May 1, 2009 on the basis of equality. They held the opinion that the new law would strengthen marriage as an institution, because more people would be taking part. Couples who entered into civil unions could decide whether they wanted to change their status to “marriage” or not. On October 22, 2009 the Church of Sweden’s board voted to allow priests to use the term “marriage” during the wedding ceremonies of same-sex couples.

Portugal ended their exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage on June 5, 2010. A few weeks later on June 27, 2010 Iceland became the ninth country in the world to legally end the exclusion of gay people from marriage. The Althingi parliament voted unanimously for inclusion, and added the words “man and man, and woman and woman” to their country’s existing marriage legislation. Iceland also became the first country in the world to elect an openly gay head of state, when Johanna Sigurdardottir became prime minister.

The first country in Latin America to legalise the freedom to marriage for same-sex couples was Argentina. On July 22, 2010 same-sex couples received the same rights and protections as different-sex couples, provided that they are citizens or permanent residents of Argentina. The new law also allowed them to adopt children. In 1989 Denmark has already passed a first-of-its-kind law which allowed the same legal and fiscal rights to same-sex couples provided by marriage through registered partnerships (with the exception of laws making explicit references to the sexes of married couples and regulations of international treaties). On June 15, 2012 a gender-neutral marriage bill took effect in Denmark. This bill legalised same-sex marriages through civil registry or the Church of Denmark. On May 14, 2013 the National Council of Justice in Brazil ruled that government offices should issue marriage licences to same-sex couples, thereby ending the confusion which existed in their federal marriage laws due to a mechanism called “stable union”, whereby certain legal rights similar to married couples were allowed to same-sex couples nationwide. In France, President Francois Hollande signed the bill for same-sex marriages into law as approved by the National Assembly. It

became effective on May 29, 2013. Uruguay became the third country in Latin America to end the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage. The law came into effect on August 5, 2013. The parliament in New Zealand also approved a bill extending the freedom to marry to same-sex couples, and the first weddings between same-sex couples took place on August 19, 2013. The same right to marry was extended to same-sex couples in Britain (England and Wales). The law came into effect on March 29, 2014 when the first couples got married. The famous singer Sir Elton John and his partner also got married soon after the bill came into effect. On February 4, 2014 the parliament in Scotland approved of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill which extended the freedom to marry to all same-sex couples across Scotland.

In the United States of America regional freedom to marry same-sex couples were given to individual states. Currently seventeen of the fifty states of the USA have legalised same-sex marriages. On May 17, 2004 Massachusetts became the first state to extend the freedom to marry to gay couples. Since then states⁹ like CA, CT, DE, HI, IA, IL, ME, MD, MN, NJ, NM, NY, RI, VT, WA, and Washington, DC have passed their own freedom to marriage laws. However, in June 2013, the US Supreme Court overturned the so-called Defence of Marriage Act, a law which was passed by President Bill Clinton in 1996. This was done to prevent the federal government from respecting legal marriages between same-sex couples.

Countries that offer many rights to same-sex couples, but stop short of marriage, include Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Greenland, Ireland and Hungary. Countries which offer some kind of protection to same-sex couples, but still are a far cry from endorsing marriage rights are Andorra, Austria, Columbia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Switzerland. Some countries, like Israel and Mexico, only acknowledge same-sex marriages performed in other countries, but do not perform those marriages themselves. In December 2012, the Mexican Supreme Court declared their Oaxaca Civil Code, which restricted marriage to different-sex couples, as

⁹ CA =California, CT = Connecticut, DE =Delaware, HI = Hawaii, IA = Iowa, IL= Illinois, ME= Maine, MD = Maryland, MN =Minnesota, NJ = New Jersey, NM = New Mexico, NY = New York, RI = Rhode Island, VT= Vermont, WA = Washington, DC. (<http://www.50 states.com/abbreviations.htm>). [Accessed 2014/06/10].

unconstitutional. At the moment this ruling only applies to the three couples who filed the suit. Should two more couples achieve the same court ruling, a binding national precedent would be set in Mexico which will extend the freedom to marry to all the other jurisdictions in the country. Two other countries who are taking positive steps are Australia and Colombia. In Australia couples who have lived together for two years or more achieve a “De Facto Status”, which extends many of the privileges and responsibilities of marriage. In December 2013, the first same-sex marriages took place after being enacted by the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), but a court ruling overturned the freedom to marry and invalidated those marriages. The High Court decided unanimously that the ACT cannot operate concurrently with the federal Marriage Act of 1961 (*The Commonwealth of Australia v The Australian Capital Territory [2013] HCA 55*). The Australian Marriage Equality commission is currently taking the lead in this battle for freedom to marry in Australia. In Colombia in July 2011, the National Colombian Court ruled that the Colombian Congress should pass a marriage bill or an equal alternative for same-sex couples before June 20, 2013. In April 2013, the freedom to marry was not approved, but same-sex couples could register their unions in court (Freedom to Marry 2014 [online]).

While I was writing the above, I remembered Rev Muller’s remark (see 3.2.4) that “the whole world was marching on” and realised that his warning to the DRC of becoming irrelevant in the lives of many of its members was not so far-fetched.

4.5.2 South African law speaks on gay relationships and gay unions/ marriages

The end of Apartheid led to the first democratic constitution of the Republic of South Africa (The Constitution of South Africa 1996: Act 108). The Bill of Rights in the constitution enshrined the right to equality and the right to human dignity, also to homosexual people. However, it took a while to remove the “sodomy” laws. Today it seems almost inconceivable to imagine that up till 1998, under the Criminal Procedure Act, any person authorised to arrest a “sodomy suspect” could kill such a person should he/she attempt to run away (An ABC of LGBTI [2005]:3). In November 2005, South Africa’s highest court ruled in favour of same-sex marriages, striking down a law that banned gay unions and ordering parliament to draft new legislation within a year. It requested that the courts change the common-law definition of marriage from being a

“union between a man and a woman” to a “union between two persons”. The date for implementation of this new legislation was 30 November 2006, and the first gay marriages in South Africa were performed shortly after (Wikipedia 2013b [online]).

Justice Albie Sachs (*Minister of home affairs and another v Fourie and another CCT 60/04 Constitutional Court, 2005*) in a ruling delivered by the Constitutional Court said that the common law definition of marriage was inconsistent with the Constitution and invalid to the extent that it did not permit same-sex couples to enjoy the same status and benefits it granted heterosexual couples. Justice Albie Sachs further wrote:

The exclusion of same-sex couples from the benefits and responsibilities of marriage, accordingly, is not a small and tangential inconvenience resulting from a few surviving relics of societal prejudice destined to evaporate like the morning dew. It represents a harsh if oblique statement by the law that same-sex couples are outsiders, and that their need for affirmation and protection of their intimate relations as human beings is somehow less than that of heterosexual couples. It reinforces the wounding notion that they are to be treated as biological oddities, as failed or lapsed human beings who do not fit into normal society, and, as such, do not qualify for the full moral concern and respect that our Constitution seeks to secure for everyone. It signifies that their capacity for love, commitment and accepting responsibility is by definition less worthy of regard than that of heterosexual couples.

Par 71 of the Judgement

In South Africa this ruling and the implementation of same sex marriages were greeted with mixed reaction. Many Christian communities, including the DRC, objected directly or indirectly to the legislation (Jackson 2006a:5; Jackson 2006b:6; Malan 2006; Bellingan 2006). As far as the DRC was concerned their objections resulted in the 2007 Resolution on Homosexuality (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007:8). The focus of this study is on the impact of this Resolution on especially gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. In agreement with Justice Albie Sachs I also underscore the injustice of the prejudice levelled against gay people and the outsider position they hold in the DRC (see 3.3.1).

Although many gay couples got married since 2006 (and it seemed as if society was accepting gay marriages), a different scene was depicted through an exclusive survey done by Ipsos¹⁰ (Van Onselen 2014:14). The survey was done just before the 2014 elections, on March 7, requesting 2219 voters to reply to a series of questions about key issues facing South Africa. Each voter was presented with two statements on the issues and asked which was closest to their own view. One of the issues was gay marriages. Only 28% of the voters indicated that gays should be allowed to marry because we are all considered equal before the law and a denying of that right to gay people would be a violation of their constitutional rights. The 48%, who responded that they should not be allowed to marry, chose that option because they considered marriage as an institution which should be kept for a relationship between one man and one woman only. According to Van Onselen, the South African government's neutrality on the inhumane gay laws in Uganda (see 4.4.2) seems to "be mirrored by a well-entrenched moral conservatism on the subject of gay rights in South African society".

In spite of the fact that gay people's rights are enshrined in the South African constitution and although they obtained the right to marry during 2006, the 2007 Resolution (see 3.2) of the DRC suggests that the DRC is still struggling with the concept of gay relationships. Therefore I thought it would be appropriate for the gay community themselves to speak (see 4.5.3) on their relationships and their marriages. According to Dreyer (2008a:739, 740) ecclesial resolutions with regard to same-sex relationships are based on "Biblical propositions, theologies of heterosexual marriage, and often also on social stereotypes". Dreyer considers this as an illustration that the ecclesia itself has not yet been transformed by the gospel message of inclusive love, without having the well-being of the gay people at heart. As described in 3.4 it seemed - if the DRC were to take the ideas of Maturana and Varela (1998) seriously - the challenge for bringing about the necessary perceptual change on both sides would be an ethical one. An effort would be necessary in order to find a domain for co-existence, where both the DRC and its gay ministers

¹⁰ Ipsos is a global research company founded in 1975 with worldwide headquarters in Paris, France. En.wikipedia.org/wiki/ipsos. [Online] 28 July 2014.

would work together in creating a common world. This would require a better understanding of, and appreciation for gay relationships.

4.5.3 The gay community speaks on gay relationships and gay unions/marriages

During the past thirteen years I have been witness to numerous gay couples entering into and out of relationships. I also had the joy of listening to the stories of gay couples who have been together for many years, some as long as thirty or forty years. This whole experience made it clear to me that to expect from a gay person not to be in a relationship with someone special is to expect from such a person to give up hope and to stop living. In this respect gay people are no different from heterosexual people.

4.5.3.1 The longing for belonging to a family

The majority of gay and lesbian people were born from a heterosexual mother and father. Therefore, they treasure the idea of family and want to belong to their own people (Piazza 1995:3, 4). According to Piazza, this is a need seldom acknowledged by a prejudiced society, which draws on assumptions and generalisations, with little resemblance to the truth (see 3.3). "... (T)he overwhelming majority of us are loving and nurturing people, very capable of raising children and caring for others." Many gay people would go to lengths trying to gain their parents' acceptance, not only for being gay, but also for accepting their partners. For a parent this acceptance of a gay child and his/her partner would involve a process of envisioning a different kind of family to the one they had in mind, the nuclear family consisting of a mother, father and two children. It is, as Stiles has put it, to envision a family "worth talking about" (Stiles 2002:15).

4.5.3.2 No map to guide gays to the territory

Piazza (1995:55, 56, 140) views the absence of records of same-sex relationships as one of the biggest effects of homophobia. Ironically, some of the best examples of same-sex relationships are found in the Bible, such as Naomi and Ruth and David and Jonathan (see 4.2.3.2). Although they were not gay couples as we understand it today, their relationships represented positive models of same-gender relationships that revealed God's blessing. Today, gay people have to explore an unmapped territory. The example put to them by their heterosexual parents in terms of dating and relationships does not fit the new territory on which they have to embark as a gay person. The next

generation of gay adolescents should be more fortunate; they should have movies, books, love songs, television series, and quite a new spectrum of enlightened parents and family members to provide them with guidelines on forming relationships.

4.5.3.3 Shame and fears

On my journey with gay people I found that the majority of gays, while they were still in the closet, were overwhelmed by shame and fear of being “caught out”. The mere thought of coming out could induce an anxiety attack or even a deep depression. Gay people often consulted with me merely because they could not keep their “secret” to themselves anymore. Living a lie required huge amounts of energy, and “coming out” seemed to be a relief, especially if it takes place in a safe environment where they could find acceptance and love. Coming out was the beginning of the process of deconstructing the voice of shame.

Downs emphasises that every young child is dependent on the love and acceptance of parents (2006:9–12). But as soon as parents start to sense that their child is gay they start to treat the child differently. The gay child soon starts to realise that he/she is different and then tries to hide the difference in order to retain the love and acceptance of the parents. As early as four, the gay child may start living the lie. Gay children not only hide their true selves from their parents, but also from everyone else – especially other children in order to escape the teasing and ridicule which would soon follow. Downs views this early abuse by peers coupled with the fear of rejection as an engraving of a very important lesson in the minds of gay children: “There was something about us that was disgusting, aberrant, and essentially unlovable” (Downs 2006:9). Unfortunately, fathers are often driven by societal discourses on how a boy should be to abandon their sons emotionally, and often even physically. Mothers mostly step in to protect them. Thus, the only validation for young boys often came from their mothers. The long-term effect on children is an inability to love and to validate them. “[T]he little boy with the big secret becomes the man who is driven to avoid shame by hiding his dark secret” (Downs 2002:16). The big secret is not his attraction to men, but his shame and self-hatred. According to Downs, this wound of betrayal by especially their fathers would go on to affect them throughout most of their lives. Consequently, once he becomes a man who is still governed by the shame and the fear of rejection he enters into a relationship in which he struggles to accept the love of his partner. He does not consider himself worthy

of love. This is also true for gay women, which is evident when reading the following 'sms' sent to me by M:

I struggle with my feelings for K. Is it possible that she could be sincere in her feelings towards me? I don't deserve such tenderness and love. I fear rejection from her. Is this how it feels to be in love? I feel so un-dead. Maybe I should not take the risk. Maybe I should go back into my own jail again. I cannot stand the shame of being rejected again. What would my colleagues say if they were to learn that the big love of my life is a woman? I am 54 years old and have never been in love before. Last night I dreamt that God would forgive me.

Hillier and Harrison (2004:79) affirm the notion of the production of shame in homosexual youths. Often, at school or in the family, people do not talk about same-sex sexuality. When it is suspected or disclosed that a child is gay, it often leads to denial, discrimination and abuse. Consequently, such youngsters from a hostile environment become a high-risk in terms of drug abuse, depression and suicide (see 3.3).

4.5.3.4 Married to heterosexual people

My memories are still vivid of how the first "gay" book, which I have read thirteen years ago, has moved me. In her memoirs Sally Lowe Whitehead (1997) invited me along on her journey with her gay husband, Michael, a Baptist priest. After years of having counselled hundreds of married couples of mixed-orientation (where one of the partners was gay), I still, repeatedly, relive the pain of my first introduction to the almost unsolvable, unenviable, unbearable situation in which such couples find themselves in. A client of mine, Johan, now living in South Korea, has written to me about his similar journey: "I first had to lose my life in order to find my life."

When a gay person comes out to a wife or husband, quite often the partner has been suspecting it in any case. However, once it is verbally confirmed, it may constitute new meaning in the relationship. Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) underscore the role of language in meaning making when they say: "Meaning and understanding do not exist prior to the utterances of language." Often marriage partners cling to each other and decide to put every effort into saving the marriage. D, a gay man in his early forties, told me that after he has told his wife that he was gay: "It is unthinkable to get divorced. There is no way that I can leave my family. My wife and my two children are too

precious to me. I love my wife very much. It is just that I am gay and long to be with a man. It rips me apart.” It also seems that, especially, straight women tend to be very understanding and forgiving and promise their eternal love to their husbands. Often, the wife is also willing to allow her husband to have a gay friendship with someone outside their marriage, “as long as there is no intimacy involved.” Unfortunately, the disclosure of being gay often only comes after the gay partner has already met someone else and has fallen in love. From my experience such an expectation seems to be naïve from the onset. In an epilogue to Whitehead’s memoirs her ex-husband, Michael, wrote:

As a confused eighteen-year-old, I made a commitment to ignore my homosexual desires and thrust into marriage and fatherhood. Always thinking that I could control my feelings for other men, I attempted to live a life that ultimately crisscrossed the worlds of heterosexuality and homosexuality. I anguished over the guilt and shame that a possible confession might bring to my life (Whitehead 1997:255).

A gay man, aged 35 and married to his wonderful wife and the mother of his two sons, heartbreakingly described his efforts to control his feelings for a man he fell in love with. He also tried to verbalise something of the intensity of his beyond humane struggle to get an erection with his wife. He described the whole tedious and agonising process of preparing himself sexually to be with his wife in order to satisfy her sexual needs. If he then fails to get an erection, the disappointment is indescribable. Consequently he then questions his own manhood and doubts his dignity as a human being. When he is with the man he loves, he has difficulty in controlling his erection, because they are two mature people who respect his marriage and do not want to engage in a sexual relationship before he has decided to divorce from his wife. This behaviour, of holding on to their values, is also contrary to the common perception of “all gay people are promiscuous and sexual perverts”. He described the whole painful process to me on 27 June 2014 as follows:

When I think back to all the years of living in a dream of being normal (my perception at a time when my circumstances and beliefs classified me as 'not normal'), I realise that everything I have ever done for myself has been a solid lie. I have had some exposure to 'my life' and felt I needed to live it, but I just could not accept it and live through the hell of being rejected by my family, friends and the world around me. As part of my escape I have accepted myself as being gay, but never accepted living 'my life'.

Ever since I've been married, I have a constant fear of situations that may lead to sexual encounters, every night and every bit of free-time we may have together. In order to respond in an acceptable way, I prepare myself mentally each day; I role-play the entire sexual experience in my mind for hours before any possible contact and plan every single move. I touch myself in certain ways to get myself going and manipulate my thoughts through mere brain power. Every single step has to be planned in such a way that I would remain in control of my mind and body. Sometimes, especially when mind-control seems lacking, I use Viagra. By reliving scenes from sex videos in my mind, I find it possible to stimulate certain thought patterns, over and over again, while imagining myself being with the most amazing man. I touch my wife in ways that make me think I am touching the man in the video. Then reality kicks in when I realise I am having intercourse with my wife. I then want to get it over and done with as soon as possible. I get depressed when I fail to perform and feel that I am not man enough to do the 'normal' stuff. Then I usually end up seeing my doctor for my regular 'Viagra' fix'. Frequently, due to the immense pressure to perform with a lacking sexual drive and haste to get it over with, my erection would not last long enough. I can never experience the emotional excitement that is part of any normal, intimate relationship. I beg God to help me forget and move on, and cry myself to sleep.

I depend on God for strength, every single day, and ask him to remove my gay identity. I have developed a daily ritual where I would stand up praying to God to protect me, to control my mind and thoughts and to prevent me from ever having sexual thoughts about a man again. I would ask him to remove all obstacles related to being gay and protect me from myself (as I have always viewed myself as being a problem). The anger inside of me would escalate until I would be shouting out to be set free and be released from all frustrations.

I feel like I am cemented in behind a wall too high to climb. I feel strangled, drained, emotionally raped. But most of all – I am feeling guilty towards my wife and the world. When I look at myself, I hate who I am. I am not worthy of the concept 'life'. I am just a piece of wood floating down a river to nowhere, just floating through this world with no feelings except hatred.

The moment the wife learns about her husband's sexual relationship with another man, she might still decide to remain married, but becomes reluctant to proceed with an intimate relationship with her gay husband. However, quite often the lack of sexual intimacy provokes much anger in the wife, because "(s)he hadn't bargained" for it (Grever 2001:82). This often leads to married couples of mixed-orientation resorting to

other measures in order to keep the family together, as described by the author Catherine Whitney in her book *Uncommon Lives* (1990). Such measures may include loving relationships between partners, albeit not sexual, or time-outs for example one month per year free to do whatever one wants to do, or allowing a third person into the relationship, etc. Even married ministers of the church may have a secret gay relationship. However, due to the fear of being discovered and guilt because of the “sin” they have committed, such secret relationships eventually tend to cause much anguish (Whitney 1990:151). Often, the affairs of married men are short-lived when they decide to return to their wives. I have counselled quite a few gay Christian men, married to women, who have chosen to honour their commitment to their wives and children by staying married. However, most of these men would make secret visits to other cities for brief anonymous encounters with men (see Whitney 1990; Klein & Schwarz 2001).

When a gay person is married to a straight person, especially where children are involved, a relationship with a gay partner could become extremely complex (Grever 2001:131). Quite often the gay person may choose not to end his/her marriage. This normally leads to much pain and suffering and frustrated expectations for both the gay and the straight spouse involved. In terms of their Christian values, many consider it better to go through the process of divorce before engaging in an affair. In practice this seldom happens. Usually, it is the new relationship of the gay spouse meeting his/her “soul mate” which forces the decision to get a divorce (see Whitehead 1997; Klein & Schwartz 2001; Clark 1997; Grever 2001:83). According to Grever (2001), much of the pain described above could be avoided if society and especially the church would stop forcing gay people to get married to straight people in an effort to be “normal”. The following letter was written to me by a gay woman who is married to a straight man. It portrays her struggle through her childhood years and underscores not only the shame and fear that gay people have to live with, but also their desperation in a situation which often leads to suicide.

Dear Marietjie

13 February 2014

For days on end my son was silent and withdrawn, like a total stranger to me. Twelve years of age and always bubbling with life and laughter. But something was amiss. My husband and I took turns trying to get through to him. Eventually, with two clear-blue eyes fixed on me, he spoke from under his cheeky blond tuft. “Mom, you know that I

love you just the way you are?" I nodded, "yes". "But why does the Bible say that people like you will go to hell?" The question and the fear on his sweet little face were like a blow to my stomach. Since Sunday's sermon with the preacher's PowerPoint lecture on Romans 1:26—32 and 1 Corinthians, explaining quite clearly what kind of people would be missing out on the kingdom of God, my world had started tumbling again. "What kind of people, my child?" came my empty question. "Gays, mom. Homosexuals!" Helplessly and panicky my eyes searched for John's, hoping that he would know what to say. But my husband, once so steadfast and firm in his beliefs, had long since lost his words.

Please, tell me, Marietjie, how do I explain myself, what do I say to my child? I don't even understand a single thing myself! How could a loving God make people gay and then punish them for being so? And I don't doubt for a moment I've been created and born this way. No one in his right mind would choose to be treated like a leper for the rest of his life.

I was merely six years old when I first realised that I liked girls better than boys. I didn't know it was wrong. It never bothered me and I courageously told my grade-two class mate that I thought my teacher was very beautiful. I can't remember her exact reply... but I remember how she made me feel. She had an older sister and already knew about lesbians and moffies and that they – I – would go to hell. The Bible said so. I grew up going to church twice on a Sunday and having 'silent time' each night around the dinner table. I certainly knew that hell was no place to go to. I couldn't read well enough to read the Bible myself, but I suddenly felt covered in cold sweat. And I knew: I was not normal. I was not okay. I was not good enough. God, who had made me, did not even want me. Like a discarded child. One that unfortunately survived an abortion. I was not a child of the King!!!! Do you know how it feels for someone, yearning to be a child of God, to know that it had already been decided that you would be excluded from his grace?

On various occasions I tried to test my parents' reaction towards people that were gay. But they assured me that no children of God could be gay. Year after year I listened to the message being repeated, over and over, in the house of the Lord, from the Bible, by my parents, my friends, in the newspapers, on television and by headlines raised on posters. I started praying that God would take away those feelings. Like a child I truly believed that he would, because if he could walk on water he could help me too. If he really loved us so much that he had died on the cross for our sins, he would also forgive me for being gay. For years on end... but nothing changed.

At the end of primary school, I realised that God had no intention of changing or removing anything. It did not make sense. He could do wonders, forgive, be merciful “if I prayed and appealed to God my deepest heart desires...” But He kept quiet. I was really on my own. Each day was a test, and there were so many ways to deceive. You could control the way you stand or sit, even take a stance against lesbians if needed, remember not to dress like a ‘tomboy’ or wear your hair too short...

By the time I reached 13, I had lost all hope. I was in grade 7 when I started praying to God to take me away. Every night I prayed on my knees and cried before God. I begged, hoped and really believed that he would fetch me one night in my sleep. Each morning I opened my eyes, hopelessly depressed with the weight of perdition and shame. Fear and shame and guilt later changed to self-hatred. But I made a decision; if I lived decently and correctly, maybe I would be reprieved. I studied my Bible for hours on end, searching for a ray of light and encouragement. And I did find some. At times it gave me peace, for instance to hear that Paul had also suffered a ‘thorn in his flesh’ and that he had found comfort in the grace of God. I prayed, attended the church youth-group and later went through the formalities of the Confession of Faith, and meant every word of it. But during my first Holy Communion I was so stressed and scared that I felt giddy. Although I desperately needed the grace of God, I knew that by receiving the holy signs while knowing that I was homosexual, I might be drawing the fury of God on myself. And how would I explain to my magnificent parents that I was gay and did not qualify for neither receiving the Holy Communion nor God’s grace?

I began my studies in Social Work and while I was at university I decided to see a Christian therapist. I was depressed and thoughts of self-hatred and suicide crowded my mind. It took me two years to gather enough courage to tell her I was gay. “No problem,” she assured me and referred me to an elderly Christian lady to pray for me and rebuke the homosexual demons. It did not change anything in spite of my determination that it would, but I could not bring myself to admit this to my therapist.

For the first time in my life, at the age of 22, I became involved in a relationship with a female student. Falling in love felt to me like flying and falling, both at the same time. Joyful and happy, but we both were on the road to hell. So, my guilt and self-hatred escalated and eventually brought me to the point of a suicide attempt – which unfortunately failed. And when I admitted to my therapist that I was still gay and did not expect to change, she kindly but firmly told me to find another therapist. She said, as a Christian therapist she could not see me any longer, because I chose to remain gay.

After my suicide attempt and encouraged by the therapist I talked to my parents. They reacted in the following way: “My child, we love you and shall never reject you. But

there is no possibility for you to live that way. The Bible states clearly, it is a sin and the punishment is eternal death. You should also keep it from your brothers and sisters, because they won't understand." I turned my back on being gay and took an oath never to give in. I turned my back on myself. In fear of future romantic involvement, I refrained from all new female friendships. My depression and self-hatred never gave way. I completed my studies and started working at the social services of the church, but inside me the anger grew.

The preacher approached me to take one of the primary-level groups for Sunday school classes. For two years I was their teacher and together we studied the Bible. Imagine how shocked I was to be told one morning, during a meeting, that gays were not allowed to serve in any official position of the church. Even if you were the organist, the lead singer, the soup-kitchen keeper or the preacher – nothing you could do for God or his church or community would be good enough. How could it be that God had made me and put me on this earth for no purpose at all? Depleted of meaning and worth? Didn't I have a right to exist? A right to love? Or should I love but never show or tell? What kind of love could go without deeds? The Bible tells us to live according to our nature. Well, my nature was skew. Not for a lack of trying, I can assure you. I was like trying to keep an empty 2-litre Coke bottle under water in the swimming pool, for years on end. Your arm would get tired, but you would only push harder. You would rather die before admitting you were gay. Literally. And you knew it was only a matter of time for the bottle to be launched into the air. You could fight your nature for just so long before it would turn pathogenic.

I was privileged. I met the man of my dreams (gay women could manage to fall in love with and make love to men). We were both in our late twenties and got married 11 months later. By that time I had already, on top of having my demons rebuked, received hypnosis treatment and aversion therapy. Those were the days when people were easily convinced that gays merely had to stay celibate or marry someone from the opposite sex and choose to be straight. I prayed and hoped and believed from the bottom of my heart that it would turn out to be that way. However, I was convinced that I needed to tell my prospective husband about my past and fears so that he could make an informed decision about our wedding plans. It made no difference to him. Not then. It was the happiest time of my life. I was without lady-friends, but with my precious, beautifully handsome man. Together we loved the Lord and morning after morning I rose, giving thanks and praising him for making me feel normal. We became pregnant within the first year and entrusted our child to God's care. We took our baptismal vows with great sincerity and became committed members of church cell-groups. My

commitment to be straight worked for about six months. In spite of our wonderfully blessed life together, the old feelings returned. I was again aware of being drawn towards women and an intense desire to die. Every time I went through this struggle I shared my feelings with my husband and we prayed together for peace and healing. Things would be better for a few months. But the feelings never really left me.

Week after week I sat before men and women coming for therapy: men who abused their wives and children, women and men with reckless, sexual habits. And often I wondered, was it more acceptable in God's eyes to be in a dysfunctional heterosexual marriage than in a committed relationship between two women? The church did not speak out against heterosexual child molesters or men abusing their wives, or against the humiliation and rejection of gays by Christians. There was a deadly silence. The only thing that was ever heard was a ringing forthrightness against the sinfulness of gays. That was a topic that brought church people up in arms.

The relationship between my husband and I had changed into camaraderie and friendship. We were like two best friends sharing a bed and raising a child together. Z was now in grade three and I felt it was time to admit to him that his mother was gay. Deceiving my loved ones by keeping my real identity from them was destroying my mind. Z should grasp the meaning of it and be enabled to defend himself against what other people might say. He should be fine with it, because he had a mother and father who loved him and loved each other. But at his age his peers had started joking about lessies and moffies and I suddenly realised that the secret and shame I was carrying my whole life had now become the secret and shame of my husband and child. Without any words or intent they had started hiding my truth – hiding their knowing it and suppressing their desire to defend me in order not to become targets of ridicule, moralisation and rejection.

John also started struggling with Bible texts, those that people frequently quoted to condemn us (see 4.2). Funny how those little sections were the only ones people could find applicable to us. In the past people did the same with apartheid, using a specific selection of Bible verses to justify the sowing of discrimination and hurt amongst black and brown people of our country – and the church (people, not God) had since been proven wrong. Still there were those, too proud to admit they were wrong, refusing to sign the confession of Belhar; for twenty years still carrying the scars, the anger and hatred. And my heart bled for those who had to go through life suffering discrimination and rejection, especially by the children of our loving God.

And now, when I come to think of it – maybe, it was easier to be black than gay. At least when you're black, your family and friends are also black and they accept you.

They accept you as well as your talents, welcoming these in the community as gifts from God. You are part of a bigger whole and together you have a voice. Together you enjoy acknowledgement and support.

But when you're gay, you hide it even from your parents, your children, your friends and colleagues. You walk a lonely road, and when your journey becomes too painful and you turn to the church for consolation, you can be sure to be met with a Christian choir of rejection and contempt. So, you are left with God. He is your only comfort. He is the unchanging rock and you are his child, even when the church tells you otherwise. What hope would we have if we were not his children? What would be our purpose for living? God, how would I get through the next 30 years? Is it better to be a dead mother and a dead wife than to be a gay mother and a gay wife? This is a question that stays with me.

It is impossible to think it could ever change. The Law has been changed locally, but not until the church delivers an absolution for everyone to hear and publishes it in newspapers and spells it out on posters high up against lampposts for everyone to see, would anything change. For heaven's sake!!! The Synod's flawless scholars needn't even admit they were wrong. They needn't say they encourage it. Just say you are sorry for treating us with so much hatred and so little love. Just admit that you do not know everything. Just say from now on all gays will be welcome in your congregation. Just say that we may play your organs and help dishing out notices at your church doors. Give individuals who are willing to be our voice a chance to tell you about our yearning to belong to the community of believers, just the way we are. ...And even then it will take decades, just the way it was with apartheid, for our lesions to heal.

What do I say to my child, Marietjie? How do I explain to him that secrecy is nothing but lies, and that the church is actually encouraging people to live without integrity ...in other words, to be unfaithful to the person of his making? How do I convince him that the God of love we have been teaching him about is not to be found in the church?

I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

4.5.3.5 The dating game

Dating before marriage is normal -- for heterosexuals. Piazza (1995:143) described how many girls he has dated while in high school without being labelled as promiscuous. In fact, parents and teachers often promote dating more than one person instead of going steady too soon. Dating is a healthy way to practice one's relationship which one hopes

to have one day with that special person. Gay people often do not have that privilege. Most of them start dating early in their twenties once they “come out” or when they are away from surveillance by teachers and parents. Unfortunately, as with most heterosexual adults, adult dating with gays often includes sex. Society soon labels gay people as immoral while depriving them of a normal social and emotional development during their teenage years (Piazza 1995:144; Hillier & Harrison 2004: 90, 91).

Gay people themselves also seem to lack the awareness that sufficient time is necessary for practicing how relationships work, before settling down. Quite often emotional and financial reasons trick them into moving in with a partner much too soon after the relationship has started. Piazza (1995:144) warns gay people not to enter into a permanent relationship too soon. They have the right to follow a normal pattern of dating first. Coontz (2012:22-24) indicates the importance for couples to have enough experience in order to be able to distinguish lust and infatuation from love before they get married. This is equally true for both heterosexual people and gay people. According to Coontz, this would imply a phase of life where young adults hook up (friends with benefits) in order to satisfy their sexual needs before they are ready to invest in a serious relationship. This reminds me of a gay couple who, after five years of marriage, are now busy to get a divorce. The one partner said to me, “In hindsight, I realise we got married too soon. I married for the wrong reasons. I was so in love and infatuated with this person, without knowing her well enough. We did not want to live in sin and therefore got married as soon as we could. Apart from that I was shocked by the realities of marriage. My parents were divorced and I did not get a good example from them.”

In the age of internet and social networks dating could become a dangerous game. I have heard numerous heart-breaking stories in therapy where gay people met on the internet, trusting the other person after a period of internet communication, just to be disappointed after the first meeting. Sometimes a pseudo identity is used, misleading the one person completely. A few of my clients have flown to places like Cape Town, and even Europe and the USA, just to be disappointed and abused and often having lost much money. For gay people the need to be accepted and loved is often so overwhelming that they would take any chance on finding happiness.

4.5.3.6 Societal support

Although societal attitudes towards gay relationships and gay marriages have slowly started to change, many families are still relieved when a gay son or daughter's relationship is in trouble or when it ends (Piazza 1995:145). I have often experienced parents informing me about the ending of a relationship. They would then ask in a hopeful tone: "Do you think he/ she will now start to search for a straight partner?" Piazza (1995: 146) considers it "amazing" that some of the gay relationships do last for long periods of time, especially when one takes into account the impact of homophobia, living in the closet, dysfunctional families, AIDS, and living in a secular culture where traditional values are not honoured anymore. The impact of the latter was demonstrated by the following incident which took place on 23rd March 2014:

The church service at the gay congregation at Silverton DRC church had just come to an end. As usual, we were gathering in the hall to enjoy a cup of soup and sandwiches when my phone rang. It was a client's phone number, but her daughter was speaking, "Marietjie, my mother tried to commit suicide this afternoon. My grandmother found her lying on the bedroom floor at about 6 o'clock. The ambulance took her to the Eugene Marais hospital. She swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills."

I had seen this coming. R had threatened several times during the past three days that she would take her own life. She had been married to Z for the past five years. Although they were deeply in love, Z's mother considered the marriage of her daughter to another woman as despicable, unacceptable, and she totally and vehemently rejected the couple. According to her they were going to hell "because the Bible and the church say so". Consequently, R developed such an antipathy against the Bible and the Church that she started to renounce both. This led to huge problems in their marriage, because she did not want to go to church with Z anymore. She also did not want to have anything to do with Z's mother. In the end Z was torn apart, because she had to choose between her values as a Christian and her marriage partner. She could not live like this anymore and after yet another row decided to separate. R's whole life fell apart.

Ironically, while hurrying to my car from the gathering after the church service at Silverton, Rev Muller walked with me while conveying to me some "good news". He told me that the Skuilkrans DRC congregation has now officially offered the Silverton building

of the DRC to the Reforming (gay) Church as a gift. This was a direct consequence of point number 8 of the 2007 Resolution (2.3.9). This is often the dilemma: while some congregations have become so-called “gay friendly” congregations, the official policy of the church was still against gay relationships and gay marriages – with dire consequences, like the one I was confronted with at that moment.

At my arrival at the Eugene Marais hospital, looking at the bright signs against the building and finding myself constantly for two years now in a sort of “research mode”, I took a cell-phone photo. The past Monday I had to present an article at Pretoria University’s Ph.D group of practical theology students on research methodology. It immediately went through my mind whether this photo would qualify as field data or field text or research text. R was lying in ICU, attached to all the necessary pipes and drips to keep her alive. They allowed me to visit her at that hour, because I was her pastoral therapist. When she saw me, she started crying. “I just want to be loved and accepted. I cannot live with the constant rejection of who I am anymore.” “My God” I thought, “this was neither field data nor a field text. It was a human being lying here. She does not want to live anymore because of the rejection of who she was.” I tried to comfort her by assuring her of my love and acceptance and that we would try to work things out. While I was trying to tidy her hair with my fingers, she said: “I know you care deeply. Your love and acceptance is all I can hold on to now.” The meta-data on my phone said 21:22 when I took the photo. I deleted the photo. It was about an hour later when I drove home. There was a chill in the air. It was autumn in Pretoria. I wondered in what season the DRC leadership was right now with regard to their thoughts on gay marriages. My body was shaking as I tried to dry the tears of shock and pain and anger from my cheeks. But I did not feel disempowered. I, and many others like me, had a voice in the DRC and change was possible. Inevitable.

4.5.3.7 Conflicting values

Piazza (1995:146–148) considers money as a major source of conflict for gay couples, because it is one of the major areas in which gay couples really lack role models. Many gays still grew up with a heterosexual model of fathers who were the breadwinners, while mothers either stayed at home to bring up the kids, or where mothers who did work were earning less than men when doing the same job. Money represents different things to different people, like security, power and control, self-esteem or love. Whenever couples

experience conflict, over money or how to rear their children, the underlying problem is usually about conflicting values and subsequent identity related conclusions (White 2007:85).

4.5.3.8 Broken promises

Broken promises and sexual or emotional affairs are usually the cause for much strain in the love relationship of a couple (Piazza 1995:150). Affairs are mostly a violation of the mutually agreed upon boundaries of a love/marital relationship. According to Piazza, gay people are much more vulnerable to emotional affairs. He says: “Trust is the air that relationships breathe”. Although jealousy is normally considered to be an unhealthy emotion, it could be a useful danger sign that trust is lacking in a relationship.

4.5.3.9 Change

In our generation, the changing of jobs, homes, cities, cars and spouses seem to be the regular thing to do, although it creates incredible stress (Piazza 1995:153, 154). Quite often such stress could become a major factor that pushes people apart. Piazza considers changes in our spouses as one of the stressors we seem least equipped to deal with. He reports from his experience as a pastor how couples (gay and straight) often break up/divorce due to the inability to adapt to the change in the partners over a period of time. Nobody stays the same. André Brink, an author of many novels (Brink 2004:380), considers this our biggest betrayal, because initially in a marriage people often want their partners to change. Thereby they deny the reality of the one they love. Once their partners do change they desert them, because they cannot live with/love the person who has changed. Isn't this in a way similar to what the DRC is trying to do to gay ministers when expecting them to change who they really are? In our gay congregation it is often experienced that when a couple breaks up, both would leave the church (at least for a while), thereby magnifying the sense of loss for both partners. Piazza (1995:155) reminds gay couples who are also Christians that they should celebrate change, especially when it is transforming them more and more into the image and likeness of Christ.

4.5.3.10 Anger

Piazza (1995:174) considers gay men and women to be angrier people than the average person. Their anger is caused by the suffering of oppression and discrimination in its most insidious forms (see 3.3.1). Although other groups may also experience similar oppression, at least they would have a family to turn to for support. In the life of a gay person, especially a gay couple, they would most likely be on their own. Often their parents and close family and friends may add to the voices of oppression by reiterating the evilness and unacceptability of being gay. Thus, gay people may enter into life and relationships with an incredible storage of anger and internalised shame.

4.5.3.11 Grief

Just like most straight people growing up, gays have dreams about their future vocation, their love life and other things. Often gay people's first dream is that they would stop being gay. Once that "heterosexual myth" (Piazza 1995:156) is shattered, they develop a need to grieve their loss. Should this not happen and the loss and its effects not be acknowledged, in terms of added distress and pain to their general feeling of invalidation it could impact negatively on the gay couple's relationship (see Morgan 2000:44). Piazza (1995:157) describes how the loss of his dream to become a Methodist minister impacted on his relationship. In spite of his hard work and due to his being in a gay relationship the church asked for his resignation. He remembers how unprepared he was for the depth of depression which felt like death (see also 5.4.9). At one stage he felt like blaming the source of his pain on his relationship, which of course was not true. The problem probably lay with the Church and the discrimination against gay ministers.

According to Piazza (1995:157–162), HIV/AIDS has brought a whole new dimension to gay people's grieving process. Many gays know many gays who have passed on due to AIDS. They themselves may even discover one day that they are HIV positive. Piazza does not view their apparent indifference as a consequence of ignorance, but as a consequence of the general hopelessness amongst gay people. I have witnessed this often in the gay community. Many gays have expressed this immense sense of loss and hopelessness after their parents, the Church and consequently also God have rejected them. This has a profound handicapping effect on gay relationships, because it blocks

any future dreams for a relationship. It is only when they start to distinguish between God and the Church that they realise the meaning of Psalm 139.

4.5.3.12 Intimacy

Piazza (1995:191–208) expresses the view that almost all problems with sexuality may be linked to the alienation of sexuality from spirituality. The Church in general has largely been silent about sexual issues except for sporadic outbursts of condemnation. Although I support Piazza's view to a great extent, I consider the publication, *Liefde is die grootste: oor erotiek en seksualiteit* edited by Professors Cas Vos and Dirk Human, as a brave and ground-breaking event (Vos & Human [ed] 2007). The book openly addresses issues of sexuality and homosexuality. A prominent theme presented in most of the contributions by theologians is the urgent need for the church to revisit their traditional views on sexuality by means of a more nuanced approach to hermeneutics than they have done so far. Unfortunately, according to the Resolution of the Synod (see 2.3.9), especially in the context of gay ministers intimate homosexual relationships are still banned. This reiterates the shame on gay people and has an inhibiting effect on gay couples. Quite often one or both of the partners are so filled with shame and guilt and fear of God's wrath that they refrain from entering into a sexual relationship.

It is important to help gay Christian couples to understand that God made them as gay sexual beings. Sexuality in itself is neither right nor wrong, neither good nor bad. How they choose to express it may determine whether it will be life-giving to the relationship or unhealthy. Spiritual values and principles are socially constructed and may change over time. How this is negotiated between partners in a relationship should be beyond an imitation of heterosexual relationships. A gay relationship, where sex and intimacy are integrated, should be unique.

4.5.4 Presenting a case for gay marriages

Mattmann (2006:78) asks the question: "Why does the idea of ...gay marriage make so many people splutter with rage? What crucial button does it push in the human psyche?" Apart from the arguments against gay marriages based on biblical texts as discussed in 4.2.3 and 4.2.4., there are numerous more arguments against gay marriages. I will discuss the most common arguments as portrayed by Myers & Scanzoni (2005), Sullivan (2004) and Mattmann (2006).

- **Same-sex marriage is a contradiction in terms. Marriage is historically and by definition the union between a man and a woman.**

This argument has already partly been debunked in 4.2.1. Marriage has undergone so many changes since King David and his eight wives and ten concubines and King Solomon's three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines. Over time the definition of marriage has changed from polygamy to monogamy, from arrangements to romantic choices, from male headship to mutuality. Interracial marriage and remarriage after divorce have also been de-stigmatised. Societal laws on the married woman's identity, her ability to control property, the custody of children after divorce, etc. have changed. The question is whether it could change again to include gay people (Myers and Scanzoni 2005:119, 120; Sullivan 2004)?

- **Marriage implies procreation, which gays simply can't do**

Myers and Scanzoni (2005:121) concede that although marriage is about having children and raising them, that is not the only reason why people get married. Heterosexual couples who choose not to have children, postmenopausal women, infertile men, couples who cannot engage in sexual intercourse or conceive children in the normal way marry for reasons of love. On the other hand, it becomes more common amongst gay couples to procreate, albeit by means of a surrogate mother, artificial insemination or adoption. Even amongst heterosexual couples those practices are not uncommon (Sullivan 2004:74, 75). I have counselled a number of gay and straight couples who have children born through artificial insemination. My impression is that those children are considered to be so special that the parents shower them with love. Although most of the children I refer to are still between the ages of one and seven, they all seem happy, well-adapted and full of confidence.

- **Children need both a mother and a father**

According to Sullivan (2004:239–272), the argument against the granting of civil marriages to gay people revolves around the impact it would have on children. The argument is taken further when asking the question if gay couples would be fit parents for adopting children. Myers and Scanzoni (2005: 121) offer arguments in this regard which comes from the conservative Family Research Council in the USA. The latter is

concerned that gay marriages would open the door to homosexual adoption, which may lead to more children growing up without a mother and/or a father. They are also concerned that gay marriages may encourage teenagers who are unsure of their sexuality to engage in a lifestyle with high risks of “suicide, depression, HIV, drug abuse, STD’s and other pathogens”. The underlying discourse to these arguments may be that gay people choose their sexual orientation and that all gay people are caught up in injurious lifestyles.

Studies done with children of gay couples seem to show no appreciable difference between children brought up in stable homes of either homosexual or heterosexual people (Sullivan 2004: 239). Myers and Scanzoni (2005:122) confirm this when they refer to Charlotte Patterson, a researcher at the University of Virginia, in a briefing paper to the American Psychological Association. According to Patterson:

Taken together, the data do not suggest elevated rates of homosexuality among the offspring of lesbian or gay parents...not a single study has found children of lesbian and gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.

From my personal experience, I can agree with Myers and Scanzoni (2005:123) that it seems that many same-sex couples with adopted children are parenting mentally or physically challenged children, or previously neglected or abused children. In South Africa quite often adoption agencies give black children who are educationally challenged to affluent white gay couples to adopt. What I have experienced in terms of unconditional love and care and unwavering efforts to do what is best for such children, stands in stark contrast to the arguments above. With the apartheid history still fresh in their memories, white gay couples quickly overcome the racial barriers with their overpowering love for their children from different races.

- **Gay people are promiscuous**

Myers and Scanzoni (2005:124) are not surprised by studies which highlight gay promiscuity by suggesting that heterosexual marriages last longer than gay relationships. According to them studies also suggest that heterosexual non-marital relationships,

including cohabitation, are also less enduring than marriages. This is partly what one of the arguments for gay marriage entails, that it curbs promiscuity.

Schmitt (Schmitt 2003:100, 101) and his colleagues in psychology asked more than sixteen thousand people (mostly university students) from fifty-two countries how many sexual partners they would like to have over various time intervals, for example in the next month, or year, or in their remaining life-time. They gathered the information by means of a self-report measure which they had developed. Of those who were unmarried or in a relationship 29% of heterosexual and 31% of gay men expressed a desire for more than one partner. The same response was obtained from 6% of heterosexual and 4% of homosexual women. Although there was a huge gender difference, the difference between the sexual-orientations was trivial. The results of the study were strong and conclusive – the sexes differ regardless of their sexual orientation – and these differences seem to be culturally universal. Men tend to have a greater desire than women for having a variety of sexual partners, while they also seem to require less time to lapse before they consent to sexual intercourse. Now, the question is: Are gay men promiscuous? According to this study, both men and women can be promiscuous, but men tend to be more promiscuous than women irrespective of whether they are gay or heterosexual – that is, if one defines promiscuity as the opposite for having only one sexual partner, and preferably after marriage.

- ***If marriage is redefined to include two men in love, on what possible principled grounds should it be denied to three in love?***

Sullivan (2004:278–281) raises the argument of polygamy and the accompanying arguments of bestiality and necrophilia used by anti-gay marriage activists. According to Sullivan marriage has undergone many changes over time and he considers the arguments above as similar to the panic about interracial marriages or the ending of men's property claims on women (see 4.2.1). He concedes that in all probability gay male marriages will differ from both gay female (lesbian) marriages and heterosexual marriages. Differences between genders will probably create an institution of marriage which will not easily be "squeezed into a completely uniform model". If men are naturally more promiscuous than women, then lesbian marriages should have more moral legitimacy than heterosexual marriages. If the argument is that marriage is not to

reward monogamy but to encourage it, then gay men, especially, need marriage as an incentive for responsible behaviour, monogamy and fidelity. Instead of opening up the possibilities for multiple partners for homosexuals, marriage would actually close them down. Therefore, Myers and Scanzoni (2005:4) argue that gay marriage could help elevate the institution of marriage. When we are arguing against gay marriage, are we not actually arguing for less commitment, less monogamy and less fidelity?

- **Gay marriage will undermine traditional marriage**

According to Johnson (2008:6, 46) our basic need as humans is to belong. Myers and Scanzoni (2005:116) consider marriage to be a healthy way to satisfy this human need. Same-sex marriage could help fulfil this need with gay people, thereby also strengthening the institution of marriage. Regarding such a basic human need as belonging and the unique way it finds expression within the institution of marriage, why should marriage be granted only to heterosexuals when neither hetero- nor homosexuals had any choice in the matter of orientation? Mattmann (2006:81) explains what this belonging looks like in his life and that of his partner.

We are trying to shape our life partnership as a gay couple so that we support each other in emulation of Christ. This happens through talking, arguing, consoling each other and praying together.

Sullivan (2004:73) believes that God does not create in vain. A deep, heartfelt yearning for companionship and intimacy is not an abomination before God. According to Sullivan he is convinced that God does not want gay people to live a lie for a lifetime. Sometimes it seems that the church views some sins to be bigger than others in the eyes of God, like promiscuity, while adultery, domestic violence, alcohol or sexual abuse in families, for instance, destroy more families than being in an exclusive, loving gay relationship can ever think of doing. In fact, gays in monogamous relationships or married gay people are the least prone to destroy families.

Spong (2004:67) views “a homosexual orientation as a minority but perfectly natural characteristic on the spectrum of sexuality”. Gay people, like all other people, have unique gifts to offer the human family, especially the church, some because of their orientation and not in spite of their orientation. He contemplates on how difficult it must be for a person to discover gifts that celebrate one’s being but at the same time may be

the cause of your subjection to other people's oppression and hostile behaviour. This perspective places the guilt on the shoulders of society, and of the church – in this context on the shoulders of the DRC. Spong invites the church to start practicing God's inclusive love. The church must also realise its role in the marriage procedure. The church does not marry anyone. People marry each other. The state defines the nature of the legal marriage. The church listens to the couple's vows in holy matrimony and adds to that vow of commitment its blessing. According to Spong, the church's blessing is a gift of its official approval. Certainly, this blessing becomes any two people in an honest relationship of love, fidelity, commitment, and trust. In addition, it is also necessary for the heterosexual community, and specifically the church, to share the experience of integrity and caring, and grace and beauty in homosexual unions as part of its attire.

4.5.5 What God has joined together

Since 2006 many gay couples in South Africa have opted for marriage. In my participatory journey with the gay community, especially members of the Reforming Church of Pretoria, I have attended a large number of wedding ceremonies. One of the ceremonies was the wedding of Christo and Deon Bessinger in 2008. I still have regular contact with them – at least once a week - at the church service on Sunday evenings. When they heard that I was busy doing research “on gay marriages”, they offered to be interviewed. On the 26th of December 2013 I called them to set a date for the interview. They were on their way back to Pretoria after having spent Christmas with Deon's family. Christmas Eve was spent at Christo's parent's house. I asked their permission to either take notes, or to record the interview on my cell phone. They agreed to both. I also explained to them the ethical procedure of the research; also that nothing would be published without their permission. At any stage could they reconsider, add on or exclude information. Should they wish, they could even withdraw their complete interview from the thesis. Being real gentlemen, they offered to come to my house. But, I couldn't resist their warm invitation – “come and have tea and cake with us” – and went to their place instead.

Opportunities for gay people to meet other gays at “respectable” places like the church, workplace or at sports clubs are limited. This is mainly due to the homophobic attitude of society and the prevailing fear of rejection amongst gays. Therefore, I was not

surprised when Christo and Deon told me that they had met at a gay club. Apart from where they met, their story of how they met and how they started dating and fell in love was nothing different to that of any straight couple. What seemed to me a bit different, perhaps, was the romantic way in which gay people tend to go about these things. The couple shared with me how they sent romantic text messages, flowers and gifts, and how they arranged romantic breakfasts and dinners. From the onset there was a strong connection between the two of them.

At the time when they started dating, Deon had a business in Barberton, while Christo was working at an IT company in Pretoria. Deon stayed at his own guest house and Christo (ten years younger than Deon) rented a room at a friend's house. They saw each other every weekend. Three months into the relationship Deon had to go to Dubai for six months. This created a turning point in their relationship. Deon soon arranged for Christo to visit him in Dubai. At the end of the week, before Christo returned home, they decided that they were in a relationship that both valued. For the rest of the six months Deon worked in Dubai, while Christo stayed alone in South Africa. During the whole period apart they remained faithful and in love. On Deon's return he sold his business in Barberton and moved in with Christo. They just could not stay apart any longer. For six months they shared a room in the friend's house. Times were tough, because Deon did not have a job. They had to make ends meet on Christo's salary alone. With R10 000 each month they had to pay their cars, their rent plus all other overheads. On my question of what kept them going, they quickly responded, "Our love for each other, our healthy sexual relationship which buffered all the stress and frustrations, and our faith in God. We both have always had a strong belief and intense involvement in our church's activities." After six months, Deon had started a new business and they were able to move into a small townhouse. For five years they lived together before they decided they were ready for taking the next step in their relationship: marriage. From the onset they realised that financial stability would be their first priority before they could think of getting married. They remembered how hard it was at times. Sometimes they had to wait for a client's payment before they could pay the internet costs for their business. But they persevered. When the act on civil unions came through on 30 Nov 2006, they decided to wait and see how the gay community would react. Two years later, in 2008, Christo and Deon Bessinger were married at a lovely venue in Pretoria. My husband and I were

among the privileged guests to attend their wedding. The wedding ceremony was conducted by Rev Muller from the Reforming (gay) Church.

I was curious about what actually moved them to get married? What difference did it make to them, being married? First of all, they explained, emotionally and financially they both felt they were ready to get married. They were still very much in love, a love that has grown into a deep and caring relationship over the past couple of years. They wanted to proclaim their love in front of other witnesses. Financially and legally there would also be benefits, such as pension funds, a medical aid and buying of property. Of course, marriage also brought added safety and security in terms of permanency, and a sense of belonging into the relationship.

In the planning of their wedding they had to face many obstacles, just because they were gay.

The first obstacle was their respective families. Being traditional in terms of certain values, they felt they should still get their parents' permission to get married. Deon recalled how the one and a half hour's drive took them three hours to get to Christo's parents' home. Surprisingly, his parents were quite acceptable with the idea. They gave them their blessing. The problem was with Deon's parents. On the day they had planned on asking their permission, a number of unfortunate events happened that were out of their control. Early that morning, Deon's paternal grandmother died. They took his parents away for the weekend to Crystal Springs, a holiday resort in Mpumalanga. The plans for the morning breakfast were to drive to a popular tourist site nearby the resort, a town called Pelgrimsrust. On their way they were met with an overwhelming field fire. The smoke was suffocating. The town had no electricity and, consequently, they could not be served breakfast. They left for *God's Window*, a popular look-out point, hoping to find something there to eat. On their way to *God's window* they decided to ask Deon's parents whether they could get married. When he asked his dad if he could attend the wedding, his dad suddenly demanded him to stop the car, in the middle of the road, where he got out. The world around them was in flames and covered in smoke. Then his father replied firmly, "No, this is not going to happen. It is against the Bible, against our faith." Deon's mother tried to save the situation by pointing out that his dad had way too many emotions to cope with so soon after his mother's death. His dad started walking down the road through the smoke. Deon asked, "Dad, where are you

going to now?” After a while his dad got back into the car and they drove back to Crystal Springs, in silence. The weekend was a huge disappointment. The couple returned to Pretoria, without the blessing of Deon’s parents. The disappointment almost got the better of their enthusiasm for organising the wedding. Deon called his brother and pleaded with him to attend so that at least his family could be represented at their wedding. He agreed; his sister refused. Also on Christo’s side of the family they were met with resistance – his brother was against the wedding. However, while respecting the three individuals from both sides of their families, the couple decided to go ahead with their wedding arrangements.

On a more practical level there was another obstacle, this time the florist who suddenly seemed reluctant to provide flowers for a gay wedding. This problem was easier to overcome. The straight florist was simply replaced by a gay florist – with creative results.

Christo and Deon celebrated their happiness with their 120 guests, but obviously not without a touch of sadness because of the absence of Deon’s parents. They had the children of Deon’s brother to keep them company for the evening. Deon fondly remembered how his brother, who took the wedding photos, had been sending them home during the course of the evening to his children. The children showed them to their grandmother at home, who was obviously yearning to be at the wedding. In a way these pictures made it possible for Deon’s mother to participate in these special moments in her son’s life.

Fortunately, with the passing of time Deon’s father had managed to change his attitude. In fact, he had grown to love Christo and call him “son”. But still he couldn’t approve of the idea of two men getting married, especially of them sleeping together. He showed his aversion by refusing to enter into the bedroom they shared. However, as he observed the love, respect and commitment between Christo and Deon, the relationship between them improved and he started to change. Recently, for the first time in years, he entered their bedroom. Deon and Christo saw this concession as his way of acknowledging their marriage.

When reflecting on their years together as a gay couple, they shared some valuable insights with me. Deon revealed that he has done a lot of research on homosexuality. The process saddened him, because his general impression was that people were still

thinking that being gay was a choice. Both Deon and Christo were convinced that they were born gay. Both grew up in a ‘normal’, happy environment without any of the traditional discourses on the aetiology of homosexuality, such as sexual abuse, dominant mothers and absent fathers. They are convinced that the negative perceptions of society, and especially of the church, play a dominant role in the heart sore of gay people in general. According to Deon, he would not have survived in this tough world without Christo.

I asked them what they considered to be the glue, or the binding factor in their marriage. They replied that they did not necessarily talk about everything. However, they complement each other and respect each other’s differentness (see Müller 2009a:36, 37). Since the beginning trust had played a big role in their relationship. They also believe in keeping a healthy balance between passionate intimacy and allowing each other space (see Müller 2009a). Furthermore, they celebrated the intellectual stimulation they were receiving from friendships, as it replenished the creativity in their relationship. Role models for gay relationships were but a few (see Piazza 1995:55); therefore, Deon and Christo had to work things out for themselves. They developed an easy way of negotiating important decisions. They considered their relationship as an equal partnership in honour of God. Patriarchy was not part of it. Ephesians 5:21 was their guideline: “Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.” Their love for each other was a given, it was automatically always present. They had become a unity. Both said they could not have asked for a better life partner. As a bonus their families had become more accepting of their marriage. Their faith in Christ and their church (the Reforming Gay Church) formed the foundation of their marriage. But they also believed in working on their relationship. They deliberately made time for conversation. At the end of each day they took a relaxing bath together and used the time to discuss their day. Although sexual intimacy was still very important, they considered their “talk-time” in the bath as a way to ensure a healthy emotional bond. When asked what they would do if they had to cope with a ban on sexual intimacy (such as the DRC was expecting from gay ministers), they replied with a twinkle in their eyes, “We would definitely do it anyway.” “What do you think the impact would be on your lives if you had not been allowed to be in a loving relationship?” was my following question. Their first response was thoughts of loneliness and depression, and eventually severe mental illness (see 5.4.9).

Davidson and Steiner (1998: 97) ask the question of what makes life valuable for people with mental illness. Their conclusion is noteworthy: “Exactly what is necessary for other people. We need to feel wanted, accepted and loved. We need support from friends and family ... we need to feel a part of the human race, to have friends. We need to give and receive love.” If this is true for the heterosexual mentally handicapped and the heterosexual “other people”, it is equally true for the gay mentally handicapped, and the gay “other people”. Johnson (2011:24) considers close ties with others as vital to our mental, emotional and physical health. Cacioppo et al. claim that loneliness raises blood pressure, to the extent of doubling the risk of heart attack and stroke (2006: 140–151). House (2001:273) considers emotional isolation as a more dangerous health risk than smoking or high blood pressure. He admits that our understanding of why and how our lack of social connectedness affects our physical health so negatively is still limited. Conversely, we also do not understand much about why our social ties and relationships are so protective of our health. Johnson affirms this when she speaks about the value of the quality of our relationships. Negative relationships can undermine one’s health. It does not only matter in our physical health, but also in our mental and emotional health (Johnson 2011:25). Brain studies done by Eisenberger and Lieberman (2004:294–298) showed that rejection and exclusion trigger the same part in the brain, the anterior cingulate, as physical pain. Johnson (2011:27) regards love as a basic primary need, like oxygen and water.

At this point in time the only emptiness in the marriage of Deon and Christo is their longing for a child. They would love to adopt a little baby boy. Previously, they came very close to adopting, but at the time their family were still so negative about their marriage, let alone their adopting a child, that they let go of the idea. Now, a couple of years later, the families are much more accommodating and ready to welcome a child into their midst. I have promised to try and help them at least to get an appointment with a social worker at the CSC (Christian Social Council) in Pretoria. Fortunately, we have managed to get an appointment with a social worker who “has no problem with gays”. She apparently realises that people’s sexual orientation does not determine their love for children or their ability to be good parents. Piazza (2002:35) describes the grief both he and his partner have suffered for not having children. Presently, they are in a co-parenting relationship with two gay women who are not only very good friends of theirs,

but who have become family now. He is the father of two lovely daughters with one of the women. The children flourish in the light of the love of four parents.

4.5.6 Inviting authenticity by coming in

Downs (2006) describes different phases that especially gay men may go through in order to escape and to hide from the shame and embarrassment of being gay. First they may do anything to deny that they are gay; they may even resort to internalised homophobia. Then follows the coming-out process, which is considered to be the most important step a gay person may ever take in his/her life. Mattman (2006:128) does not consider this step as the “ultimate destination”. It is an enabling step to take when orienting oneself to one’s environment and finding one’s own identity as a gay person. According to Downs (2006:76–102), during the second phase of coming out, the core belief of being inferior and the toxic shame accompanying this belief are the underlying motive for seeking validation from others during this phase. The more validation a gay person receives, the less distressed he/she may feel. Validation assures gay people that they are worthy human beings and deserving of love. During this stage a person may do almost anything to gain validation, especially from a partner. Partners having a low tolerance for invalidation may cause many relationships to end. Especially men in this phase may find it extremely difficult to admit mistakes, because in doing so they might open the door to more shame and rejection. The gay man often pursues sources of inauthentic validation, because he has not yet accepted himself as a gay man. Once he starts taking responsibility for his own mistakes instead of passing the blame, he may find the shame lifting and experience the process towards authenticity.

Mattman (2006:128, 129) reckons the road to authenticity is to balance the coming-out process with what he calls the coming-in process. For Downs (2006:102) this means leaving the inauthenticity of the past behind while moving to a place of “becoming oneself”. Often this journey involves a period of meaning-making and spiritual growth. Silent retreat may be good for an inner spiritual growth, but one may also experience an ‘outer’ spiritual growth by facing society where homophobic patterns are being disrupted and role expectations that tend to dominate the commercial gay and lesbian scene are slowly changing. It is during this phase of meaning-making that gay people free themselves from the stronghold of shame and the pain of trauma and start building a life of meaning, purpose and eventually real contentment. Downs (2006:155–166) views the

three pillars of contentment to be passion, love and integrity. Passion may be defined as the repeated experience of joy in doing something, and differs from validation by being intrinsically generated. Love is seen as the on-going experience of joy in the presence of another person. It is difficult to ascertain love when you are driven to avoid shame – a possible reason why many of the gay relationships fail.

According to Downs integrity refers to the state of being undivided, integrating all parts of a person without hiding some parts. Unfortunately, the broader church and the DRC in particular, are only partially accepting gay people by banning gay relationships. Thereby, they are also contributing to their shame and self-loathing. By allowing gay people, and in the context of this thesis, gay ministers, to enter into loving monogamous relationships the DRC could play a powerful role in eliminating the suffocating shame which forces them to hide their true selves and live inauthentic lives without integrity.

4.5.7 The way of Christ for gay and lesbian couples

Mattman (2006:154–163) interprets the different stages of the life of Jesus Christ as an ascending spiral which can be experienced over and over again in the lives of Christians. Each stage integrates the experiences of the previous stage, resulting in a person's response to evolve and to become more mature with each turn of the spiral. The author applies these stages to the lives of today's gay and lesbian people. As I have indicated, the shame and self-loathing have a devastating impact on gay couples; whereas spiritual growth may help them to live authentic lives and find joy in each other's company (see 4.4.4.5). I believe applying these stages of the life of Jesus to the lives of gay people will "do hope" with them (see also Weingarten 2000:399), and especially with gay couples. Throughout the centuries the stages of Jesus' life have served as a basis for and explanation of people's own spiritual life experiences. It provided them with a strong sense of solidarity and support in difficult times. Mattmann (2006:155) considers these stages of Birth, Baptism, Vocation, Cross and Resurrection each as an enabling resource for working through different challenges in life and initiating a liberating process of growth and transformation.

The solidarity that gay Christians have with the way of Jesus lie both in the unfavourable circumstances of his life and in God's divine purpose for him. Likewise, gay children are born and grow up with the message that they are not exactly what any parent would

hope for, therefore undesirable and even an abomination (Lev18:22). This birth connection between gays and Christ is important, because gays have to become spiritually, emotionally and intellectually aware of their godly purpose, as they are, complete with their sexual orientation.

Very little is known about the first thirty years of the life of Jesus. But the Bible tells us about his birth and that John the Baptist baptised him when he was about thirty years old. According to Mattmann, this ritual was the moment Christ became aware of his identity when he heard a voice: “You are my beloved son; on you my favour rests.” In Jesus God became human, a unique and total act of solidarity. Consequently, those who trust in God may and should have a radically transformed relationship with him. They are not slaves anymore, but are spiritually born again children of God. This changes all other relationships as well as one’s concept of faith. God is now experienced as love. All human beings are thus brothers and sisters, on an equal level before God. Rogers (1999:34, 35) underscores this concept when he writes, “It is Christ who binds Christians together, and tells them the truth about themselves.” The same binding and truth-telling are found in the sacraments of marriage, the Eucharist and Baptism. The baptism incorporates them in the community of faith through salvation in Christ, and whether they are gay or straight, no one is denied the right to be a child of God. Rogers refers to Galatians 3:26–28:

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

After his baptism Jesus recognised his vocation. According to Mattmann (2006:159, 160) Jesus understood his mission as one of teaching and living the good news of love, liberation and salvation. The vocation of gay ministers became muddled by conflict surrounding their relationships, making it difficult for them to stay true to their calling (see 5.4.1). They went through a period of total confusion in terms of their shattered dreams and uncertain vocational future. Mattmann explains that one’s calling may partly be determined by factors beyond personal desires and life situations, factors like global issues. Although all of my co-researchers were positive that they all had received a personal calling to become a minister in the DRC, some of them had reached a point of re-evaluation of their future, whether they should think

of changing their vocation, like studying medicine or starting their own church, or becoming a minister in another denomination, or becoming a pastoral therapist. This personal process of deepening consciousness and awareness of potential and vocation impacted also on their partners (see 5.4.12). Mattmann suggests one should consider the help of a mentor or therapist in such a time of personal growth, provided the person is either also gay or has a real concern for gay people.

The fourth stage in the life of Christ which can be applied to gay people's lives is his crucifixion. Suffering people identify with his tremendous suffering on the cross. No human being escapes suffering, but apart from normal human suffering gay people throughout history have been subjected to discrimination, oppression, torture and persecution (see 3.3.1). In many countries same-sex love and marriage are still forbidden (see 4.5.1). Mattmann (2006:161, 162) shares how he, instead of focussing on his suffering, is constantly aware of being carried and nourished by the reality of the Christ within, who connects him with Jesus of Nazareth who suffered for injustice. Mattmann also applies the dying metaphor by urging gay people to let go of destructive life-patterns that may be preventing them from progressing toward who they really are. This could refer to relationships or lifestyles that may be blocking the coming-in process.

Mattmann (2006:162) views the resurrection as stage five, a transformation and metamorphosis that point to a new beginning. For Christ the cross was not the end of his journey. His resurrection and ascension transformed the whole world. In times of suffering this could keep hope and faith for gay people alive, as it may remind them that transformation and new beginnings are possible. Resurrection implies a second birth, a completion of one turn of the spiral on the way of Christ.

4.6 REFLECTING ON GAY RELATIONSHIPS AND GAY MARRIAGES

In this chapter I have indicated that the concepts of marriage and sexuality are socially constructed, contextually bound and able to change with time. Similarly the concepts of homosexual unions and marriage are socially constructed and society's views on these concepts have also changed through certain periods in history. The literature suggests that religion and tradition have played a huge role in the forming of those perceptions.

In the Near-Eastern world of antiquity homosexuality and homo-erotic acts were known and practiced, without moral or religious judgement. Although the sexual (also homosexual) images explicitly portrayed on crockery and elsewhere may seem familiar to us, the meaning which those people attached to it was completely different from how we understand sexuality and eroticism today. Nakedness and passionate sex were celebrated without any feelings of guilt but rather as something to be proud of. Women were seen as inferior and incomplete, while the ideal body was that of a well-built man. They did not differentiate between heterosexual and homosexual desire. The male body was the biggest source of temptation. With Christianity, the perceptions on nudity and sexuality changed. The cultures and religions of neighbouring countries played a role in how biblical authors interpreted sexuality and homosexuality. The Bible as such cannot be interpreted meaningfully without taking into consideration the cultures and religions of the neighbours of ancient Israel. There are four texts in the Old Testament and three texts in the New Testament which are traditionally viewed as prohibiting homosexual acts. Theologians differ in how they interpret these texts, but the Bible does not say anything about committed, monogamous homosexual relationships.

During the late Middle Ages the attitude about homosexuality started to change towards less tolerance, which led to marginalisation and criminalisation of gay people, and being gay was regarded as a mental illness. This negative attitude was reversed by the Stonewall riots in 1969 and the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973, which represented a revolution causing a major shift in attitudes on homosexuality. Literature suggests that, when the socio-political climate changed, attitudes towards homosexuality also changed. In South Africa, after the end of Apartheid, the Bill of rights enshrined the right to equality and human dignity, also for homosexual people.

In the latter part of this chapter I have offered arguments for gay marriages, interwoven with examples of gay people who are either happily married to someone of the same sex, or unhappily married to someone of the opposite sex. The chapter ends with a suggestion to gay couples to rather focus on the life of Christ instead of on the pain and rejection suffered at the hands of society (the DRC). This could help them to remember that transformation and new beginnings are possible. In the following chapter I share stories of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers, while focusing on the impact the 2007 Resolution had on them.

CHAPTER 5: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE RESOLUTION ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE GAY MINISTERS AND CANDIDATE MINISTERS

*Human vocabulary is still not capable, and probably never will be, of knowing, recognizing and communicating everything that can be humanly experienced and felt --
José Saramago*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In co-journeying with my participatory authors towards an ethical spirituality, I soon realised that “neither life, nor spirituality, nor ethics is neat and tidy” (Hudson and Kotzé 2002:288). According to these authors life, ethics and spirituality are much rather complex, messy and untidy. Instead of working with abstractions and generalisations and eternal truths, it much rather involves immersing us in our own life-details and stories of our faith, and then following Jesus in faith and hope and compassionate caring. As a narrative therapist I opted for a narrative approach in doing research. It was important for me that my approach should be able to provide an ethical spirituality where the story-telling and story participation would have the space to lead to what Van der Ven (2000:1) formulates as “the formation of moral communities.” Although my co-researchers and I interacted with Scripture, it did not mean the imposition of spiritual principles, moral guidelines or theological truths on them. Instead, Gerkin (1986:54, 55) suggested that the human story should be embedded within the biblically grounded story of God as transcendent, but also immanent in the ongoing human story (see chapter 2).

I positioned myself within the social-constructionist paradigm. This had implications for how I viewed truth and reality, and how I formulated my arguments (Freedman & Combs 1996: 21; Müller et al. 2001:1). Van Huyssteen (1999:133) refers to Schrag who considers rhetoric as an important dimension of rationality. Through rhetoric (persuasive discourse) we communicate with others in an attempt to convince them of good reasons why we hold certain beliefs and why we do certain things. Van Huyssteen, when arguing for a postfoundational rationality, does not use the terminology of social constructionism (Müller 2005:79). He does, however, consider a belief, action or choice as rational when we can convince others about its sensibility under certain circumstances or within a specific social context (Van Huyssteen 1999:133, 134). Therefore, when my co-researchers and I socially constructed interpretations and meanings from their stories,

we were within the parameters of a postfoundationalist approach to doing theology and research (Müller 2005:80).

The problem of this dissertation is rooted in the impact of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers and on those gay candidate ministers who subsequently could not be legitimated. The topic, therefore, is grounded in the lives of my co-researchers (Rubin & Rubin 1995:48). In order to determine what gay people thought, felt, experienced and had to offer in terms of learning from them, I opted for a qualitative interviewing approach to research (Rubin & Rubin 1995:1-5). Although these authors consider qualitative interviewing as building on conversational skills where relationships are at the core, they underscore its value as a research tool, and as a philosophy. It is an intentional way of gaining information guided by the researcher for later analysis, interpretation and sharing. The guidance by the researcher is gentle and without imposing one's world views on the interviewees.

5.2 INVITING MY CO-RESEARCHERS TO PARTICIPATION

According to Anthonissen and Oberholzer (2001:14), both members of the Western Cape Synod in 1999, their research indicated that 6% of the DRC ministers of the Western Cape were gay. This amounted to about 20 out of the 330 who filled out and returned the questionnaires. If this would be the norm for the rest of the DRC ministers in the RSA it would have been easy to find gay ministers as co-researchers for my research. Despite this rather large number of gay ministers in theory, in practice they prefer to be anonymous and to remain in the closet. It is, therefore, not so easy to find gay ministers willing to be involved in in-depth interviews, especially when the person is in a heterosexual marriage and has a family to protect. I originally planned on interviewing at least one married gay minister, but abandoned the idea. The risk for a married gay minister to be identified would have been too high. It would pose an ethical dilemma to me, something which I wanted to avoid at all costs. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995:93, 94) research ethics is gaining information from conversational partners in ways that cause no harm to them. This include avoiding deceptions, asking permission to either record or to take notes, being honest about the purpose of the research, and ensuring that the co-researchers are not emotionally, financially or physically hurt. (Although I covered Lulani's direct expenses to travel to Pretoria, the sacrifices that she and her partner made to take three days leave and to drive all the way to Pretoria could

never be quantified in terms of a monetary value. The rest of the co-researchers did not want any compensation). The co-researchers must also be given the opportunity to retract something which they did not want to be included in their stories. This meant that I had to respect their wishes and even had to exclude interesting material which my co-researchers did not want to be included. It so happened that one of my co-researchers asked me to exclude some very personal information which had been revealed to me. Realising my obligation to protect my co-researcher, I immediately deleted the specific information from all the copies on my computer.

In terms of the ethical process of dialoguing with gay people, the 1999 Synod of the Western Cape at the time took brave decisions (Anthonissen & Oberholzer 1999:8). This inspired Anthonissen and Oberholzer to publish their book *Gelowig en Gay* which intended to provide guidelines towards a meaningful dialogue between gay people and the DRC. Anthonissen and Oberholzer (1999:14) considered the test for any viewpoint by the church on homosexuality to be whether it brings their gay neighbours closer to the church or whether it drives them away. Bosch (1991: 483-484), albeit in a missionary context, argues that dialogue manifests itself in a meeting of hearts, rather than minds. He considers the first perspective to be acceptance of the co-existence of different faiths (in our context: different sexualities). According to Bosch dialogue is impossible if we resent either the presence itself, or the view held by the other person. I perceived gay people to be sensitive to whether one is sincere in one's efforts to engage in dialogue or whether one is in one's heart resentful towards them. Over a period of thirteen years I have managed to engage with the gay community in such a way that we have not only earned each other's trust and respect, but we have also invited each other into our hearts.

At the beginning of 2012 during my first meeting with my promoter he asked me: "Would you be able to find enough gay ministers whom you could interview? Do you think they will talk to you?" Being a wise man, his questions were probably based on his knowledge of how sensitive gay people are and of how distrustful they are of heterosexual, "church" people. One of my co-researchers expressed the notion that she was very weary of "church people", and felt much safer when someone identifying him/herself as an atheist. The chances of being rejected by the latter were much less. In order to follow an ethical approach in terms of my research, I called proponent Judy

Kotze (I met her at the task team, see 2) from *I am ministries*, as well as Rev Muller from the *Reforming (gay) Church* in Pretoria to inform them about my intentions to do the research. I also offered my assistance should anyone in their organisations prefer to do the research. Both gave me their blessings and promised any assistance I would need. Rev Muller also offered to participate as a co-researcher, while Judy also gave me Lulani Vermeulen's (see 1) phone number. She even offered to call Lulani first in order to prepare her for my call that would follow. The rest of my co-researchers were known to me.

SW was a gay minister (in the closet) who went on early retirement just before the 2007 Resolution when the fear of rejection got the better of him. I thought he would be a suitable co-researcher because, over many years, he had to hide his gay identity from colleagues and members of his congregation. Throughout his life he experienced the impact of the celibacy requirement for ministers in the DRC. Mark le Roux was at the time also denied to be legitimated, because of his relationship with a gay man. Rev André Muller, the founder of the *Reforming (gay) church* in Pretoria, also offered to participate. I considered him as a valuable co-researcher, because the impact of the DRC's Resolution on gay people took him on many different roads. I thought much was to be learnt from his journey. Although he was forced to resign in 1988, long before the 2007 Resolution, very little has changed between the treatment that he received from the DRC and the treatment which someone like Lulani received in 2011. Charl Ubbink was a client of mine and a student in theology at NWU¹¹. He was a student from the *Gereformeerde Kerk* at the time, and offered a different kind of experience which could be valuable in my understanding of the impact of the Resolution on a gay candidate minister who was staying at a university hostel. Bertus was also a client of mine: gay, legitimated, in the closet and celibate. I was curious as to how the Resolution impacted on him, especially since he was working as a gay minister, while being celibate and in the closet.

Before my first meeting with my promoter I had spoken to all the gay ministers and gay

¹¹ North West University

candidate ministers. When my promoter thus enquired about the availability of participants/co-researchers, I was able to confirm that I had already spoken to six gay ministers who not only promised their willingness and commitment to co-operate, but who were actually very excited about the whole study. I extremely appreciated the prospect of being entrusted with their stories.

5.3 CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

Rubin & Rubin (1995:28-30) identified two broad categories of qualitative interviews: cultural and topical interviews. I considered our interviews as topical interviews, due to their narrow focus on a particular event or process, and being concerned with what happened, when and why. We would, for example, explore the whole process of not being legitimated as ministers, or of being banned from the ministry in the DRC. We would look for explanations of events and for descriptions of experiences. This means that I, as the interviewer, played a more active role in keeping the conversation focused. In this context it was the impact the Resolution had on my co-researchers. As the topical researcher I was continuously interpreting what was said, gaining information by asking different questions to different participants according to each individual person's context, experience and personality. Qualitative research allowed me the flexibility of iterative and continuous designing of my research questioning (Rubin & Rubin 1995:42-48), always with the motive of gaining a better understanding of what the person experienced during the event. Through my narrative questioning, I upheld narrative principles like a respectful, non-judgemental and a not-knowing approach (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28). Together, we tried to construct meaning from each participant's experiences, thereby also deconstructing some taken for granted realities, while journeying towards alternative stories which stood outside of the power of the dominant discourse (White 1991: 23). The focus of the interviews remained the impact of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers.

5.3.1 Individual interviews

I conducted five of the six interviews in my study. The interview with SW was conducted at a hotel near his office. Although I initially communicated through e-mail with the co-researchers, explaining the aim of my research and the role that they as DRC ministers and candidate ministers could play, I eventually invited them telephonically to a personal interview. Rubin and Rubin (1995:93) emphasise the research ethics in terms of

acquisition and dissemination, demanding that no harm should be done to those who are being studied. I negotiated with all of the co-researchers whether I could record the interviews or whether I should rather make detailed notes while we talk. As a therapist I am used to taking notes of every session with a client. Therefore it was not difficult for me to take notes. The co-researchers felt more at ease with me writing their stories down than being intimidated by a voice recorder. Before each interview I handed a letter of consent to the interviewee to read and, if satisfied with the content, to sign. This is in line with what Rubin and Rubin (1995:94) consider as the professional code of ethics, where the purposes of the study, the background of the researcher, the possible benefits and the risks for those involved, the undertaking to share the results, and the degree of confidentiality are disclosed. It emphasises that participation must be voluntary. An example of the letter of consent is included as Appendix I. The completed interviews were translated to English, language edited, and sent back to the co-researchers to review. After they approved the content I copied the translated interviews to a CD-ROM, included as Appendix III.

5.3.2 Combined telling and retelling of stories

Logistically it was the most difficult to get Lulani to Pretoria. Therefore, as soon as my appointment with her was set for the Thursday, 28 June 2012 and Friday, 29 June 2012, I arranged with the other five for a combined interview on the Friday morning. Lulani would again leave for Philippolis (6 and a half hours drive from Pretoria) early the Saturday morning. Although Charl lives in Vanderbilpark (about 3 hours' drive from Pretoria) his parents live in Pretoria and his partner and he decided to visit his parents for the rest of the weekend. At the time Bertus was living and working as a minister in a town about an hour's drive from Pretoria. He also arranged to be here for the combined session. André Muller lives in Pretoria and because the arrangement was made well in advance, he also managed to attend. Unfortunately SW was working and it was impossible for him to take time off and attend the session. Everybody felt sad that they could not meet him and that he could not share some of his experiences, especially some of his wisdom acquired over the years, with them. Mark also lives in Pretoria and took the day off from his part time job to participate with the rest of the group.

5.3.3 Brainstorming session by co-researchers

After I had conducted the individual interviews with my co-researchers I invited all of them to a combined session. I viewed the purpose of this combined session as to act as a definitional ceremony (a term employed by Myerhoff) where the different members (co-researchers) would have the opportunity to tell and retell, and to perform and re-perform, the stories of their lives (White 2007:165, 180, 181). It provides a context for rich story development. At the end of our combined session, I wrote the title of our research project on the flip chart. We then had a brainstorming session where every co-researcher could write down any ideas with regard to the impact of the Resolution on him/her personally. Together we then decided on the themes which should be explored in the research study. This is in accordance with Rubin and Rubin where co-researchers are truly treated as conversational partners (1995:11). The following ideas were written down: Depression; unworthiness; disillusionment; the church plays “outside of the rules”; the church has very little if any empathy with gay ministers; the church leaders were hard; merciless; like in a court; the church leaders showed secular behaviour; they handled the situation in a clinical way; we received no pastoral care; it was as if they did not have any appetite for the issue; they just wanted to get it out of the way; they were not open to dialogue; at the beginning of our theological studies the church just put off the inevitable decision; no church leader or moderator wants to be remembered as the one who allowed gay ministers unconditionally to the ministership; nobody wants to overthrow the apple cart; we were rejected all over again; we were not good enough for the church; we experienced immense suffering; there are alternative stories born from all the suffering. These ideas are depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Brainstorming by Co-Authors

From the above I identified a number of themes/discourses which seemed to be dominant in their brainstorming session. I also read through their respective stories and identified more themes. This chapter was sent for their review to the co-researchers, to comment on the themes, and on the impact which my retelling of their stories had on them. Some of the themes were common in some of the stories, and some were unique to a particular person. Regardless of whether emerging themes were common or individual, they were treated of equal importance. In looking for common themes I used real examples which kept the lived experiences of the participants unique (see Rubin & Rubin 1995:39), thereby showing respect to each person's own experiences.

When we reflected on the value of the combined session, all five of the co-researchers commented on the value of breaking the isolation. The session made them feel part of a group. They experienced that there were others experiencing the same prejudice and

injustices like they did. Bertus reported that the combined session “did hope” with him (Weingarten 2000:399). He got the impression that resistance against homophobia was strengthening within the DRC. Although he was still committed to being celibate, he hoped for change in the near future. This hope was born from the knowledge that there were many other voices in the DRC (apart from “Marietjie’s” voice) who stood on the side of gay ministers. André expressed intense sympathy with the younger ministers and candidate ministers, because by merely listening to their stories he could recall his own experience in the DRC (reliving and retelling his story) and could thus identify with their pain and their perceptions of being not good enough for the DRC.

5.4 DOMINANT THEMES/DISCOURSES AMPLIFYING THE IMPACT OF THE RESOLUTION

In selecting the themes/discourses which I thought represented the stories of my co-researchers best, I was always aware that I was treading on holy ground. Although I was busy with a research project, I was co-researching with real people whose lives were irreversibly changed by the impact of the Resolution of the DRC. Not all of the dominant themes/discourses were shared by all of the co-researchers’ dominant stories. However, even if a theme was only part of one person’s story I considered it as respectful to that one person to convey it in this research.

5.4.1 Obedient to my calling

Many gay ministers and candidate gay ministers revealed to me that they received the calling to become a minister from God himself. It was almost as if they had no choice but to obey His voice. This view is supported by the DRC in article 12.2 of *Die Kerkorde* ([NGK] 2013:5) where it states a minister is called by God through his church. Given this, it raises the question of whether, and how, the DRC dealt with this sacred conviction of the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers.

Lulani’s calling became a reality to her after she returned to South Africa from her “gap” year in the UK. It so happened that the family where she had once worked in the UK was on a tour through South Africa. She planned to go to Cape Town to meet with them. Dr Carin van Schalkwyk, another minister at Philippolis, inquired if she could accompany her to Cape Town, as her parents were also living there. At first, Lulani preferred travelling alone to enjoy some time on her own, but her parents convinced her to take

Carin along. Many things changed after that trip. To Lulani, this trip seemed to be one of the best things that happened to her. Carin was non-judgemental. She did not have textbook answers to all her questions on homosexuality. She would often admit that she did not know, and that the theologians differ in their hermeneutical interpretations of the biblical texts on homosexuality. At that time, Lulani's relationship with God was broken. Carin encouraged her just to start reading her Bible again and she did so. This was the beginning of a good 2004 for Lulani. She entered into a new relationship with God, experiencing his presence again together with an open kind of communication. This experience resulted in a sense of being called by God to the ministry. Carin subsequently involved her in many church activities at Philippolis. Her local minister enquired about her sexuality. He also questioned her dad, whether he thought this "new thing" about her calling might be just a passing phase. Lulani felt hurt by his approach to her calling. She contemplated on how the church could have so much power to determine whom God had called or not. At least Carin seemed comfortable with the idea, even if only for Lulani's sake. Carin arranged with Professor Elna Mouton at the University of Stellenbosch for Lulani to study Theology there, starting January 2004.

In Mark's situation, his awareness of his calling already started to develop early in high school during Bible study classes. He increasingly started thinking about becoming a minister. Dr Daan van Wyk led the church specific discussions. Normally it would include church history, church dogma and church ethics. Mark's early recollections are that he loved it to engage with people. Already when he only was a grade 11 learner a girl and a boy with relationship problems came to talk to him. They came from a different town to Mark's and were also in a different denomination. However, Mark instilled so much trust and compassion that they felt emotionally safe to talk to him about their considerations on taking their relationship to a next level of sexual intercourse. Mark advised them to wait. At that tender age Mark already showed wisdom beyond his years. He is of the opinion that compassion towards people is his strong point. When Mark was in matric he was already certain about his calling to become a minister. However, in his first year at the faculty of Arts when he had to choose subjects, the realisation struck him again: "I'm gay. There was no way that I could study Theology." He therefore decided to study as a Bachelor of Arts (BA) with French, Psychology, Philosophy and Media studies as subjects. Although he enjoyed his studies, he soon realised that he was missing his

calling. At the beginning of the second term of his first year he started with theological subjects, completing his first year simultaneously with his BA subjects.

According to Mark the Resolution deprived him of his passion to make a difference on a person-to-person basis. He would have preferred to negotiate change in a person's everyday life and in ways how he/she thinks. Although he was able to deliver a sermon, he considered his strong point to be his pastoral heart. "Other students who did not necessarily have this talent, were allowed to be legitimated, but I was not. This is not fair".

André Muller heard God's calling to become a minister when he was even younger than Mark. He was only in standard four at boarding school. One night he had a supernatural experience, an apparition like an angel. He heard God's calling through the angel. Shortly after that night his mother and he were in a car accident. She was killed, but he miraculously survived with only a few scratches. During Standard Six he negotiated a contract with God: "If He would cure me of my homosexuality, I would give my life to him and become a minister. I would one day bear witness of my godly healing to all who would listen."

Bertus also has a vivid memory of how he was called to become a minister. During our conversation we spoke about his perceived identity of "not being good enough" as constructed by the DRC. To my question of how, in spite of this, he had managed to remain convinced that he should be a minister. He answered:

"I'm a sucker. I believe that God wants me in the DRC. I am wary to use the word "calling". In Standard 8 and 9 I was busy experimenting with 'über'-masculine things and people in order to deny the Shame of being gay. Fortunately, after the first time I prayed to God to let His will be done in my life, which was on the 4th of Dec 2003 at 15:50, things started to turn around. While I was struggling to figure out God's will for my life, I still experienced emptiness inside of me. A few months later things drastically changed. One night I had a very strange dream. When I did the maths the following day, I was amazed. I had the dream 7 days after Pentecost and 7 days before the 7 month anniversary when I surrendered to God's will completely. I call this my "777" dream. After that dream I never experienced that emptiness again. I knew that it was God that took the emptiness away. From that day onwards I knew I wanted to study

theology and nothing else. While other friends took a gap year, I decided to go to university right away, because I was certain about what God wanted me to do.”

Although Bertus made it clear to me that he had experienced a strong calling to become a minister, according to him the Resolution came as a “*train smash*”. His calling had ignited a momentum in him that was derailed again by the celibacy prerequisite. To expect of him to live a life without someone to love and to share his life, was to bluntly say that he was not good enough. He could not bring his messages from God and those from the church in line with the meaning of his life. He was certain about his calling. He still believed He would give him the momentum to fulfil his task. His calling was unconditional. His image of God was someone who was excited about him. God gave him direction in life. He (God) is happy about Bertus. Then the DRC said: STOP! Maybe, if they had applied the same conditions right through, to both straight and gay ministers, it would have made the situation more equal and easier to accept. Then celibacy would be a different issue to address. But, by treating gay ministers in such an exceptional way, the DRC contributed to their disempowering experience of inferiority and worthlessness.

Charl Ubbink, my co-researcher from Vanderbijlpark, told me that ever since he could remember, he has been dreaming up his own future, how his life would unfold growing older, what he would be and how he would change lives. Therefore it was not unusual that his awareness of being called to serve the Lord has also developed through his dreams.

“I suppose any ‘normal’ thirteen-year-old boy dreams about changing the world, about police cars and fire fighters, the Springbok jersey and his game farm. From an early age I have dreamt about every little detail of how I would like to live my life. I am not ‘normal’ – I am special. At the age of thirteen I dreamt about working for the Lord ... a dream that was not only about me but one I shared with the almighty God.

That was the first time that I experienced a calling to join the office of the church, at the age of thirteen, an innocent little boy in Grade 7. I was sitting in the Life Orientation class when the teacher asked us what we would like to become when we grow up. I listened to all the stories around me about heroes, farms, sport teams, fashion houses and Hollywood’s red carpet. Eventually, it was my turn, “Teacher, when I’m grown up I want to become a preacher.” For almost ten seconds there was a complete silence in

the classroom. Then the teacher started to smile, and my peers responded, one after the other, 'That's cool...'

However 'cool' that was, the dream was short-lived. Soon after, I started noticing something devastating. My dream of one day having a wife and children slowly diminished into a growing awareness. Unlike the other boys around me that were coping with puberty and started noticing the girls, I was harbouring an interest in people of my own sex.

This realisation, that I regarded boys as potentially being more than just friends, was on many levels a rude awakening! I was confused; I tried to make sense of it all, but could not compare what I was going through with anything else before in my life. I could not imagine what had happened to me. My confusion turned to astonishment one evening, after my mother and sister came home from the movie theatre. They had seen 'Brokeback Mountain', and while they were recapturing the story about 'gay men', disconcertedly expressing their disgust in the sinfulness of being gay, the truth started to dawn: 'Does this perhaps mean I'm gay?'

I looked up the word 'gay' to see what it really meant. It only confirmed my diagnosis ... I am both emotionally and sexually different in the way I react to my peers. So, naturally, I am gay. I could not understand my mother's being upset with the 'sinfulness' of being gay. Eventually, I googled the words, 'Homosexuality and the Bible', and my dream of becoming a minister went up in thin air."

5.4.2 The DRC acted as my panopticon

Some of the stories of my co-researchers reminded me of Foucault's ideas (Dreyfuss and Rabinow 1982:188, 189) of panopticism. The latter enables disciplinary power to function by relying on surveillance where the subject disciplines him/herself. Bentham, an architect, designed a ring shaped prison which enabled the guards to continuously observe the prisoners. Few supervisory powers were necessary, because the supervisor was behind one direction glass and therefore invisible. The inmates accepted that they were permanently observed and were thus subjected to normalising judgment. Consequently they disciplined themselves, because they have internalised "the gaze". Foucault sees a parallel between the functioning of the panopticon and how discourses function. The power in discourses is exerted in an invisible way, which tricks individuals to embrace their own submission through the influence of certain norms or truths about life and identity. Power is considered a system of normalising judgement (White 2007:268). In this context the DRC and her dogmatic approach to homosexual

relationships of ministers could be seen as acting as the internalised “gaze” or the watchdog controlling and normalizing the gay ministers’ behaviour, as it became evident through their stories. It had a huge impact on them to behave “straight” in order to comply with the norms constructed by people with power in the church. According to White (2004:193) if people can manage to separate their lives from the “truth obligation” associated with normalising judgement, it can provide a foundation for the development of a different moral agency. This moral agency would not be linked to the sort of moral judgement which is compelled by specific social, religious and legal institutions with authoritarian and disciplinary structures.

SW reported how he had to remain celibate throughout his years as a minister in the DRC. He feared to be “caught out” as being gay. Before the 2007 Resolution, gay people were forbidden to be ministers in the DRC. For many years this had a negative effect on him in terms of his identity as a human being. He had to be aware of his every word, the way he walked, talked, etc. as acts of disciplining himself in order to cover up his gayness. Lulani also described efforts to avoid the possibility of her parents finding out that she was gay by withdrawing from society. She tried to be as “normal” as possible. Both André Muller and Charl Ubbink described how they tried to hide their homosexuality. André even believed that God had “healed” him and that he became straight. Bertus, as a gay minister in the closet, still has to be careful not to reveal his gay identity lest he might be discriminated against. According to him, any single minister of age 27 makes the congregation uncomfortable. There was pressure from the members of the congregation put on him to get married. This is sad, because, although the Resolution of the DRC allows gay, but celibate ministers on the pulpit, in practice the fear of prejudice and discrimination is still prevalent (see 3.3.1).

5.4.3 I’m in love (and a gay minister/candidate minister)

In almost all the co-researchers’ stories their problems with the church (be it the DRC, the *Hervormde Kerk* or the *Gereformeerde Kerk*) started when they revealed their feelings towards a person of the same sex. Already after school during Lulani’s first year at the University of the Free State she started to struggle with religion and her own homosexuality. It was the first time that she started going out with a woman. She asked her DRC minister his viewpoint on homosexuals and he replied: “*They are going straight to hell*”. She was confused. “*How could something so wrong feel so right?*” The only

logic to her was that the church was not meant for her, and consequently would live like someone on her road to hell. She dropped out of university and went to The UK. While in England, she e-mailed her local minister back in Philippolis, to inquire about his understanding of the so called gay texts in the Bible. He replied, to be gay is a sin, which did not mean that she was a bad person, provided that she started going out with male friends. Years later she studied theology at the University of Stellenbosch, where she was again expected to renounce her relationship with a woman and to remain celibate. This time it was not to avoid going to hell, but to be legitimated as a minister in the DRC.

Mark was in love with Estian. During 2009 he addressed the *Algemene Kerkvergadering van die Hervormende Kerk (AKV)*, telling the meeting that he was just an “ordinary guy who wanted to be in an ordinary relationship where he could also love somebody.” The *Hervormde Kerk* has a similar Resolution as the DRC on gay ministers. They also expect their gay ministers to remain celibate. According to Mark their guidelines with regards to celibacy are based on the following three foundations:

- A person should not cherish a relationship
- He/she should not live with a partner
- He/she should not have sex

At the time when Mark addressed the *Algemene Kerkvergadering* his partner Estian and he had been together for three years. He has fond memories of how they met at a friend’s birthday party. They connected on the social network, Facebook, and met each other again two months later at another friend’s house. They fell in love and started a relationship. At the time when Mark had to be legitimated he could not be disloyal to his partner. Therefore he revealed his love relationship to the church who, instantly, denied him to be legitimated.

André remembers his first boyfriend, MC, from high school years. He was the love of his life. During the years when André studied theology he prayed to God to “heal” him from his homosexuality, and he believed this was exactly what happened to him. MC knew him well and did not believe in his healing. “I always preached to MC to turn his back on his homosexuality. He later studied Law and I studied Theology. My sexual orientation and the struggle to remain celibate stayed with me. After I had completed my studies, I became a DRC chaplain in the army. Then I received a calling from the DRC Witbank congregation. My recollection of those years was positive; I was popular and I enjoyed

my work in the ministry. I later got married to a woman who after two months in the marriage confronted me about my homosexuality. She made it known to the DRC, and I was asked to resign.”

Charl’s problems with the faculty of theology at the NWU started when it became known that he was gay and in a relationship with a man. He met Jean Van Wyk from Vanderbijlpark in December 2010. The two are planning to get married in January 2015. They could talk about anything and grew together in sharing their beliefs. He regarded their togetherness as the biggest religious quest since his acceptance of being gay and since his second calling (see 5.4.16). They prayed together, sang and philosophised together, while getting to know more about God.

As far as relationships were concerned Bertus chose to remain celibate and was therefore legitimated. Although he has never been in love with a man he knows that he is gay. At this point he is committed to his calling to serve the Lord and suppresses any thought of intimacy. To him, there is a serious inconsistency in the practical execution of the Resolution. According to the Resolution individual congregations have the power to decide on if, and how to accommodate gay people in their congregations. This implied that gay-friendly congregations may decide to accept gay families, yet their gay minister still has to suffer from a life-long sentence without a partner or a family. Why can’t the congregation not also be given the right to exercise the same power with regard to their own gay minister? It was becoming common practice in the DRC to baptise the children of gay families; yet, the gay minister performing the baptising ceremony was not allowed to have a family himself. Bertus could see himself coping with this celibacy arrangement during his twenties, because he managed to engage with it in a purely intellectual manner. In his thirties, however, this vision turned into one of himself sitting sadly alone at a dinner table, while his friends are married and surrounded by their children. During this phase of his life his own isolation and loneliness could increase dramatically. Psychologically he could still control his yearning for a life partner and he could focus his thoughts, but he assumed that, eventually, the loneliness will catch up with him. In his third year he prayed seriously for someone special to love and to share his intimate life journey, “...but please, dear God, not now, not right away. Will you please answer my prayers much later?” He also declared, “God and I are fine with each other. I can distinguish between God and the DRC.”

During our conversation I asked SW whether he has ever been in love. It was as if a painful memory physically had struck him. He shared how one of his colleagues tried to comfort him after the Synod Resolution of 2007. The colleague's words of "let us celebrate your celibacy" cut deep into his psyche.

"Did he know what he expected of me to celebrate? Did he know about my loneliness? Did he have insight on the impact the ban on any possibility to be loved by anyone, or to love anyone had on me? Could he ever grasp my physical frustrations never to have sex? Could he fathom my rejection as a human being? No, how could he realise that? I forgive him. He did not know. There are still strong emotions when he said: How come that I was not allowed doing what everybody else was doing? Why was I tagged as an embarrassment to the church because of who I am and not because of something I have done or have chosen? Some members of my congregation were so happy when I left, because they thought the problem was removed from the church. As long as the DRC denies the problem or refuses to respect and to accept gay people, so long will the problem remain in the church."

5.4.4 The Balancing of two constitutional rights

During the second part of November 2011 Lulani and her life partner of four years consulted with Professor Karin Calitz from the University of Stellenbosch who specialises in Labour Law. At the time Lulani was a final year student at the Faculty of Theology (US), which required her to sign a document committing her to celibacy. Her honesty did not allow her to sign the document, because she was in a relationship. This left the Faculty of Theology with no choice but to deny her to be legitimated, purely based on the Resolution of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) on gay ministers (Algemene Sinode [NGK]2007b:8). This was also confirmed by Dr Coenie Burger, the chairperson of the Curatorium, in an interview with *Kerkbode* (2012:13), the fortnightly news magazine of the DRC, when he referred to the Resolution.

Lulani enquired from professor Calitz whether she could call upon the South African Bill of Rights which entrenches the individual rights of gay people (see 1.1). According to Lulani in a later interview with Malan (2012:6), a reporter from *Rapport* the information published in *Rapport* was twisted in such a way thereby creating the impression that Lulani threatened the DRC with legal steps should she not be allowed on the pulpit. This was never Lulani's idea. She just wanted to ascertain what her rights and her options

were in this regard. According to Professor Calitz (e-mail correspondence: 2014) the South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the RSA 1996:7, 8) entrenches both the right to equality, including that no one should unfairly discriminate against someone on the ground of sexual orientation, (section 9 of the Constitution) and the right to freedom of religion (section 15 of the Constitution). When churches, which as entities are also entitled to freedom of religion, discriminate against persons on the ground of their sexual orientation by barring them from becoming spiritual leaders, the question is which of these two rights will take precedence. Woolman and Bishop (*Constitutional Law of South Africa* 2008:41-47) states as follows: “Few exercises are more central to religious freedom than the right to choose its own spiritual leaders. If the court were to hold that a church could not deem sexual orientation ... as a disqualifying factor for priesthood, the effect for many churches could be devastating. Consequently, although the value of equality is foundational to the new constitutional dispensation it is unlikely that equality considerations could outweigh the enormous impact of failing to give churches exemption in relation to their spiritual leaders.” In *Strydom v Nederduits Gereformeerde Gemeente Moreleta Park* (Equality Court Case TPD 26926/05) the court held that the church unfairly discriminated against Strydom, who acted as a music teacher at the church, on the ground of his sexual orientation. The judgment seems to indicate that the outcome could have been different if Strydom had been a religious leader. The discrimination would possibly then not have been regarded as unfair. It was this interpretation of the constitution, backed up by the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers that left Lulani at the time in a stalemate situation with a lived experience of powerlessness and despondency.

5.4.5 Coming out, going out

Mark first came out to his parents, with the words of his dad prior to his coming out still clear in his memory: “*If anyone of you would bring home a black woman or a man I will chase you away*”. Thus, he experienced strong rejection from his stepmother and his dad, who actually sided with the Curatorium, affirming the church’s viewpoint on gay relationships. Later during 2009 he addressed the *Algemene Kerkvergadering (AKV)* on him being gay. Mark remembers the effect of his speech at the 2009 AKV on some of his friends, especially many of his Facebook friends. Initially they started to ignore him,

with no explanation given. Plus-minus 40 people immediately removed him as their Facebook friend. That was on top of his rejection by the church itself.

André Muller's story of rejection took place 26 years ago, but the memories still cause him to experience pain.

"MC was my best man at the wedding. He warned me that I was getting married for the wrong reasons. We remained best friends. But soon our friendship became a threat to my marriage. My wife became jealous of the friendship which she thought was "too close". She gave me an ultimatum – either I break completely with MC, or she would leave. It was impossible for me to make that choice. Consequently, two months into the marriage my wife packed her bags, and left. She spoke to my senior colleague and told him that I was gay. He came to see me the following day and gave me two options: either I face a series of meetings with the Circuit (a church body consisting of all the DRC ministers of the region) or I resign. At the age of 30, I was out of the DRC, without any farewell. Like a criminal. A lot of gossip went around."

Lulani's coming out to the Curatorium was also the beginning of her "going out" process. At the end of her fourth year she sent a letter to the Curatorium, formally informing them about her sexual orientation. According to her they summoned her and confronted her with a document committing her to live a celibate life. She refused and explained that this would be un-Christ-like, inhumane-like and unconstitutional. In their reply they acknowledged that, whilst it might seem that way to her, they were definitely not acting unconstitutionally. They asked her again whether she was in a relationship and she gave them an honest answer: "yes". This answer meant the end of her student status and the immediate repayment of the bursary she was awarded earlier by the DRC as a theology student. She experienced the decision as very unfair, because they never enquired from any of her straight, unmarried colleagues about their sexual relationship statuses. She concluded that, to them, this would probably be fine, because theirs were of a heterosexual nature. One member of the Curatorium even accused her openly in a newspaper of wanting extra-marital sex and "of course she knew that was wrong". She felt that one could not possibly say these things in a national Sunday newspaper and then invite her for coffee on a Wednesday. "No, thank you. This is false. Don't make little chit-chats with me." She perceived the actions of some members of the Curatorium as mischievous and malicious. If they had refrained from using ridiculous arguments (i.e.

the same arguments about extra marital sex should apply for both gays and straights) in their dealings with her, a fruitful dialogue might have transpired.

5.4.6 In a spiral of chaos/disillusionment

It seems that the period immediately after the expulsion by the church landed the gay ministers and candidate gay ministers in a state of chaos and disillusionment with the church. Lulani explained her bitterness towards the church. It was not anger, but bitterness. In order for her to gain perspective, Ecclesia de Lange (minister from the Presbyterian Church who was banned from the ministry because she married a woman) advised her to separate God from the church; it was not God who was rejecting her and finding her not good enough.

Lulani's rejection by the DRC led her to do her practical year at the Presbyterian Church at Somerset West. Even though she had to do it in English, it was a good experience and a positive step to help her adjusting her feelings towards the church in general.

"In terms of my feelings towards the DRC: I feel as if I would be dishonest with myself if I should stand on their pulpit while things had been dealt with in such an ugly way. Is it bitterness? There's a breach of trust, a distance. When I hear the names of the members of the curatorium, I experience resentment. The problem with the Curatorium is that they don't know the students well. For example, there was this guy in our class who was legitimated... a straight guy. Everybody in the class was aware that he was living a life that would eventually come to harm, both for the church and his congregation. It was okay for him to be legitimated, but I was denied that right. One member of the curatorium said they had to protect themselves from me; I had to sign a document confessing that I was in a gay relationship and thus acting against the Synod's Resolution. Consequently, I would not – like Laurie Gaum – be able to take the DRC to court."

Lulani expected the church to play according to the basic rules of Christianity such as honesty and integrity.

"They can't expect me to be honest about my sexual relationship, but on the other hand encourage me to lie. A prominent member of the Curatorium said to me that my honesty made him uncomfortable. I wished they had handled me with a sense of pastoral guidance. My probation sermon in the Presbyterian Church focused on church discipline. Church discipline requires of us to sit next to each other and to handle

conflict and transgressions with empathy and brotherly love. My case was treated as if we were opponents in a court of law. At the time I was naïve and was caught off-guard.”

In her opinion this went against everything the church were promoting: honesty, love, care, empathy, and more. Never during this whole period was there an opportunity or an invitation to sit down and really listen to each other. She experienced that they were trying to bully her: for example, in one meeting with members of the Curatorium she found herself alone on one side having to face three men. They presented her with a letter and asked her to immediately react to the letter. She viewed this as unethical behaviour from the Curatorium. How could she read and react so quickly under such pressure?

From the onset, she was open about her homosexuality. During her first year at Stellenbosch she spoke to a member of the Curatorium about it. He asked her whether she was in a relationship. At that stage she was not. He then asked her whether she had been in a relationship before, which she confirmed. His answer was: “And it did not work out?”

“In my first year they asked me to sign a form, committing me to celibacy at the end of my fourth year. I told them that I was not going to sign such a form. They knew this from my first year. Why then did they keep on granting the bursary to me? ...I don't want to sling mud in the media, but the church doesn't stick to the rules.”

Mark was also disillusioned by a new side of the church which he discovered in the gay debate. He wondered why the progress in the gay debate is usually driven by politicians and the judiciary, while it is the church that knows, and preaches the Gospel of love and mercy.

André Muller remembers chaotic times after he was banned from the DRC, trying to establish a church for gay people:

“Publicity was not a good idea for gays at the time. Those were criminal times for us back then. I found myself being arrested by the security police one night in the gay club where our newly established gay church held its services, merely because I was saying goodbye to a friend with a hug. I spent that night in detention.”

Those memories are still painful.

5.4.7 Rejection and Shame danced on my dreams

Rejection intensified feelings of unworthiness and shame. Mark revealed his inner feelings when he said:

“The direct effect on me is that I try to compensate by pretending that I am fine, like in the newspaper article with Neels Jackson. People often think and talk to me in a very sympathetic way.” “Poor Mark...” I don’t want to receive others’ sympathy. Sympathy disempowers me more. It does not address the gay issue. In fact, it reinforces the feeling of shame of being gay and my life story of being the underdog. I would much rather attend to the real issue: working towards removing oppression in the church.”

Mixed emotions of anger and sadness emerged when Bertus shared his recollections of his student years. The years that should have been the most carefree and happy years of a young person’s life were, to him, the complete opposite, in fact; they were “*sheer hell*”. According to him, he would for the rest of his life be trying to outlive those terrible memories. Of course, there were also good times during his student years: he made some friends (male and female). He also constantly tried to regain the “high” of the life he had experienced before the 2007 Synod decision. If the DRC had not come to such a “ridiculous Resolution” he would have turned out differently. He would not have ended up in Denmark¹². According to him, the DRC deprived him of at least four of what should have been six unforgettable years. The DRC made him feel like a less worthy member, a less worthy minister and a less worthy human being: a second-hand everything.

“This NOT GOOD ENOUGH story about me was amplified through the church, as if someone was shouting at me: “Are you mad? We know better. Who are you actually? What if you were actually wrong? What if you were really going to hell?” Tough accusations would follow: ‘What if you were beseeched by the devil? What if what you are, or do, or plan on doing were sinful and were revolting in the eyes of God?’ For a long time I had been tricked into believing that this was the TRUTH about me. At the

¹² A psychiatric clinic in Pretoria

beginning of my second year I told Professor Yolanda that I was gay. She replied: "You will have to get to a point where you can say to yourself that God has made you so." Her words shocked me, because how could she speak such blasphemy? How could God have made me... so defective?"

Part of Lulani's disillusionment with the church was due to the absence of pastoral care from their side. She received no empathy from the church. They were hard, merciless, and clinical, like in a court. This secular behaviour caused her immense suffering. The Church was not open to dialogue. It was as if the Church leaders were guarding their legacy: no leader wants to be known as the one under whose leadership gay ministers were accepted unconditionally. They wanted to maintain the status quo. They were impatient with the problem. The meaning which she constructed from all that has happened to her was that she was not good enough for the DRC. This was the ultimate rejection.

Lulani's memories of her fourth year were more positive. Up till then she never really experienced the pain of her being offended. It was only in her fifth year that the issues between the church and her gayness overwhelmed her and invited Sadness as a constant companion into her life. The offense of her humanity being disregarded, her sexuality expected to be pushed aside as useless, stood in the way of her legitimation. How could she separate her sexuality from herself? Isn't sexuality interwoven with all the other aspects of human-ness? While she struggled with her relationship with God and the integration of her sexuality with her being a Christian, she came to realise that, in the church, she didn't need to split these two. She could embrace both God and her partner simultaneously, never to be separated again.

Lulani has a very high regard for respect. In her relationship with Margaret she considers respect and honesty as two important pillars of the relationship. Her perception was that the DRC had treated her with disrespect. Their expectation of her to remain celibate invalidated her dignity as a human being. The lecturers respected her situation, but the Curatorium did not take her seriously. How could she respect them? They considered her as a problem that had to be removed. She was a case; at no stage did they look at her as a person. They said, "Maybe there would be another church or denomination that would accept you". Their view of her being the problem instead of the Resolution being the problem was flawed.

Rejection and shame also danced on Charl's dreams while living at the university hostel. Fortunately it could not kill his dreams of becoming a minister. Today, he is living in Vanderbijlpark. He is continuing his theology degree by means of telematics at the University of North West. The hostel on the campus in Potchefstroom became unfriendly, even unsafe. People changed. Students that he knew since first year started ignoring him, even his friends. During a week-end away some of the students at the hostel opened the door to his room with a master-key. They poured milk over his desk and left the fridge door open. When he returned, everything was rotten inside. The nameplate on his door was damaged. One guy remarked in passing, "I hear you are gay, are you?" "I didn't say anything, but by that time the story about me being gay had spread right through the hostel. Neither the Theological School nor the church could manage to give me the most basic and necessary love and support. I got more support from the DRC."

5.4.8 Keeping the wolf from the door

One aspect which is often forgotten is that, immediately after the gay ministers or gay candidate ministers come out, their careers as ministers were terminated. This had huge financial implications. André Muller found himself in a financial dilemma after coming out:

"I relied on my pension money which had accumulated quite nicely at the time – approximately R14 000. The DRC Synod Office called me telephonically to inform me that the bursary I had been awarded by the church for my studies was also R14 000. They would deduct this from my pension. I was out on the streets with no job, no house and no money. During 2007, and again during 2013 when the General Synods of the DRC banned gay marriages for their ministers it was as if I was reliving all the pain and anxiety of the past on behalf of those youngsters who had to experience what I had experienced years ago. Even today I am still struggling financially and emotionally because I was as a gay minister, not good enough for the DRC".

After Mark le Roux's dreams of becoming a minister were shattered, he realised he had to get a job. He managed to find a part time job at a hospital in Pretoria, and a part time job at the music library of a University. Apart from these jobs he said: "Financially I can wait a little longer due to my maternal grandparents who have left me a small inheritance."

Just like in André's situation, Lulani's ending of her being a student of the DRC implied the immediate repayment of the bursary she was awarded earlier by the church. This left her in dire straits. Since 2012, Lulani had been helping out as minister at Pollapark, a small non-denominational congregation at Philippolis. Philippolis consisted of a diverse community. Although she received no remuneration, she considered herself fortunate to be in a position to fight for the unconditional acceptance of gays while working within the church. She is currently employed by the Good Work Foundation (GWF) in Philippolis, who is in partnership with VVA (Vrystaat Versorging in Aksie) and the VGK (Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk). Her partner, Margaret, was holding a secretarial position, while Lulani was appointed as a convenor of the overseas students who were taking a gap year by working at the GWF. She now earned a modest salary considering that they were staying in one of her father's farm houses about 20 kilometres from Philippolis. Her dream for the distant future is to take over the farm from her parents one day.

After his early retirement SW suffered financially, but he preferred that to going back to "jail" again. The financial burden is heavy. After he went on early pension the hard reality hit him. He is responsible for his 85 year old mother and sister who were declared medically unfit to work. There were times that they hardly had money to buy food. This escalated the inward anger towards the church once again. He could have had a good 10 years or more to fulfil his "Godly calling" and his "well known talent of preaching and presenting the word" in a very acceptable and well responding way. He forfeited the opportunity of growing his pension fund for a period of 10 years or more which would have made a considerable difference in his monthly pension. But he couldn't submit to the "expectations and rules" of the church anymore. He was stuck and he had to jump into the unknown...

5.4.9 Depression my safe hiding place

The third year was a bad year for Lulani. She often skipped classes, although she managed to submit her assignments on time and passed her examinations. Her negative feelings deepened against the church and Depression tried to get a stronghold on her. Her relationship failed and she missed her rugby team (Western Province). She stopped reading the Bible, stopped praying and stopped attending church services. Towards the end of the year she met Margaret, and the depression became less severe.

Mark recalls his grade 10 home economics teacher, Lydia, who made space for his differentness. Even in those days he experienced it as wonderful, but also sad, because in gay people's lives it is rare that people close to them, like family members, create such a safe space where they can relax and just be themselves. Quite often, the fear of being "*discovered*" as gay and the consequential efforts to hide their gayness take so much energy that it invites Depression into their lives. Withdrawing from the world becomes a safe hiding place. It also provides an acceptable name for the Problem: "*Depression*" instead of "*Gay*".

Bertus also reported on the relief of having a name for the Problem: Depression. Towards the end of 2006 Bertus accepted himself as gay. The following year, directly after his 'coming out process', the 2007 DRC Synod took the decision on gay ministers with its requirement of celibacy. In spite of his youthful optimism, the decision threw him off balance. He had never expected such an outcome. After the 2004 Synod when gays were unconditionally accepted (only on the grounds of their baptism and faith) as full members of the DRC, he expected the same unconditional acceptance to be carried over to the office of ministers. The Depression gradually increased its stronghold and eventually landed Bertus in Denmar. Eventually, his psychiatrist suggested shock therapy. This was a traumatic but life-changing experience for Bertus. He gradually managed to regain his grip on life and completed his studies within the normal time frame.

I recall SW when I met him for the first time as someone on anti-depressants, anxious and with a light shiver in his hands due to the years of medication which he used to keep him functioning. For many years during his time of service as a gay DRC minister in the closet he used Depression as his safe hiding place. Since his resignation he has stopped all medication. He didn't need it anymore. The anxiety and the depression were gone. The fear of being "*discovered*" as gay was gone. The constant awareness of rejection has disappeared. He appeared calm, relaxed, at peace with himself. According to him he was free now.

5.4.10 Atheism my new faith

After André Muller was asked to resign from the DRC his disillusionment with the church for the way in which they handled the whole situation landed him in a phase of atheism.

"I gathered my whole collection of Bibles and dumped them in a huge dustbin. I was finished with the church and with God." According to Karen Armstrong (2009:7), historically, atheism has seldom been a blanket denial of the sacred *per sé* but has nearly always rejected a particular conception of the divine. When I asked him why particularly he was so disillusioned, he said he was so certain that God has "*healed*" him from his homosexuality, yet it turned out that it was all but an illusion. Furthermore he could not believe that a loving God would allow his servant to suffer so much at the hands of the DRC. All the years of studying, all his hard work in the church, and all his years of struggling to suppress his gayness, seemed to be to no avail. He could not read the Bible or pray to God anymore. He was an atheist now.

Although Charl Ubbink did not consider himself as an atheist, he described a time in his life away from God after he realised that God was not going to "cure" him.

From the age of seventeen my life took a turn for the worse. I became rebellious, started questioning God and neglect my religion, my youth dream now rejected and forgotten. I was annoyed, hurt and confused. There was nobody with whom I could share my feelings, nobody understood. Many evenings I overheard my parents reflecting on gay people and their condemnation, the subject of many Sunday sermons and discussions, even during my Confirmation year.

I had stopped praying. I had stopped pleading for a cure, for help. I had wasted years on doing just that, although nothing changed. I blamed God – it was He who made me like that and then left me to go to hell. It was not my choice to be gay, Lord. Then why am I what I am? Why can't you take it away? Or aren't you able to? Why do the world and the church hate me for something I did not ask for? Lord, what about my dream of serving you as a minister?

Suddenly, Theology seemed to be the last thing in the world I wanted to study. I started to look into other possible courses: drama, music, theatre, the movie industry... anything but theology. Conflict became the order of the day between my parents and me, and God and me. I started blaming and cursing everybody else. The greatest dream of my life was blasted to smithereens.

Almost two years passed during which Charl rejected and blamed God.

5.4.11 Promise at a death bed

After André Muller had completed his studies, he became a DRC chaplain in the army. Then he received a calling from the DRC Witbank congregation. Although he enjoyed life then, he experienced immense pressure from members of his congregation to get married. A determining moment was when an elderly church member, the aged Auntie Elsie, was lying on her death bed. He was there, comforting her, when she spoke her last words: “But *Dominee*, have you not found a wife yet?” At that moment he realised that he had to have a wife at his side in order to be an acceptable minister in the DRC. He started praying earnestly for God’s guidance in finding the right woman. Shortly afterwards he met a beautiful woman, a pharmacist. They started dating and a year later they got married. Auntie Elsie would have been delighted. André praised the Lord that he was married. However, he was a gay man and after two months the marriage was dissolved. His friend MC came to his rescue. André moved in with him and they started a wonderful fulfilling relationship which, unfortunately, only lasted two years. MC was diagnosed with leukemia and in 1991 André was again standing next to a death bed. This time it was someone he has loved with his whole being. Before he died, MC made him promise that he would go back to the church and to God. He suggested that he should start a church for gay Christians.

5.4.12 Impact on my relationship

The Resolution also impacted on the relationships of the co-researchers. Lulani reported a period where her relationship with Margaret underwent much stress. The uncertainty in terms of her career, and their financial well-being challenged their relationship, but they managed to work things out and their love for each other kept them together. At the moment they are living fulfilled lives, although Lulani still hopes to be legitimated one day.

Estian is a publisher and a well-grounded person who has a definite direction in life. Although their relationship ended Mark did not experience much external pressure on their relationship due to him not being legitimated. Estian supported him in terms of understanding his calling as a minister, and was lenient towards him when he “kept on clutching at a straw”. During our initial interviews he told me:

"I am fine because Estian respects my Theology-hopes. Nothing other than Theology seems to have the same value to me. The support does not only come from him, but also from his family. I am very much at home with them. When visiting there we all enjoy a good debate on all kinds of theological topics. However, at one time during last year when I changed direction with my studies, we did experience some tension in the relationship. What complicated things was the lack of support in terms of talking to friends about the turbulence in our relationship, because people idealise our relationship."

During the interview Mark and I deliberated on the possible reasons for the fighting during that time. Mark remembers a time when Estian was actually relieved when Mark considered turning his back on the church. Maybe he wanted to save Mark from further Humiliation and Shame and Sadness. During that time Estian also got offered a position in Cape Town. He turned it down and made the sacrifice on behalf of Mark and his hopes to become a minister in the *Hervormde Kerk*. Maybe some of the Anger which surfaced in those days was infused by a sense of frustration and powerlessness. Estian also had to learn to be patient. He also had to wait and wait and pray for change and for unconditional acceptance by the church. And this is exactly what he was doing.

Unfortunately the relationship between Mark and Estian ended towards the end of 2012. Mark is now in a new relationship.

5.4.13 Knowledge my first ally against injustice

According to Gerhardt (2004:179) the three main strategies to regulate one's emotions and to control one's impulses are self-distraction, comfort seeking and seeking information about the obstacle to our goals. Bertus discovered that increasing his knowledge about homosexuality became an ally against the injustice levelled against him as a gay minister because it, *inter alia*, helped him to regulate his emotions. It brought him to a better understanding of himself, but also of those who rejected him. During our interview Bertus realised that he had already started the creation of an alternative story for himself, a story which contradicted the problem-saturated story of not being good enough. But, according to Bertus, it was only during our previous discussion that he started realising how the problem story operated.

"When we negotiated the name of NOT GOOD ENOUGH to the problem-saturated story and we explored how it had affected me, I realised that it was the origin of my

doubt in my own abilities. Had it been Christianity in the broader context that made me doubt myself, I could have written it off. But it was my own denomination. This was too close to my body. This hurt. Since my second year it has been a struggle for me to rediscover my own worth and dignity. But it was only during my practical year that it started happening... that I realised I could do the work, I have the ability and know-how, I am enjoying it and God works through me. Whereas previously I had actually gone so far as perceiving my body as gruesome, I know today that I have a body just like everybody else. As my knowledge of and insight into biblical texts and sexual orientation accumulated, I also discovered that not every person on the planet was anti-gay. This knowledge helped me to reposition myself in order to stand up against NOT GOOD ENOUGH.”

5.4.14 Staying in, hanging onto hope

Bertus visited me again on 14 July 2014. When I asked him questions like: Does he still consider his decision to remain celibate as a good one? What does he hold onto and what keeps him going? Was he still positive in terms of the Resolution on gay ministers that the celibacy requirement would change one day? He responded as follows:

“I justify my decision concerning the celibacy by looking at the Roman Catholic priests. If they can manage it that means that celibacy should be humanly possible. I try to find fulfilment in my work and in platonic friendships, and in hobbies like reading and music. I have also had some major breakthroughs with my saxophone playing. I realise I am in the prime of my life. Sometimes I think of the possibility that the DRC could change her viewpoint at the next synod meeting. There are many people in the DRC who are nowadays standing up for us. I realise celibacy is just a temporary compromise. Maybe, when the DRC makes up her mind one day, I will be ugly and old and grey.

What kind of a life partner would I then be to someone or will I be able to find a partner when I am so old? Maybe I am just postponing my misery. Maybe it would be better had the DRC already stopped me at my first year. Then I could have studied something else. Although, since my 777 dream, it was as if God has guided me to study Theology. I developed a sense of urgency which subsided the first day at the Theology class. This was where I belonged. Sometimes I have said to myself: stop being a minister and find yourself a life partner. The mere thought brings anxiety back into my life. It is as if God says to me he wants me here. I don't want this invisible connection between God and me to be cut off. It would be as if I was turning my back on God. I don't want God to

sigh. The incarnation of Jesus is my model. I love to be amongst people. I want to touch people and talk to them and have coffee with them.”

When I asked him at what place he was in terms of his identity conclusion, he replied that he perceived himself as becoming grown-up, more competent and more self-sufficient. In agreement with White not to totalise a problem (2007:34), I asked Bertus how he benefitted from the 2007 Resolution. According to him his life came closer to the earth. It became simpler. He developed more empathy and sensitivity with people’s pain and brokenness. He also perceives himself as being closer to the core of the Gospel and the heart of God when his eyes opened to the most insignificant of human beings. If it was not for the 2007 Resolution, maybe he would have stayed blind. He has developed a heart for the poor and the beggars on the street corners. He spends a lot of time thinking of how to get those people off the street corners and to help them regain their human dignity. Human dignity is what the 2007 Resolution tried to steal from him. He understands what it means if one does not have dignity.

Mark is more confident. He “knows” there will be change.

“I know God is on my side. I think of the gay theologians coming after me and of their prospects of being ordained while in relationships. It gives me hope because I want to make a difference, especially in those people’s lives. When I realised I was gay, I had no one whom I could really confide in. I really don’t want anyone else to experience the same pain brought about by Shame and Rejection and by the message that you are not good enough for God’s church and His work. My struggle is getting better, because I know I am not alone. Apart from God, many people support me. And Estian was there. Now my new partner is supporting me.”

When I asked Mark what it is that moves him to want to take responsibility for the next generation of gay theologians, he answered:

“When you know that you can run the hundred meters, you have to do it. I know that I have the emotional, cognitive and spiritual tools to do it. I am really convinced that I can do it. I am extremely patient. Like a tree which has rooted itself in a specific place, I can also stay put until the day comes when I have to move.”

5.4.15 I don't need the church

During Lulani's second visit to me on the 20th of May 2014 I asked her whether she still thought it was a wise decision to reveal her sexual orientation, and her relationship with Margaret to the Curatorium during 2011. She replied that she knew it was the right thing to do. According to her she discovered that she does not need the church to fulfil her calling as a minister. She is at peace with herself and with God. In Philippolis they are 100% accepted by the community. They are involved in many organisations. They serve on committees, organise the annual show, are seen as role models, get invited as a couple to wedding ceremonies, guide the Bible study group, are involved with the youth of Philippolis, etc. According to Lulani, had she kept her orientation a secret people would continue to gossip. Now they have become a part of the community. After Lulani's story about her rejection by the DRC was published in the media, she was offered a position of minister in a non-denominational congregation at Philippolis where she is accepted unconditionally. The first Sunday when she entered the church building the whole congregation got up and greeted her with the hymn: "We accept you with the love of the Lord." This corresponds with Jamieson's (2003:152) views that believers who leave the church have to find a place where they belong, acting as an oasis to them. In Lulani's context, all that mattered to her new non-denominational church members was her ability to guide them to serve the Lord and to serve the community. Her sexual orientation did not matter. This must have been like an oasis to her.

Although SW also seemed at peace with himself and the world, he was spiritually, emotionally and financially at a different place than Lulani. After his resignation SW has left the church. Five years later during our interview I was curious as to what his thoughts were when he deliberated on his years as minister in the DRC and on all that has happened in terms of the gay issue?

"I am glad that I am finished with the church. It is tragic, though, that I invested my whole life in the church. What a wasted life in the church it has been. It was as if I was promised the land Canaan, but like Moses I could only stand on mount Horeb looking down on a land of milk and honey – a land of which I could never be part of because of me being gay. Now, after five years I don't feel anything. In fact, I couldn't care less. I don't attend church services anymore. I have started to realise the impact of Facebook on society. It seems as if Facebook is to an extent taking in the role played by the

church. On Facebook you can see how people are looking for answers on current affairs.”

5.4.16 Authentic me coming in (see also 4.5.3.5)

Martin Heidegger's main interest was to discuss the issue of *Being*, referring to the human being-in-the-world and to make sense of his capacity to make sense of things. Being (1996:7) is amongst others found in existence (*Da-sein*). According to Heidegger (1996:4) Being is indefinable, but can only be defined in terms of possibility (1996:41). Therefore, all human beings are continually oriented towards their own potential, among which are the possibilities of authentic and inauthentic existence. If individuals embrace the standards, beliefs, and the prejudices of society, they may fail to differentiate themselves from the masses. He refers to this as being related to “average everydayness” (1996:44). This would be living an inauthentic existence. Heidegger considered an authentic existence when individuals realise who they are and understand their uniqueness. Once human beings realise that they have their own uniqueness to fulfil, they won't aspire to follow the masses anymore. Then they become authentic to fulfil their real potentiality in the world. Downs (2006:106, 166) considers the cultivating of authenticity for a gay man as the final good-bye to toxic shame and the beginning of a life that is truly worth living. A constant move towards authenticity builds a sense of self-worth: “who I am is worth presenting in the world.” White (2007:182-183) draws our attention to the social constructionist paradigm where authenticity is derived through social processes acknowledging one's preferred claims about one's identity and history. This stands in contrast to the idea that authenticity is found through the expression and identification of the essences of the “self” through introspection. According to White (2007:102,103) these internal state understandings of human expression have achieved taken-for-granted status. On the other hand, intentional state conceptions of identity are distinguished by the notion of “*personal agency*.” The idea of personal agency considers people as active mediators and negotiators of life's meanings and predicaments. It also views people as the originators of the preferred developments of their own lives. In other words the notion of personal agency considers people as actively shaping their existence in their effort to achieve their preferred goals.

When I started with my research project I expected the gay ministers and candidate gay ministers to be despondent and down trodden by the 2007 Resolution. From my

experience as a narrative therapist I knew that there was always a unique outcome in every story, initiating alternative stories to develop. But to be honest, at the beginning of my research when I started listening to the stories of pain and rejection, I became a little doubtful myself. As we progressed, the alternative stories started to emerge and to develop into rich identity descriptions of some of the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. This took me back to White's (2007:34) notion that problems should not be totalised, but one should rather be on the lookout for unique outcomes which stand outside of the power of the problem.

Throughout his life **Mark** looked at himself as an Underdog, a marginalised person. Many events in his life supported this dominant problem-saturated story of his. The fact that he could not be legitimated added much weight and credibility to this story. I was curious about his earlier reference to a journey "to get to know himself well as a gay man". What would he call this journey? Could it be a journey towards authenticity? We decided to name the real Mark the Authentic Mark, taking personal agency for his life. Could the outcome of this journey be different from the thin conclusion of his identity as the Underdog?

Together we revisited the stories which lay outside the power of the dominant story of the Underdog. We put Mark's story of Authenticity in a power relationship with his dominant story of being the Underdog. It soon became clear that the latter provided Mark with a thin or negative identity conclusion (White 2004:124). Together we co-constructed stories about Mark's identity which have never been constructed before. His new identity was constructed based on evidence unmasked by the untold stories. When he told me about his first year at university and all the studies he successfully completed, I opened up the possibility of him being not only highly intelligent, but also someone with much perseverance, guts, risk taking, goal directedness and passion for the ministry. I was also wondering whether he was someone who could take tough decisions and follow them through. Considering the fact that he now realised that he is actually good at decision making I asked Mark whether he would consider himself to be a leader. He answered in the affirmative, sharing more stories as proof of this. Apart from his job at the hospital he also holds a job at the library. Therefore it would be fair to describe him as a leader who works very hard. He responded by saying: "I will survive." I asked him about his underlying values by working so hard. He replied it is because of his self-

respect and his yearning to be independent. I asked him whether there was a relationship between his self-respect and his perseverance. He replied: “If I did not have so much self-respect, I would not be able to persevere.” Mark spoke about his compassion with people and of how his humour has pulled him through difficult situations. All of a sudden Mark said: “I know I am more than just ‘gay Mark’. I am ambitious. I have dreams. I have a future. I will not live with this thin description of me being the Underdog anymore. I realise I have a rich identity as a child of God.” Migration of Mark’s identity (White 2004: 126-128) took place. We decided to undo the dominant story of Mark being an Underdog and to replace it with a newly emerging and empowering story of Authenticity. He looked in awe at the flip chart, where we have visibly re-constructed his identity as an authentic gay man. This empowered him and enabled him to stand up against the Shame of being an Underdog, a discourse which has up till now tried to control his life and his thinking about himself.

“The church tries to keep me as an Underdog. They tag me, while this new identity of mine is setting me free. The Underdog discourse of Shame is a dis-empowering discourse, while I realised today that I have God’s DNA on me, his fingerprints are all over me (Psalm 139). With this in mind, there is no way that I can still be an Underdog. I feel more competent, more authentic now. It is as if the Shame and the voice of me being an Underdog were taking back stage in my life. When my father and stepmother were still struggling with their own pain in coming to terms with me being gay, my grandmother told them one day: ‘Who are we to prescribe to God how He should make us? He made us in his image. Mark was made in the image of God.’”

This identity pronouncement was in stark contrast with an identity of being an Underdog. I asked him whether this means that he has reclaimed his authenticity from the lies of the Underdog. “Yes, I have,” he answered.

On my question how Mark managed to acquire such a high standard of norms and values, he replied that he was always surrounded by strong female figures. Apart from his aunt, his maternal grandparents, especially his grandma, played a huge role in his life. In a way she played the role of the mother that he has lost so early in his life. She taught him to differentiate between right and wrong. She showed him the face of unconditional love and of the value to belong to a family. Although trust was broken in the relationship between him and his primary caregivers, his grandma assured that Mark’s trust in all of humanity was not broken. He learnt the art of discernment in terms

of trust – something which served him well later in his life as a gay man. According to Mark every gay person journeying into the self, will develop a sense of intuition in terms of who can be trusted and who not.

Mark's grandmother was also very religious. "I was always very close to her. She was my comforter, my confidante. She taught me values like good manners and etiquette. She also taught me to live with the constant recollection that I am God's child." Although the two brothers were exposed to the same influences, they differ greatly in terms of their identities. On my question whether one can take a deliberate decision in terms of one's identity, he quoted Sartre:

"Man is not who he is, but is who he is not"

The meaning Mark deducted from this quote is that man is actually what he aspires to be. One can make a difference even if one only tries to. The legacy that Mark would like to leave behind one day is to have made a positive difference to the common good. He would like to have co-created a society where there are no scars, where nobody inflicts scars on others.

In spite of all the challenges which **André Muller** had to face, he managed to construct many alternative stories in terms of new career paths, achievements in terms of gay rights, and forgiveness to the DRC. Today, as minister of the gay church, he even manages in maintaining good relationships with the DRC. In a weird way, he even has good relationships with the Moreleta congregation, despite their anti-gay convictions. At heart he is a minister who feels sad when he thinks of all the people not attending the church services, for the numbers of his congregation are but a drop in the gay ocean.

On 3 August 1992, he started the Reforming Church for gay people in Pretoria, which celebrated its twentieth year of existence in 2012. The first time he made news headlines, was in 2001, when he publicly demanded that the South African Bible Society must admit that the term "homosexual" does not belong in the modern Bible translations, because it doesn't appear in the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible. That led to him being invited to speak on numerous religious and actuality TV and radio shows, where he defended the right of gay Christians to be both gay and Christian at the same time. When the Dutch Reformed Church decided to include gay persons in their official study about homosexuality, he was invited by Dr Bartlett to join the study

committee, which functioned for almost four years and resulted in a thorough discussion document. He made a submission to the South African Law Commission regarding same-sex marriages, and was consequently invited to take part in that commission's discussions on the topic. After the Synod of 2004, an official delegation from the Dutch Reformed Church, headed by the general secretary Dr Kobus Gerber, visited his congregation as a symbolic gesture to openly apologise for the wrongs committed by the DRC against gays in the past, and to ask their forgiveness. He accepted the apology on behalf of the gay Christian community and expressed the desire for cooperation between gay and mainline churches.

Another pivotal role that he fulfilled was in the struggle to get same-sex marriages legalised. He 'married' the very first couple whose 'marriage' led to the legalisation of all same-sex marriages in South Africa. On 1 December 2004, he 'married' Mari Fourie and Cecilia Bonthuys in the Reforming Church, while it was still unheard of and illegal. This resulted in strong opposition from various sectors in society, as reported in the media. Most of the mainstream churches distanced themselves officially from his actions and convictions. The Department of Home Affairs reported that the marriage was totally unacceptable and that they would officially oppose it in the Constitutional Court. A number of mainstream churches, the DRC included, joined forces against the possibility that same-sex marriages might be legalised, and formed a pressure group, the "Marriage Alliance". They indicated that they strongly supported the Minister of Home Affairs' opposition to same-sex marriages.

In spite of all this opposition, André never retracted or asked Home Affairs to pardon his wrongdoing, but supported the two women and even drove them to the court hearings. Both the Marriage Alliance and the Department of Home Affairs strongly objected. He recalls how ironic it was, hearing the advocate representing Home Affairs, using the Bible to defend their opposing view. A very brief, but significant moment was when his advocate pointed to him in the audience, lifted up a Bible, and asked him whether he as a gay minister also based his faith on this same Bible, upon which he answered: "yes". That clearly conveyed the message to the court that not all Christian churches are in agreement on the subject. Then, on the 30th November 2005, it was with utter delight that the two women and he embraced at the Constitutional Court, when the full bench of judges ruled that same-sex marriages must be legalised. The court gave Home Affairs

one year to get its administration in order to provide for same-sex marriages, and in November 2006, the Civil Unions Act of 2006, (Act No. 17 of 2006) was published in the Government Gazette. Since then, same-sex marriages were legal in this country.

In spite of everything she went through **Lulani** still considered herself as fortunate, because of a couple of reasons. Firstly, she could still work in the church at Philipopolis where she was completely accepted for who she was. Many other gays in the town were not so lucky to be so well accepted as Margaret and herself. They had stopped going to church, because they were made to feel unwelcome. This had led to isolation, even when trying to participate in societal activities. In her congregation the community called her *dominee*. They understood that there was no link between her ability to be a minister and her sexual orientation. She knew exactly where she stood with the people in her congregation. They were honest to the core and accepted her for who she was. To them the view that your sexual orientation determined your value system or the quality of your work as a minister was wrong. This story stood outside the power domain of her dominant story in the DRC.

Secondly, her relationship with Margaret brought her joy. At her age many married women were in patriarchal submissive relationships with their husbands. Margaret and she had a relationship where they shared power and responsibilities. This was a very liberating and dignified experience. In her conversation with the three members of the Curatorium, one asked her whether it wouldn't be better to keep quiet about the nature of her relationship with Margaret. This was not an option for her, because then Margaret's role in her life would be invalidated. Many relationships did not last, exactly because of the lack of support from parents and family members. Sooner than later, gay relationships that were maintained in secrecy and surrounded by shame, would disintegrate.

Lulani recalled happy memories of gay jokes which they had in their theology class at Stellenbosch. They developed names for gay women on a continuum. If you were a very feminine gay female, you would be classified as a *lesbabie*. If you were an ordinary gay woman you would qualify as a *lesbian*, and if you were butch your category would be a *lesbier*. These light-hearted jokes about gay women helped their group to deconstruct gayness, making it easier to talk about it and provided an emotionally safe environment. She felt accepted by the group of students. She could share information about gay

women, for example issues like promiscuity, relationships, coming out, and more. Her perception, for example, was that gay women were less promiscuous than gay men when they come out of the closet. Normally, they immediately enter into a steady relationship. It is also a common tradition for gay women to remain friends with their “ex” after a relationship had ended. Margaret and Lulani decided to stay out of the traditional gay circle of friends and make their own new friends together.

When referring to his early therapy sessions with me, **Bertus** compared it to the likeness of John the Baptist: to him I was like a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for his self-acceptance as a gay man on an emotive level. In that way, it was to him like a prophetic voice, only acknowledgeable in hindsight. According to Bertus, he immediately heard me saying something totally different to what the church was saying, although I was also the church. But, at that point in time, my voice was still just a voice in the desert.

“As the people of Denmark were adding their voices to mine by means of their reactions to my disclosure, I gradually realised: there were more voices than just Marietjie’s voice. I do remember you suggesting that I should talk to other people, thus adding more voices to my experience. But I chose not to listen to them. It was only in Denmark where I had no choice but to expose myself to others and to experience their reactions. Their voices lifted me from my self-imposed isolation. Up till then, yours was the first voice of acceptance and of being good enough that I experienced. What made your voice unique was the way you stood with one foot in the DRC and the other in the gay community. It was easy to connect with your caring humane-ness. You treated me with dignity.”

During the middle of 2012 Bertus was offered a part-time position at a congregation. He has not revealed his sexual orientation to his employers out of fear of being victimised. After his contract expired he was offered another position as a minister in a different DRC congregation, a position in which he flourishes. He is still in the closet and celibate, extremely happy by doing what he was called to do: to serve the Lord through service to his people.

In contrast to the other co-researchers **SW** seemed to still be struggling with “a life wasted in the church”, although during our interview there were glimpses of alternative stories standing outside of the power of this dominant story of rejection and not being

good enough. When I asked him how he would view the impact of the 2007 Resolution on him in general, he replied as follows:

“I have changed from being an extrovert when I was a child to an introvert as an adult. Apparently this dramatic change is possible only after a huge or prolonged traumatic experience. Presently I have no appetite to go to the movies or to visit people. Or even to find a boyfriend. It is too late for that part of my life. The financial burden has stolen my hope. Maybe a proper job will bring back some hope again.”

Spiritually, the impact of the Resolution led him to believe that it was a sin to be gay. For a big part of his life he was actually indoctrinated to believe that. Then, gradually he started to gain more insight into who he really was. Apart from all the books he had read on the gay topic, two incidents changed his perception about gayness and consequently about how he would view himself in future. The first incident was when Dr Willem Nicol said to him: “You are part of God’s multi-coloured creation.” That opened up a whole new perspective on the diversity of God’s creation. The other incident was when I assured him of God’s love for gays, and when I hugged him during our first therapy session. He said I was the first person who wasn’t actually scared of touching him and who did not treat him like a leper. Germond and De Gruchy (1997:205, 206) refer to the gospels’ account of the intimate association Jesus had with the marginalised by including them, especially through touch (Mark6:5). This act would automatically render Jesus as unclean, but by showing love and compassion he actually challenged the rituals of the purity system of his time. SW also recalled a session in 2002 when we deconstructed the church in her rejection of gays as being without insight and knowledge of gays, and without the all-embracing and inclusive love of Christ. Although, during our interview, SW only referred to two people who opposed the prevailing discourse on gayness, it is supportive of White’s (2007:182, 183) ideas that authenticity is derived through social processes acknowledging one’s preferred claims about one’s identity and history. Those events brought SW closer to self-acceptance and to reclaiming and celebrating his potential. According to SW he remembered those events, because they stood outside of the power of rejection – a theme which runs like a dark strong current through his life.

“You know, if you are a gay person, the fear of rejection lies very, very deep. Extremely deep.”

For **Charl Ubbink** almost two years of rejecting and blaming God had passed, but in his first year, he felt a need for praying to him again. The last evening at the end of the first quarter, just before they adjourned for the spring interval, he experienced God's presence again for the first time since he had realised that he was gay. He realised he had to do something; he had to change his self-perception. For the first time he accepted who he was and told God:

"I do not understand the reason for my being gay, but surely, Lord, I can still be useful to you, in spite of my sexual orientation? Lord, I have stopped blaming you, and I don't blame or hate myself anymore. I only pray that you would guide me the way you did before."

That night he started dreaming again. The dreams were colourful, detailed, real and alive. And again he received God's calling. I heard Him saying: "Charl, I want you to serve me, in spite of who you are." The acceptance of what he couldn't change calmed him down. The moment he started praying differently, his life started to change. Just after the spring interval, he changed over to Theology and began living his life-long dream. Unfortunately this journey of his would not be without challenges.

5.4.17 A DRC congregation restored my dignity

Since Charl Ubbink lost his candidature at the NWU he moved to Vanderbijlpark and started living with his partner. They joined the DRC Driehoek congregation. His experiences in the DRC were much more positive than in the *Gereformeerde Kerk*. He writes:

"Ds Frik Smit from the DRC Drie-Hoek in Vanderbijlpark welcomed me with open arms to his congregation and its activities. Since then, I had become much more involved with the DRC at Vanderbijlpark. When the Curatorium at the NWU called me in because of a sudden decline in my marks, I told them about my intention of joining the DRC. They said that if that was the case the discussions were closed. Although the gay issue was never discussed at this time, I immediately lost my candidature. I had more hope of becoming a minister in the DRC and prove my obedience to God's calling. I felt blessed to be working with Ds Frik and with Anje, the youth minister at DRC Drie-Hoek. They took me into their youth ministry. A month ago (2012) I delivered my first sermon. The circuit decided that I could preach whenever Anje was not available."

Maybe the General Synod may find this example to be helpful in finding a more satisfying approach to the issue: to legitimate all students who qualify academically, and then leave it to individual congregations to decide who they want to appoint. At the moment I am determined to complete my BA degree at the North West University, after which I would like to continue my studies for B.Th. at the University of Pretoria.

I know my dream is to serve the Lord, but what my future holds presently seems dim. Will I, one day, be able to make use of my Theology degree? Will it enable me to put up a house and start a living with Jean? Will we be allowed to grow as a union in a congregation free of condemnation and rejection? Will they listen to what I have to say?

My name is Charl Ubbink, and I am gay. I am what I am, I did not choose it. I am gay, God chose me. I am gay... and my biggest dream is that Christ's love becomes a reality on earth."

5.5 REFLECTION ON MY RETELLING OF THEIR STORIES

Mark le Roux

Two years ago when Mark le Roux first read my retelling of his story he reacted spontaneously. According to him he tried to put himself in the shoes of the church. According to him he wondered how he would have reacted if he were the straight people in the church who had to deal with the gay issue. Would he react differently, with more understanding and compassion? He recalled how long it took him to understand himself as a gay man. Therefore, he had empathy with the church leaders when they didn't understand what it entailed to be gay. When we reflected on our discussions, he responded that he found it valuable to have thought about the origin of his values. He also realised afresh that he had choices, also in terms of how he wanted to react to the rejection as a minister by the church. Our discussions reminded him again that he was chosen by God to become a minister and as such he is the anointed of God. Who were we to act against someone who was anointed by God? Not even David disrespected Saul as the anointed one of God.

Two years later when Mark reflected on my retelling of his story in this chapter, he responded as follows:

"I read about our shared stories, our exhaustive battle against a faceless opponent (the church). I cannot help but admit that I am bitter and angry at the church. I am angry for

the battle/debate will still last for a long time. I am frustrated that I have to build my life and future from scratch. I am studying LL.B part time while working full time in a job where I can't express my passion, but I move forward so I do not simmer in my own bitterness. For almost two years now I have not gone to church any more, except for special occasions. If anyone would ask I would say that I am a post-institutional Christian. Things are now between me and God and I make my contributions to small groups and individuals who care to listen. I am angry with the church because I wasted several years of my life studying theology which left me with no useful skills on my resume if the application is not for a position at a church. There were many opportunities for teaching candidate ministers additional skills - like management, bookkeeping and marketing. Things that people outside the church could use to look for jobs. Thank God that, during my studies, I worked part-time and praise God for my Grandparents who left me some farms in their will to earn an income from. The Lord provided and comforted me through everything. It's just the church which angered me a lot. I made good friends and I can think independently from religious dogma - for that I am grateful - that my theological studies taught me to think independently. I know that the church, years from now, will apologise for the delay and for their insensitivity. By that time I will hopefully be established in a new career - working to help others with the gifts God has given me for my real calling. Then the church will probably want all the gay ministers to return. Similar to affirmative action, the church will reward those congregations for appointing a gay minister. Well, I will not be one of those. I will fight for equal rights for gays in the church and in the world for as long as I live, but I will not be in the church. I will practice my Christianity post-institutional. Amen to that."

Lulani Vermeulen

In earlier spontaneous reflections on her experiences Lulani also showed mercy towards the DRC when she said: *"Granted, it could not be easy for non-gay people to grasp what it meant to be gay."* Even her best male friend, Ernest, had to make a mind shift at the beginning of their friendship. She felt he was treating her as his male friend when he made some disrespectful remarks, and it prompted her to draw his attention to the fact that, although she was gay, she was still a woman. In an ideal society she believed, there should be no tags like gay, or gay church or gay cell groups. However... it was nice to have a gay neighbour on the farm next door! When she was still a student she had only straight friends, but recently realised the need for having gay friends as well.

When Lulani visited me on 20 May 2014 she looked different, more content, at peace with herself. She said:

“80% of the time I feel I am good enough. But then something small may trigger the idea that I have to stand back, to submit to other more superior straight people. Sometimes it is the people closest to you who might say something insensitive. When I am with people who say they are atheists, I relax, but when I am with “church” people, I become tense. I fear their judgement. That is precisely why I had to separate church and God from each other.”

In her reflections, after having read this chapter, she responded as follows:

“I must say I have forgotten lots of info already. Reading it took me through the whole process again. I can honestly say that I no longer get negative feelings when I think about it. I do not know if it is because I've been working through it for such a long time, or if I am only more hopeful now. It was actually good to read. Yes, I am reminded of the bad times, but the pain is much less now. I'm happy where I am now and that makes it easier! I must say that reading the other co-researchers' stories, upset me. I don't know everyone's stories in detail. I get upset when I hear how the church treats others. And that makes it worth walking the road which I have chosen.”

Bertus

He sent the following feedback:

“I enjoyed reflecting on my story and found that it also had therapeutic value. When reading Professor Yolanda's remark again I know that today I can say with the greatest of confidence that I know God made me gay. The memories of the times when Depression and Inferiority tried to trick me into believing that I was not good enough, confirmed my decision that I will never allow those two to take so much control of my life again. I will stand up against them with all the power that I have.

I am grateful for having been able early on to draw a distinction between God's voice and the church's voice. It saved me a lot of hardship. The 2007 Resolution, although cruel, enriched my understanding of my calling: I was called to bring love - unconditionally - to people.

Somewhere I came to the realisation that we are all trapped in a web of patriarchal discourses. SW said the church was his Panopticon. As I read his story (I do not know whether I should have done it), I began to wonder if one could not expand on that

metaphor. Everyone, including the church, is trapped in a Panopticon. The patriarchal discourses regulate everyone's behaviour. The church acts love-less because they are swept along by these discourses. They do not even realise it. It is sad, but it also makes me understand something (at times it perhaps even gives me compassion) of why the church assumes this position against gays.

The same discourses cause single mothers to feel inferior because they do not have a man to care for them and their children. They make professional women feel guilty because they left the house and now operate where they do not actually belong. Similarly, men, who are sensitive and who do not fit into the traditional image of masculinity, are paralysed by these discourses. I do not know if it makes sense, but it gave me an awful lot of perspective."

SW

He sent me the following reflection on my retelling of his story:

"During our last conversation, after a lot of water under the bridge and when I read your script now, I realised how angry I actually am! After the 2007 Synod I decided to go my own way. I thought that doing so would bring peace. I distanced myself from the church and became church-loose and church-less. In the language of the DRC, I am defined as a "mission-object", yet pursuing those in my days as a minister.

Still, I remained a traveller, forced to walk my own journey through the desert. I was in self-imposed exile. Despite intense reading, I kept searching for God. Like Karin Armstrong writes in her book "The Case for God", I was yearning for a new language to talk about G-O-D ...a language that would make Divinity pure and true. I sought God, yet, a different God because the God of the DRC murdered me emotionally, spiritually, and now, at this stage in my life, also financially. The God of the DRC is a selfish, homophobic God. So I echo what Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "...I would rather go to hell than worship a homophobic God". I was a freak ...an unwelcome guest on the pulpit. "An embarrassment to the Kingdom of God", as someone referred to me. I could not associate myself any longer with the DRC and with such a homophobic god. I had to come out to breathe the freedom it gave me.

Meanwhile I suffer on many fronts. I search for, write to and scream at a Divine Infinite Creative Intelligence; a Being; a divine Creator somewhere; a White Light; Energy, but I cannot find it. I yearn to find it. I hope to rekindle in myself something of the divine spark, but the flame wouldn't ignite.

*Ironically, I am exactly where the church wanted me to be with their inhumane Resolution of the Synod of 2007 on the clergy's celibacy and the office bearers. Yes, that is where I am at! I am Sixty two years old. I am celibate! For seven years I have not looked at a man, and have no need for one either. I am celibate, unemployed and angry – f**king angry! I am sex-less and alienated from people and I yearn to finish with this world and to say goodbye. I long and yearn for the end of my diaspora or for my own Via Dolorosa!”*

Charl Ubbink

“When I read my story and reflect on it, I became emotional. The pain and grief that I went through was still with me and the memories will never fade. Yet, it is in the past. As I reflect on how my life turned out, I cannot help but to look forward positively. The path I have chosen is definitely not easy, but, in retrospect, I realise that to come out was the best decision I could have taken. Since our last conversation, I have learned much and experienced much growth. I know where I am going and what I should do. I am positive and I look to the future in anticipation.

As I reflected on your narration of my story, I came to realise that my experiences at the NWU and my life now in Vanderbijlpark contribute to me having so much more to give. I am positive about the changes that occurred in the DRC. Whether in the near future or not, I do not know, but that more changes are going to follow, is certain!”

André Muller

André Muller reflected as follows on my retelling of his story:

“My all-encompassing feeling is that I have been rejected by the mainstream church because of what I am. Although I am the minister of a gay church, I firmly believe that there is no theological ground for having such a separate ministry. As believers we are all members of the same body, and one member cannot tell another member: “I don't need you.” (1 Cor. 12:21). My ministry of 22 years is a constant reminder that I am being rejected by the mainstream churches, and that they are in fact saying: “We don't need you!” My prayer is that they will one day realise that I am not an enemy that should be wiped out, but that I am a co-worker in the Kingdom of God.”

5.6 CONCLUSION

In an effort to acquire information on the impact of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers and candidate ministers, I conducted interviews with six gay ministers

and/or candidate gay ministers who acted as my co-researchers. While making sense of their stories, we interpreted the meanings they constructed from the impact of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on them. We participated in selecting themes/discourses emerging from their stories. As primary author of the research I then organised parts of their stories under certain themes. Sometimes a theme was only applicable to one co-researcher's story, but was nevertheless considered as equally important. Often themes would be applicable to parts of all the co-researchers' stories. During the process of interpretation and meaning making I realised how complex, messy and untidy life stories were, especially in terms of ethics and spirituality. After drafting this chapter I sent it to the co-researchers for their reflection and feedback on my retelling of their stories. When I listened to the stories of the gay ministers and candidate ministers it reminded me of a novel written by Albert Camus.

In his novel, *L'Étranger (The Outsider)*, first published in 1942, the philosopher and writer, Albert Camus (1910:118, 119) explained in an afterword that the main character in this novel, Meursault, was punished because he was not prepared to play the game expected of him by society. Eventually he was convicted and executed because he refused to lie. He died because he was prepared to speak the truth. He did not want to make life simpler by lying, but by expressing his true feelings, society felt threatened. The character created by Camus loved a sun which left no shadows. For me there is an analogy between this character and the gay ministers who were prepared to speak the truth about their loving monogamous gay relationships. In a certain way, they were prepared to be punished and convicted for telling the truth. They were prepared to die for the truth – something which they have done, metaphorically speaking.

In the next chapter the interpretation and meaning making process of the impact of the 2007 Resolution is extended to interdisciplinary dialogues with three experts, respectively from Social Work, Psychology and Law.

CHAPTER 6: INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUES

“The belief that one’s own view of reality is the only reality is the most dangerous of all delusions.” - Paul Watzlawick

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I reported the stories of my gay co-researchers by focusing on the impact that the 2007 Resolution had on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers in the DRC in their embodied local contexts. They are all trained theologians. Therefore, their interpretations of the Resolution and of the subsequent impact on them were probably mainly formed by the traditions of interpretation in their discipline (theology), and by their specific interpreted experience (hermeneutics). As such, my research data is limited to one discipline, namely, theology. Van Huyssteen (2007:6) believes that, as theologians, we should be able to engage in interdisciplinary conversation without sacrificing our personal convictions. Simultaneously, interdisciplinary conversations empower us to cross the limits and boundaries of our own contexts and traditions. In order to move beyond my own discipline of interpretation, I opted for a postfoundational approach of doing practical theology, with its language of transversal rationality. According to Müller (2009b:2-4), within postfoundational thinking, transversal rationality stands opposite to both the languages of foundational or universal rationality, and of nonfoundational or diverse rationality. Postfoundational, foundational and nonfoundational thinking are all possible perspectives from which interdisciplinary conversations could be approached. In the context of this research the approach chosen will have an effect on the interdisciplinary participants’ responses to the stories of the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers.

6.2 A FOUNDATIONALIST OR UNIVERSAL PERSPECTIVE

Müller (2011:2) describes the foundational approach as taking it for granted that absolute truth is available to us. Such a perspective would provide us with a “God’s eye view” resulting in a theory of a universal rationality containing only one theoretical truth to be pursued. Müller (2011:2) cautions that such a perspective could easily lead to an overestimation of one’s own discipline. He views doing interdisciplinary work grounded in this position as extremely difficult, because it can lead to assimilation and incorporation where more than one perspective is seen as a threat to the truth. According to

Gregersen and Van Huyssteen (1998:1, 2, 13), the dialogue between theology and science suffered because of this modernist dilemma, where “objective”, universal, scientific claims are contrasted with subjectivity, and irrational theological beliefs. It always resulted in the “relentless pressure” to polarise science and religion. This unwillingness to listen to each other and to open a space for dialogue can not only be blamed on the natural scientists. Theologians are also often seeking for universal truths. Especially in the debate on homosexuality, it often happens that theologians are willing to incorporate scientific viewpoints, provided that it does not contradict their interpretation of the Bible.

6.3 A NONFOUNDATIONALIST OR DIVERSE PERSPECTIVE

This perspective is seen by Müller (2011:2) as the opposite of the foundationalist perspective. According to this approach, there are no foundations; only a diversity of opinions. Although this approach to pastoral understanding and intervention can be more tolerant, it tends to be relativistic and without direction. It can lead to a sense of helplessness, because stories could be heard, but fail to develop into alternative stories due to a sense of everything goes without critical assessment of traditions of interpretations of experience. Van Huyssteen (1997:75) views this approach to rationality as centering on a radical rejection of all dominating global narratives of legitimation, and, thereby, embracing pluralism and diversity. It highlights the local context and resists any global interpretation of science that could constrain local inquiry. In terms of interdisciplinary discussions, Müller (2009:3) considers this approach as even more impeding, due to scepticism about any effort to create mutual understanding.

6.4 A POSTFOUNDATIONALIST OR TRANSVERSAL PERSPECTIVE

The postfoundationalist approach challenges both the afore-mentioned positions. It is suspicious of both the relativity of nonfoundationalism, but also of the rigidity and false claims of a universal rationality (Müller 2011:2, 3). A postfoundationalist approach tries to move beyond both foundationalist and nonfoundationalist claims through transversal rationality. According to Müller (2011:4), Schragg and Van Huyssteen proposed transversal rationality as a way of providing a “responsible and workable interface” between various disciplines. Van Huyssteen (1999:135, 247) refers to Schrag as using the metaphor “transversal rationality” in the sense of integrating diverse past experiences through remembering self-awareness and/or consciousness, thereby acknowledging

multiple patterns of interpretations as one moves across the boundaries of the different disciplines. The embodied human subject is resituated in the space of communicative praxis. Transversal rationality, thus, opens up the possibility to focus on patterns of discourse as they happen in our communicative practices. Van Huyssteen (1999:247) indicates that transversal rationality is not merely a “passage of consciousness” across a wide spectrum of experiences held together by our memories, but rather a “lying across, extending over, and intersecting” of different forms of discourse, patterns of thinking and ways of performance. Van Huyssteen (2007:7) calls transversal rationality a wide, reflective equilibrium, pointing to the safe, fragile, public space between disciplines, where multiple beliefs and practices, habits of thought and attitudes, prejudices and assessments, converge. According to Van Huyssteen (2006:25), this approach helps us to realise that we are not intellectual prisoners of our contexts or traditions.

Müller (2011:2) views postfoundational theology as providing a theological framework within which the contextual and narrative approaches are inevitable. It forces us to listen to the stories of people in real life situations, thereby confronting us with a concrete situation. In order to engage in interdisciplinary conversation, I approached experts in disciplines other than theology to act as my interdisciplinary participants. Me Wezet Botes from Social Work, Professor Wilhelm Jordaan from Psychology and Professor Marinus Wiechers from Law kindly agreed to participate. When reading the life stories of the gay co-researchers, they were also confronted with specific and concrete situations of the co-researchers.

6.5 THE PROCESS OF TRANSVERSAL REASONING

Transversal reasoning, as seen from a postfoundationalist perspective, is a dynamic move away from the “static notions of rationality” where the axis of reasoning is rotated from the vertical to the horizontal (Van Huyssteen 2007:7). According to van Huyssteen, it creates space for the emergence of paradigmatic interdisciplinary networks, and the dynamic movement of our everyday and academic discourses. In this space, different disciplines can learn and benefit from one another by incorporating some of the insights obtained through the interdisciplinary dialogue. As such, transversal reasoning enables the performance of new insights as a communicative praxis. At the same time, transversal reasoning is fused with embodied consciousness and self-awareness, becoming the space where beliefs, thought patterns, prejudices and evaluations come

together. In this space meaning and interpretations are socially co-constructed (Van Huyssteen 2006:24). A practical theologian who approaches his/her discipline from a perspective of transversal rationality needs to be mobile and adaptable (Müller 2011:4, 5). Müller compares the fragile public space to the practical theologian's ecotone (a term borrowed from the natural sciences referring to a transition area between adjacent, but different plant communities). The ecotone as metaphor provides for a wide reflective equilibrium, which houses a variety of narratives. Through the narratives different habitats can be visited. From each habitat emerge the rationalities which are uniquely part of each discipline. Through transversal rationality these rationalities can communicate with each other. In the context of this thesis the narratives of the gay co-researchers are uniquely part of the discipline of theology, but through transversal rationality they can also communicate, for example, with Sociology, Psychology and Law. Van Huyssteen (2007:8) stresses the importance of discursive (through language) and non-discursive (actions, moods, desire, experiences as "events of interpretations") performance of transversal reasoning, which are always situated in a specific time and space.

Van Huyssteen (2007:8) points out that there are limitations to transversal reasoning to be aware of. After sharing the rich resources of the transversal reasoning moment, a postfoundational approach redirects us to the natural boundaries of our own discipline, namely, theology. By bringing back interdisciplinary results to our own discipline, this may lead to a "re-imaging of specific theological and doctrinal traditions". Although the boundaries may become more permeable it does not mean that deep convictions in terms of paradigms, world views or traditions of interpretations will be uncritically transferred to and from one discipline to the other (Van Huyssteen 2007:9). On the other hand Van Huyssteen (1999:266) also expresses the following concern:

If none of our criteria were to be acceptable beyond the boundaries of a specifically chosen research tradition, the giving of rational reasons beyond the boundaries of any tradition would be impossible.

He views the crucial problem for a theology located in interdisciplinary conversation as whether it is at all possible to make sensible and rational choices between different viewpoints and alternative research traditions. Van Huyssteen's (1999:266-268) attempt to solve this problem lies in his views that both in the sciences and in theology we have

to trust our traditions of interpretations as we engage in interdisciplinary conversations. He views scientific knowledge always as local knowledge, and the universal applicability thereof as arising from a process of “standardisation”. The deeper trust in the narratives and the traditions of a specific discipline should however not be seen as an “imposed consensus of authority, but rather as a creative field of concerns.” Because both theology and science are so deeply embedded in praxis, we should, therefore, be able to identify some criteria to justify our theory choices. Good arguments should be offered for or against theory claims, for or against commitment to a tradition, and for or against the problem-solving ability of a research program, instead of making truth claims. Assumptions on which these arguments are based, can, of course, also be challenged. This means that we will communicate continually through conversation, deliberation and evaluation in an on-going process of collective evaluation. Therefore, we do not enter into interdisciplinary dialogue just to persuade, but also to learn. There is no talk of force to agree or to share assumptions, but rather to criticise our assumptions while standing in them.

In planning the process of transversal rationality with people from disciplines different to theology, I first had to make a selection of who to invite as participants. After they have accepted my invitation I drafted a letter containing all the information and guidelines they would need to participate (see Appendix II).

It was only long after I had conducted the interdisciplinary interviews and after I have re-read an article by Müller (2009:16) that I considered including the co-researchers in the process. In reading a critique in Müller’s (2009:16) article demonstrating the process of transversal rationality, the question on the involvement of the person (Siswe) whose story formed part of the context, was raised. One of the persons attending Müller’s workshop where he presented his findings of his interdisciplinary conversation in the context of HIV and AIDS asked the “most dangerous question”: Should Siswe not also be asked to voice his concerns? All participants were in agreement that interpretations and truth claims should not be made on behalf of Siswe. In the context of the current research we could ask whether the co-researchers should also form part of the interdisciplinary dialogue. I have decided against such a step, because they have already reflected on my retelling of their stories in chapter 5 (see 5.5) and no interpretations or truth claims were made on their behalves.

6.5.1 Selecting the participants

Selecting participants for this study was a daunting task. I tried to identify people who were really experts in their respective disciplines. This was important to me, because of the sensitive, but urgent nature of the problem being researched. I tried to be as unbiased as possible. Only Me Botes was known to me beforehand, due to my long involvement with Tshwane Child Welfare. She holds a managerial position at this organisation. I have come to know her as an excellent academic, and a creative social worker and therapist. The other two participants were well known not only because of their academic excellence, but also because of their prominent public profiles in South Africa. Professor Wiechers was involved with the writing of the Constitution of South Africa. I was eager to involve him in the transversal rationality process, especially in terms of the gay ministers' rights (see 1.1). I was also inspired by Dr Bartlett's view already expressed in 2005 (Jackson 2014a:82) that the gay issue was not only a pastoral problem but also a problem of justice. As all of the co-researchers reported psychological problems due to the impact of the Resolution, I was eager to involve Professor Jordaan, a renowned Psychologist. At the time I did not know what the respective views of the participants on the celibacy requirement of gay ministers would be, but I was looking forward to learn more from all of them in terms of their unique perspectives. I must, however, concede that after having researched their views on various issues in the press, I have formed a perception of them of at least being "forthcoming or open minded". I cannot, therefore, claim that I was completely unbiased in my selection of the three interdisciplinary participants. In Müller's (2009:16) article where he demonstrated the process of transversal rationality, the question of objectivity in terms of selecting the participants was raised. He admitted to have been biased in his selection of participants, but he justified his choices by indicating that he did not focus so much on the content as on the process. Therefore the possibility of results being influenced was not really relevant to his study. In my research, however, I was focusing on the content. As such the question of biasedness is relevant. In the end, I had to trust the professionalism of the three participants as renowned academics and as exponents with integrity of their respective disciplines.

Once I had decided on whom to invite, I phoned them. All three agreed without hesitation. I then sent them a letter containing the title of my research topic, the

instructions in terms of reading the stories and nature and timeframe of their expected responses (See Appendix ii). I also attached the stories of the co-researchers. All three agreed to their names being made known in the research.

6.5.2 Reading the stories of the gay co-researchers

Key concepts of postfoundational language is the acknowledgment of contextuality, the important role of interpreted experience, and how tradition forms epistemic and non-epistemic values as the starting points for academic reflection (Van Huyssteen 1997:4). For that reason I shared the stories of the gay co-researchers with them to serve as context for reflection. I requested them to read and to respond on the four questions put to them in 6.5.3. These four questions were adapted from an article by Müller (2009b:6) on interdisciplinary work in the context of HIV and AIDS.

6.5.3 Questions asked to each participant

I put the following questions to each participant, requesting that they should respond from the perspective of their own disciplines:

- When reading the stories of gay ministers and candidate gay ministers, what are your concerns?
- What do you think is your unique perspective on these stories?
- Why do you think your perspective would be understood and appreciated by people from other disciplines?
- What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline might not be taken seriously?

6.5.4 The responses from the interdisciplinary participants

The purpose of this section was to move my rationality beyond the boundaries of my own discipline, theology. I opened myself up to learn from other disciplines in terms of their traditions of interpretations. As the boundaries between the disciplines became more porous I became sensitive to new discourses which could emerge from the responses by the interdisciplinary participants.

The respondents' replies were translated into English and returned to them in order to ascertain that the original responses were correctly portrayed. A few corrections were

made to the translations. The original response of Me Wezet Botes was in English. At the end of each group of responses to a question I have formulated some reflections. I again sent it to the participants for feedback and corrections. Those corrections have also been included in the formulations to follow.

6.5.4.1 Concerns

The following concerns were raised by the respondents:

6.5.4.1.1 Respondent 1: Me Wezet Botes

- The deep sense of isolation and “otherness” experienced by the interviewees - this could cause serious internal conflict and depression or other psychological problems.
- The dashed hope and unfulfilled dreams of the interviewees to become ministers. Presenting the possible search for acceptance within a structure that in its very definition may not have space for them.
- The seeming discrimination against their sexual orientation as well as the possible double standards applied by the DRC that were alluded to in their interviews - the inconsistencies can create intense frustration and powerlessness. If these inconsistencies are true, the DRC may have a difficult case to make within the constitution and legal framework of South Africa.
- The external restrictions of behaviour placed on the ministers and candidate ministers - that they can be ministers but that they have to be celibate - this can require a price that would be too high to pay then leaving the ministry or going underground with higher risks of discovery and expulsion. The emotional cost for not belonging and being in a relationship is critical.
- In this situation between the DRC and the interviewees there seem to be two opposing value systems in conflict with each other. The value system that promotes human rights and diversity opposed by a system that follows a predetermined set of rules that guides what is right and what is wrong. If these two systems were equal there might have been room for both sides. When the DRC structures call on God for justification of their position it assumes the higher position which will create a constant discord.

- If for a moment I part from my social work hat, I would say that Christ calls us to “come as we are” not to first be worthy of Him when He invites us in. But the call to every-one is very clear, in response to His great love He helps us not to stay as we are. This is relevant for jealousy, strife, bitterness, lies, homosexuality, over eating, unforgiving, etc. But he does not leave us alone to face all of this alone.
- Understanding God’s mercy from a human perspective will always leave us far short of the fullness of who He is and what his transforming power is able to do. In this I refer to the belief that God can transform the DRC as much as what he can any individual.
- My last concern is that the concepts of salvation, calling and vocation have become one construct in this debate. Salvation does not equal the acceptance by any institution but is true repentance and surrender to God’s will and purpose. Calling does not equate the right to stand on a pulpit but a God inspired urge to share His love healing and acceptance with all. Vocation in this context is not a statement (to accept or reject) but an opportunity to serve.
- The assumption that both sides of the argument are equally weighted. This is an impossible situation and not foundationally true. In the end mercy triumphs over justice and God is quite able to build His church.

6.5.4.1.2 Respondent 2: Professor Wilhelm Jordaan

My concerns are based on my understanding of human sciences (psychology) – my field of expertise and the subject that inspires both my teaching and writings on what people do and don’t do.

One could say that the Dutch Reformed and other churches had gone a long way towards the acceptance of gays – that is if you could get past the abstract church statements with their overly careful wording and typical entrenchments and elusions.

Still, the decision of the DRC (2007) regarding gay ministers is principally a destructive, inhumane and psychologically painful message to both gay ministers, serving as well as prospective.

While their decision is generally regarded as a fair compromise, a closer look reveals it as a classic case of double bind in the sense of ‘you may, you may not’. To put it

differently:

- Officially, you may serve the Lord (and the church) through your preaching and pastoral work.
- You may not live up to your real self and express your humanity (which inspires your preaching and of which your sexual orientation is a part and parcel) in a special love relationship (having to stay celibate, never marry).

In my profession, to be entangled in a double bind is regarded as one of the worst kinds of life-defeating situations. It leaves no room for meaningful living; it is totally disempowering. People who are trapped in a double bind may manifest psychopathological symptoms as a result of being trapped (see work done by Paul Watzlawick).

Joseph Heller's depiction of madness in his classic (and comical) "Catch 22" is notably valid of people who have been submitted to this decision – indeed a tragicomedy.

The stories I have read are indeed unique with some similarities. They portray the nature and effects of psychological scarring: anxiety and fear of exposure, self-reproach, sin delusion, isolation and withdrawal, loneliness, feelings of rejection, inhibited creativity, and what-ever-distressingly more.

In short: As unique human beings the narrators do not reach or live up to their real potential. Existentially one may ask: How could one serve the Lord with one's whole heart and mind if living up to an essential part of that heart and mind is not allowed?

From this argument stems another concern: Once again, instead of taking a lead in an important discourse, the church's decision rather seems like they prefer to be followers (pro-active versus reactive).

Considering many comments made in the press and on Facebook and twitter, the public in general seems to be applauding the church's point of view. In this respect the DRC (as other mainstream churches) constitutes a certain pattern of behaviour, by joining the protective ranks of the majority of its conservative members.

Church people and even church officials who may think differently would rather keep quiet in fear of treading on conservative toes and causing some members to walk out,

without even the slightest thought of offending those who may be weighing their options of escaping the stifling conservatism and finding themselves a new spiritual home.

It is important to note that these critical observations do not come from someone who wants to oppose the church. I am writing both as an indestructible insider who loves the church and would never want to be without it, and as a “psychologist” constantly in contact with gay ministers and ordinary people who aren’t really welcomed by their congregations or communities.

Whenever I am thinking about the gay question, a moving image pops up in my mind: A few rows before us in church on Sundays, an elderly gay couple used to sit, and both now deceased – the one a professor and the other an early-retired minister. Their love relationship was a devotion of many years. Their story, tearfully entrusted to me in privacy, recounts all the reviling, rejection, isolation, fear and loneliness; but then also, later in life, the loving embrace of acceptance that they had experienced in this specific congregation.

I want to describe people’s ignorance about homosexuality by means of an example of the patriarchal discourse and its subtle disrespect and belittling of gay relationships:

I wrote a chapter in a textbook on friendship using WH Auden’s well known poem ‘Funeral Blues’ (“Stop all the clocks, cut of the telephone ...He was my North, my South, my East, my West...”) as an expression of a deep-reaching friendship. The language editor, a highly educated woman, sent me a note saying, “Are you aware of the fact that Auden was a homosexual? That the poem was recited at a gay funeral in the movie picture ‘Four weddings and a funeral’? Maybe you should use another example?”

The homophobic innuendo is subtle but clear: a gay relationship is about anomalous sex and can neither be an expression of true friendship speaking of mutual care and camaraderie, nor of the pain of personal loss. This is reserved for heterosexuals only!

Is it not precisely what love and comprehension requires: a church that rather bravely thinks ahead, than keeps on parroting the back-peddlers - a church that will do everything that is necessary, together with the support of knowledgeable experts, to inform its members on being gay?

6.5.4.1.3 Respondent 3: Professor Marinus Wiechers

Reading these stories, two concerns came to the fore. First, I became forcibly aware that throughout their upbringing and as a result of their backgrounds, these gay ministers and gay candidate ministers were all deeply attached to and involved in the Church. Their aspirations to become ministers were very real and inspired by an abiding faith. All of them confessed that they personally experienced an overwhelming call to become ministers of the Church, to spread the Gospel and also to perform a ministry of love and compassion. In those instances where some of the respondents turned from the Church, it was felt as a kind of personal *quid pro quo* (salvage) as the Church rejected them.

My second concern, from a reading of these stories, is that although in certain instances, Church authorities and members of the Church when asked for guidance, were sympathetic and even offered some consolation, the dilemma and extreme anguish of the gays involved was neither really understood nor appreciated. It is therefore small wonder that some of the respondents felt that they were betrayed or worse, that the Church was bigoted and insincere. In short, the overall impression I got from these interviews with the gay research participants is that the Church did not understand them and was not responding to their cries for help.

6.5.4.1.4 My reflections on “concerns”

Van Huyssteen (2007:7) calls transversal rationality a wide reflective equilibrium, pointing to the safe, fragile public space between disciplines, where our multiple beliefs and practices, our habits of thought and attitudes, our prejudices and assessments, converge. When reading the participants’ responses I experienced a sense of this convergence in their concerns:

- All three expressed empathy towards gays, especially in terms of their well-being.
- The participants were able to put the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers in the space of communicative praxis by being concerned about the consequences of the Resolution in terms of psychological scarring: they referred to the isolation

and withdrawal, the perception of “otherness”, the feelings of detachment and rejection, anxiety, fear of exposure, self-reproach, delusion, inhibited creativity, and the like.

- The actions of the DRC were criticised in words like “double bind”, “double standards”, being disrespectful towards their “calling”, lack of understanding by the DRC, discrimination, betrayal, “lack of empathy”, disempowering its gay members, being insincere, being followers in the gay debate instead of leaders, and not informing its members about homosexuality.
- Patterns of discourse were identified, while transversal rationality opened up the possibility for the emergence of new discourses.

An important pattern of discourse identified, was the patriarchal discourse, leading to homophobia in this context. The emergence of new discourses was very helpful in my own discourses and thinking patterns, and in my understanding of aspects of the Resolution. Jordaan highlighted the aspect of the double bind and referred to the work of Paul Watzlawick. This urged me to get acquainted with his work, which expanded my understanding of the impact of the Resolution on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. It highlighted the cruel and impossible situation which the Resolution created for the gay ministers. Being a constitutional lawyer, Wiechers was very aware of the vagueness embedded in the term “unfair” discrimination. This is definitely a concept which needs further exploration, especially in the context of injustice levelled against gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Botes asked a thought provoking question, thereby opening up space for another discourse to emerge when she asked whether the DRC has in the past declined ministers to be legitimated on other grounds like gluttony, etc. If not, this would point to double standards being applied. My own gay discourse was challenged by the subtle reference by Botes to God’s mercy which can “transform the DRC, as much as any individual”. If the respondent meant that God’s mercy can transform a gay person to become straight, I would have to critically re-examine my own discourse on this aspect of homosexuality. According to Van Huyssteen (1999:266-268) transversal rationality challenges us to critically evaluate our own traditions of interpretations.

In reading the responses of the participants it reminded me of what Van Huyssteen (1999:267) said: “the deeper trust in the narratives and the traditions of a specific

discipline should not be seen as an imposed consensus of authority, but rather as a creative field of concerns.” This perspective of concern provided common ground to the respondents (Müller 2009: 9) where the boundaries between the disciplines became more porous.

6.5.4.2 Unique perspective

The following responses were received on unique perspectives

6.5.4.2.1 Respondent 1: Me Wezet Botes

Social work is often a more pragmatic discipline where the value of theory is determined by the value of its practical use. This does not mean that social work operate without theory but rather that theory often emerge out of the work of social workers and not first from pure conceptualisation. Social work centers in practice around upholding the “social company”. This is done through social control, social norming, social redress and social change.

These aspects come into play at different times and in different ways for example social control is in effect when parents ill-treat their children in such a manner that the social worker as representative of society has to remove the children from the parent’s care. Social norming could be seen in dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic where members of society is encouraged through programs offered to them to adopt certain behaviour that would lower the risk of contracting HIV such as using condoms and pursuing exclusive monogamous relationships. Social redress is aimed at attacking a specific imbalance or injustice such as gender inequality through systematic programs aimed at rebalancing society. Social change is often associated with challenging injustice, where there is certain changes needed in the sphere of society where social work actions are aimed at bringing about change - such as social workers working towards integrating South Africa during the time of Apartheid.

In the pragmatic nature of social work there is often tension between what ought to be and what is. This tension is clearly visible in the case studies where the norm of what ought to be (i.e. heterosexual in the views of the DRC), is in tension with what is (i.e. the homosexuality of some of the ministers and candidate ministers). The social work perspective may ask: “Does this matter in the performing of pastoral care?” From a

social work perspective there would be an acknowledgement that persons from differing sexual orientations make up society and that all who are in society can contribute to society. Using the social work ethical framework there are serious concerns arising from the experiences of the interviewees. For clarification the governing ethical perspective of social work can be summed up as:

- respect for diversity,
- the self-determination right of each person,
- service
- social justice
- dignity and worth of the person
- importance of human relationships
- integrity and authenticity
- acknowledging competence in each person

This framework forms and informs the way that people can relate to each other within the “social company”. From this context the experience of the interviewees of not being good enough and not being worthy enough can be challenged as each person’s contribution is seen as valuable.

6.5.4.2.2 Respondent 2: Professor Wilhelm Jordaan

The first part of my reply explaining double bind is probably a kind of unique perspective coming from the psychology.

Psychology is possibly also unique in the way its boundary position lends itself to an interdisciplinary study and understanding of the gay question and people’s (and the church’s) reaction to it.

In short, Psychology as an interdisciplinary field of study affirms and broadens the interdisciplinary scientific findings that a gay orientation is biologically firmly based – just as firmly as the heterosexual impulse. And that being gay is as old as humanity itself; that its ‘biology’ has been there from the beginning. In itself it has nothing to do with ‘abnormality’. In the same way that heterosexual relationships may miscarry and

become pathological, gay relationships may also suffer. But again, it cannot be blamed on a specific orientation.

Psychology also helps people to obtain a better understanding of homophobia (a fear of gay people). And this insight may help people to change their attitudes. (See my last sentence in question 1.)

Homophobia is first and foremost conceived in a primeval portraying of man and woman, and sexual enjoyment, procreation and the constitution of the family as part of that unit.

This is how it was portrayed: the powerful man penetrated the woman, discharged his semen and she received it. A Child was begat and nursed and raised by the woman. And 'nature' provided it that way, for time and eternity.

From this biological cycle of being, grew the patriarchal supremacy with its male dominance dictating how things were and would be what it meant to be: a man or a woman, and what their roles, sexually and otherwise would be.

With this argument as point of departure – and supported by historical and on-going patriarchal (read: biblical) discourse – being gay was being declared as a deviation from the norm and a repugnant transgression, even an extreme sin. Because of this primeval portraying the church and many church people are still finding it difficult to change their opinions. People in a patriarchal discourse look upon gay relationships as being nothing more than revolting: as “abnormal sex”. Therefore, it is impossible for them to regard gay relationships as an expression of all the same kind of values that are present in growing relationships between non-patriarchal, heterosexual people. And they are exposed to the same perils that others may suffer – distrust, implacability, dissipated love and infidelity.

Some reasons for homophobia are much more subtle. But, essentially, it involves the perception of heterosexual, patriarchal men who cling to the pre-historical notion of the penetrating man and the available and accommodating woman, because they are driven by a fear of losing their sexual rights and pleasures and their whole power base in their world of relationships.

Patriarchal men also consider what they see as ‘a culture of liberal tolerance’ towards gays as essentially the same sort of culture that encourages women to resist and escape from their stronghold of patriarchal perceptions of the nature and role of women. In short (bizarre as it may sound), they reckon gays are hand in glove with feminists!

6.5.4.2.3 Respondent 3: Professor Marinus Wiechers

Being a lawyer and more specifically, a constitutional lawyer, my unique perspective would be inspired by legal and constitutional considerations.

Our Constitution prohibits discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. This prohibition is in the first instance directed to the state, but also applies to natural and juristic persons. From this point of view, the Church may not discriminate against gay ministers and gay candidate ministers on the ground of their sexual orientations. However, the Constitution does condone discrimination on account of sexual orientation if such discrimination is not unfair. It is not at all clear what unfair discrimination means in this respect.

The Church, no doubt, will argue that their discrimination against gays, although seemingly unfair, is sanctioned by the Scriptures and church doctrines and that it is therefore not unfair in the context of religious freedom and the church’s autonomy. (Church autonomy is accepted by the Constitutional Court as long as it is not illegal. The church will certainly in this case plead an autonomy which is doctrinally sanctioned and underwritten by the church’s higher authorities such as the Synod and that it is therefore not illegal.)

However, a rethinking of the matter shows that the Church’s conditions for admission, especially its pontifical prescription to abstain, constitute unfair discrimination. This is so because gays are denied the hope and possibility to live full emotional lives, thereby encroaching on their inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected. Admittedly, the Church frequently pays lip service by proclaiming that it respects gays and that it does not reject the homosexual but only his or her “gay lifestyle”. However, gays experience such an attitude not as an acceptance, but rather as a denial of their human-ness.

The crux of the matter is that the Church by and large justifies its discrimination on abstract grounds with no real appreciation for the depth and extent of the sufferings of gay people and without an appreciation of the nefarious effects that its discriminatory dictates and attitudes have on human relations, not to mention self-worth, emotional stability, and human dignity.

6.5.4.2.4 My reflections on “unique perspective”

Although the perspective of concern provided common ground to the participants, it became evident from their responses that each discipline had unique perspectives on the impact of the Resolution on the gay ministers and candidate ministers. I found those perspectives enriching, taking me beyond the boundaries of my own discipline.

Social work: Botes summarised the governing ethical perspective of social work as follows, thereby asking for

- respect for diversity
- acknowledging the self-determination right of each person
- being of service
- the exercising of social justice
- acknowledging the dignity and worth of the person
- acknowledging the importance of human relationships
- treating of all with integrity and authenticity
- acknowledging competence in each person

Psychology: Jordaan offered three unique perspectives, thereby asking for

- Removal of the double bind from the Resolution. In Psychology a double bind is seen as “one of the worst kinds of life-defeating situations”.
- Understanding and acceptance of interdisciplinary scientific findings that a gay orientation is biologically firmly based. Both heterosexual and homosexual relationships may become pathological, but it cannot be blamed on a specific orientation.
- A better understanding of homophobia within a patriarchal discourse.

The Law: Wiechers gave the following unique perspectives inspired by legal and constitutional considerations, thereby opening up possible pitfalls in the constitution:

- Discrimination on account of sexual orientation is condoned, if it is not unfair discrimination. It is not clear what is meant by “unfair” discrimination. If discrimination is sanctioned by the church Scriptures and doctrines, it may be fair within the context of religious freedom. The Constitutional Court accepts church autonomy as long as it is not illegal. In this context it is sanctioned by the Synod and therefore not illegal. However, according to Professor Wiechers, the Church’s conditions for admission of gay ministers and candidate ministers (no relationships, celibacy) deny the hope and possibility to live fulfilled emotional lives, encroach on the inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity protected and respected.
- The cliché “we love the sinner but hate the sin” is a denial of gay people’s humanness and as such a demonstration of the lack of grasping of the depth of the sufferings of gay people and without an appreciation of the effects of the discriminatory Resolution on the human relations, the self-worth and human dignity and emotional stability of gay people.

6.5.4.3 Understood and appreciated by other disciplines

6.5.4.3.1 Respondent 1: Me Wezet Botes

Some of the activities of social workers are necessitated by laws and regulations of the state. This does not always lend itself to creating popularity amongst other perspectives. At times the ethics of the social work discipline becomes very murky in the practical unfolding within a very messy society. The social work perspective is tolerant of ambiguity and sensitive to power discourses. There is space in the social work perspective to accommodate the breaking of the norm to create a new relationship between parts of society. This aspect is the most valuable outcome of social work activities in society and ultimately this can be seen, understood and appreciated by other disciplines.

Regarding the social work perspective of the interviews of the ministers and candidate ministers there seem to be a clear challenge in the norm of what is accepted and what is

challenging the status quo within the DRC. The unique perspective of the interviewees has a legitimate place in broad representation of society and on a micro level within the congregations of the DRC. Their ability to be of service is taken as a fact from the Social Work perspective and the suggested barriers to their service restricts them to a very narrow band of opportunity within the space offered to them by the DRC. Viewed from a social justice perspective these restrictions seem unjust and discriminatory. The question arise: “Whom does it serve to restrict and prohibit the participation of the interviewees in church life?”

The dignity and worth of a person is not measurable by their sexual orientation but should be universal and irrefutable. Our human relationships offer us the greatest meaning and depth and are essential for mental health and a functional society. From a humanistic¹³ view the restriction on relationships for the interviewees is unrealistic and unhelpful. This restriction would either potentially drive the interviewees underground in the forming and maintaining of close relationships or create suffocating isolation and emotional shut down.

The integrity of both the DRC and interviewees seem to be significantly challenged in this whole process. The moment you withhold dignity from any person you inevitably damage your own integrity. By objectifying the interviewees as ‘not good enough’ and the DRC ‘hypocritical’ the potential is there to miss the value of the people on both sides of the issue. Is there not a higher value of love and mercy? Convergent to this, the experiences of the interviewees are truly valid but one sided. Would it not be valuable to interview those who made decisions regarding these particular persons to determine if the rejection experienced were the full representation of those that made the decisions?

The criteria for determining competence within the DRC as in any other institution should be objective but in this case there seem to be another additional criterion that applies to the interviewees that is not applied to others. The question that arose with me is has the

¹³ Determining the value of the social work perspective in this case is viewed from a humanistic perspective. It stands to reason that the humanistic perspective may not be the only view to be considered. The differentiating fact is that the DRC is a religious institution. The criteria of review from this spiritual perspective may be different and needs the input of experts on this field for more clarity.

DRC refused qualification to others on any other basis as mentioned in the Bible or just to gays? (E.g. sex outside of marriage, strife or gluttony etc.)

6.5.4.3.2 Respondent 2: Professor Wilhelm Jordaan

(See partly my reply to question two re psychology as border science.)

Due to its nature as a boundary science, psychology is sustained by, and sustains other disciplines – especially in its research and reflection on gays. This is also the case with sociology, anthropology, practical theology, communication science, etc. These disciplines work together and frequently ‘borrow’ from each other. Therefore, they respectively appreciate both the other’s uniqueness and potential contributions towards a given field of knowledge.

By nature, psychology is more focused on the intra-psychological experiences of gays. In affiliation with other disciplines, a broader corpus of knowledge can be obtained.

Psychology’s contribution, both on its own and in conjunction with others, to the development of qualitative research procedures is also widely known – in order to reach a better understanding of subjective experiences of problematic life situations of, for instance, gay ministers and church members.

6.5.4.3.3 Respondent 3: Professor Marinus Wiechers

My opinion is from a legal and constitutional perspective. I have no doubt that as such it will be appreciated and respected by people from other disciplines. However, having said this, I do not mean that my more liberal and teleological approach (that is, taking into considerations the underlying goals of the Constitution namely human dignity and equality), would be generally accepted. Many theologians might feel that accepting gay ministers goes too far and they would therefore rather abide by the view that the Church’s autonomy allows for such discrimination. Also, some lawyers - and there are many - would prefer a positivist and not a goal-orientated approach and would consequently entertain similar views.

6.5.4.3.4 My reflections on “appreciated by other disciplines”

It seems that, although the participants had different viewpoints based on their unique perspectives from their disciplines, they were all aware that their respective disciplines do

not function in isolation. It is part of a bigger body of science or a “collage of worldviews” and can be challenged, and augmented by other disciplines. According to Jordaan, psychology sustains and is sustained by other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, practical theology, communication science, etc. These disciplines respectively appreciate the other’s uniqueness, but also the potential contributions towards a given field of knowledge. Botes was in agreement with this by suggesting the perspectives of social work on the gay minister’s stories which are based on a humanistic perspective would benefit by input from other disciplines. Wiechers was confident that his opinion being from a legal and constitutional perspective would be appreciated by other disciplines. However, he did concede that many theologians, and even some lawyers, might prefer a different approach. The participants’ responses not only demonstrated openness to other perspectives from other disciplines, but also a willingness to learn and to benefit from those perspectives.

6.5.4.4 Concerns if the discipline’s perspective is not taken seriously

The following responses were obtained regarding if the discipline’s perspective was not taken seriously:

6.5.4.4.1 Respondent 1: Me Wezet Botes

The basic inherent dignity of a person is at the heart of the matter. The social work perspective and ethical framework gives clear and explicit parameters to be respected when working with people - even if their views differ from your own.

The social work perspective along with other disciplines creates a collage of world views which hopefully would represent the diversity in society as a whole. The viewpoint of respect for diversity and basic human dignity should be underpinning our interactions with each other.

If the social work perspective is discounted the risk is that the fundamental meeting ground of one person to another as equal (and even equal in the sight of God) could be eroded. In a space where we do not acknowledge the worth of a person human rights cannot exist. Discrimination thrives and the abuse of power can easily follow.

6.5.4.4.2 Respondent 2: Professor Wilhelm Jordaan

Mainstream Psychology's viewpoint has already been stated under question 2 (also see reference to the biological predisposition of being gay). This implies the normality and equality of this kind of sexual orientation alongside the heterosexual.

Should a scientific viewpoint such as this one (and those of other human sciences) not succeed in making an impact on the decision makers and resisting members of the church, naturally my concerns expressed under the first question would become even more acute – even more intensely painful for gay ministers and prospective ministers as well as the rising irrelevance of the church as a value-affirming institution.

I repeat what I have said at the end of question 1: With the help of experts, the church will have to do everything in its power to inform their members of the true facts behind being gay.

(See partly my reply to question two re psychology as border science.)

Due to its nature as a boundary science, psychology is sustained by, and sustains other disciplines – especially in its research and reflection on gays. This is also the case with sociology, anthropology, practical theology, communication science, etc. These disciplines work together and frequently 'borrow' from each other. Therefore, they respectively appreciate both the other's uniqueness and potential contributions towards a given field of knowledge.

By nature, psychology is more focused on the intra-psychological experiences of gays. In affiliation with other disciplines, a broader corpus of knowledge can be obtained.

Psychology's contribution, both on its own and in conjunction with others, to the development of qualitative research procedures is also widely known – in order to reach a better understanding of subjective experiences of problematic life situations of, for instance, gay ministers and church members.

6.5.4.4.3 Respondent 3: Professor Marinus Wiechers

I am not concerned that my perspective might not be taken seriously. It is an objective legal opinion that cannot be readily ignored. However, it might happen as explained above, that another and more restricted view prevails thereby prolonging the present agony of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers.

At the same time, I am not convinced that the present view as expressed in the Synod Resolution of 2007 will in its entirety, be maintained indefinitely. In Psychology, it has long been accepted that homosexuality does not constitute a deviant condition. Admittedly, many prejudices and fears still exist in this regard, especially in the Church. The result is that while the present official view might still be upheld for quite some time at Synod level, and at congregational level it is quite probable that the position may very soon change drastically. Point 8 of the 2007 Synod Resolution: “The General Synod acknowledges the discretion of local church councils to handle differences on homosexuality in congregations in a spirit of Christian love” clearly points in such a direction. The proposal on homosexuality which is at present (2013) before the Western Cape Synod also reinforces this view.

6.5.4.4 My reflections on “concerns when scholars feel that their discipline is not taken seriously”.

All three of the participants were convinced of the unique contribution of their own disciplines. However, remembering Van Huyssteen’s (1999:267): “the deeper trust in the narratives and the traditions of a specific discipline should not be seen as an imposed consensus of authority, but rather as a creative field of concerns,” it seems that the participants’ perspectives of concerns remained a common ground to them.

The concern of Botes was if the social work perspective is discounted, the risk would be that the fundamental meeting ground of one person to another as equal (and even equal in the sight of God) could be eroded. In a space where we do not acknowledge the worth of a person, human rights cannot exist. Discrimination thrives and the abuse of power can easily follow.

Jordaan referred to his concerns expressed to the first question. According to him should a scientific viewpoint such as the one from psychology (and those of other human sciences) not succeed in making an impact on the decision makers and resisting members of the church, his concerns would become even more acute. It would become even more painful for gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Also, the irrelevance of the church as a value-affirming institution would become more prevalent.

Wiechers was not concerned that his perspective might not be taken seriously. He considered it as an objective legal opinion that cannot be readily ignored. However, it

might happen that another and more restricted view from his could prevail thereby prolonging the present agony of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. He was convinced that the present view as expressed in the Resolution of 2007 would not in its entirety be sustained indefinitely.

6.6 CONCLUSION

My approach in this research to learn about and to understand the impact of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers was *inter alia* a postfoundational one. In order to move beyond the boundaries of my own discipline with the possibility to learn and to benefit in terms of the input of experts from other disciplines, I resorted to the language of transversal rationality. In this chapter I explained the process of transversal rationality. I also presented the responses of three experts from respectively social work, psychology and law to four questions which I have put to them. In my reflections on their responses I indicated how transversal rationality created common ground for these experts from different disciplines to respond to the same questions concerning the impact of the Resolution on the gay ministers. After the interdisciplinary participants have read the stories of the gay ministers it was interesting to see how they could move to and fro between foundationalism and nonfoundationalism to a place where it was safe to reason where neither universal ideas nor no foundations at all was the ideal. The common ground created by transversal rationality created a “gentle fragile space” where consensus of ideas was not the goal, but rather a common concern for the local contextualised embodied gay ministers. Each participant could formulate his/her own concerns and perspectives of their own disciplines, thereby providing a unique contribution which was communicable to the others. From their responses the differences and the similarities emerged. Although the process illustrated that no universal truths about the impact of the Resolution on the gay co-researchers existed, it was also not so diversified that transversal communication was not possible. This corresponded with Müller’s (2009:15) conclusions after he has reflected on his interdisciplinary work in the context of HIV and AIDS.

In the next chapter I interpreted and integrated insights gained from the literature study, the stories of the co-researchers, and the responses from the interdisciplinary participants in terms of the impact of the Resolution on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. This integrated view of the impact of the Resolution guided me to

come to tentative conclusions from which recommendations and suggestions for further research were inferred.

CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

*Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"*

7.1 INTRODUCTION

An ordinary phone call can, quite often, change the course of one's life. It was a phone call soliciting my assistance to enable a gay student to be legitimated which planted the first seed for this research. This call, plus the prayer of the mother of a young gay minister who chose to remain celibate, put me on course. The mother asked me to pray that her son would always be content to live alone, never succumb to a relationship and never fall in love with someone. I was touched by these events and became concerned as to what the real-life implications of the 2007 Resolution of the DRC on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers could be. Having been part of the task team who served the General Synod of 2007 with two reports, I felt a shared responsibility in terms of the consequences of the Resolution. At the time, the Resolution was rightfully judged as huge progress compared to the previous Synod, despite everyone knowing that it was a compromise Resolution. But now, perhaps for the first time, the reality of the potential negative consequences of the Resolution on those gay ministers and gay candidate ministers who chose to remain celibate and those who chose to reveal their relationship statuses dawned on me. I began to realise that, viewed from the side of a gay minister, the Resolution brought no progress. For them, nothing has changed at all. They could still not enter into same-sex relationships or get married to their same-sex partners. The research problem, formulated in Chapter One, was to evaluate the impact of the Resolution of 2007 on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Clearly, a gap existed in what was known about the consequences or impacts of the Resolution and this research aimed to fill the gap.

The research problem guided me to ask the primary research question: What are the impacts of the Resolution on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers? In order to answer the primary research question I formulated a number of secondary research questions which first had to be addressed before the primary question could be addressed:

- What is the history of the Resolution?
- What discourses constituted and sustained the Resolution?
- What are the implications, contradictions and interpretations of the terms in the Resolution?
- What does the literature say with regards to traditional perspectives on gay relationships and gay marriages?
- What are the impacts of the Resolution on the lived experiences of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?
- What do experts from other disciplines say about the impact of the terms in the Resolution?

Below I have revisited these research questions and indicated how they have been addressed.

7.2 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

7.2.1 What is the history of the Resolution?

In telling my gay story and the gay story of the DRC I have situated it in the narrative social constructionist paradigm (Morgan 2000:5; Freedman & Combs 1996:43; Hare-Mustin 1994:20) by indicating that societal discourses determine which of our life events should be storied and what meaning we attach to those stories. The importance of language, a specific context and of power/knowledge relationships (White 1991:28) was also underscored, especially in the meaning making process and on the effect those stories have on people. Because stories are socially constructed and sustained by discourses or belief systems, their truth claims can also be deconstructed (Collins & Mayblin 2003:5). This can lead to the re-authoring of people's lives into alternative stories. It is within this paradigm that I have storied my own gay narrative and the gay narrative in the DRC. Both of us were trying to alleviate the pain and injustices levelled against our gay brothers and sisters in Christ, but were often frustrated by our hermeneutical horizons which limited our vision (Gadamer 1975:273).

In Chapter Two I have indicated how my gay narrative started with a moment of insertion in 2001 when I was confronted by my gay hairdresser in terms of the view of the DRC, and my own view on his salvation due to him being gay. I became aware of injustices

levelled against gay people, especially by Christianity and, in my own case, by the DRC. Through participation I gradually became accepted by the gay community, while, at the same time I was also communicating with members of the DRC on the subject. I was co-opted on the Regional Synod of Southern Transvaal and later on the task team to serve the General Synod of 2007 with a report. The gay narrative of the DRC seemingly started in 1986 when the General Synod viewed homosexuality as a deviant form of sexuality and gay practices and gay relationships as against the will of God (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 1986:672). The General Synods of the DRC to follow gradually became more sympathetic towards gay people until the General Synod of 2004 accepted a resolution that gay people could be members of the DRC on the grounds of their baptism and faith. The Synod also extended an official apology to the gay community and their families for all the pain inflicted on them (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2004:433). At this point the DRC had no clear standpoint on homosexuality, thereby confusing many of its members. This led to a number of regional Synods distancing themselves from the decision of the General Synod of 2004. It, therefore, became imperative for the General Synod in 2007 to formulate a standpoint on homosexuality. What complicated this expectation were the differences between task team members in terms of the recommendations to serve at the Synod. Eventually the task team split in two separate groups, each drafting a report containing commonalities and differences.

Seemingly to avoid a vote in the general assembly, the General Synod of 2007 requested the ten regional moderators of the DRC to draft a compromise proposal from the two separate reports which served before them. Dr van Rensburg facilitated the meeting of the ten moderators. The proposal was presented to the two chairpersons of the two groups of the task team, for their reviews. They then jointly accepted it. On the next day of the General Synod of 2007, it was approved as the Resolution of the DRC on gay people.

This brief history of how the Resolution was constituted addressed the first secondary research question.

7.2.2 What discourses constituted and sustained the Resolution?

This research question was addressed in Chapter Three. My participatory action research approach implied much more than a mere involvement of the co-researchers;

they had to take ownership in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice (Tandon1988:13). Therefore, I was continuously in conversation with them, asking for their views as I progressed with the research. From their questions and concerns a power imbalance was clearly indicated in the Resolution. The Synod was informed by a patriarchal discourse, prescribing to the ten (white, heterosexual, male) moderators to decide on behalf of those without power (the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers). In the Resolution, power had an influence on how knowledge was created, but also on the marginalisation of “alternative” knowledges of the gay ministers. Knowledge is negotiated meaning (Kotzé & Kotzé 1996:3), which, in this case, took place in the absence of gay ministers. This reiterated the power imbalances. The absence of the gay ministers in the negotiating process gave rise to another discourse, namely, that gay people could be treated like objects. They are not worthy and dignified enough to be involved in discussions on their own status in the Church. Underlying to this discourse (that gay ministers are unworthy human beings) could also be a discourse that gay relationships might harm the dignity of gay ministers, or the dignity of the DRC. This would mean that the DRC still regarded gay relationships as sinful: an abomination before God. The rejection of gay relationships in the Resolution also indicates the power of the hetero-normative discourse. According to Blumenfeld (1992:15), this portrays heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. Hillier & Harrison (2004:81) view “[g]lobalising discourses around gender and sexuality, which are supported by the church and the state, as sanctioning heterosexuality and certain types of masculinity and femininity, while constituting non-heterosexuality and other ways of performing gender as unacceptable”.

The second secondary research question was, therefore, also addressed.

7.2.3 What are the implications, contradictions and interpretations of the terms in the Resolution?

The third research question was also addressed in Chapter Three. From the conversations with the co-researchers, the perception emerged that the power imbalances, due to a patriarchal discourse, led to a Resolution which discriminated against gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. This discrimination was based on prejudice and stigmatisation. The formulation of the first point seemed vague in terms of its meaning. Does it mean a literal interpretation of the Bible or were the cultural

historical contexts taken into account while interpreting the biblical texts on homosexuality? Both “liberal” and fundamentalists” are using the Bible as their respective point of departure, but arrive at completely opposing viewpoints. The second point contains a contradiction, because the added precondition in point seven overrules it. When the Resolution states that the love of Christ is embraced as the only valid basis for relationships in the Church, and that all people were created in the image of God and should be treated with dignity, it is perceived as insincere. How does this apply to gay relationships? Why are gay ministers accepted only up to a certain point? This overrules the love of Christ. By denying gay ministers meaningful relationships, they are robbed of their dignity as human beings who also have feelings and a need to belong. *Imago Dei* as the intention of God with humankind, embodied in Jesus Christ and fulfilled in the eschatological new creation, was realised through relationships (Grenz 2006). If the Spirit works in all believers, why invalidate the presence of the Holy Spirit in gay ministers?

Point three in the Resolution sounded like an embracing statement, because people from all sexual orientations are included in the love of Christ. But, as indicated in point two, what is meant by the love of Christ? Does it mean his saving grace? Why would the church still reserve separate ways of dealing with gay church members and gay clergy? According to this point in the Resolution, all gay people were included in God’s love, but this inclusion was made conditional. The added requisition – “as long as you are not in an intimate loving gay relationship” – made it conditional. According to the church ordinance, all positions in the church were equal (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2013:2). Why then the exception with regard to gay ministers? Why should they be disciplined if they are in loving monogamous relationships?

By preserving marriage only for heterosexual men and women, the DRC completely disregarded the origin of marriage and the many changes it has undergone. Internationally the world is increasingly acknowledging same-sex marriages. This may bring (and possibly, brought) the DRC to a position of irrelevance in the lives of some of its members. Apparently, they formulated this point based on their “understanding” of the Bible, yet it was not clear who was included in the meaning making process.

It was further noted that the concept of promiscuity referred to in point five of the Resolution was vaguely defined. How many sex partners would qualify as a

promiscuous lifestyle? Does it reject all extra-marital sex? This leaves no way forward to gay ministers, because with the added celibacy requirement in point seven they are also not allowed to be in relationships or, as stated in point six, to get married. Consequently the Resolution entangles the gay ministers in a double bind: “damn if you do; damn if you don’t.” According to the co-researchers, this contradictory point in the Resolution creates an impossible situation. It completely disregards the human nature to belong, to attach, to be with someone, and not to be isolated.

Another implication of the Resolution was the disregard by the DRC for God’s calling of people to serve Him. On what grounds could the DRC decide on behalf of God who was fit to serve Him as ministers? The question was asked whether the DRC was not abusing the Bible to justify their homophobic attitudes towards gay people.

Point seven of the Resolution also led to questions such as how to define and control celibacy and whether celibacy is a category or a divine calling. Should the DRC continue with its inducement of gay ministers into celibacy, would they also consider introducing a confessional practice with a celibate minister to listen to the confessions of gay ministers who have failed to abide by this superior ideal?

Although point eight in the Resolution was perceived by many as a huge step forward, it was perceived by gay ministers as a deliberate step by the DRC to abdicate their responsibility to local congregations. Cilliers (2011:413) considered this step as a cowardly decision, because it creates uncertainty and constant fear of rejection amongst gay members.

After deliberating on the discourses, the contradictions and interpretations of the Resolution, my co-researchers and I formed the perception that the Resolution reiterated the prejudice (premature judgement of someone) and stigmatisation of gay ministers, leading to discrimination. From the literature prejudice towards a person is formed based on values and feelings, rather than on actual experience, and is resistant when threatened with contradiction. Prejudice leads to the forming of in-groups and out-groups, where the familiar is preferred to the unfamiliar and positive attitudes and loyalty to the in-group play a bigger role in the formation of in-groups, than negative attitudes towards out-groups. Brewer (1999:441, 442) expressed concern that the very factors which give weight to attachment and loyalty might create fertile ground for antagonism

and distrust towards outsiders. These forces were considered to exert more power in highly segmented, hierarchically organised societies, which often happened to be the case between the DRC and the gay community.

According to Allport (1954:200) prejudice may lead to stereotyping, which again may lead to stigmatisation and discrimination. Stigmatised persons are viewed as of lesser value, and often rejected and excluded on grounds of reasons that had no bearing on them (Goffman (1990:12). People remember more readily instances that supported the stereotype and discount instances that challenge it (Goleman 1996:157). Ackermann (2005:389, 390) indicated how stigma uses metaphors (moffies, dykes), lies, silence, denial, guilt, fear and cultural taboos like promiscuity and HIV/ AIDS to create negative attitudes towards people, in this context gay ministers. The consequences of stigmatisation, prejudice and discrimination are often antilocution (hate speech), avoidance, exclusion and even physical attacks like hate crimes executed on gay people. Ackermann (2005:389) considered internalised stigma as the most difficult to deal with since it invaded a person's identity. On the same basis, many gay Christians, especially the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers, internalised these patriarchal discourses and homophobic ideas, which landed them in painful struggles with themselves, society and with God. Stigma is a severely dehumanising factor. It denies the reality that all people, also gay Christians, were created in the image of God.

In terms of how discrimination and in the context of this research the ban on relationships for gay ministers could affect them on a physical level, the literature suggested the following: Cacioppo et al. claim that loneliness raises blood pressure, to the extent of doubling the risk of heart attack and stroke (2006: 140–151). House (2001:273) considers emotional isolation as a more dangerous health risk than smoking or high blood pressure. Our understanding of why and how our lack of social connectedness affects our physical health so negatively is still limited, but it seems that negative relationships can undermine one's health. It does not only matter in our physical health, but also in our mental and emotional health (Johnson 2011:25). Brain studies done by Eisenberger and Lieberman (2004:294–298) showed that rejection and exclusion trigger the same part in the brain, the anterior cingulate, as physical pain. Johnson (2011:27) regards love as a basic primary need, like oxygen and water.

The next concern I addressed was whether prejudice, which causes stigma and discrimination, could change. Authors like Pettigrew (1975:x), Allport (1954:12, 486) and Goleman (1996:156) view emotions of prejudice to be formed in childhood, and consider it more difficult to change these feelings than intellectual beliefs about a stigmatised person or group. They consider it easier to change the beliefs and attitudes of a group than of an individual, providing that strong and brave leaders who are not governed by fear stand up for justice and heal the community (in our context, strong DRC leaders healing the gay community). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006:751) consider four circumstances conducive for intergroup contact which may maximally reduce prejudice, namely in circumstances of similar status, similar interests, similar tasks, and when the situation was conducive for personal intimate intergroup contact.

In Chapter Three I have addressed the third research question by indicating the contradictions, interpretations and devastating implications of the Resolution in terms of literature findings on prejudice, stigmatisation and discrimination.

7.2.4 What does the literature say with regards to pre-modern, modern and post-modern perspectives on gay relationships and gay marriages?

This research question was addressed in Chapter Four. From the literature it emerged that the Christian Coalition (Christians, churches) is the strongest opposition against same-sex marriages (Sullivan 2004:46). This opposition is primarily based on religious and scriptural grounds. Societal discourse (patriarchy, hetero-normative) on sexuality, marriage and religion maintain this opposition today. During “pre-modern”, “modern” and “post-modern” times, different societal discourses on sexuality, marriage and religion impacted differently on gay unions /marriages because of different interpretations and meanings attached to it. Authors like Gerstenberger (2002:17) and Dreyer (2008:504) remind us to take the cultural-historical contexts into account when interpreting biblical texts, and for instance an institution like marriage.

The concept of marriage has undergone many changes in terms of structure and definition (Coontz 2000:10-15; Coontz 2012:22). The motive to marry changed from an arrangement regarding money, property and pro-creation to one of mutual love and personal fulfilment. The ancient Hebrews allowed men to satisfy their sexual needs with several wives, prostitutes, and even male lovers (Ridgwell [2012 Online]; Boswell 1995:

xxi, 173; Greenberg 2004:147, 177). Over time, the structure and definition of marriage changed fundamentally. If anti-gay marriage traditionalists defend marriage, what are they actually defending? Dreyer (2008:501, 502) views both sexuality and marriage as being socially constructed. As such it is soteriologically indifferent and should be de-sacramentalised. With the rise of the Roman Catholic Church in the eighth century, religion became interwoven into marriage and marriage became a sacrament. A marriage became legally recognised through the blessing of the priest. The Reformers like Luther rejected the idea of marriage as a sacrament. According to Martin Luther (Fudge 2003: 323–325), “Marriage is a civil affair...it has nothing to do with the church...” He also strongly opposed the imposition of clerical celibacy. From the short history of marriage it became clear that marriage was not biblically instituted, but rather an institution that was socially constructed over time. Boswell (1995:9) underscores how difficult it is to know exactly what pre-modern heterosexual relationships entailed. This is also true for homosexual relationships of pre-modern times.

Same-sex unions/marriages have been a valuable institution for most of human history and most cultures have known about it all along. Homosexual and homo-erotic acts were known and practiced in the Near-Eastern world of antiquity, without any moral or religious judgement (Human 2007:37). According to Otto (2007:58-60) the Near-East of antiquity had no systematic guidelines on ethical norms and values. Especially in Mesopotamia with its complex world of gods, the normal was considered as the norm and was, as such, socially acceptable. Already in the third century BCE in Egypt and Mesopotamia, homosexual contact was a known practice. Nakedness and passionate sex were celebrated without any feelings of guilt as something to be proud about (Botha (2007:68-87). Women were seen as inferior and incomplete, while the ideal body was that of a well-built man. They did not differentiate between heterosexual and homosexual desire. The male body was the biggest source of temptation. Practices that were considered to be “against nature” were acts executed as a consequence of excessiveness and a lack of self-discipline (see 4.2.4.2). Self-control was considered to be one of the highest virtues. Botha (2007:82) indicates that the early Christians established the idea of marriage as a sacrament. This developed along with the idea that sex was something dirty; genitals were ugly and should be covered with clothes. He points out that those ideas were not the ideas of the Romans, Greeks or Jews of antiquity. When comparing the approaches to sex of the people of Pompeii, for example,

to the changing ideas of early Christians, it is clear that perceptions regarding sexuality and eroticism are culturally and historically bound, and therefore contextual (Botha 2007:68; Gerstenberger 2002:16).

The Old Testament offers four texts that seem to refer to the issue of homosexuality: Gen 19:1–29; Judges 19; Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13. According to Groenewald (2007:104,105) and Otto (2007: 61) the first two texts refer to rape – an act which is categorically condemned. There is no reference to a homosexual relationship. The following two texts form part of the purity codex, aiming to safeguard the identity of Israel with respect to other nations. Groenewald (2007:105) holds the opinion that the exegesis of these texts points to married men wanting to get involved in the temple prostitution practices of the Canaanites. There is no evidence of homosexual relationships, but much rather of married men committing adultery. He claims that it would be unethical to condemn all homosexuals or all heterosexuals because of these texts.

The New Testament does not represent a homogeneous world, but rather a mix of Greek, Roman, Jewish and early Christian influences, especially in their viewpoints on sexuality and the human body (Steyn 2007:147; Loader 2004:). Germond (1997:220-225) views three New Testament texts as traditionally having been interpreted as prohibiting homosexual activity: Romans 1:26-7, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Although theologians differ in their understanding of those texts, it seems that the texts refer to people who have turned their backs on God and who did not display behaviour suitable for the converted. Paul refers to the unrighteous, people who commit idolatry, homosexual perversion, pederasty and temple prostitution, including immoral homosexual acts (Germond 1997:224; Du Toit 2007a:165). According to Pronk (1993:277), Paul uses the example of homosexuality to illustrate the wrath of God against the Gentile world, because he probably viewed homosexual behaviour as a typical example of paganism. It may seem as if Paul viewed homosexuality as “non-normal” and as such considered it as unnatural (*para phusin*) behaviour for believers.

Nowhere in the four Gospels do we find any reference by Jesus to homosexuality. In Matthew 19:11-12 He mentions the three categories of people who may find it impossible to get married. Theologians differ whether Jesus referred to homosexual people in this passage. Germond (1997:203) puts it clearly that the redemption (or condemnation) of

gay people does not depend on how you or I interpret the Bible. We are saved by grace alone (see also Müller 1997:176). In terms of unconditional love and inclusion in his engagement with people from all walks of life Jesus sets an example to his followers of all times. Jesus challenged categories of exclusion, especially those based on the purity system. He lived in a world where strict demands for ritual purity created large groups of marginalised people, such as menstruating women, lepers, the blind, the physical disabled, eunuchs (castrated men), children, Gentiles, tax collectors, prostitutes, murderers, etc. Jesus proclaimed that these marginalised groups also belonged to the Kingdom of heaven. He did not only use words of inclusion, but also acted upon those words by touching the marginalised.

Same-sex unions in pre-modern Europe were seen as natural (Boswell 1995:54; Veith 1994:30, 31; Germond 1997:222). Greek culture not only tolerated homosexuality, but even encouraged it. Neither Greek nor Roman law or religion considered homosexual eroticism as of less value or different from heterosexual eroticism. Both Greek and Roman societies merely assumed that adult males would be interested in sexual relationships with males and females. Sex was considered as a social and not a moral issue. Boswell (1995:80) reports relationships and formal unions, even marriages between same-sex couples. The status of these marriages was comparable to heterosexual marriages.

Boswell (1980:187) suggests that same-sex relationships in Medieval Europe were especially associated with the clergy. According to Eskridge (1993:1452) Boswell based his claims on information acquired during his research on medieval Christian liturgical collections. Boswell (1980:187, 188) reports some of the rules contained in the forerunner of the Rule of Saint Benedict (the code by which most medieval monks regulated their existence) were apparently made to regulate and discourage homosexual behaviour, for example all the monks had to sleep in the same room, with the abbot's bed in the middle of the room. Later Saint Benedict added a rule that a light had to be kept burning during the night and all monks had to sleep with their clothes on. The young men had to mix with the older men, but were not allowed to sleep side by side. Boswell reminds us that the regular clergy were bound by vows of celibacy and that efforts to prevent sexual activities could be seen in the light of assisting them to keep their vows.

Originally, same-sex unions were commonplace and legal in medieval Byzantine society but a new discourse on homosexuality emerged from the fourteenth century (Boswell 1995:218, 262, 263). Apparently the author Dante played a role in this new discourse by placing the sodomites as punishment for their sins in the highest rung of purgatory just outside the gates of heaven and on top of the list to be cleansed. Soon many Italian states started to legalise punishment for homosexual acts. During the Renaissance intolerance towards homosexuality increased, partly to the quest for intellectual and institutional uniformity. Clerical supervision for moral, ethical and legal problems was standardised, resulting in gay people living their lives more covertly (Boswell, 1980:270). Sullivan (2004:30-45) reports the story of an English emigrant worker in Philadelphia, Mary East, who lived with her wife for 34 years, the only catch being that Ms East was living undercover as James How. The Stonewall riots (see 4.4) in 1969 proved to introduce the end for this period in which gay people were forced to remain in “closets”, thereby either suppressing their identities or living it underground.

The Postmodern era introduced a new paradigm where context, language, social constructionism and deconstruction became important in the meaning making process of people’s lived experiences (Doherty 1991:40, 41). Hoffman (1990:7) believes that we look at reality through different lenses that influence our interpretation of reality. She considers the value of a gender lens as exposing established assumptions in psychological theory that have been taken for granted (i.e. being gay is a pathology, or homosexual behaviour is, *per sé*, perverse). Pronk (1993:232,) for example, states that since the 1990s a fundamental change has occurred in the Western concept of nature regarding the debate on Romans 1:26, 27. This explains why biological and other causal explanations (see 4.2.4) for homosexuality are increasingly playing a role in the moral debate on the acceptability of homosexuality.

In the postmodern era it also increasingly happens that well-known theologians defend gay relationships/marriages in public. In an interview Rev Mpho Tutu, Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s daughter, criticised banning of marriages between people of the same sex. She considered the banning of same-sex marriages as the last bastion in the efforts to legalise love (CNN 2014).

On the international level, numerous changes took place during the past decade effecting gay unions/marriages (see 4.5.1). Some of these changes were in support of gay

marriages, while others were banning gay marriages, even introducing harsh punishments for being overtly in a gay relationship (Beeld 2014:2). In South Africa gay marriages were legalised on 30 November 2006. This ruling and the implementation of same sex marriages were greeted with mixed reaction. Many Christian communities, including the DRC, objected directly or indirectly against the legislation (Jackson 2006:5; Jackson 2006:6; Malan 2006; Bellingan 2006). As far as the DRC was concerned their objections resulted in the 2007 Resolution on Homosexuality (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2007:8).

While the gay debate, especially the struggle for acknowledgement of gay relationships carries on nationally and internationally, the gay community was often marginalised and left voiceless in terms of their relationship needs and problems. According to Piazza (1995:3, 4) gay people's yearning for belonging to a family is often overlooked by the parent's own struggle to accept their gay child. Once this gay person enters into a relationship, he/she has no map to serve as a guide as to how they should go about to establish a healthy relationship. Quite often Shame and Fear get the better of them, causing the relationship to suffer due to their own perception of being disgusting and unlovable. Many gays are married to straight people due to societal pressures to get married and to bear children. This usually causes immense turmoil in the gay person, but also in the family, often leading to divorce. In 4.5.2.4 I have reported a gay man's inhumane struggle to be intimate with his wife. It is not uncommon for married gay men and women to have extramarital affairs with people of the same sex, reiterating the Guilt and the Shame. Sometimes gay relationships do not last, because they do not always have a normal dating period like heterosexuals. Financial and emotional reasons may trick them into moving in with a partner much too soon after a relationship has started. If the relationship gets into trouble, it lacks societal support. On the contrary, parents often hope that the gay child will now enter into a relationship with a heterosexual person. Like any other couple, gay couples also, from time to time, struggle with conflicting values, like how to manage their finances or how to manage children from previous relationships, or from their own relationship. Another hurdle in gay relationships is caused by sexual and emotional affairs. When trust is broken, it is difficult to be restored (Piazza 1995:150). Emotions like anger and grief due to the years of oppression and discrimination are also common with gay people. Once the "heterosexual myth" is lost there must be a time to grieve that loss. A last hurdle in gay relationships that was

discussed in Chapter Four is intimacy. The Church has laid much Guilt and Shame on gay people in terms of their intimate relationships. Many gay couples refrain from being intimate, because it is a “sin” and they fear God’s wrath – with devastating consequences for their relationships.

Some arguments levelled against gay marriages are that marriage is between a man and a woman, defeating its main purpose of procreation. A counter argument applied (Myers & Scanzoni 2005:119, 120 and Sullivan, 2004) is based on the many changes that marriage has undergone already. Potentially it is possible for it to undergo another change to accommodate gay marriages. With reference to procreation, although gay people can’t procreate in the normal way, infertile couples or post-menopausal women should then also be precluded from getting married. Another argument is based on the discourse that children need both a mother and a father and the impact on them in a same-sex household. Myers and Scanzoni (2005: 121) offer counter arguments in this regard. The concern is that gay marriages open the door to homosexual adoption, which will lead to more children growing up without a mother and/or a father. They are also concerned that gay marriages may encourage teenagers who are unsure of their sexuality to engage in a lifestyle with high risks of “suicide, depression, HIV, drug abuse, STD’s and other pathogens”. The underlying discourse to these arguments is that gay people choose their sexual orientation and that all gay people are caught up in injurious lifestyles. Studies done with children of gay couples show no appreciable difference between children growing up in stable hetero- or homosexual households (Sullivan 2004:239).

Another discourse is that gays are promiscuous and therefore their relationships do not last as long as heterosexual marriages. Myers and Scanzoni (2005:124) reported studies suggesting that heterosexual non-marital relationships also do not last as long as heterosexual marriages. Based on this argument, gay marriage can actually curb promiscuity. Another argument bordering on the promiscuity argument is that gays might engage in polygamy and the accompanying arguments of bestiality and necrophilia. Sullivan (2004:278-281) compares these arguments to the panic which occurred about interracial marriages or the ending of men’s property claims on women. He concedes that when the gender differs the marriage model will probably also differ. If females are less promiscuous than males, then lesbian marriages should have more moral legitimacy

than heterosexual marriages. If marriage is seen as encouraging monogamy, then especially gay men need marriage as an incentive for responsible behaviour, monogamy and fidelity. Gay marriage could then actually elevate the institution of marriage instead of undermining it.

Our basic need as humans is to belong. Marriage could be a healthy way to help gay people to fulfil this basic need of belonging. They also have a need for companionship. Certainly this privilege should not be reserved only for heterosexual people. It seems that the Church views some sins as bigger than others, because many more heterosexual families are destroyed by adultery, alcohol abuse, domestic violence and sexual abuse than by a loving monogamous gay relationship. In fact, gays in monogamous relationships or married gay people are the least prone to destroy families (Sullivan, 2004:73).

This notion was confirmed in the interview I had with a gay couple who have been together for 12 years and married for seven years. In our conversation it became clear how committed and faithful they are towards each other. They have a healthy sex life, but also make special time at the end of each day for quality communication. During my interview with them I became aware of the normality of their relationship. They were two married men, gay and in love, and in a caring, respectful and committed relationship.

The literature on gay relationships is summarised by what Downs (2006:102) describes as the journey towards authenticity, leaving the phase of Shame, invalidation and inauthenticity behind. The DRC, by rejecting gay relationships and by reiterating the Shame through invalidation, deterred this growth phase for gay people. Once a gay person does not have to hide anymore, often a period of meaning-making and spiritual growth follows – what Mattman (2006:128, 129) calls a coming-in process. He interprets the different stages of the life of Jesus as an ascending spiral which can be experienced over and over again. Each stage integrates the experiences of the previous stage, resulting in a person's response to evolve and to become more mature with each turn of the spiral. He applied these different stages: birth, baptism, vocation, cross and resurrection to the lives of today's gay people, each as an enabling resource for working through different challenges in life and initiating a liberating process of growth and transformation. The solidarity that gay Christians have with the way of Jesus lie both in the unfavourable circumstances of his life and in God's divine purpose for him.

By this literature review on gay unions and gay marriages I have addressed the fourth secondary research question.

7.2.5 What are the impacts of the Resolution on the lived experiences of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?

This research question is addressed in Chapter Five. I have become much aware of the immense suffering of gay ministers and gay candidate ministers due to the complete rejection they experienced as human beings by the church as a result of the Resolution. They were not good enough for the church. The first and direct impact on those who decided to make their gay relationships known, was that they either immediately lost their jobs as a minister, or their candidature to be legitimated. This resulted in immediate consequential problems: no place to stay, no money, bursary awarded by the DRC had to be repaid with immediate effect, no immediate hope of an income, because it is not so easy to find a job with Greek and Hebrew on your CV. Worse of all, their career – their calling by God - was shattered in a moment. Some had to deal with media reporting overnight; they became the (gossip) talk of the town: one day they were still the minister baptising the children in the congregation and burying their dead; the next day they were treated like criminals without having committed any criminal act. They had to leave the ministry without even a farewell. One recalled how he was immediately removed from about forty of his Facebook friends' list of friends. Others who decided to remain celibate had to continuously “guard their step” in order to hide their homosexual identity and to prevent possible (inevitable?) prejudice and discrimination – with dire consequences.

The gay ministers and gay candidate ministers perceived that the DRC invalidated and belittled their calling from God. They did not understand how the Church could have so much power to determine whom God had called or not. Another gay candidate minister felt the Resolution deprived him of his passion to make a difference on a person-to - person basis. Someone else described how the Resolution with its celibacy requirement came as a train smash and derailed his momentum to become a minister. He experienced the Resolution as disempowering and contributing to his feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. It reiterated the Shame of being gay. As he put it: “The DRC made me feel like a less worthy member, a less worthy minister and a less worthy human being: a second-hand everything.”

One of my co-researchers entered into a relationship with someone from the opposite sex just to appear “normal” and to escape feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. He believed marriage with a heterosexual person would “cure” him from his homosexuality. The marriage did not last long. These actions were as a direct consequence of the pressure from society which just became too much to bear. This can be seen as a direct impact of the Resolution of the DRC. Whether the Resolution was formulated in 2013, or 2007 or 1986 nothing has actually changed over the years in terms of same-sex relationships for gay ministers. Some of the other co-researchers reported immense strain on their same-sex relationships; one even had to go through a break-up. Those co-researchers, who chose to remain in the DRC, but celibate, chose a life of loneliness without anyone to love or to have as a companion. Their needs to attach and to belong would always just remain dreams. One co-researcher was invited by his colleague to “celebrate his celibacy”. The impact of the celibacy requirement landed both of my celibate co-researchers in Denmark for depression and anxiety treatment. One had received shock treatment, while the other one had years ago been subjected to aversion therapy. These treatments left them with negative side-effects, like temporary memory loss and erectile dysfunction. What is heart-breaking is that one of the co-researchers treated for Depression became better when he realised that he had to distinguish between God and the DRC.

In terms of engaging with members of the Curatorium one co-researcher reported extremely negative and disappointing experiences. Although members of the Curatorium were bound by the requirements of the Resolution, words used by my co-researcher to express the interpretations how he/she was treated by members of the Curatorium, were: in-humane, un-Christlike, unethical, malicious, impatient, hard, merciless, unsympathetic, clinical (like in a court of law), intimidating and without any pastoral care. The co-researcher felt that members of the Curatorium “did not play according to the rules”, i.e. they suggested to the co-researcher to lie about his/her sexual orientation, despite two core values of the church: honesty and integrity. This led to disillusionment with the DRC. The co-researchers were disappointed with the Church because it seems as if the church leaders were not open to dialogue and wanted to maintain the status quo. One co-researcher expressed the notion that it seemed as if the church leaders were guarding their own legacies in the church, thereby not wanting to be the leader under

whose leadership gay ministers were accepted unconditionally.

A big moment in the life of a theology legitimate is the delivering of the probation sermon. As they told me: there is only one first time that you stand on the pulpit. Two of my co-researchers did not have this privilege. One co-researcher had to deliver the first sermon in the Presbyterian Church, while another had to deliver the first sermon in the Reforming (gay) Church. Although it was good experiences to both, the events were also accompanied with huge disappointments. First prize would have been to deliver their first sermon in the DRC, evaluated by members of the Curatorium and supported by their family and friends.

The humiliation and rejection inflicted on my co-researchers by the DRC moved some of them away from the Church and from God. One gay minister experienced a period of atheism. Another felt that she did not need the church to serve the Lord and to remain faithful to her calling. She found a different congregation who accepted her just as she is. Sadness got the better of me when she told me: "When I am with people who say they are atheists, I relax, but when I am with 'church' people, I become tense. I fear their judgement."

Fortunately one of my co-researchers had a more positive experience with the DRC. The ridicule and humiliation that he experienced from the *Gereformeerde kerk* and fellow students at the NWU moved him to join the DRC at Vanderbijlpark. The congregation there set an example of love, inclusion and acceptance. According to him they restored his dignity.

Sadly, a co-researcher who chose to remain celibate throughout his career as a DRC minister, and who went on early retirement, referred to himself as a traveller searching for a different God from the god of the DRC. According to him the god of the DRC murdered him emotionally, spiritually and financially. Another co-researcher who was also denied to be legitimated referred to himself as a post-institutionalised Christian, angry with the Church, but still contributing in different ways.

Although the impact of the Resolution was devastating on the lives of my co-researchers, most of them have also reported alternative stories which developed from their misery. One co-researcher started a church for gay Christians, which is now twenty two years in existence. He also played a major role in the legalisation of gay marriages in South Africa on the 30 November 2006. A co-researcher, who chose to remain celibate, believed he can still be faithful to his calling by bringing unconditional love to other people. He just hopes that nobody will “discover” that he is gay. Another co-researcher, although being angry with the Church, parted with his dominant story of being the underdog. In the process he came to the realisation that he is on route to authenticity. He has many skills which he will still apply in the service of Lord. Regrettably one of my co-researchers who chose to remain celibate in the DRC and who went on early retirement has become lonely, angry and despondent. It is as if the full impact of the Resolution after a life-long struggle to deny his homosexuality is getting the better of him now. Negative thoughts are trying to convince him that ending his life journey would be the only way out of this misery.

In Chapter Five I have addressed the research question on how the Resolution impacted on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers.

7.2.6 What do experts from other disciplines say about the impact of the terms in the Resolution?

This question was addressed in Chapter Six. Some of the concerns raised by the interdisciplinary participants were common concerns, while others were unique to their specific disciplines. All of the interdisciplinary participants were sympathetic towards the gay ministers. They were deeply aware of the sincerity of the gay co-researchers calling to become ministers and to serve the Lord. According to some the DRC never understood or appreciated the real anguish of the gay ministers. The DRC was seen as prejudiced and insincere. They were also concerned about the discrimination and double standards and inconsistencies contained in the Resolution. The question was raised whether the DRC has ever banned ministers to be legitimated on other grounds like gluttony. According to the participants, the hopes and dreams of the co-researchers were frustrated and left unfulfilled, leading to feelings of powerlessness.

Some concerns which were unique to Social Work were feelings of “otherness”, internal

conflict experienced by the gay co-researchers and depression. Another participant from Psychology was concerned that the stories of the co-researchers revealed lived experiences of psychological scarring: anxiety, fear of exposure, self-reproach, sin delusion, isolation and withdrawal, loneliness, feelings of rejection and inhibited creativity.

One of the participants was concerned about the double bind contained in the Resolution, which he considered as the worst kinds of life-defeating situations. It leaves no room for meaningful living and is totally disempowering. People who are trapped in a double bind may manifest psycho-pathological symptoms as a result of being trapped, like inducing schizophrenic behaviour (see 3.3.4).

Some of the concerns which emerged from the participants were that the Resolution was sustained by discourses of patriarchy and homophobia.

Although they acknowledged the progress made by the DRC to accept gay people, it was criticised for using abstract statements and careful wordings. The DRC was accused of choosing to be followers rather than leaders. Love and understanding requires a church that bravely thinks ahead, rather than keeps on parroting the back-peddlers - a church that will do everything that is necessary to embrace all of God's creatures, just as they are.

In terms of the legal aspects and the constitutional rights of the co-researchers, one of the participants expressed the notion that the Church's conditions for legitimisation, especially its pontifical prescription to abstain, constitute unfair discrimination. This is because gays are denied the hope and possibility to live full lives, thereby encroaching on their inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected. Admittedly, the Church frequently proclaims that it respects gays and that it does not reject the homosexual but only his or her actions, but many consider that to be paying lip-service as the church's deeds do not mirror the words. Gays experience such an attitude not as an acceptance, but rather as a denial of their human-ness. According to this participant the Church justifies its discrimination on abstract grounds with no real appreciation for the depth and extent of the sufferings of gay people and without an appreciation of the nefarious effects that its discriminatory dictates and attitudes have on human relations, not to mention self-worth, emotional stability, and human dignity.

Through interdisciplinary dialogues with experts from Psychology, Social Work and the Law I have addressed the last secondary research question.

7.2.7 What are the impacts of the Resolution on the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers?

The previous conclusions took me back to my primary research question: What are the impacts? In Chapter Two I have explained how the compromise Resolution was formulated and accepted at the General Synod of the DRC of 2007. Chapter Three unmasked the discourses underlying and sustaining the Resolution. Possible interpretations and discriminatory implications were discussed. In Chapter Four, pre-modern, modern and post-modern voices from literature spoke on gay relationships and gay marriages, highlighting that sexuality and marriage are social constructs that change over time as societal values and perceptions change. Chapter Five created a space where gay ministers, gay candidate ministers and I could tell and retell our lived experiences in terms of the impacts which the Resolution had on us. In Chapter Six I conversed with three experts from Social Work, Psychology and the Law by reflecting on their responses to my questions after they have read the stories of the gay co-researchers. This led me to address my primary research question by concluding that the Resolution of the DRC causes gay ministers and gay candidate ministers to feel like “less worthy members, a less worthy ministers and less worthy human beings: a second-hand everything.” This is confirmed through the interdisciplinary dialogues with the experts.

The impact of the Resolution was that it did unfathomable harm to those in the cross-hairs of the DRC: the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Lives have been affected in ways that will be difficult to heal and left gay ministers and candidate ministers with deep feelings of rejection and betrayal by the very focus of their affection: the Church.

7.3 VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH

Polkinghorne (2007:1) considers judgements about validity of research-generated knowledge as part and parcel of social science research. Knowledge development consists of two communities: conventional researchers and reformist researchers. Narrative research is positioned within the reformist community. It rests on the shoulders

of the researchers to develop arguments to convince readers of the validity of their research. Threats to validity for narrative researchers relate to two areas: people differ in the experienced meanings and the stories they tell about this meaning, and connections between storied texts and the interpretation of those texts. In referring to the brainstorming session (see 5.3.3) with all the co-researchers it became clear how significant the correlation between their experienced meanings of events and the connections between their storied texts and the interpretation of those texts were. They had similar perceptions about how the DRC treated them as gay ministers and their interpretation as being rejected and not good enough for the DRC. This serves to refute the threat to validity.

For knowledge claims to have scientific merit, it depends on the weight of the evidence and argument offered in support of a statement or knowledge claim. A knowledge claim is thus not intrinsically valid, but its validity is a function of intersubjective judgement (Polkinghorne 2007:4, 6). If, for example, I as the researcher make a validity claim about one of my co-researchers' depression he has experienced because he could not be legitimated, I as the researcher have to provide supporting evidence and arguments of the anguish of my co-researcher. Evidence would for example be the admittance of the co-researcher to a psychiatric clinic where he received treatment for his depression. This would connect the evidence to the conclusion. Apart from grounding the conclusion in evidence, I also cited the evidence in support of the conclusion (Polkinghorne 2007:8).

In narrative research the researcher should give clarification of what the storied text is meant to represent, and whether it is a product of a co-construction between researcher and co-researcher. The focus is on the personal meaning that life events have for people and not on factual occurrence of events (Polkinghorne 2007:9). There is often a difference between a person's actual experienced meaning and his storied description of his experiences. Polkinghorne (2007:10) offers four sources for this disjunction: The limits of language, the limits of reflection to reveal all the layers of meaning, the resistance of people to fully reveal all the felt meanings of which they are aware, and the complexity due to the co-creation of texts by the interviewer and the participant.

Although, according to Polkinghorne (2007:12): "It is the interviewer's task to empower participants by acknowledging that they are the only ones who have access to their experienced meaning," I, as the narrative researcher, followed certain principles of

narrative research which enabled me to increase understanding of my co-researchers' lived experiences. By being respectful and non-judgemental in the research which I have done with gay ministers and gay candidate ministers an emotionally safe space was created (Morgan 2000:4). This space was necessary for a relationship of trust to develop. Respect also prevented me from asking more questions when I sensed that a co-researcher was not ready to reveal more of the felt meanings he/she was aware of. Furthermore, I adopted a not-knowing approach where I asked questions if I really did not suspect what the answers were. This helped me towards a deeper understanding of my co-researchers' experiences of pain and rejection, without making any assumptions. Polkinghorne (2007:11) expresses the notion that participants can only articulate that part of meaning which they can access through reflection. In my research journey my participants and I have told and retold our stories, and reflected on the retelling of our stories. In the process I have come to realise that reflection has limitations, because somewhere we had to conclude the reflections on the retellings. Apart from the time limitations I was also aware of the complexities of experiencing and expressing meaning. Meaning permeates through the body and the psyche, something which is not easily translated into language when reflected on. Keeping in mind that the text was socially co-constructed in an intersubjective way, I was aware of my responsibility to lessen the distance between the participants' articulated experienced meaning and the experienced meaning (Polkinghorne 2007:12; Schwandt 1994:127). Therefore, I returned the texts more than once to the participants for reviewing. Often some clarification took place, or alterations or even expansions of the text were made which would be a better interpretation/representation of their experienced meaning.

In doing my research with the gay ministers I was guided by Polkinghorne and the requirements discussed by him to refute the threats to the validity of my narrative approach. The above discussion serves as proof of the credibility of my research, thereby providing the research with a degree of acceptance of the knowledge claims made in my conclusions.

7.4 POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

7.4.1 Research Contribution

The main contribution of this research is viewed to add to the existing body of knowledge. As was indicated in Chapter One, no formal research had been done on the

impact of a decision such as the one taken by the DRC in 2007. Although one could have been speculative in this regard by exploring possible impacts, such statements would never stand up in a serious debate.

This research informs any debate on the topic of gay Christians, in particular those debates on gay clergy. It documents in no uncertain terms how the 2007 Resolution impacts to this day on their lives. Such impacts, based on scientific research, should inform debates and further decisions in this regard.

This research stretches the envelope on what is known of how gay people experience decisions that are taken – unilaterally - by non-gays. In that sense it has the potential to sensitize communities of faith and beyond to the suffering of gay people, especially gay ministers. Before this research little or nothing was known about such impacts. After this research, no such decisions dare ignore the consequences.

7.4.2 Impact of the research on the local community

This research could have the following impacts on the local community:

7.4.2.1 Revisiting the Resolution

The issue of the gay ministers' celibacy requirement is on the agenda for 2015 General Synod. Hopefully the conclusions of this research will be disseminated to the new task team who has to serve the General Synod with a report on gay relationships and gay marriages (Algemene Sinode [NGK] 2013 [online]).

7.4.2.2 Admission of theology students

In my conversations with the gay ministers and gay candidate ministers, the issue of admission of theology students was often raised. A stumbling block was to understand why the various faculties of theology would allow gay students to register as students of theology at all. Wouldn't it be more ethical if the faculties of theology were more transparent by spelling out the implications should a gay student choose to enrol in any case? If such students insist on doing the course, should they not be well informed about the stipulations in the Resolution or be offered different career options within theology, like pastoral psychology.

7.4.2.3 Doing theology and pastoral care with gay people

All my co-researchers complained about the lack of pastoral care from the members of the Curatorium, from their local DRC ministers and from the members of their congregations in general. I do not want to assume why that basic vocation of ministers was not executed. Although doing pastoral care was not the main focus of my research study, as a pastoral therapist and in the light of the pain which my co-researchers experienced due to the rejection by the DRC, I would not be able to journey with my co-researchers without doing pastoral care. Therefore it is also applicable to reflect on the implications of the research in doing pastoral care.

I prefer the Narrative approach for doing pastoral care, because it is a respectful, non-blaming approach which centres people as the experts in their own lives. This means that we follow a not-knowing approach where we do not assume we know how someone felt, or what he thought or what the meaning is that he attached to an event. When people tell their stories to us, they link certain events in a certain sequence across time and according to a plot together. The meaning that we give to our experiences forms the plot of our stories (Morgan 2000:2, 5; Müller 2000). In applying these narrative principles when we do pastoral care with people like my co-researchers, a safe space will be created emotionally in which they will feel free to share their painful lived experiences. At the core of this pastoral care would be healing towards re-authoring a person's life stories. Healing is also at the core of a feminist theology of praxis (Ackermann 1998:80, 81).

A feminist theology of praxis understands healing as a quest for both a personal and a political healing. For such healing to begin, the victims need time to grieve their losses and to get the opportunity to speak their pain, and their right to justice. Through this research merely by "speaking their pain" the healing process of the gay ministers and the gay candidate ministers had begun. The perpetrators (the DRC) also need healing through acknowledgement, confession and repentance. This is a process that should be facilitated between the different groups of people involved in the gay debate. When a healing praxis is collaborative and involves "sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, it can be viewed as truly restorative". The basis for this healing process should be accountability, love, hope and passion. The first step towards healing is awareness. Awareness is the willingness to hear, to see and to feel the pain of those

who tell their stories. As Christians we know that forgiveness is central to our faith, but it is not a private affair and without repentance it becomes cheap. Forgiveness cannot be demanded; only hoped for. Forgiveness aims at reconciliation and to restore communion with one another. It also restores our communion with God by reconciling our brokenness. It is possible, but takes time. Human relationships take time to heal. One can only hope that forgiveness and repentance will meet in order for reconciliation to become possible (Ackermann 1998:80-93; Hooks 2000:104), especially between the gay ministers and the gay candidate ministers and the DRC. This could lead to freedom on both sides: freedom from guilt, from jail, from shame to freedom to love unconditionally and inclusively. Then the DRC could become what Landman (2014:9) suggests: a space for streams of water and of love, a space where people get healed and where people heal, a space where people reach out and where people rebuild. If this does not happen, reconciliation remain superficial and hypocritical (Boesak & de Young 2012:149).

7.4.3 Impact of the research beyond the local community

Müller (2005:85) considers practical theological research as more than just describing and interpreting of experiences. “Alternative interpretations” is reached through deconstruction and emancipation by allowing all the different stories of the research to develop into a new story which points beyond the local community. This differs from generalisations in that it refers to contextual research done with such integrity that it can be applied to a broader community. Through the narrative approach this happens through a process of social constructionism where all the co-researchers are engaged in the creation of new meaning.

The way this can be done lies on the level of dissemination (Müller 2005:86). He recommends group work, workshops and/or seminars held with stakeholders, like academic institutions and different congregations of the DRC. Another way of dissemination could also be through radio and television interviews and panel discussions. It can also be done through concentric dissemination to various communities of faith different from the DRC, including the gay communities of faith.

Although this research did not intend on entering the debate on homosexuality, it could contribute by being a prophetic voice in sensitizing the DRC and other communities of faith to the impact of the Resolution on her gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. In

the past resistance to social discourses like slavery, apartheid and the submissive role of women in the church was met with shock, disbelief, resentment and vehement resistance. In South Africa it took a long time to change those attitudes, but persistent, brave prophetic voices sensitized societies to the real effects of discriminatory systems on real people. Without such voices an awareness or consciousness would not have been created which eventually led to a change in attitudes and a consequent change in systems sustaining these attitudes. In this sense this research wishes to be a prophetic voice towards greater consciousness of the impact of the discriminatory Resolution on gay ministers and gay candidate ministers. Once ministers of different faith communities become aware of the impacts of the Resolution on gay ministers they will have to ethically respond to their new knowledges.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In Chapter One I mentioned that the impact of the Resolution was explored on gay ministers only while acknowledging that many other people or groups of people might have been impacted by the Resolution. This was not seen to reduce the quality, validity or relevance of the research but just fell outside of the scope of the research. This could be a topic for further research, because the Resolution probably also impacted on parents, family and friends of gay ministers – financially, emotionally and spiritually. Ordinary members of the DRC could also have been committed against their will or conscience by the Resolution. How did the Resolution impact on those members who are in favour of gay relationships and gay marriages? Are they leaving the DRC? Similarly further research in terms of dialogue with and spiritual care for church members who reject homosexuality is recommended. These members should also have a voice in terms of how their church is changing due to the changes in Resolutions with regard to gay people, especially gay ministers.

Another area for research could be how to change prejudice. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006:751) consider four circumstances conducive for intergroup contact which may maximally reduce prejudice, namely in circumstances of similar status, interests, tasks, and when the situation was conducive for personal intimate intergroup contact. This could form a valuable contribution if researched in a scientific way.

If one takes into account the immense suffering and subsequent psychological, physical

and spiritual impacts of the Resolution on the gay ministers, further research should be imperative to assess if the interpretation of the constitution in terms of the fairness of the discrimination levelled against gay ministers, is just.

A last suggestion to consider for further research is the feasibility of starting a specialised ministry for gay people in the DRC, similar to the Andrew Murray congregations. The Andrew Murray congregations cater for English speaking people and many other members of the DRC who do not find a home in the ordinary congregations. Gay ministers could be ordained in congregations as suggested. This has the potential of solving the problem of accommodating gay ministers in the ordinary congregations of the DRC where members still could be uncomfortable to ordain a gay minister. This need not be a permanent ruling, but a gradual transition towards the full acceptance of gay ministers in the DRC.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In Chapter Two I indicated how much progress in terms of accommodating gay people, including gay ministers, has been made by the resolutions taken by different Synod meetings of the DRC up till 2013. Unfortunately gay people do not always appreciate the changes, because the one persistent challenge remains: celibacy. Celibacy rules out sexual relationships and marriage remains impossible. In other words, the requirement for celibacy rules out intimate relationships, including marriage. It unequivocally dooms a person to remain single for life; unable to love and unable to be loved.

All of us take decisions all the time and we do not always take into account what the consequences will be. When the Synod approved the Resolution in 2007 the consequences could not accurately be predicted. In any case just to formulate and approve the Resolution required a great deal of bravery and diplomacy. The impact was therefore presumably not first and foremost in the minds of the decision makers.

This research studied the impacts of the Resolution in a qualitative way. Guessing and speculation were done away with. It brings authentic perspectives to the debate on gay relationships.

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APPENDIX I: CONSENT FORM

THE IMPACT OF THE 2007 SYNOD RESOLUTION OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH ON GAY MINISTERS: A POSTFOUNDATIONALIST NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have been informed about the project and I understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the research study is voluntary.
2. I am free to talk only about what I feel comfortable with.
3. I agree to the way of data capturing, viz. tape recording and procedural notes.
4. I am free to withdraw from the research study if I wish.
5. I am aware that my viewpoints will be written down as part of a PhD thesis.
6. Should I want to review my responses to questions before submission, these reviewed responses will be included in the thesis.
7. I will receive no payment for participating in the research study.
8. All my viewpoints will be treated confidentially.
9. I choose to use my own name/ pseudonym
10. I am aware that the supervisors of the study will have permission to read the material.
11. I know that by participating in this study I will contribute to the gay discourse.

.....
(Signature of participant) Date

.....
(Name of participant) (Signature of witness)

For any further information or concerns feel free to contact:

Marietjie van Loggerenberg: Tel: 012- 3476393 Cell: 082 3243 726
Or my promotor: Professor Julian Müller: Tel: 012 - 4202040

This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, UP.

APPENDIX II: LETTER TO EXPERTS

241 Carelsberg Street

Erasmusrand

16 January 2013

Dear Me Wezet Botes/ Professor Marinus Wiechers/ Professor Wilhelm Jordaan, Professor Juan Nel

I am exceptionally grateful that you are willing to assist me with my Ph.D research in Practical Theology (UP) with Professor Julian Müller as supervisor. I have selected you as one of my transversal reasoning partners/research participants from disciplines other than Theology. I have the highest regard for your expertise in your discipline. On top of that, the acclaim you have received, both nationally and internationally, for your contributions in your discipline speaks for itself. I am honoured to have access to such a body of knowledge and wisdom.

The complete title of my research is: **The impact of the 2007 Synod Resolution of the Dutch Reformed Church on Gay Ministers: A Post-Foundational Narrative Approach.**

You are required to do the following:

1. Please read the attached stories of the gay participants.
2. Respond to the four questions below from the **perspectives of your own discipline**. My expectation is that you will respond to each question in anything between one paragraph and two pages.

QUESTIONS:

1. When reading the stories of the gay ministers and/or aspiring gay ministers, what are your **concerns**?
2. What do you think is your discipline's **unique perspective** on these stories?
3. Why do you think your perspective would be **understood and appreciated** by people from other disciplines?
4. What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline **might not be taken seriously**?

Please note that I intend to identify you in my thesis by name. If this is not acceptable to you, please let me know.

I would be grateful if I could receive your feedback, if possible, towards the end of March 2013. If anything needs more clarification, please contact me.

Thank you again.

Kind regards

Marietjie van Loggerenberg
Pastoral Therapist (M.Ed; M.Th)
Cell 082 324 3726

APPENDIX III: CD-ROM WITH INTERVIEWS
