
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH ORIENTATION

*Is this work better defined as a worldview?
Perhaps, but even this is not enough.
Perhaps it's an epistemology, a philosophy,
a personal commitment, a politics,
an ethics, a practice, a life, and so on.
Michael White, 1995:37*

1.1 MARRIAGE TODAY

Is it really possible to prepare someone for marriage? What do you tell them? I was asked these questions by a counsellor during a visit to London in October 2000. Writing about this subject would "logically" lead to a positive answer. But the answer is not a simple one. I agree with Friedman (1989:134) and Stahmann and Hiebert (1987:18) that the decision to marry and the timing of a wedding is far from random or accidental. Friedman has found, for example, that many couples either meet their spouse or decide to marry within six months of major change in the family of origin of one of the partners. Anderson and Mitchell (1981:88; Schoen 1992:281) even argue that when couples who have lived together for a long time suddenly decide to marry, the reason is frequently that the one or the other senses an impending break-up and wants to use marriage as a bond for the relationship - which it may have been in the family of origin (see also Randall 1979:57-58). On a more positive level, the couple's decision to marry could also represent their hopes for the future. The premarital conversation can provide an opportunity to mobilize the strengths of the couple for the purpose of improving the prospects of success in marriage and personal development.

I agree with Cartledge (1998:1) that it is often believed in the Christian tradition of marriage preparation that if correct biblical information is passed on to Christians (or non-Christians), they will become obedient, and behavioural change will take place automatically. While this may appear to be good theology and a healthy move towards true spirituality, but the belief is neither good theology nor healthy spirituality, because practically it does not work! Some other marriage preparation programs seek to provide practical information to couples in the hope that this alone will safeguard relationships. Practical theology seeks to understand by practice, and then seeks to practise by

understanding. Practical theologians don't formulate a certain theory and afterwards apply it.

Marriage is the closest bond that can occur between two people. Therefore, the choice to marry is one of the most important decisions in life, yet many people do not invest time and energy into preparing for their marital relationship. Who, though, is really prepared for the demands of living together in such a way that needs are met, dreams are fulfilled, harmony is attained, and God is glorified through the relationship? Couples typically spend more time preparing for their wedding ceremony, the festivities afterwards and the preparation for their honeymoon than investing in the understanding of the storying nature and meaning of their relationship.

A reason that is usually mentioned to motivate marriage preparation is the high rate of marital dissatisfaction, marriage breakdown, and family dissolution. Couples contemplating marriage have found that changes in contemporary marital and familial relationships render observations of parental models insufficient in providing information or experience in coping with the complexities of present day intimate relationships. Also, the pace of modern urban life frequently leaves couples with little time to consider thoroughly the many aspects of marital relationships such as parenting, economic management, relations with friends and family, ways of managing conflict, communication styles, and so on. The result can be a failure to reconcile conflictual ideas and expectations prior to marriage (Russell and Lyster 1992:446).

In a general sense, a couple is not required or it seems that they are not expected to complete marriage preparation. Anyone may marry provided he or she fulfils the meagre requirements of state law. This is usually less than what is expected to obtain a driver's license, sew, dance, or engage in sports. The prospective bride or groom may know practically nothing about marriage or its responsibilities, but that does not prove to be an impediment to getting married. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, such as marriage and family living, and the influence of socially constructed realities involving these relationships, it is considered by many as an invasion of privacy, brainwashing, experimentation, conditioning, and otherwise harmful to provide learning contexts through which people can gain some understanding of the meanings and values governing our humanity not only for entering into a close interpersonal relationship such as marriage but also for maintaining that relationship over time.

Enticing a couple to consider the mundane aspects of future living together when compared to their immediate aura of romantic love is not at all easy. And as Irvin Yalom (quoted in Wood and Stroup 1990:112) has pointed out:

Therapists do not like to treat a patient who has fallen in love. Therapy and a state of self-merger are incompatible because therapeutic work requires a questioning self-awareness and an anxiety that will ultimately serve as guide to internal conflicts. The person who has fallen in love, and entered into a blissful state of merger, is not self-reflective because the questioning lonely "I" (and the attendant anxiety of isolation) dissolve into the "WE". Thus one sheds anxiety but loses oneself.

Wood and Stroup (1990:112) also found in their practice that during the first year of marriage, a blueprint is formed for the pattern of the marital relationship. This blueprint is based on each person's participation in a family system. Without intending to develop the permanence of a pattern, the couple establishes ways of dealing with each other, with in-laws, and with friends. Organization evolves in every area, whether it has to do with religion, household affairs, holiday rituals, habits of work, money, social life, and even affection and sex. This happens, in part, by design, and in part by default, resulting in additional patterns of behaviour by which the relationship may operate well or poorly for the entire duration of the marriage. Fowers and Olson (1986) find support in an empirical study that marriages that are distressed within the first three years contain the seeds of that distress from the very beginning.

It must also be kept in mind that marriage is changing. It is adapting to the new needs of our society. Its traditional utilitarian functions are diminishing in importance, while its role in providing intimacy, warmth, and emotional security - which we so sorely need in our impersonal world - is rapidly increasing. We are switching from the hierarchical, institutional marriage pattern that has now become a creaking anachronism to the "companionship" marriage. It could be stated that we are now in the awkward process of swapping horses in midstream, and a lot of people are falling into the river and getting wet. Why have we been so slow in developing the new pattern? Because, while it is more rewarding than the old, it is also much more difficult to operate. It depends on the skilled management of interpersonal relationships and competence (Mace 1975:10).

The difference between the traditional marriage and the modern marriage could be summarised as follows (Rice *in* Alpaslan 1994:3-4):

| Traditional marriage | Modern marriage |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The marriage is a means to a goal, example to create a stable environment for the raising of children. • The marriage is institutional. The main focus is on the extended family or group. • The focus is on self denial and the fulfilment of the extended family - and group expectations. • A higher degree of security and less freedom is experienced. • Autocratic management style. The woman is subservient to the man. • Minimal emotional and personal involvement and almost no open communication. • Rigid roles. Husband - outward focus. Wife - inward focus. • A static relationship. • Sexual intercourse for the purpose of procreation. • Sex is seen as the privilege of the husband and the obligation of the wife towards the husband. The wife is not expected to enjoy sexual intercourse. • Large families. Family planning is not the major priority, and when family planning methods are used, it is seen as the responsibility of the wife. • The extended family is actively involved with the choice of a marriage partner. • Divorce is unacceptable for many. • Expectations of marriage are low, and so also the possibilities for failures and disappointments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The marriage is the goal itself, i.e. for companionship and the satisfaction of the emotional needs of the married couple. • The marriage is personal. The main focus is on each of the marriage partners. • The focus is on self development, self fulfilment and self actualisation. • Less security, but more freedom and creativity are experienced. • Democratic management style. The husband and the wife are equals. • Maximal emotional and personal involvement and open communication. • Flexible roles - the husband as well as the wife move inward and outward. • A dynamic, developing relationship. • Sexual intercourse as an expression of love and for pleasure. • The need and desire for sexual intercourse are acknowledged by both partners, and the focus is on the satisfaction of the sexual needs of both. • Small families. Family planning is seen as an important priority and the use of family planning methods as a joint obligation and responsibility. • The choice of a marriage partner is a personal matter. • Divorce is seen as a legitimate alternative in the case of an irreconcilable marriage. • Expectations of what marriage ought to be are high and so also the possibilities for failures and disappointments. |

This development and establishment of the modern form of marriage compared to the already existing traditional marriage necessitates premarital conversation for the following reason: if one of the marital partners, for example, has been raised in a family

where the traditional form of marriage was exercised and he/she was committed to that model and marries someone who, as a result of socialisation, supports the modern form of marriage (or facets thereof), chances are very high that their own expectations, those of each other, and of the marriage will differ (Alpaslan 1994:5). Wright (1981:11) is in agreement with this when he says the following:

The two basic causes for trouble in marriage (are): not finding in marriage what one is expected to find, and not expecting what one actually finds.

One of the goals of the premarital pastoral conversation therefore is to accompany and help a couple to work through the process where there are these different expectations as described above, and to help them to make the necessary adaptations to accommodate each other.

Mace (1983c:37) advocates the need for premarital pastoral care and counselling based on the fact of "marital illiteracy".

In the following I shall from time to time make a comparison between the modern and post-modern (or more specifically narrative) approach to research. We cannot ignore modernity, i.e. we cannot go back in time as if Descartes and Newton had never existed.

I shall now explain the nature, demarcation and purpose of this study. I shall do this by the orientation of the study and by my positioning towards the study. The purpose of this is to justify and to order the study methodologically. The two terms *orientation* and *positioning* function like two lenses that, on the one side, give a clear picture of the field of action, and, on the other side, help on a preliminary basis as a guide to plan the direction of the field of action.

The *orientation* focuses on the title and the *why* of the study. In this section I shall also describe the *habitus* of this research, the *modi* of research interaction and the possible research expectations.

1.2 A PREMARITAL PASTORAL CONVERSATION

Contrary to traditional terminology for example *premarital preparation* (which could imply that someone has the right information about marriage to share with some

uninformed objects) or *premarital counselling* (which could imply a certain pathology and a "know-how-fixer" exercising his power), I am opting for a *premarital narrative conversation*. With this in mind I would also like to invite you, the reader, to take part in this conversation.

When I employ the term *conversation* I am not referring to making small talk or talking about the weather. Neither am I referring to certain people who have the talent to lead conversations and tell interesting stories and captivate audiences (story tellers). This approach could make people sceptical about a narrative conversation in the sense that it is too simplistic. Nor am I implying that one should be an expert in literature analysis to be able to make use of a narrative conversational approach.

A narrative conversational approach envisages an open-ended interaction in which the pastor and the couple are led by the (unexpected) possibilities involved in the couple's story.

Working from this narrative stance, one also becomes aware of one's own story, one's own narrative conversation and the extent to which one is a part of that which is being presented. Hence my reason for including in this dissertation a short chapter on my life. Michel de Montaigne writes in the foreword to his *Essays* that -

Je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre (I am myself the content of my book).

What I am presenting here are *my* perceptions of a premarital narrative conversation. But, at the same time, this being a research study a critical reflection and conversation will be undertaken with other viewpoints and theories. The "my" refers to the subjective choice and creative going about with these other viewpoints and theories that might be different from somebody else's perception of the subject at hand. Saying this does not subjectivize the meaning of life or the biblical interpretation. Interpretation is not a point on a subjectivism-objectivism scale, but a process through which we try to grasp the objective meaning as we understand it.

I made certain punctuations and choices out of my own story - including the overlapping of my story with other stories and *The Other Story* - to present this approach to you,. This does not mean that one falls into subjectivism, but that the information drawn from the Bible, Christian tradition, theology and culture could be understood

differently and presented in a different way by somebody else - who could have made quite different choices out of his story. Critical realistic reflection stays a part of any research. This is also evident from the questions that I chose to ask my co-researchers, i.e. the couples, as their stories unfolded during these premarital narrative conversations.

The idea of a "conversation" is also linked to the methodological approach of this study, i.e. a narrative - which is alternated with the term "story". I believe that people are born into stories; their social and historical contexts constantly invite them to tell and remember the stories of certain events and to leave others unstoried. Even while you are reading this manuscript you are not only busy reading *my* story. You are at the same time busy using *your* story and this new story that you are reading in storymaking. What you are making of this story says as much about yourself as it says about me, or even more. The story of another reader would probably look different. In this way we become co-authors of *our* story.

A number of authors (Foucault 1980; Hare-Mustin 1994; Lowe 1991; Madigan & Law 1992; Weingarten 1991 *quoted* in Freedman and Combs 1996:42) suggest that *discourse* is a useful notion for understanding how this happens. Rachel Hare-Mustin (1994:19) defines a discourse as

a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values.

She (Hare-Mustin 1994:20) suggests that discourses sustain particular worldviews, pointing out,

The ways most people hold, talk about, and act on a common, shared viewpoint are part of and sustain the prevailing discourses.

Madigan and Law (1992:33) add that -

discourse can be viewed to reflect a prevailing structure of social and power relationships.

Discourses powerfully shape a person's choices about what life events can be storied and how this should be storied. This is as true for pastors as it is for the people who consult them.

Our stories about premarital conversation have been shaped by a variety of discourses. To name a few, discourses about pathology, normative standards, and pastors as "experts" are quite prevalent. These discourses are propagated by the content of religious education, as well as by the structure of our theological institutions and socialization processes.

These discourses also shape and are carried by practices outside of our field: Freudian "archaeological" metaphors about the "deep, unconscious truth" have permeated our culture so thoroughly that we often don't notice their influence. These metaphors invite us to listen not for the person's meaning, but for the connoisseur's meaning hidden beneath it (Freedman & Combs 1996:43). The marriage preparation programs that will be outlined could also be added here.

The analysis of discourse can be used as one method in research. The analysis of discourses, or discourse analysis, is not or should not be a "method" to be wheeled on and applied to any and every topic. Rather, it involves a number of approaches.

Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary concept drawing on linguistics, cognitive psychology, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, and is used in a variety of ways. However, this in no way suggests that discourse analysis is a "free-for-all" where anything goes or that any method can masquerade as discourse analysis. As Van Dijk (1997) indicates, all approaches to discourse analysis involve rigorous methods and principles of "systematic and explicit analysis" (1997:1), although the methods and principles may differ according to the approach to discourse analysis that is adopted:

An analysis of discourse is a scholarly analysis only when it is based on more or less explicit concepts, methods or theories. Merely making "commonsense" comments on a piece of text or talk will seldom suffice in such a case. Indeed, the whole point should be to provide insights into structure, strategies or other properties of discourse that could not readily be given by naive recipients (Van Dijk 1997:1).

What then are the key features of any analysis of discourse? Discourse analysis is underpinned by the -

notion of language as a meaning constituting system which is both historically and socially situated (Cheek & Rudge 1994:59).

Texts, whether they are books, articles, newspaper reports, interviews, observations or drawings, are embedded within discursive frameworks. They are constructed by the understandings of particular discourses and in turn they construct understandings in keeping with those discursive frames.

Meanings, as they occur in ... text[s] are the product of dominant discourses that permeate those texts. Not only do powerful discursive frameworks provide meaning for the text, they actually frame the text itself in the first place (Cheek & Rudge 1994:61).

In discourse analysis then,

text is not a dependent variable, or an illustration of another point, but an example of the data itself (Lupton 1992:148 quoted in Cheek 2000:42).

Discursive analyses of texts are thus not simply descriptions or content analyses; rather, they are critical and reflexive, moving beyond the level of common-sense.

Furthermore, discourse analysis situates texts in their social, cultural, political and historical context. Questions that may be asked include "Why was this said, and not that?" "Why these words?" and "How do the connotations of the words fit with different ways of talking about the world?" Texts are thus interrogated to uncover the unspoken and unstated assumptions implicit within them which have shaped the very form of the text in the first place.

1.3 A PREMARITAL *PASTORAL* CONVERSATION

The word *pastoral* gives this study a particular colour. This study is being conducted in theology, meaning that the existence and presence of God in our world is accepted, taken for granted. The reading of the human story is read, interpreted and understood in light of THE STORY in which Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God to mankind. In this way, Pastoral Care is understood as a process of pastoral involvement. This process facilitates mankind's search for meaning by guiding him in the light of the Gospel and in association with the church. Thus, meaning is not given, but the search for meaning is facilitated. Through the *pastoral* process the pastor introduces the "road(s) less travelled by" to the participants (Heitink 1984:75; Müller 1996:27-28).

By adding the adjective *pastoral* to the title of this thesis, I am giving an important focus to this study: A premarital *pastoral* conversation is particularly conducive to a depth dimension. Apart from the vertical and horizontal dimensions, a pastoral approach also calls for a height-depth dimension. It is not something that is done separately or afterwards, but it is a sort of infra red light which focuses on the context of the couple/family and which brings forth totally new perspectives (see Müller 1996:85).

The particularity of a premarital *pastoral* conversation is that the narratives that are told during the premarital conversation are continually reviewed against the background of the Biblical narrative.

The challenge for the pastor during the premarital conversation is to find points of contact between THE STORY and then to integrate them into the other story/stories so that a new story can be created (see Müller 1996:85).

The title of the study *premarital pastoral conversation* refers to the process by which the human story is reviewed against the background of the Biblical story with the purpose of facilitating the construction of a new story. According to Gerkin (1997:113) the task of Pastoral Care involves responsibility for facilitating the maintenance and further development (through deconstruction = CdP) of the Christian community's story and its dialogue with its traditions, on the one hand, and for facilitating the growth and creative development of particular life stories, on the other.

1.4 A WEDDING OF STORIES - A NARRATIVE APPROACH

Becoming married is a wedding of many stories. It is a continuation of the particular story that began when the couple first met. Because many people live away from their home of their origin before they marry, each individual also has his or her own unique narrative to unfold into the common story that is being formed. Those who have been married before will have memories of a relationship that did not endure to include in the new story that is being written. Finally, there is the legacy from each family of origin that is a major factor in forming a new family story.

This legacy from our family of origin is kept alive by many kinds of stories. They are the foundation for our future. Most of the stories families tell are about ordinary events like holidays or birthdays or vacations or dinners that come to have special meaning in their remembrance. We tell stories about the birth of a long-hoped-for child or the death of a significant family member.

During a Summer camp Victor told me the following touching story about his birth: I was the only child born to my parents after several years of marriage. My mother had an extremely difficult labour and an even more difficult time giving birth to me. I was in a critical condition with a variety of injuries from the complications of the delivery. So was my mother. I was baptized shortly after birth. After three days, both of us had made enough progress that we were taken off the critical list. It was then that I was named "Victor" by my father. This story is regularly told on my birthday. I am grateful to be alive. At the same time, I am reminded again and again of how much it cost my mother to give me life. Sometimes I wish we could forget the story.

The power of family stories to shape our attitudes and reinforce our obligations is illustrated by Victor's remembrance. The stories we tell are modified over time as the pain or the shame recedes. For Victor's mother, however, the pain of his birth was still vivid on his fortieth birthday. So was his sense of debt to her. In rehearsing this story in preparation for his second marriage, Victor finally determined that he needed to tell of his birth in a new way in order to be free to marry.

When families do not tell stories, it may be because they are very private or because communication is not a dominant part of their portfolio. However, some families do not tell stories because there are secrets to be kept. The secret may be about a grief

that was too great to bear or so shameful that it must remain hidden. Even though some secrets may be several generations old, they continue to be a negative influence on a family's interaction in the present. Secret-keeping patterns diminish and limit the kind of intimacy that storytelling creates. If those assigned the role of preserving the secrets are skilled at their task, others in the family may not even know that there are stories to be told. All they know is that their family does not tell stories or talk about itself.

Somewhere I read the story of Jean :

My great-great-grandfather was a priest who was a strong advocate for the cause of the proletariat during the class struggles of 1848-1850. Beyond making speeches and preaching in that cause, he contributed his time as a volunteer in many social actions. While in the service of that social cause, he contracted dysentery, and became so sick that no one expected him to live. He was, however, sent back home by boat, and his elder sister nursed him back to health against all odds. He lived for more than forty years after that. It was not until I read the diaries of his sister that I learned that my sainted great-great-grandfather had been a morphine addict for those forty years.

In order for Jean's family to preserve the mythic character of the great-great-grandfather and the story of his heroic deeds, his vulnerability had remained a secret. It was not altogether surprising that Jean discovered several other secrets in the attic when the home that had been in the family for five generations was finally sold. Once she made the discovery about her great-great-grandfather, Jean also understood more clearly why her family never told stories. She also knew better why being vulnerable was so difficult for her.

Families tell stories in order to maintain their foundational beliefs, sustain their unique identity, and reaffirm their common values. Even when we come from families that do not tell stories, every family has a history that is itself a narrative which reveals its values and beliefs. When two people marry, they embark on a new story that incorporates the narratives from their past. Knowing and telling our family stories is a way of claiming our particular legacy. It is also a way of bonding, because marriage is a wedding of stories. White and Epston (1990:10) claim that in -

... striving to make sense of life, people face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a

coherent account of themselves and the world around them. ... This account can be referred to as a story or self-narrative.

If becoming married is a wedding of stories, then a premarital conversation must be an invitation to storytelling. When one's family of origin has a history of storytelling, it is relatively easy to engage the bride or groom in identifying the legacy that he or she brings to this wedding of stories. When there is resistance to storytelling for whatever reason, then it is more difficult - and more important - to help the bride or groom recover the stories of the family. Telling family stories is a critical part of the process of becoming married because it is a way for the couple to weave together their new story while at the same time preserving the thread of each separate narrative.

1.5 MY REMEMBERING CONVERSATION AND THIS PREMARITAL PASTORAL CONVERSATION

The purpose of this thesis is to invite the reader into the world of Narrative Pastoral Care. It is an invitation to accompany me on a tour of an area of ministry that includes the important and, at times, difficult work that the Christian pastor has to do. This area of pastoral work is multifaceted and full of surprises, unexpected problems, and opportunities for profound insight into the human situation. It is the arena within which the pastor is privileged to be with people where they live and breathe, succeed and fail, relate intimately and experience alienation. It is the down-to-earth world of human living.

Touring the world of Narrative Pastoral Care means considering the caring task of the pastor in relation to individuals and to communities. Those communities include not only families living together and groups of people who work and play together, but also, more significantly, communities of faith who live and worship together as they seek to be faithful disciples of Christ in the world. Touring that world will cause us to encounter the inevitable tensions involved in providing pastoral care for individuals and for congregations.

Conversation between writer and reader

Writing or reading a book/thesis is in many ways not only like going on a tour, but also like participating in a conversation. As writer/researcher, I want to converse with the

reader, even though she or he may be unknown to me. I want to share what I have come to know, and the ways I have come to think about the art and science of the practice of Pastoral Care within the Christian community and its tradition. As the reader, the person who begins this book wants to converse with the author, at least to the extent of entering into the world of the author's thoughts to learn more about Pastoral Care.

If we are to think of the writing and reading of a book as a conversation, it is important to recognize that neither author nor reader come to the dialogue empty-handed. Both bring certain preconceptions to the conversation. Both bring a history that is linked, albeit often in tacit or unacknowledged ways, to the subject matter of the book, and both bring unique ways of thinking about their history.

There is no doubt that this is particularly the case with a thesis on a topic such as Narrative Pastoral Care. The experience of care is such a significant part of living that all readers of pastoral care books have some preconceptions of what Pastoral Care might be. Thus in reading a book about Pastoral Care, both the writer and the reader seek to form a link between their prior experiences of care, including Pastoral Care.

What you bring as the reader

As we begin our tour of the world of Narrative Pastoral Care, I invite you first to pause and reflect on your prior experiences of receiving and giving care, particularly Pastoral Care. What were those experiences like, and what did they mean to you? It may be useful to focus on a specific experience of Pastoral Care you have received. What was it about that experience that made it an experience of care for you? What, if anything, about the experience identified it as *Pastoral* Care? What associations does the word *pastoral* conjure in your memory and imagination? Is it significant to you that the care you recall was offered by a *Christian* pastor? If so, why was that significant?

Some readers, of course, have read other books or heard others speak about Pastoral Care. What these readers remember about those experiences will also play a part in what they bring to this author-reader conversation. You may find that what comes to mind is not at all well organized, but seems rather more like a collage of images, themes, half-formed ideas, and impressionistic notions. This collection of memories and ideas comprises the preconceptions you bring to the reading of this book. These preconceptions will enter into the imaginative conversation you have with me as author/researcher and will influence considerably the interpretations you make of what you read. Allow these

memories and ideas to interact freely with what you read so that your reading may evoke interplay between what you bring to the reading and what you find in the book/thesis. Thus, in your imaginative play, you as reader and I as author may converse.

What I bring as the researcher/author

Because I have asked readers to begin the reading of this thesis by reflecting on their own past experiences of giving and receiving Pastoral Care, I want now to reciprocate by sharing something of my own experience of Pastoral Care that I bring to the writing of the book. I begin with a brief autobiographical sketch of my involvement in the work of Pastoral Care, because all reflection about the meaning of human experience and of care for persons begins from where we are. I think that a significant element of ministry is to remind ourselves, and others, of how important it is to pay attention to what is happening to us. The events of yesteryear, even yesterday, are part of a drama called ourselves. Keeping track of this drama - both the good and the bad - is to understand it (ourselves) for what it (we) is (are). This story is our secret and I not only have my secrets, I am my secrets. And you have your secrets. Our secrets are human secrets, and our trusting each other enough to share them with each other has much to do with the secret of what it is to be human.

Since my first real contact with Pastoral Family Therapy in 1993¹ I have been travelling the landscape of therapy and have heard many voices - sometimes they are clear, and at other times vague. Sometimes it felt as if I were walking in a forest, at other times through a desert and on some occasions in a well designed city with clear sign posts directing the way.

This writing underwent many different little rebirths. It took shape not at all as I imagined it would when I set out. Initially, I wanted to develop a marriage preparation program which pastors could use in their churches in France moving away from the more traditional educational approach of the Church. This causes me to think of the image Anne Lamott employs about watching a Polaroid develop:

¹ Although Pastoral Care is a part of our theological training, I didn't get a "real" understanding and "feeling" for the subject during my theological studies before 1993.

"You can't - and, in fact, you're not supposed to - know exactly what the picture is going to look like until it has finished developing. First you just point at what has your attention and take the picture . . . maybe your Polaroid was supposed to be a picture of that boy standing against the fence, and you didn't notice until the last minute that a family was standing a few feet away from him . . . Then the film emerges from the camera with a greyish green murkiness that gradually becomes clearer and clearer, and finally you see the husband and wife holding their baby with two children standing beside them. And at first it all seems very sweet, but then the shadows begin to appear . . ." (1995:39-40).

As the journey continued, the images became clearer and I arrived at the landscape of *Narrative Therapy*. What attracted me first to this practice is its post modernistic approach and its ideas involving social constructionism. Since we are living in *this* age, it seems logical that we should work within the framework of current worldviews. Of course there is a "but". Since I am a professing practising Christian (typical French terminology²) believing in Jesus Christ as the *only* Saviour and the *only* God (Acts 4:12; John 14:6), I do not embrace the postmodern worldview to its extreme conclusions. I am convinced that the Bible as the revealed and incarnated Word of God, having withstood many different and diverse theological and philosophical schools of thought over the centuries, is able to withstand the current radical application of postmodern thought. I do not reject postmodernity, but, at the same time, I am not embracing it fully. My concern is to remain true to the continuity of the Christian witness whilst responding anew to the challenges of the present age. I see this as a very exciting endeavour, since one of the symptoms of postmodernity is a resurgence of the sacred.

I will be taking the living context of people as my point of departure, bringing them into story with the Bible, Christian tradition and contemporary theology. This will not be a dualistic approach between theory and practice, and, yet, it will take into account the contextuality and pluralism of postmodern women and men.

In the following story I will use fiction writing as metaphor for research. An idea which was proposed to me by Julian Müller (see also his article *Therapy as fiction writing*, and the unpublished article *Fiction writing as metaphor for research: A narrative approach* by Müller, Van Deventer and Human). The Masters and Doctorate programmes

² I have been working and living in France since October 1995.

for Pastoral Family Therapy of the Department of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria have for the past few of years been involved in discussions in this area. As I have been residing in France since September 1995, I could not personally participate in these discussions, but I have received input through professor Julian Müller.

I began to find it more and more difficult to reconcile the "traditional" approach of the writing of theses³ with a narrative approach. The issue of "power" (which will be discussed later) comes into play here. When one enters the culture of the professional disciplines one is confronted with a shift in what constitutes for knowledge. The culture of the professional disciplines is a culture which produces particular, highly specialised, and formal knowledges. When combined, these knowledges provide systems for the analysis of a person's expressions of life, and which in turn are constructed in terms of behaviours. It is claimed that these systems of analysis provide, for professional workers, privileged access to the objective truth of these expressions. In this culture, those ways of knowing the world that relate to the more popular and more local discourses of "lay" communities are marginalised - often categorised as quaint, folk lyric or naive - and frequently disqualified. It is thus not uncommon in therapy training, for example, for a person to be subject to systems of understanding that are pathologising of the significant relationships of their lives, and especially in family relationships (and, more often than not, the mother/child relationship) (White 1997:11-12). Müller, Van Deventer and Human (2001:1-2) talk about the *use and abuse of research*. We should be researchers who do not "pathologize or victimize our narrators". Therefore, we should rather choose not to use language such as "research objects", or "research population", but rather refer to people as *research participants* or *co-researchers*. It is important that our research should not primarily serve our own objectives as researchers, but be of value to those participating in the research. The aim of research is thus not to bring about change, but to listen to stories and to be drawn into those stories. While the modernist researcher has objectivity in mind and tries to be an observer from the outside, the narrative researcher has subjective integrity in mind and look for participatory observation. A narrative practice is experienced as effective when the participants beginning with somewhat different perspectives, are able to close the gap as the narrative conversation progresses. The narrative practice might be seen as a cross-cultural experience in which two life stories are drawn closer together and each life trajectory is altered by the meeting.

³ Formulation of the problem, goal, strategy, explanation of theoretical principles and their application to a specific practical situation. See also Mouton and Marais 1990. *Basic concepts in the methodology of the social sciences*.

This (narrative) approach leads us to think about people's lives as stories, and it leads us to work with people's stories to enable them to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling. Using the metaphor of social constructionism leads us to consider the ways in which each person's social, interpersonal reality has been constructed through interaction with other human beings and human institutions and to focus on the influence of these social realities in people's lives. This I find extremely useful when working from a Christian perspective in France, as the average man (sic) in the street has a very vague-philosophical view, based on the ideas and analyses of (atheist) philosophers and psychoanalysts, as to the meaning and relevance of the Biblical narrative for this third millennium.

Furthermore, this approach enables me to make sense of how people's lives are constructed by the dominant norms of the society within which they have grown up. It is when they feel out of step with the dominant culture that they blame themselves, and this is what often brings them to counselling. Often it is this cultural alignment which creates the problem rather than there being something innately wrong with the individual.

In the description of my research orientation I will begin by describing the field of action of this study, the modi of the research interaction and my research expectations.

1.6 FIELD OF ACTION (HABITUS)

1.6.1 First level of action

In their article Fiction writing as metaphor: A narrative approach (2001) Müller, Van Deventer and Human adopted the writer Anne Lamott's model for fiction writing to explain research with a narrative approach. According to these researchers her model of fiction writing provides a useful process for the development of a narrative based research project.

Anne Lamott (1995:62) refers to Alice Adams' formula ABDCE when writing a short story, i.e. *Action, Background, Development, Climax and Ending*. They were struck by the idea that the writing metaphor puts an emphasis on the wholeness of the research process. It has the development of one consistent story in mind (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:1, 2).

According to the above formula "you begin with action that is compelling enough to draw us in, and makes us want to know more" (Lamott 1995:62). The field of action into which I want to draw the reader is a *premarital pastoral conversation* seen as a *wedding of stories*.

According to the more modernistic approach, the emphasis is on the problem and the correct formulation of the problem. The problem being in this case, for example: according to current statistics in France (Toulemon 1996:675; INED) the number of couples getting married has declined by 40% during the last 21 years. Other current estimates also show that one out of three marriages end in divorce (Pasini 1995:10), and of these one out of two are in the big cities (Krieger 1999:9). Divorce has become an accepted cure for ailing marriages. In spite of the high divorce rate and the decline in the number of marriages and commitment to marriage, marriage still continues to be popular. Berscheid and Campbell (quoted in Fowers and Olson 1986:403) remark:

Ironically, at the same time that close relationships have become substantially more vulnerable to disruption and dissolution than they were just a generation or two ago, close relationships are seen by most people as being the prime source of personal happiness.

In a more narrative approach we would like to put the emphasis on the action, and not on the problem. The narrative researcher has a deconstructive agenda. Stories need to be unpacked and alternatives have to be explored. According to this approach, not only the problem areas of life, but every action, has to be researched with a possible alternative story in mind (Müller, Van Deventer, Human 2001:2). This means that the reason for a premarital conversation is more than the high divorce rate, or the lack of commitment, or the search for different styles of living together. The fundamental issue is the NOW of the story. We must learn to stay in the now - "not the last now, not the next now, *this* now" (Lamott 1995:47). According to Lamott (1995:48) the question to be asked is: "what holds the ectoplasm together - what are the person's routines, beliefs".

The "now" is never fixed and it never acts as a premise as a curse. In the narrative approach the now is action, and therefore dynamic in nature. To take the action seriously and to have it told is to open up a possibility, to create a new now for tomorrow (Müller, Van Deventer, and Human 2001:3).

Furthermore, this study will be an *exploratory study* since no research could be found that proposes a narrative approach to marriage preparation / premarital conversation. Because exploratory studies usually lead to insight and comprehension rather than the collection of accurate and replicable data, these studies frequently involve the use of interviews, the analysis of case studies and the use of informants. Hypotheses tend to be developed as a result of such a research, rather than the research being guided by hypotheses. The most important research design considerations which apply here, are:

- to allow an open and flexible research strategy, and
- to use methods such as literature reviews, interviews, case studies, and *co-researchers*, which may lead to insight and comprehension.

The best guarantee for the completion of an exploratory study is to be found in the researcher's willingness to examine new ideas and suggestions and to be open to new stimuli. The major pitfall to avoid is allowing preconceived ideas or hypotheses to determine the direction or nature of the research (Mouton & Marais 1994:43; Huysamen 1996:10; see also Cheek 2000:69). This is supported by the fact that theoretical and practical principles of this thesis have changed at least three times since this study was started, as a result of the discovery of new ideas, developments and suggestions.

The "success" of this research will only be known after the follow-up of several couples over a period of several years. What is proposed here are the results and understanding of an exploratory research. Narrative research has to do with the NOW of the action. The aim of narrative research is not to bring about change or to develop value assumptions that are valid for all contexts and for all times, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into the stories of co-researchers, and the "Co-researcher". We can say that there are different communication lines: there is the communication line with myself, with God, and with the other(s). In this way they become companions on the journey. By bringing these different communication lines together meaning is created in this reality. In this way we try to perform research as a form of practical wisdom, which values the stories of peoples and communities. Instead of working with hypotheses of what should be, we would prefer to understand the *habitus*, "which refers to a kind of practical knowledge within which human social action enacts and constructs culture - synthesis of structure and agency: a 'system of structured, structuring dispositions ... constituted in

practice and ...always orientated towards practical functions' " (Pierre Bourdieu *in* Graham 2000:109).

It should be stressed that the philosophical-ethical understanding of these phenomena falls beyond the boundaries of this study and requires a study of its own. However it needs to be said that the failure of marriage has sparked of a wave of defeatism, even cynism about marriage. It is being described as an obsolete institution that is destined to be replaced by "alternative lifestyles" (Mace 1975:9), such as *union libre*⁴, *cohabitation*⁵ and *le Pacs*⁶. Interestingly, when the trend of cohabiting prior to marriage started, the assumption was that this would be healthy for a marriage relationship. Research results now show just the opposite, i.e. that cohabitation increased rather than decreased the risk of marital dissolution. Furthermore, it was found that cohabitation is selective of men and women who are less committed to marriage and more approving of divorce (Wright 1992:55; Axinn & Thornton 1992; Thomson & Colella; DeMaris & MacDonald 1993. The latter gives a list of research regarding this issue).

Carl Rogers (1972:11), a pioneer in the field of counselling, made the following statement 30 years ago:

To me it seems that we are living in an important and uncertain age, and the institution of marriage is most assuredly in an uncertain state. If 50-75 percent of Ford or General Motors cars completely fell apart within the early part of their lifetimes as automobiles, drastic steps would be taken. We have no such well organized way of dealing with our social institutions, so people are groping, more or less blindly, to find alternatives to marriage (which is certainly less than 50 percent successful). Living together without marriage, living in communes, extensive child care centers, serial monogamy (with one divorce after another), women's liberation movement to establish the woman as a person in her own right, new divorce laws which do away with the concept of guilt - these are all

⁴ Two people living together without any legal agreement.

⁵ According to French civil law, a factual union, characterized by a common life presenting a character of stability and of continuation, between two people of the opposite or same sex, living as a couple.

⁶ *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* : *Pacte*: a convention, agreement between two people. *Civil*: that concerns the citizens. *Solidarité*: responsible, mutual dependant, state of 2 people showing solidarity, a feeling of mutual help, obligation for each person to settle the totality of a common debt in case of fault on the part of one of the debtors. Reciprocity, association, interdependence, emotional ties.

groping toward some new form of man-woman relationship for the future. It would take a bolder man than I to predict what will emerge.

Furthermore, couples see marriage as society's interference in their private lives, and, in some cases, even as a yoke. They do not accept that society should prescribe to or make demands from the outside, of an individual's commitment through some abstract norms (Hoareau & Hoareau 1995:5.14).

Evelyne Sullerot then makes the following interesting remark (1984:18 - translation CdP):

For love and for pleasure, for ardour, and for happiness, for the best, for the choice of a partner, for living arrangements as a couple and the birth of a child - all these are private matters, which don't concern the State (and definitely not the Church - CdP).

The couple does not want to feel obligated to hold a ceremony, choose witnesses, or make promises, of informing the community and, subsequently, of celebrating their participation in the community in their new role. But for security, for the bad days, for the worst, for the moments of solitude and the difficulty in the education of the child - it is the community that is expected to provide more and more regular support and assistance.

The average length of a marriage is only four to five years (INED), and many of these relationships can be assumed to have had the seeds of an eventual break-up from the very beginning (Fowers and Olson 1986:403). The fact that so many couples experience serious marital conflict early in marriage shows that couples are not prepared to deal with the challenges of marriage.

1.6.2 Second level of action

There is also a second level of action involved, and that is the *interaction* of the researcher with the activity that is being researched. The action of research consists of an interaction with people and their transactions. In understanding research from a socio-constructionist approach, through our interaction with the action we become part of these actions (Müller, Van Deventer, and Human 2001:3). Being part of the action means that

our interpretation of the transactions involved and the meaning that we describe to them are also contextually grounded.

I would like to see this relationship between researcher and co-researchers as a relationship of empowerment. The reason for this is to move away from the investigators' "problems" to *co-researchers* problems; specifically, their efforts to construct a coherent and reasonable world of meaning and to make sense of their experiences. The effort to empower respondents and the study of their responses as narratives are closely linked. They are connected through the assumption that one of the significant ways through which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their experiences is to organize them in narrative form (see Mishler 1991:117-119).

1.7 MODI OF RESEARCH INTERACTION

In order to research the above mentioned field of action and to reach deeper understanding in the field of premarital conversation, applicable literature was read, television programmes touching on the subject were watched, semi-structured interviews were held with married and engaged couples, and also with pastors and priests involved in marriage preparation in different contexts; week-ends and evenings with groups were also attended, and a questionnaire was completed.

The modi of this research interaction is closely linked to what is called *participatory action research* (PAR). According to Reason and Rowan this -

New paradigm research involves a much closer relationship than that which is usual between the researcher and the researched : significant knowledge of persons is generated primarily through reciprocal encounters between subject and researcher, for whom research is a mutual activity involving co-ownership and shared power with respect to both the process and to the product of the research (quoted in Babbie & Mouton 2001:58).

This approach emphasises the necessity of involving those persons who are the supposed beneficiaries of research in the entire process. The knowledges of these beneficiaries should be taken seriously. In research their claims and the consequences of their knowledges should be evaluated. This process can help us explain and understand

meanings, allow us to respond more appropriately, empower in a liberating way, and reveal links between everyday reality and the structural logic that produces and reproduces that reality.

Later on I will refer to Foucault's description of **local knowledges** (as opposed to global knowledges). Regarding this, the PAR principle of participation or collaboration has important consequences, particularly in the way in which knowledge is perceived. Local knowledge (also referred to as insider, traditional or popular knowledge), the participant's common sense, wisdom, and expertise are valued and respected - even honoured, celebrated, and praised (Babbie & Mouton 2001:320). From a narrative practice point of view this could, for example, be done by means of letters and rituals.

This means not only that participants are considered knowledgeable and intelligent, but also that their local knowledge - as well as their perspectives on their situation and environment - are relied upon and incorporated into the research process. PAR not only recognizes the validity of this local knowledge, but it also aims to promote and reinforce it, so as to restore its status. The aim of this is to empower the participants by enabling them to recognize the value of their own knowledge. Furthermore, participation allows for the incorporation and faithful representation of participants' perspectives of their situation and environment. Participants have been seen to produce new insights and provide much more valid data and useful interpretations than would be the case if only academic knowledge were represented in the research (Babbie & Mouton 2001:320).

I will now turn Michael White's view of research with his reference (1997:15) to Geertz who juxtaposes "thin description" and "thick description". *Thin descriptions* of a person's actions are descriptions that exclude the interpretations of those who are engaging in these actions. Thin descriptions are also those descriptions that exclude the particular systems of understanding and practice of negotiation that make it possible for communities to arrived at shared meanings in regard to these actions. Thin descriptions are typically arrived at through "observations" made by those considered to be outsiders who are studying the lives of other people and the communities in which these people live.

Conversely, *thick descriptions* of persons' actions are descriptions that are informed by the interpretations of those who are engaging in these actions, and that emphasis the particular systems of understanding and the practices of negotiation that make it possible for communities of persons to arrive at shared meanings in regard to these actions. A thick

description of an action is one that is inscribed with the meanings of the community of persons to which this action is directly relevant.

White (1997:16) also refers to Barbara Myerhoff who makes use of these metaphors, and who reflects on the actual practices that take place in communities of persons who contribute to the generation of thick or rich descriptions:

Private and collective lives, properly Re-membered, are interpretive. Full or 'thick description' is such an analysis. This involves finding linkages between the group's shared valued beliefs and symbols, and specific historical events. Particularities are subsumed and equated with grander themes, seen as exemplifying ultimate concerns (Myerhoff quoted in White 1997:16).

To the question of how thick or rich description is generated, Myerhoff's partial response is that this is the outcome of the identification of the historical events of one's life with "shared valued beliefs and symbols". But Myerhoff also provides an account of the processes by which this is achieved. She proposes that it is through engaging with a community of persons in the telling and re-telling of the preferred stories of one's history and of one's identity that lives are thickly described. It is in this context that the stories of persons' lives become linked to shared values, beliefs, purposes, desires, commitments, and so on. It is in the context of telling and re-telling of the stories of one's life that meta-texts, and texts that are meta to these meta-texts, are generated.

The outcome of this is the production of lives that are multiply contextualised. It is the multiple contextualisation of life that contributes to the generation of narrative resources, and thus to lives that might be well read. These narrative resources contribute significantly to the range of possible meanings that persons might give to their experiences of the world, and to the range of options for action in the world. And, in that this range of options for action would not be available to persons whose lives are poorly read, these narrative resources are constitutive of life - they contribute to the shaping of life; they make up life (White 1997:16-17).

1.7.1 Literary study

In view of this research, a literature study was made, first of all, to investigate the availability of literature on this subject and, second, to establish whether such a study was viable and justifiable. The researcher checked the card and computer catalogues of the University of Pretoria, the University of South Africa and the University of Provence (France). The library assistant of Theology (University of Pretoria) undertook a search on the different computer networks. The bibliographies of some of these reference books and articles were also consulted.

The website of Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia (www.dulwichcentre.com.au) was consulted and additional website references were given.

As a result of the above, it was concluded that no research has been done in this field, i.e. the integration of narrative principles with marriage preparation. Very little research material for marriage preparation or premarital counselling from a theological or pastoral perspective could be found in France.

For this study, and because very little written material for the French context could be found, material from overseas was used, but reinterpreted and adapted to the French context. The narrative approach lends itself to a "universal" or intercultural practice. The social construction of realities and deconstruction are most helpful in this regard.

The study of this literature was necessary for the clear formulation of the research problem and the demarcation of the field of study, with reference to the following: the narrative approach, marriage preparation, marriage, pastoral care.

1.7.2 Personal experience

The association *Mission Vie et Famille* (MVF) ("Family Life Missions", an interdenominational international Protestant evangelical association, founded by Walter Trobisch) has developed over a period of 15 years of ministry in France a more educational approach to marriage preparation. Marriage preparation weekends are organized and complement that which is done by the pastor. Depending on the needs of the participants the following subjects (as outlined in their publications - *Que ton oui soit oui* - Let your yes be yes) could be addressed:

- A wife of noble character
- The wife of your covenant
- Man will leave his father and his mother
- And he will be united to his wife and they will become one flesh
- Does marriage have any advantages ?
- Husbands, love your wives, wives love your husbands
- Love and sexuality
- Children
- Conflict
- Fruits of the Spirit
- The marriage ceremony

The *Reformed Church of France*, the *Independent Evangelical Reformed Church*, the *Church of the Confession of Augsburg* and the *Reformed Church of Alsace and of Lorraine* have each published a booklet which they give to couples planning to marry and which can be used as a starting point for discussion. The marriage preparation itself consists mostly of a theological explanation of marriage and the preparation of the marriage ceremony. The material of MVF is also used from time to time. The length and content of the course may vary according to whether the couple are Christians or non believers and if they are known by the pastor or not. The personal approach of each pastor varies.

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has a national association, the *Centre for Marriage Preparation*. Couples lead these sessions, assisted by priests, and are required to complete 160 hours of training. This training consists of three modules :

Listening and communication skills (includes group leadership skills)

- Including a module on *Living our faith today for young people*

Life as a couple (Sexuality, children, married "for ever")

- Including a module *Living and growing in faith : ethics and the Christian life*

Families lives (Youth and marriage, families and societies)

- Including the modules *Living marriage as a sacrament* and *Life and the making of memories*.

The sessions of the RCC (in the Montpellier area) usually consists of 3 evenings, or 2 evenings and a Sunday, or a week-end (Saturday afternoon and evening and Sunday late morning and afternoon). Since most participants are non-believers (although most may consider themselves Christian) much time is spent talking about the Christian faith, the Church and marriage (why marriage and marriage as sacrament). Through general discussions certain subjects are dealt with (eg. parenting). The meetings of the RCC take place in group discussions. Thus, the problem of confidentiality and just how far story investigation can go sometimes arises. Some couples consider these sessions as being imposed on them by the Church. Others feel that it is the obligation of the Church to accept the request for a marriage in the Church without questions being asked - it is one of the reasons Churches are there (other reasons being for baptisms and funerals). And still others get married in the Church because of parental preference as illustrated in the example below :

Jacqueline: If I don't get married in church, I think my parents (silence) . . . I don't know what they will do to me, in any case, they won't come to the wedding.

CdP: You think so?

Pierre: Yes, sure! You really have to know them! For my parents, it is a little bit different. They are a bit less strict. But deep down, they won't appreciate it. They will be ashamed in front of their neighbours.

CdP: Did you talk to them about this possibility?

Pierre: No, not at all . . . But I'll tell you, if it only depends on me, I won't get married in the church. But it doesn't bother me, if we can please our parents, why not?

CdP: Of course . . .

Jacqueline: For myself, I'm attached to religion. And of course there's the blessing⁷. I'm not superstitious, but I would like to have the blessing of God on our life together ...

CdP: What does this blessing mean to you? What does it entail?

Jacqueline? Mmm . . . as I said, I'm not superstitious, but I think it gives me some security and it links our life to another reality.

CdP: How did you begin thinking this way?

⁷ In France people don't "get married" in the Church, they only receive a blessing. They "get married" in front of the magistrate.

Jacqueline: Until I was 12 years old I went to catechism class . . .

Through the researcher's membership in the association MVF and participation in the marriage preparation sessions of the RCC's *Centre de preparation au mariage* in Montpellier, France, various information was gathered, used, tested and altered over a period of three years.

Conversations were conducted with married couples in order to ascertain what they thought would be relevant for a premarital conversation, with reference to their own experience.

That which is proposed in this study came to light during these premarital narrative conversations. All of these aspects were not and probably would not be used systematically with each couple. They can be adapted according to the particular needs of the couple(s) concerned and the time available. Sessions with individual couples are preferred. 98% of the couples attending the sessions of the RCC and of the Reformed Church were already cohabiting before marriage.

Thirty couples completed a questionnaire (see Appendix), but I will make only brief references to this questionnaire. The reason for this is that the questionnaire was not initially written from a narrative perspective and questionnaires do not form part of a narrative approach. Questions asked concerned views on cohabitation, commitment, relationship satisfaction, children, and general autobiographical information. How these opinions were formed, and constructed, were unfortunately not considered in this questionnaire, and neither were they questioned about how their personal stories were culturally constructed.

I will describe the conversations that will serve as examples in a subjective way that portray my experience of the particular pastoral situation. This is also valid for the verbatim descriptions of the conversations. Care should be taken not to view the verbatim account of a conversation in a positivistic way, i.e. that presupposes a division between pastor and participant. In this way I will give a more accurate expression of the underlying epistemology of this study.

1.8 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS

When we go on a journey of discovery we have certain expectations of what we would like to see and discover. This is closely linked to the reasons why the journey is undertaken. Since we are working from a postmodern narrative perspective it is more appropriate to refer to research expectations than research hypotheses. Hypotheses call to mind the modernistic perspective that underlines objectivity, certainty and domination.

The expectations underlying this research can be formulated as follows:

- The narrative approach provides a theoretical basis for Practical Theology and Pastoral Care.
- A narrative pastoral approach provides possibilities for premarital conversations.
- A narrative pastoral approach enables couples to examine their life narratives, their family legacy and their role in it, themselves, their partner, and their relationship in order to re-evaluate, confirm and strengthen their belief that this is indeed the person they want to marry.
- A narrative pastoral approach to the premarital conversation facilitates the process of deconstruction and story development of meanings and values concerning marriage that are socially constructed.

It should be kept in mind that these expectations have (had!) their point of departure in the field of action.

Furthermore, the expectations that one has have to do with the climax of the research project, i.e. with the final goal(s) of the study. But there is a difference. The climax is determined by the co-researchers (main characters) of the story - not in advance by me, the research initiator. It might take a long time to reach the climax, i.e. the moment when things are really different for the characters, different in some real way (Lamott 1995:62). Referring again to the writing formula of Alice Adams (ABDCE) quoted earlier (page 16) by Anne Lamott (1995:82-83), the latter writes the following about the characters. This could also apply to the researchers in research.

When you write about your characters, we want to know all about their leaves and colours and growth (in the precedent paragraph she talks about people

that are like trees in winter). *But we also want to know who they are when stripped of the surface show. So if you want to get to know your characters, you have to hang out with them long enough to see beyond all the things they aren't. You may try to get them to do something because it would be convenient plotwise, or you want to pigeonhole them so you can maintain the illusion of control. But with luck their tendrils will sneak out the sides of the box you've put them in, and you will finally have to admit that who they are isn't who they thought they were.*

Formulating certain objectives in advance could result in trying to understand too quickly, with the possibility of not understanding at all. It could also be about the desire to control - I will decide where the conversation will lead to. Then the question could be asked, "Why am I doing research if I already know the answer?"

Lamott (1995:85) says that her students assume that well-respected writers, when they sit down and write their books, know very well what is going to happen because they have outlined their plot and that is why their books turn out so beautifully. She then makes the remark that she does not know anyone fitting this description. Everyone she knows flails around, stretching and growing despondent, on the way to finding a plot and structure that will work. Further on in her book (Lamott 1995:114) she refers to a metaphor used by a friend of hers:

If you're lost in the forest, let the horse find the way home. You have to stop directing, because you will only get in the way.

Putting it into another metaphor, she writes (Lamott 1995:121):

. . . we (writers) need to align ourselves with the river of the story, the river of the unconscious, of memory and sensibility, . . .

If you start with your agenda, your objectives, you might miss the story of the people and the meaning they find therein. Otherwise you are not respectful.

If you look at people and just see sloppy clothes or rich clothes, you're going to get them wrong (Lamott 1955:97).

You may perhaps just envision a temporary destination, but you must allow your "characters" to develop from there in their own way towards the end (Müller,

Van Deventer, Human 2001:7).

Reading through the above-mentioned objectives and different points of view concerning the goal of "marriage preparation" can influence one's judgment. For me, a climax will be reached when people (Christian and especially non-Christian) become enthusiastic about and have a better understanding of their different stories and The Story influencing their lives. In this postmodern age most people have lost contact with the relevance of the Christian story for today and for their lives. One climax would be if a contact could be made. In this process my honesty and integrity towards these co-researchers would be essential. To do this, I have to stay in touch with them, follow their life stories, make sure that I understand and hear them properly. So many times people's stories are marginalised, often disqualified, and displaced by the formal and expert knowledges (theologies) of the professional disciplines. These people are the main characters of my story and they should have the full possibility to be involved in this process and to express themselves. In this way I am drawn into the action and I don't remain an outside observer.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In this first chapter I have outlined why I chose the title *The premarital pastoral conversation - a wedding of stories: a narrative approach*. I explained the different aspects of the title and how the new paradigm of understanding of postmodernity opens-up new horizons.

In describing the field of action I outlined different aspects which demands further investigation in this study. In further defining my study, I outlined my research strategies and research expectations.

In the following chapter I will give a brief overview of the development from a premodern, postmodern and narrative worldview, and then I will briefly reflect on the implications of these developments for marriage.

I will then go on to describe a narrative hermeneutical pastoral theological response to these worldviews. The contribution of Crites and Ganzevoort of how narrative is linked to our life stories and our identity will be examined. The importance of hermeneutics in

these life stories will also be discussed with reference to Paul Ricoeur, Gadamer and Gerkin, and Müller's choice for a pastoral narrative involvement.

These insights will lay the foundation for the interpretation of marriage and premarital conversations (Chapter four). This will be done by giving some biblical portraits of marriage. A reference to cohabitation will also be made.

A narrative approach to a premarital pastoral conversation is then proposed. Taking the field of action as point of departure, conversations and life stories can be deconstructed and new stories can be written. The externalization of events and different mapping tools are used in this process. It will also be shown how the story of faith can play a significant role during this conversation. Through this premarital pastoral conversation new discoveries are made through which new meaning is given to a significant life changing event.