

CHAPTER FIVE: A PREMARITAL PASTORAL CONVERSATION IN NARRATIVE MODE

*"... an ordinary passer-by would think that my rose looked just like you - the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of you other roses : because it is she that I have put under the glass globe, because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen, because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two or three that we have saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes said nothing. Because she is my rose."
... "It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important ... Men have forgotten this truth, ... but you must not forget it."
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The little prince**

5.1 ELEMENTS OF A NARRATIVE STANCE IN PASTORAL CARE

Freedman and Combs (1996:40) have developed a set of questions to help us maintain a narrative/social constructionist position. They ask themselves these questions from time to time as they work with people, and they encourage therapists who study with them to ask themselves the same questions. The questions keep evolving, so they are reasonably sure that by the time someone reads this their personal list won't exactly match the one they offer here.

Actually, what is now a list of questions started out as a list of "guidelines" that were phrased as permissive-but-still-rather-prescriptive statements. Phrasing them as questions makes them less prescriptive. Can you see how they would think that being less prescriptive fits with a post modern worldview?

Here are the questions:

- Am I asking for descriptions of more than one reality?
- Am I listening so as to understand how this person's experiential reality has been socially constructed?
- Whose language is being privileged here? Am I trying to accept and understand this person's linguistic descriptions? If I am offering a distinction or typification in *my* language, why am I doing that? What are the effects of the various linguistic distinctions that are coming forth in the therapeutic conversation?

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- What are the stories that support this person's problems? Are there dominant stories that are oppressing or limiting this person's life? What marginalized stories am I hearing? Are there clues to marginalized stories that have not yet been spoken? How might I invite this person to engage in an "insurrection of knowledges" around those marginalized stories?
 - Am I focusing on meaning instead of on "facts"?
 - Am I evaluating this person, or am I inviting her or him to evaluate a wide range of things (e.g., how a pastoral conversation is going, preferred directions in life)?
 - Am I situating my opinions in my personal experience? Am I being transparent about my context, my values, and my intentions so that this person can evaluate the effects of my biases?
 - Am I getting caught up in pathologizing or normative thinking? Are we collaboratively defining problems based on what is problematic in this person's experience? Am I staying away from "expert" hypotheses or theories?

It can also be added that a therapy situated within the context of a narrative mode of thought would take the form which:

- privileges the person's lived experience;
- encourages a perception of a changing world through the plotting or linking of lived experience through the temporal dimension;
- invokes the subjunctive mood in the triggering of presuppositions, the establishment of implicit meaning, and in the generation of multiple perspective;
- encourages polysemy and the use of ordinary, poetic and picturesque language in the description of experience and in the endeavour to construct new stories;
- invites a reflexive posture and an appreciation of one's participation in interpretive acts;
- encourages a sense of authorship and re-authorship of one's life and relationships in the telling and retelling of one's story;
- acknowledges that stories are co-produced and endeavours to establish conditions under which the "subject" becomes the privileged author;

- consistently inserts pronouns "I" and "you" in the description of events (White & Epston 1990:83).

The following distinct advantages of a narrative metaphor could be mentioned. Firstly, narratives evolve through time and are fluid. Since people's lives progress in much the same way, a metaphor that captures this phenomenon seems more useful than one that is somewhat static (although Bateson's description of "recursive" patterns is more descriptive than "circular"). The focus here is on effects rather than causes.

Secondly, instead of a cybernetic metaphor that relies on *information* as a primary variable, a narrative metaphor uses *experience* as a primary variable. Experience is within the domain of living systems and has already been acknowledged as more primary in second-order cybernetics. Narrative also seems to capture the life experience of therapists working in the metaphor more than cybernetics does. One effect of this is the shift from people's relationships as the object of therapy to their stories about their relationships, as the object of therapy.

Thirdly, the implication that experience is larger than the problem-filled stories suggests a new role for the therapist. By inviting clients to make meaning out of other aspects of their experience, the therapist creates a context of change or re-storying in a manner whereby the clients themselves become the ones to intervene in the problem (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1994:235). Hoffman (1985) and White (White & Epston 1990) both suggest this change. In other words, people can notice that they have already experienced participating in an alternative story if the therapy context is constructed to elicit these experiences.

5.2 LISTENING

Given our stories about a pastoral conversation, which are formed within these prevalent discourses, it is hard for most therapists to learn to listen to people's stories as stories. Our stories about a pastoral conversation conspire to make us listen with our ears cocked and our mouths set to say "Aha!" when we recognize a "clinically significant item" - something that we know what to do with.

However, as Weingarten (1991) notes, discourses can change and evolve when conversations between people affect culturally available narratives. That is, knowledge at a local level and from sub communities can influence larger discourses. As simple as it may seem, in the face of prevalent discourses and dominant knowledges, simply listening to the story someone tells us constitutes a revolutionary act.

When we meet people for the first time, we want to understand the meaning of their stories for *them*. This means turning our backs on "expert" filters: not listening for chief complaints; not "gathering" the pertinent-to-us-as-experts bits of diagnostic information interspersed in their stories; not hearing their anecdotes as matrices within which resources are embedded; not listening for surface hints about what the core problem "really" is; and not comparing the selves they portray in their stories to normative standards.

Instead, we try to put ourselves into the shoes of the people we work with and to understand them, from their perspective, in their language, what led them to the decision to marry and to come for a premarital conversation. Only then can we recognize alternative stories. Connecting with people's experience from their perspective orients us to the specific realities that shape, and are shaped by, their personal narratives. This sort of understanding requires that we listen, with focused attention, patience, and curiosity while building a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

In spite of all of our education telling us that we do know, we try to listen for what we *don't know*.

5.3 NOT-KNOWING

Anderson and Goolishian (1988, 1990, 1992; see also Anderson 1990; Goolishian, 1990; Goolishian & Anderson 1990; Hoffman 1991) have written passionately and convincingly about the importance of a "not-knowing" position for therapists. They see therapy as a process in which "we are always moving toward what is not yet known" (1990:159). This implies not asking questions from a position of pre-understanding (Andersen 1991; Weingarten 1992) and not asking questions to which we want *particular* answers.

However, a not-knowing position is not an "I don't know anything" position. Our knowledge is of the process of a pastoral conversation, not the content and meaning of people's lives. We hope a pastoral conversation is a process in which people experience choice rather than "settled certainties" with regard to the realities that they inhabit. As Anderson and Goolishian (1988:381) write, -

The goal of therapy is to participate in a conversation that continually loosens and opens up, rather than constricts and closes down. Through therapeutic

conversation, fixed meanings and behaviours ... are given room, broadened, shifted, and changed.

We are most successful in achieving a not-knowing position when we concentrate on listening and when our talking is guided by and secondary to, that listening. As we listen, we notice and question the assumptions we are making. We ask ourselves, "Am I understanding what it feels like to be this person in this situation, or am I beginning to fill in the gaps in her story with unwarranted assumptions? What more do I need to know in order to step into this person's shoes?" If our internal conversation tells us that more information in a specific area would help us step more fully into a person's reality, we ask her to tell us more. Such constant questioning of our own assumptions invites people to question theirs.

Not-knowing fosters an attitude of *curiosity* (Cecchin 1987; Rambo, Heath & Chenail 1993; White 1988). We are curious about people's unique answers and we encourage people to develop them more fully. When an answer takes the conversation in an unexpected direction, we ask even more questions, following that new direction if it seems relevant.

Just listening and asking facilitating and clarifying questions from a position of curiosity can be very therapeutic. Sometimes people get all they want from a pastoral conversation through this process alone. Therapy of this sort is, as Anderson and Goolishian (1988: 380) indicate, -

...a process of expanding and saying the "unsaid" - the development, through dialogue, of new themes and narratives and, actually, the creation of new histories.

Foucault (quoted in White 1991:146) makes the following remark about curiosity:

Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity, futility. The word, however, pleases me. To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes "concern"; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervour to grasp

what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential.

These attitudes mentioned above are especially important when a couple is cohabiting and the personal opinion of the pastor is that they "are living in sin". The pastor should avoid talking about their *sexual relationship*. This is not the reason for their presence. The *attitude* of the pastor should be one of pastoral involvement, an attitude of interest, of inquiry, of pastoral exploration. He could explore by means of deconstruction, for example, the question, "Why now?" Together they can explore the difference between their prior attitudes toward marriage and their assumed changed attitudes *now*. What desires, fantasies can they share about how their partner will be "for them" once they are married? What worries and anxieties do they anticipate will go away or be taken care of? What pictures come to mind about how their spouse will respond to them when they are sick in bed and need care? What thoughts emerge as they think about marriage keeping them safe from losing their partner? How will their sexual life be changed once they are married? This should be a *pastoral exploration, a pastoral involvement*.

5.4 INTERNALISING DISCOURSES

Adams-Westcott, Dafforn, and Sterne (1993) have written about how people who suffer abuse tend to internalise the traumatising events to which they have been subjected as inner dialogues, and how these dialogues colour the interpretation of subsequent events. They write (1993:262), -

Problems develop when people internalise conversations that restrain them to a narrow description of self. These stories are experienced as oppressive because they limit the perception of available choices.

David Epston (1993) has pointed out that this process of internalising happens not just with local and particular experiences of trauma and abuse, but with larger cultural experiences as well. He notes Foucault's description of how death and disease (previously treated as if they were located primarily in a social or spiritual domain) came to be located at specific sites within specific human bodies. Epston (1993:171) writes, -

. . . anatomical space became causal space, the home of both death and disease. This was followed by the body being regarded as the repository of human

qualities. Mind, intelligence, madness, and a myriad of human qualities were regarded to be located in living bodies.

In the Middle Ages, if a person was "sick," "crazy," or "criminal," the cause and cure tended to be located in social or spiritual space - his ruler wasn't ruling well enough or he was out of touch with the appropriate spiritual community. In modern times, the emphasis is much more on individual responsibility for properly policing our minds and bodies. If a person has a heart attack, it is because she hasn't properly controlled her diet and exercise. If a person is depressed, it is because of a chemical imbalance in certain circuits of his brain and a chemical cure is required. According to Foucault, the most politically powerful discourses in modern society divide us from each other and invite us to treat ourselves and our bodies as problematic objects. Epston has called the kind of dominant discourses that support this process "internalising discourses" (see Madigan 1992:268).

An externalizing attitude can counter the "objectifying" influences of internalising discourses, by objectifying and separating what had been internalised. But, in order to adopt an externalizing worldview, we must retrain our perceptions so that we objectify *problems* instead of people.

5.5 DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is another approach that is associated with the exploration and interrogation of texts using post structural perspectives. Post structural perspectives, and in particular deconstruction, are often associated with the work of the French theorist Jacques Derrida, even though he, like Foucault, is careful not to classify his work as belonging to any particular theoretical orientation. As Bloland (1995:526) puts it:

The Derridian strategy is to search out and illuminate the internal contradictions in language and in doing so show how final meaning is forever withheld or postponed in the concepts we use. The means for carrying out this project is deconstruction.

However, it is important to recognize that Derrida has not elaborated on "a single deconstructive method" (Agger 1991:112). Rather, the term deconstruction represents a range of approaches each with its own emphases. Consequently, deconstruction does not

represent a unitary concept; it involves a multiplicity of fields and styles:

To present "deconstruction" as if it were a method, a system or a settled body of ideas would be to falsify its nature and lay oneself open to charges of reductive misunderstanding (Norris 1991:1).

Norris goes on to point out that at times, the term deconstruction tends to suffer from a fairly loose usage to refer to any critique of existing social structures. Nevertheless, despite ambiguity and plurality in the way the term "deconstruction" is used, all deconstructive approaches have the same purpose. Rather than seeking to find "the" meaning within, or of, any text, they seek to challenge the very meanings and the assumptions on which those meanings are founded:

Methodologically, deconstructionism is directed to the interrogation of texts. It involves the attempt to take apart and expose the underlying meanings, biases, and preconceptions that structure the way a text conceptualizes its relation to what it describes (Denzin 1994:185).

Thus, deconstruction involves a certain way of thinking about texts and a certain way of "reading" them: not to find "the" meaning of that text but to trouble the assumptions underpinning the text. Deconstruction involves looking at representation of reality in the text as a partial representation exploring silences and gaps in the text and what they reveal. Thus, deconstruction is -

less method than perspective, a kind of interpretative self consciousness (Agger 1992:95).

Agger (1992) has highlighted some of the assumptions implicit within a deconstructive approach and it will be useful to briefly review his argument here.

The first assumption is that culture is a text and can therefore be interrogated as a text:

the boundary between the textual world and the social world fades once we subject culture to a deconstructive reading (Agger 1992:98).

The second assumption is that deconstruction aims to locate the author. By this

Agger is alluding to the unwritten and unspoken assumptions that the author made by selecting what will, and conversely will not, be said or written in the text and by determining what form the text itself will take. Thus the text is stripped of claims of objectivity and the author's influence is exposed.

For example, in carrying out scientific research and writing scientific research reports, standard, supposedly objective, scientific conventions are followed in terms of the way that both the research and the subsequent research report is structured. Deconstructive approaches trouble this concept, arguing that in writing and reading science -

the science writer buries the subjectivity of the writer underneath the heavy prose of methodology, allowing technical language and the figural gestures epitomizing science to take control of the text. The writer's deep assumptions about the nature of the world are suppressed underneath the technical surface of the text, hidden from the community of science and thus protected from external challenges (Agger 1992:102).

The third assumption identified by Agger in a deconstructive approach is that every cultural text is undecidable: the meaning is never given, but is open to challenge and contestation. Thus, another assumption is that a deconstructive approach seeks the aporias, that is the blind spots, omissions, tensions, circumlocations and contradictions, in every text. Agger refers to these as internal fissures and fault lines" in a text (1992:102). A deconstructive reading opens such fissures and fault lines to reveal the underlying subtextual frames of the text, some of which may actually be in competition with one another. Thus, another assumption of deconstructive approaches identified by Agger is that the subtext is turned into text.

A deconstructive approach reads at the margins and views -

many overlapping and cross-cutting texts - texts within, and beyond, texts, stories within, and beneath stories (Agger 1992:108).

Finally, a deconstructive approach assumes that reading "writes", because there is no way to develop readings outside of language and textuality (Agger 1992:105). In so doing, deconstruction challenges the privileging of the written text over the reading of

that text. Each act of reading a text creates a new and different text. Thus, the reading of any text and the criticism that accompanies it, transforms that text, opening it to -

new versions of itself by bringing to light its hidden assumptions and inconsistencies (Agger 1992:96).

5.5.1 Deconstructive listening

We call the special kind of listening required for accepting and understanding people's stories without reifying or intensifying the powerless, painful, and pathological aspects of those stories *deconstructive listening*. Through this listening, we seek to open space for aspects of people's life narratives that haven't yet been storied. Our social constructionist bias leads us to interact with people in ways that invite them to relate to their life narratives not as passively received facts, but as actively constructed stories. We hope they will experience their stories as something that they have a hand in shaping, rather than as something that has already shaped them. We believe that this attitude helps to deconstruct the "facticity" of people's narratives, and that such deconstruction loosens the grip of restrictive stories.

The word "deconstruction" brings to mind the work of Jacques Derrida (e.g. 1988), which explores, among other things, the slipperiness of meaning. Derrida examines and illustrates how the meaning of any symbol, word, or text is inextricably bound up in its context. Derrida and other deconstructionists believe that it is fruitless to search for the one "real" or "true" meaning of any text, as all narratives are full of gaps and ambiguities. Deconstructionist scholars focus on these gaps and ambiguities to show that the officially sanctioned or generally accepted meaning of a given text is but one of a great number of possible meanings.

So when we listen "deconstructively" to people's stories, our listening is guided by the belief that those stories have many possible meanings. The meaning a listener makes is, more often than not, different from the meaning that the speaker has intended. We seek to capitalize on this by looking for gaps in our understanding and asking people to fill in details, or by listening for ambiguities in meaning and then asking people how they are resolving or dealing with those ambiguities.

As people tell us their stories, we interrupt at intervals to summarize our sense of what they are saying. This allows them to tell us if the meaning we are making fits with their intended meaning. Even though our goal is "really" to understand people's realities,

those realities inevitably begin to change in the process. In considering our questions and comments, people can't help but examine their stories in new ways. Our very presence makes their world a new and different reality.

As this process continues, new meanings, and new constructions emerge. Many of the gaps we notice haven't yet been filled in; people must search their experience to find details that fill the gaps, and as details are added the shape of the narrative changes. Also, when people hear that we are making different meanings from theirs, they can reconsider their own meanings and modify them. Throughout this process we listen with thoughtfulness to emerging new constructions. Are they useful or desirable? If a person doesn't prefer a new construction, we don't pursue it (Freedman & Combs 1996:46-47).

5.5.2 Deconstructive questioning

In the first part of a premarital conversation (as in other conversations) our primary intentions are to listen to people's narrative and to *understand* them, not change them in major ways. As we listen in a way that brings forth an awareness of either assumptions that narratives are built on, or gaps and ambiguities in people's narratives, space opens for stories to shift as they are being told.

At some point, usually when it seems that a certain degree of trust and mutual understanding has been achieved, we begin to ask questions of a more purposeful nature. That is, we shift from deconstructive *listening* to deconstructive *questioning*.

Deconstructive questioning invites people to see their stories from different perspectives, to notice how they are constructed (or *that* they are constructed), to note their limits, and to discover that there are other possible narratives. Another name for this process is "unpacking." As people begin to have ideas about how the narratives they are living out have been constructed, they see that those narratives are not inevitable, that they do not represent essential truth. Instead, they are constructions that could be constructed differently. The intent of this kind of deconstruction is not to challenge a narrative (Griffith & Griffith 1994), but to unpack it or to offer the possibility of considering it from a different perspective. Once this occurs, people can commit themselves to protesting it.

5.5.2.1 The politics of deconstructive questioning

Michael White defines deconstruction more actively and politically. He (1991:27) says:

According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so-called "truths" that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons' lives.

Following White (and Foucault), I believe that dominant stories can be "subjugating of person's lives." I have already discussed, in Chapter 2, how the medical model can lead people to a sense of themselves as "docile bodies," subject to knowledge and procedures in which they have no active voice. There are also subjugating stories of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, and religion (to name a few) that are so prevalent and entrenched in our culture that we can get caught up in them without realizing it.

Deconstruction in White's sense can help us unmask the "so-called 'truths'" that "hide their biases and prejudices" behind the "disembodied ways of speaking" that give an air of legitimacy to restrictive and subjugating dominant stories. In adopting and advocating this type of deconstruction we are taking a political stand against certain practices of power in society.

When saying "taking a stand" I do not mean lecturing the people I work with. In the context of therapy, like it or not and even though we take steps to minimize it, the therapist's words are privileged. Inflicting our beliefs on the people we work with would replicate the effect of the dominant culture's privileged knowledges and practices on those in subjugated positions.

However, not taking a stand supports the status quo. In that sense, one cannot *not* take a political stand. In a racist society, for example, to ignore racism (to "take no stand on it") is to support its continued existence. We believe it is our responsibility as therapists to cultivate a growing awareness of the dominant (and potentially dominating) stories in our society and to develop ways of collaboratively examining the effects of those stories when we sense them at work in the lives and relationships of the people who

consult with us.

Therapists must continually reflect on the discourses that shape our perceptions of what is possible, both for ourselves and for the people we work with. Although we can never obtain a detached or objective view, we can open up, rather than close down, the number and variety of possibilities available in the "mirrored room of therapy". We can reflect on the power relationships implicit in each possible discourse. We can seek new possibilities through self-education and through ongoing, regular deconstruction of our beliefs and practices. We pursue such deconstruction by reflecting with colleagues and with the people who come for consultation on the effects of the stories and discourses that guide our beliefs and practices.

5.5.3 Deconstructing beliefs, practices, feelings and attitudes concerning -

Deconstruction questions help people unpack their stories or see them from different perspectives, so that *how* they have been constructed becomes apparent. Many deconstruction questions encourage people to situate their narratives in larger systems and through time. Many deconstructive questioning takes place within externalizing conversations. I will now consider some general beliefs and attitudes concerning love, marriage and sex that could be problematic in constructing a couple relationship.

- Love

1. *Love conquers all* or *love is enough belief*. This is one of the most popular beliefs. Many individuals think: *Being in love with someone is sufficient reason to marry that person*. "Simply because we are profoundly attracted to people and have passionate feelings of love does not mean for a moment that we should marry them. Falling in love is easy". Marriage based mostly on emotion rather than reason is dangerous. Premarital relationships based on emotion often result in premature marriages, before the individuals really know each other.

Lederer and Jackson (1968) emphasize that romantic love actually may be something else, for example, a strong sex drive, a flight from loneliness, a neurotic attachment (as in the case of an over adequate partner married to an under-adequate partner), or an excuse for domination and control. "The expression 'I love you' has such an immutable place in our traditions that it can serve as an excuse for anything, even for

selfishness and evil" (1968:58). Although romantic love is a prerequisite for marriage for most couples, marital success is based on many more important factors including: similarity of values, similarity of backgrounds, age at marriage, personal and couple readiness for marriage, realistic expectations. Of the 25 premarital factors related to marital satisfaction, as determined by Lewis and Spanier (1979), romantic love is only one. For an extensive discussion of the limitations of romantic love in predicting marital satisfaction, see Ford and England (1979), Larson (1988), Lederer and Jackson (1968), and Peck (1978).

Although romantic love is not an ordinary state of being, some take the step of deifying it. It makes us think about the words of the John, the apostle, "God is love" (1 John 4:16), which is misconstrued by some as: "Love is god!", which has nothing to do with the godly. Is it possible that Christianity could have prepared the way for romanticism, and the fading away of the first idea?

When love is deified in this way, it becomes almighty, and we expect everything from it. This may lead again to ideas like my partner must meet all my needs of affection, security and intimacy. Love does not change certain identity characteristics, difficulties in communication, our past experiences, etc.

A more realistic alternative belief could be : *Although romantic love is important, especially in the early stage of a relationship, other factors are equally or more important to marital satisfaction and should be considered before marriage .*

2. *Angerless love.* "If you love me you will not be angry with me. If you are angry with me it means you do not love me." Anger is an essential ingredient of healthy living and loving. Love and anger are not opposites: Indifference is the opposite of both love and anger.

3. *Love without conflict.* Conflict is neither right nor wrong. Conflict is unavoidable in human affairs, and it is unavoidable in love relations. The stark absence of conflict is a far greater sign of danger than is its presence. This is, in fact, the best way to build a superficial, dull relationship. Disagreements, properly resolved, are the raw materials out of which close and creative relationships can be formed. Conflicts provide essential clues and opportunities which enable us to discover creative love and intimacy.

4. *Magical knowing.* "If you love me you will know just what I am feeling, thinking, wanting, and needing." This is a pernicious myth that assumes that love somehow opens the inner doors of one's mind to the other person. It is usually an excuse for claiming that one is misunderstood and neglected.

5. *Love should lead to marriage.* This is one of the outgrowths of historic romanticism, and it is perhaps the biggest mistake of all. During a typical life span it is likely you will meet several people with whom you may "be in love", but you would be well advised not to marry. This too is an outgrowth of romanticism, which claims that love is the sole reason for marriage. In the modern version of romanticism such love *demand*s marriage.

6. *Love means never having to say I'm sorry.* This myth gives one an excuse for being and doing whatever one wants regardless of its consequences on the other. It takes away all accountability.

7. *Love is dead, or at least dying, if we feel the slightest attraction to others.* You probably will be attracted to and attractive to many others. This means that you are alive and well. Mature love can accept such feelings *without acting* on them.

8. *The perfect relationship belief.* Some people believe: *A couple should prove their relationship will work before getting married.* They may date, remain engaged, or cohabitate for unnecessarily long periods of time trying to "prove the relationship will work." They may even set up situations to test the strength of the relationship (e.g., date another person unexpectedly to see if the partner will be jealous or to see how he/she handles anger). Such behaviours may indicate an underlying lack of trust or commitment in the relationship or an excessive fear of failure. The person's partner will likely tire of the tests and terminate the relationship. Unfortunately, ours is an imperfect world with imperfect people and imperfect relationships. In addition, future stressors, crises, and challenges to a relationship cannot be accurately predicted.

A more realistic belief could be: *There is no way to prove a marriage will work before getting married.* Marriage is different from dating or cohabitation; hence, the most a couple can do is to feel comfortable that they are ready to get married, are well matched, have good communication and problem solving skills, and are committed to

marriage and the relationship, and then trust that they will be able to adjust to each other and solve marital problems after the wedding.

9. *The cohabitation belief* (see also 4.4): There are still many single people who believe: *Cohabitation before marriage will improve a couple's chances of being happily married.* They believe this in spite of mounting evidence that cohabitation is significantly different from marriage and that cohabitation used as a "trial marriage" usually does not improve a couple's chances for later marital success (See Larson, 1988, for a comprehensive list of research articles on cohabitation and marital satisfaction). The negative consequences of the belief in cohabitation as "marriage insurance" include violating one's moral standards and later regretting it, creating tension with one's parents, and later disillusionment when cohabitation fails to make the relationship divorce-proof. A more rational alternative belief is : *Cohabitation may help us get to know each other better but will not serve as a trial marriage or increase our chances of being happily married.*

As "proof" one has only to look at today's society: Almost all couples cohabit and in spite of this the divorce rate increases each year.

The expression "trial marriage" is also a deception. A couple who builds their relationship on the basis of non-commitment learns certain habits related to this life style, and later on experience difficulties adapting to another relational system, i.e. unconditional commitment.

In a survey dating from the beginning of the 1980's couples were asked the following question : "When you started to cohabit, did you consciently think about it or did things just happened?" Two thirds (more men than women) chose the second answer. Is it possible for these couples to continue a relationship, even if they marry?

10. *The "opposites complement each other" belief, a person should choose someone to marry whose personal characteristics are opposite from their own.*¹ The negative consequences of this belief are that it: (1) encourages people to look for partners who are different rather than similar to themselves; (2) encourages irresponsibility (e.g., the sloppy person who marries the neat person thinking that the neat person will pick-up

1 Plato started this idea by saying that in the beginning men and women were joined together in pairs. Then, in a mischievous move, the gods tore them apart, leaving them to hunt around for their lost "other half".

after him/her); and (3) discourages personal change (e.g., rather than changing myself, I will find someone who is the opposite of me and who will make up for my shortcomings).

Although in some cases opposites may attract (Karp et al. 1970), marrying someone whose traits are significantly different usually leads to conflict and dissatisfaction (Gordon 1988; Lazarus 1985; Mason & Jacobs, 1979).

Polar opposites may find one another enjoyably different and alluring for a limited time. Long-term relationships usually flourish when similarity rather than dissimilarity prevails (Lazarus 1985:131).

Actually, no two people start out in marriage with more than a relative degree of compatibility. In fact, a main task of marriage is to *achieve* compatibility by a lifelong process of mutual adaptation. A commitment to work together for growth and change can achieve much more for a marriage than an initial set of shared interests. A more realistic alternative belief is: *A person should choose someone to marry whose personal characteristics are similar to their own.*

12. *The "Choosing should be easy" belief*. Some individuals believe: *Choosing a mate should be easy*. There is a popular idea that marriage and mate selection are a matter of chance. The myth that mate selection is accidental relieves some individuals of responsibility for failure of relationships and responsibility for taking action to help a relationship flourish (Stahmann & Hiebert 1987). It also may discourage people from participating in premarital conversations.

A more realistic alternative belief is: *Choosing a mate is not easy; hence, it should be carefully thought-out*. Our society has undergone rapid changes that confound marriage and career decisions (Rappaport 1976). Changing sex roles, the high divorce rate, the effect of inflation on the family, the need for higher education, and higher expectations for marriage have made choosing a mate more complicated than it was just 50 years ago.

- Marriage

1. *My partner will meet all my needs*. We have already covered this myth. No human being can or should meet all your needs. To expect your mate to meet all your

needs is to set a trap for your partner. It is an exercise in narcissism.

2. *All our love, affection, security, and sexual needs must be met.* No one must have all of their needs met in order to be whole and healthy. If you want to see where there is perfect security and no anxiety whatsoever, go to the nearest cemetery.

3. *Marriage will give me an identity.* If "who you are" depends on "to whom you are attached," then your identity is little more than an attachment identity. It is not based on one's own self-esteem and self-worth.

4. *Marriage will make me feel good about myself (or, the perfect self belief).* If I enter marriage feeling good about me, then marriage will likely make me feel even better about me. However, if I enter marriage not feeling good about me, no amount of love from my mate will make me feel better about me. Thus, *a person should feel totally competent as a future spouse before they decide to get married.* This belief keeps many individuals single for a long time because few individuals ever feel *totally* competent to be a husband or a wife. In addition, successful marriage requires cooperation and effort by *two people*, not perfection in one or both. Some people use this belief as a rationalization for an underlying fear of close relationships or marriage. An alternative to this unrealistic belief is: *A person should feel competent to be a spouse, but most people feel some anxiety about their competence.* This anxiety should not keep an individual from marrying - no one is perfect. No one can perfectly predict the future adjustments a couple will have to make.

5. *Marriage is the antidote for loneliness.* Just as loneliness is possible even if one is standing or sitting in the midst of a huge crowd, so also loneliness is very possible within marriage. Marriage no more cures loneliness than cancer cures smoking. Some people have experienced increased loneliness within marriage compared to singleness. Lonely people who marry each other to correct their situation usually discover that the most intense and excruciating loneliness is the loneliness that is shared with another.

6. *Good marriages just "come naturally."* This is another pernicious belief arising out of romanticism. This myth does a good job of relieving one of all responsibility for working at the marriage.

7. *The 'one and only' belief.* Although some people may be more "right" for you than others, the belief that there is somewhere a "right" partner out there in the world just waiting for you is another tenet of romanticism and romanticized mate selection. How does a person determine when they have found this one right person? Will they experience a magical, special feeling? Will a person pass up other good marriage prospects while waiting for this special feeling? Such a belief may also foster passiveness in the mate selection process. For example, some individuals believe that their "one and only" will eventually just "come along"; hence, there is no pressure to actively date and get to know others more intimately.

Many fallouts from failed marriages claim "she/he wasn't the right person for me." This of course gives me an excuse for divorce by placing the responsibility on the other person who wasn't right for me. The problem is all and always with the other, never with me. A more realistic alternative belief is: *There are several individuals to whom a person could be happily married* (Coleman 1988; Jedlicka 1975; Walster & Walster 1978). The fact that there is no "one and only" in no way mitigates against using good judgment when selecting a spouse. Rather, it means that if one person does not measure up - assuming one's standards are realistic in terms of one's own assets - there are other persons who will (Coleman 1988).

The "perfect" partner belief. Linked to the idea above some individuals believe: *Until a person finds the perfect person to marry, they should not be satisfied.* Such a desire for perfection reduces a person's ability to find solutions and can lead to the opposite of the desired result. People live in a world of probabilities. The desire for absolute truth and security leads to exaggerated expectations that cannot be fulfilled and, consequently, produces indecisiveness and anxiety.

Individuals who believe there is a perfect partner for them out there somewhere often engage in short-term "rating relationships." That is, instead of getting to know their dates and *relating* to them, they evaluate and *rate* them prematurely in the dating relationship. These individuals then develop a pattern of multiple short-term relationships, which lead to frustration, disappointment, and disillusionment for both the individuals and their dating partners. The uselessness of this belief is further amplified by the fact that people change over time. The person who appeared perfect at the beginning of marriage will inevitably appear imperfect later.

An alternative belief is: *No one is perfect.* Mate selection based on the qualities that are most important to a person and being able to compromise when all the qualities

are not found is more realistic. A balance sheet with the pluses and minuses of a particular relationship may be useful for some individuals. The most an individual can hope for is to decide in the light of the best information available.

8. *The "try harder" belief.* This unrealistic belief is: *A person can be happy with anyone they choose to marry if they try hard enough.* (This is the opposite of the perfect partner belief.) The negative consequences of this belief include taking a too casual approach to mate selection (since "just about anyone will do"), fostering another false belief that "with enough effort anything is possible," and premature marriage (i.e., committing to a relationship before carefully evaluating similarities, differences, values, goals, expectations, etc.).

Many married individuals who hold this belief have experienced months or years of "trying harder" to make a marriage work without much success. This is because marriage is a reciprocal relationship that requires both spouses working together to resolve relationship problems.

It appears that there are some kinds of people who may not reciprocate one's efforts in marriage; thus, they may be poor marriage risks. Examples include:

- An addict who is not in recovery. This includes drug, alcohol, gambling, sex, food, and work addictions. People usually marry addicted people either not knowing the person is addicted or mistakenly believing they can change the person after marriage. In reality, no one changes anyone else.
- Someone who is violent or emotionally abusive.
- A young person (under age 20).
- Someone who is sexually unresponsive.
- Someone with major religious differences.

Pastors can help couples avoid relationships that are "disasters in the making" by bringing these ideas through deconstruction to the attention of the couple.

A realistic, alternative belief is: *It takes two mature and well-adjusted individuals to make a marriage work, so one needs to be reasonably sensitive and selective in the choice of a mate.* A prospective mate should be someone who is willing to give their fair share to the relationship, compromise, and be sensitive to equity in the relationship.

9. *Love never changes.* In effect, the essence of death is stagnation: The essence of life is growth. There can be no growth without change. All reasonably whole and healthy people change continually throughout their lives. Love will change. It may die or it may grow. Sometimes lovers grow apart. More often the partners kill their love and blame it on the partner changing.

10. *You don't marry the family.* The romanticist would have us believe that the individual is an isolated and unattached love object. On the contrary, both partners are the product of generations of socialization, rules, rituals, processes of interaction, and patterns of coping. Even if your partner claims "I have broken away from my family," he/she is still involved, if only in a reactive way. There is no escape from familial influence.

11. *Togetherness is the same as closeness and intimacy.* Not so! Genuine closeness and intimacy is not at all the same as "togetherness." Too much togetherness may be stultifying and smothering and may prevent the cultivation of one's own space and one's own interests.

12. *Children cement the marital bond of love.* The overwhelming evidence of research on marital satisfaction reveals that the single greatest negative influence on marital satisfaction is the birth of the first child. This is because the twosome becomes a threesome, and this changes the roles and the role enactment of the husband and wife, now become mother and father. Although the child may be much loved and much wanted, the child is a powerful influence on the relationship between the parents.

13. *A wedding is a marriage.* We say that Claire and Jean-Paul "got married". But they didn't! They only "got wedded". A wedding is just the first step toward the distant goal of becoming married.

- **Sexuality**

1. *Men are more sexual than women.* This myth is true only if orgasm, normal frequency, and reaction to specified stimuli are defined by the male. Only if variety means uniformity, only if more diffuse physiological response is considered less powerful,

and only if single episode multi-orgasm capability is seen as less fulfilling, can we say that males are more sexual than females. Or, men enjoy sex, woman tolerate it.

2. *Love and sex are the same.* This myth points to the utter impoverishment of the English word *love*. There are those who would say that love is nothing more than sex, and there are those who would say that sex should be nothing but love. There is sex without love, and there is love without sex. Sex may or may not be a part of love. Linked to this is the idea that sex is always an expression of love.

Expressions like "Peace and love", "Make love not war" - emphasized during 1968 - still nourish the idea that sex is an automatic expression of love and peace. One of the confusions of our time is that the expression "I love you" means "I want to go to bed with you, have sex with you, now, without waiting any longer". "I am free to love" means "I will sleep with whom I want to when I want to."

The idea is to glorify love by liberating sex, to liberate sex from the spiritual and social under the pretext that they are too restrictive and limit freedom. Consequently that our sexuality became enslaved to the "tyranny of the short-lived". Rather than becoming masters thereof, we become weak and crippled in love.

According to the American psychiatrist Erich Fromm (1956:54) -

... sexual desire can be stimulated by the anxiety of aloneness, by the wish to conquer or be conquered, by vanity, by the wish to hurt and even to destroy, as much as it can be stimulated by love. It seems that sexual desire can easily blend with and be stimulated by any strong emotion, of which love is only one.

Before a sexual union can become a real act of love, the persons concerned need to learn to love. This learning process has to do with the control of egoistic drives and mutual respect.

3. *Women want only love.* Since the waning of the influence of Victorianism and the important research by Masters and Johnson on the female's capacity for multi-orgasm, there is no basis for such a general statement. Some women want love without sex. Fewer women want sex without love. Probably the great majority of modern Western women want sex as an expression of love.

4. *Men want only sex.* Some men want sex without love some of the time. Some men want love without sex some of the time. Men use the language of love to get sex. To say that men want only sex is unfair to men.

5. *Persons divorcing must have been having poor sex.* On the contrary, many divorcing people have great sex but nothing else. Some divorcing people continue to have sexual relations with each other either because of the convenience or because sex is so good or because they want a safe sexual outlet without getting involved with other partners.

6. *Sex is unimportant in really good marriages.* An old adage states that if there is poor sex it counts about 90% against the relationship, but if there is good sex it counts about 10% in favour of the relationship. If this statement is taken for its symbolic rather than its literal meaning, it illustrates how important sex is. It is so vital that if we do not have it the marriage is likely to be in trouble. On the other hand, even if we do have a good sexual adjustment it means that we are now free to pursue the other challenges and problems of married life.

7. *Simultaneous orgasm is the supreme sexual or lovemaking experience.* This is a belief related to middle and late Victorianism, and it was the cause of much sexual frustration. Although it is good to be committed to the satisfaction of one's mate, this becomes a most difficult and often self-defeating challenge because of the fact that one's mental concentration cannot be totally on both the mate and the self at the same time. Today the emphasis is on taking turns in petting and stimulation to orgasm so that both partners may be fully involved in both their own and their partner's orgasmic experience. Taking turns allows for much more quality and concentration on the needs and wishes of the partner as well as providing both partners the enjoyment of bringing pleasure to their partner (Crosby 1991:19-20, 88-91; Mace 1983, 1984:21; Larson 1992; Stahmann & Hiebert 1987:18-26; Tenenbaum 1999:49-51, Louw 1993:37-44).

5.6 EXTERNALISATION CONVERSATIONS

People within a culture share a dominant set of discourses, or ways of making sense, but each one of us puts our own individual story together in our own particular way, often changing the story depending on whom we are talking to, when, and why. Because

each story is particular, there are no formulas that will definitively teach exactly how to use deconstruction in counselling. For this reason, it could be difficult to learn the narrative approach.

Some people speak about deconstruction as a process of "externalizing the problem," without necessarily discriminating against the nuances of the term. This process, called deconstruction, focuses on the problem rather than on the person and then mobilizes the client's resources against the problem.

More recent formulations of this approach have adopted the notion of ongoing *externalizing conversations* - a more fluid idea than that of "externalizing the problem." Externalizing is a rhetorical device that opens up a slightly different way of speaking about one's life. It seems to achieve several things.

First, if the dominant discourses of twentieth-century Western culture have promoted a view of individuals as prime movers in their own lives, then externalizing conversations create space for a different understanding in which discourses are accorded more influence in the shaping of experience.

Second, the device of externalization helps to reverse the trend in psychology toward seeking more and more deficits in individual character and encouraging clients to relate to themselves as deficient human beings. Separating the person from the problem often comes as a pleasant surprise to people who come to counselling with the expectation that they will have to walk across hot coals in penance for the inner deficiencies that "must" be causing their pain. Instead, they are immediately given the status of agents in their own and others' lives and regarded as resourceful, intelligent persons engaged in common human struggles.

Third, externalizing has an ironical effect. In a world intent on maximizing the disciplinary power of internalizing logic, the process of externalization parodies the dominant ways of thinking in our culture. The discourses in which problems have previously been located are thus travestied. The previous discourse can almost be laughed at from the new perspective; certainly, it has been gently undermined. This ironical effect is far more potent than any kind of direct confrontation.

Fourth, the process of speaking in an externalizing way provides pastors with a discipline to maintain - a discipline that alerts them to the possibilities for agency in the lives of the people who seek their help. This discipline trains them to listen for discourses at work in the production of problems and breaks the unconscious habit of imputing to clients a sense of deficit. It moves them into a more respectful way of speaking to those who consult them (Monk *et al* 1997:45-46; White 1991:126, 140).

Thus do externalizing conversations serve the purposes of deconstruction. In this section, we have attempted to sketch some notions of deconstruction, locating it - as does White himself - in a much wider philosophical context. However, in the narrative literature, the notions of externalizing and deconstruction are sometimes used interchangeably.

5.6.1 Perceiving problems as separate from people

White has introduced the idea (1987, 1988/9, 1989; see also Epston 1993, and Tomm 1989) that the person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem. Externalisation is a practice supported by the belief that a problem is something operating or impacting on or pervading a person's life, something separate and different from the person.

When listening to people's stories, we ask ourselves questions like "What is problematic here? What is the nature of this problem? How does it show itself? What does it feel like for this person to have this problem in his or her life? What is influencing the person so that he thinks/feels/acts this way? What is keeping this person from having experiences he would prefer?" In asking ourselves these questions, we are taking the first steps in perceiving problems as separate from people. Externalisation is more important as an *attitude* than as a technique.

5.7 TRANSITIONS AND MAPPING

Information about a couple during a premarital conversation can be organized to reveal relationship patterns and changes in those patterns. By plotting the couple's relationships on charts known as genograms, ecocharts and the couple's life-line the different transitional stages, family life cycle and faith development could be graphically presented.

5.7.1 Transitional stages

A transitional stage is reached when events make it necessary for family relationship patterns to be renegotiated and redefined. Events can originate inside or outside the couple or family system. The stages vary in timing, type, and magnitude according to factors such as ethnic culture, local custom, and family preference.

Burnham (1991:36-41) describes these transitional stages from three different, but interrelated aspects : trigger, timing, and magnitude. Essentially, change may be triggered in a family system by people entering, leaving, or developing. These triggers may occur expectedly or unexpectedly.

- **Triggers**

There are many events or issues that can prompt a family system to change its current patterns of relating. They can be describes in many ways. Three basic divisions are as follows :

- *Formation*

Two or more people may decide to commit themselves to a relationship on a regular basis.

- *Exits*

Someone or something is lost, or leaves a relationship, or signals the intention to do so. Leaving may be enforced, voluntary, or by death. In systemic terms leaving not only implies loss and, perhaps, suffering, but also the process of reorganizing and redefining relationships. The memory of those departed plays a significant part in this process. Death, divorce, imprisonment, going into care, working away from home, leaving to get married, going to college, are all examples of exits. Sometimes this may signal the disintegration of a system.

- *Entry*

Someone or something different enters an existing relationship. The pragmatic

effect of such an event is that the existing hierarchy and alliances have to be realigned to make way for the newcomer. Whether this is a 'good thing' depends on factors such as the rate at which relationships are expected to adapt in order to assimilate the new information. Stepparents, babies, boyfriends, live-in grandparents are examples of such triggers.

In the flux of family life these divisions are seldom discrete events. For example, someone's leaving may be prompted by another's arrival, or the formation of one relationship may depend upon the collapse of another.

- **Timing**

These trigger points may be expected or unexpected.

- *Expected*

These are the kind of changes that all families anticipate at particular times in their evolution. People can map these out as part of their future plans. Changes that are prompted by physiological development or prescribed cultural or family patterns come under this heading.

Physiological development: Birth, growth, puberty, and aging continually prompt the need to redefine relationships by regulating the distance between people. For example, the increase in dexterity that usually accompanies development allows a child independence in tasks that were done by other people, thus changing the relationship between them. Caretakers are freed from these tasks and may turn to other interests or people to fill this 'gap'. Similarly, as a person ages and again becomes more vulnerable, the associated decreasing independence usually prompts a redefinition of the arrangements of living and often leads to increasing dependence on others (family or professional).

Cultural patterns: Socially prescribed events, such as going to school, leaving school, receiving higher education, beginning work, retiring, leaving home, and getting married, also prompt changes in relationships. Each child in French culture has to go to school by the age of 6. This custom is supported by law (a cultural rule) and so a change in the relationships between the child and the family is dictated by an outside

agency. It significantly alters the closeness/distance between a child and family.

Expected transitions in relationships are more predictable in time and can therefore be planned and even rehearsed. Ethnic groups have specific rituals, like the Jewish bar mitzvah, or the Irish wake, facilitating the transitions of adolescence and death respectively. Major transitions can be rehearsed, as when a parent and young child prepare for separation at primary school through incremental separations at playschool and in the company of other adults. Spouses who spend time maintaining their marital relationship during the parenting phase are more likely to adapt successfully when their children leave home. This type of preparation demonstrates a family system's flexibility and ability to reduce the confusion and distress that are commonly experienced at a time of transition.

Such events signal cultural-specific rules, i.e. that children should become autonomous from their parents. If a family rule is at variance with this, e.g. the child should spend all its time with the parents or vice versa, then such transitions are more likely to be difficult.

Family scripts: Families have idiosyncratic rules and rituals that govern transitions in the life cycle of relationships. These family scripts may be explicit or implicit. For example a family may have a rule handed down through the generations that the daughter who does not marry is expected to give up her personal plans and devote herself to looking after the aged parents.

These levels of biology, culture, and family system are not exclusive and there is an interplay between them. The greater the congruence between the levels the smoother the transitions and vice versa.

- *Unexpected*

These stages are triggered by events that are not in the family's schedule of anticipated events. Their timing cannot be predicted and adjustments cannot therefore be planned. Examples of such events include: the discovery of an incestuous relationship; job loss; a premature or accidental death; a miscarriage; or an unwanted pregnancy. An unexpected transition is also triggered when there is a surprise variation in the way that an expected event occurs, as when an adolescent declares

himself gay, or a handicapped child is born. There may be no pool of knowledge in the family or community to offer advice. There will probably be no rituals to guide and support people through the experience. These deficiencies increase the risk of isolation which is already present as friends and relatives may not know how to approach those undergoing such changes. In many ways these events test the flexibility of a system's response to change more than the expected stages.

Another example of such a stage would be divorce. This would throw the family relationships into turmoil and confusion. A systemic practitioner would look at the ways relationships were reorganized, and the associated suffering of the individuals. Some alliances are severed, coalitions may be formed, and other relationships become more distant. When children are involved the adults have to negotiate the end of the marriage but maintain the parental relationship.

- **Magnitude of change**

This refers not to the size of the triggering event but to the degree to which a family needs to alter its beliefs and behaviours in order to accommodate the event.

- *First-order change*

This is a change that can be incorporated into the existing pattern or definition of relationships. A couple who decide to increase the number of evenings they see each other from three to four while still defining the relationship as platonic are making a first-order change.

- *Second-order change*

Bateson (1979) refers to this level of change as a *difference that makes a difference*. It denotes a change in the definition of relationships, which profoundly changes the system. This kind of change requires a fundamental reorganization of relationships, not merely an adjustment based on the prevailing beliefs and behavioural repertoires. A 22-year-old woman living at home begins to spend less time with her parents and more time with her boyfriend. This is seen by the family members as part of the continuing process towards her independence. It is within the

pattern that has existed for some time. Therefore they do not feel it is out of the ordinary, and there are no homeostatic "alarm bells" ringing. It is news of a difference that does not make a difference. Suppose instead that one evening the young woman comes home and says "I've given up my boyfriend because I think I'm gay. I'm going to live with a woman, please don't try and stop me, it's something I've got to do." This would be out of the ordinary for the family. It would be news of a "difference that made a difference" at the level of behaviour and beliefs, and thus one that significantly changes the patterns of relationships and the previously held views about those relationships.

Difficulties can turn into problems when first-order solutions are applied to second-order problems. An example of this would be if the parents said to their daughter, "Don't be ridiculous, go to your room and don't come down until you are ready to say you are sorry." This is using a solution that was appropriate at an earlier stage, when the definition of their relationship was a complementary one of parent and child, not the current person-to-person symmetry.

The implications of second-order change are often more significant to a family as they can devastate current routines, beliefs, and emotional ties. It usually takes place when someone is entering or leaving the family system. There is a need to find a new pattern or 'map' to fit the new system. According to Burnham (1991:41) first order difficulties are more likely to respond to a direct, educative approach, while second-order problems usually require more challenging or strategic approaches.

The ideas of externalisation and deconstruction can be fruitfully employed with regard to these transitional stages and the mapping of them by means of a genogram, an ecomap, a couple life line and the family life cycle (as described below). For example, the co-narrator maps the influence of the couple's decision to marry and the marriage itself on the couple, their family, Church and society. Bringing these influences to light would give the couple a clearer sense of their decision and commitment within their social context. The ideal situation would be if the respected families (parents, brothers and sisters) could also be present for this part of the conversation.

The concept of "marriage" can also be externalized, and some general opinions of the society can be shared. Afterwards it can be linked to the couple and to what extent these ideas influence the couple's view of marriage.

One of the hallmarks of narrative therapy is *persistence* (Monk et al 1997:11). We continue to ask questions and to respond to the couple's stories, seeking to provide an opportunity of a full account of their experience - past, present, and future.

For example, with the following questions past, present, and future oriented questions could be asked. How (did/do) they intend to cultivate the idea to be separate and to bond (closeness) as a couple at the same time? How (did) are they going to create a context for growth and change? How (did) are they going to foster intimacy in their marriage? What (were) are their opinions on the sharing of power in marriage? How (did) are they going to implement it? How (did) are they going to foster good communication?

5.7.2 The genogram as mapping tool

Unless we come from a family of storytellers, we will need some assistance in thinking about family stories. The genogram is a very effective tool to facilitate telling stories for the sake of understanding one's family of origin. It is like a family tree, only more so. What makes a genogram different from a family tree is the stress on stories and traditions and emotional connections that go beyond mere facts. In a sense, the genogram is simply a vehicle for storytelling. There are insights that can be gained, however, simply by putting on paper a picture of the family within.

Like a family tree, a genogram seeks to identify two or three generations of membership in our first family. Unlike a family tree, stories and patterns of interacting and alliances are more important than the actual dates or places of birth. It does not matter whether one begins with the oldest or the youngest generation; the goal is to draw a map of the significant relationships of each family of origin from a multigenerational point of view. If you have a few models to start with, it does not take long to develop a distinctive approach to doing a genogram.

Because one of the goals of the premarital conversation is to clarify each individual's relationship to his or her first family, no story is unimportant in the creation of a genogram. Nor is any relationship insignificant. We are interested in the alliances that transcend generations and the impact of major family events over time. It need not be a

problem that an individual does not know all the facts about births and deaths. Sometimes what we do not know reveals as much as what we do know. It is useful to do the genogram before going in search of information, because it helps to focus on the questions that need to be asked.

When the families we come from have not functioned well, there will be a reluctance to tell stories of things for which we are ashamed or to talk about relationships that are hurtful. Obviously, individuals should not be forced to tell stories they do not want to tell or talk about pain or shame they want to hide. There is usually more than enough material to explore in a family's history without such stories. Honouring their reluctance should, however, be linked with a recommendation to the couple that they share with one another what they cannot talk about in the presence of an outsider. It is also important to alert them to the possibility that they may attempt to create an impossibly ideal family in order not to be *at all like* the destructive families from which they came.

Telling the stories and exposing the family secrets enables a couple to confront the emotional power of their first families in order to create something new. The process of telling and hearing each one's story in the context of a genogram enables a couple to think about their pasts and their future in a way that is non threatening and often pleasurable. It is one action that has the potential to effect both leaving and cleaving. Doing a genogram is a leaving-home event because it can enable an individual to gain more emotional distance by externalizing the picture of the family she or he carries within. It is a time of cleaving because partners regularly discover something more about the one they intend to marry or a commonality between them that strengthens their emotional bond.

5.7.2.1 The advantages of a genogram

If the relationship is the primary focus of premarital counselling, then psychological inventories or questionnaires are the useful tools for locating areas in the relationship in need of further exploration. Because we regard the invitation to storytelling to be an essential dimension of preparation for marriage, the genogram is the preferred method. It has other advantages, which are particularly beneficial in areas where pastoral ministry moves across cultures or among the poor or in areas of the world not yet technologized.

1) It does not presume literacy or even an extensive ability in the language being used. It is possible to do a genogram with someone with very limited language skills. It simply takes longer.

2) A genogram is portable and adaptable to a variety of situations. Ordinarily it is done on paper large enough to include all the various connections of people we call family. There are computerized versions of a genogram that can be used individually. It may be done on a blackboard, although that medium does not leave a permanent record that can be used at another time.

3) It diminishes defensiveness. When couples are in love, they are not generally open to exploring their relationship - out of fear that someone might tell them they should not get married. Even if couples are told that psychological inventories will not be used in that gate keeping way, they are still cautious. The focus on the family of origin that we are proposing defuses this worry. Moreover, talking about our families is something that is ordinarily done over coffee with friends or with perfect strangers at social gatherings.

4) The genogram builds a bond between the pastor and the couple. It is a common activity that becomes a part of the history they share together and, when appropriate, may be introduced at some point in the rituals that follow. It also provides a reference point for pastoral conversations after the wedding.

5) When it is not possible for one person of the marital couple to be present until just before the wedding, doing a genogram is still useful. Being clearer about legacy and continuing the process of leaving home are both individual tasks that can be worked on even if the couple are apart. Beginning to understand how or in what ways one's family of origin will influence becoming married may be done individually before it is done as a couple.

6) The genogram is a public document. Presumably the material discussed is generally known to the family. The primary focus is not on a relationship that is still quite private and is still being formed.

7) Related to the public nature of the genogram, the focus on family of origin has the potential to make the wedding a many-generational event. People anticipating marriage should be encouraged to share what is produced with their parents, in the interest of initiating more conversation about the legacies of their history. One of the great advantages of the genogram in this regard is to give permission to people to ask questions about their families that they might not otherwise feel free to ask and bring to light previously hidden stories.

8) Doing a genogram can be fun (Anderson & Fite 1993:48-49).

5.7.2.2 Significant themes to explore

No two genograms are alike. Family stories are unique and so is each member's interpretation of those stories. The patterns of interacting across and within the generations, the values and traditions, and the legacy of roles, rules, and rituals are also particular to every family. There are, however, some common themes to look for in doing a genogram. We have organized them around the following series of questions. The way one approaches these themes will be different with each couple, because the responses to some of the first questions we ask will determine what particular areas it might be important to pursue. No single genogram exercise can or should be expected to cover all these questions.

1) *What are the patterns of closeness and distance among family members?* Do the parents have a close marriage? What stories are told about the marriage of grandparents? Which child is close to which parent? What are the alliances among siblings? What are the attitudes about intimacy and sexuality in the family? Did some people work together better than others? Has anyone had difficulty leaving home?

2) *Are there special alliances that include one or both parents and cross generational lines?* What is the primary triangle in the family system? Is there anyone who is a permanent outsider? How does the family handle the question of loyalty? Are there secret alliances? Is there a child or grandchild who is the recipient of a special blessing? Are there naming patterns that suggest the bestowal of particular blessings?

3) *Is the family open or closed to the world outside?* Does the family value privacy highly? How are outsiders welcomed into the family? Is it easy or hard to become a part of the family? Is the family involved in activities in the community or church or neighbourhood? Is the family open to differences that children bring home in the form of friends or ideas?

4) *How were family beliefs and values expressed?* How were religious beliefs expressed? How were values taught? If your parents had different views on religion or politics, how were those differences worked out? Can you identify the beliefs and values by how people worked and played, or by the organizations they belonged to? Were there sayings or family maxims that were frequently repeated by a parent or grandparent? What are the organizing myths that the family lives by?

5) *In what ways are cultural ethnic actors important to the family's history?* If there were differences between the ethnic traditions of parents or their families, how were those differences dealt with? In the marriage of your parents, which ethnic traditions predominated?

6) *What is the family's history of loss and grief?* Is there a pattern of buried grief? Are there births and deaths in close proximity? For example, did grandfather die six months before or after the youngest child was born? If two things happen in the same year, was there any other loss? When there are a series of deaths before a child is born, what does that mean for the child? One of the things that makes a genogram different from a family tree is the relationship of events. The juxtaposition of the death of a parent and the birth of a child is particularly difficult because those two events introduce the processes of celebrating and mourning, which are not easily compatible.

7) *Are there repetitive symptoms, relationships, or functioning patterns across the family or over generations?* Are there losses that repeat generation after generation? What is the family's way of dealing with change? Are there patterns of failure that repeat? Is conflict unresolved or are resentments harboured? Is there a pattern of alcohol abuse or divorce or angry leaving-home events or unwanted pregnancies over time?

8) *What roles, rules, and rituals are part of the family?* Who are the responsible ones? Is there a family peacemaker or scapegoat? What are some of the other roles? Is there one person that the family worries about? Does the person about to marry understand his or her role in the family? Are there special rituals in the family for the celebration of birthdays? How did the family enforce its values or beliefs? Were there, for example, rules posted on the refrigerator door?

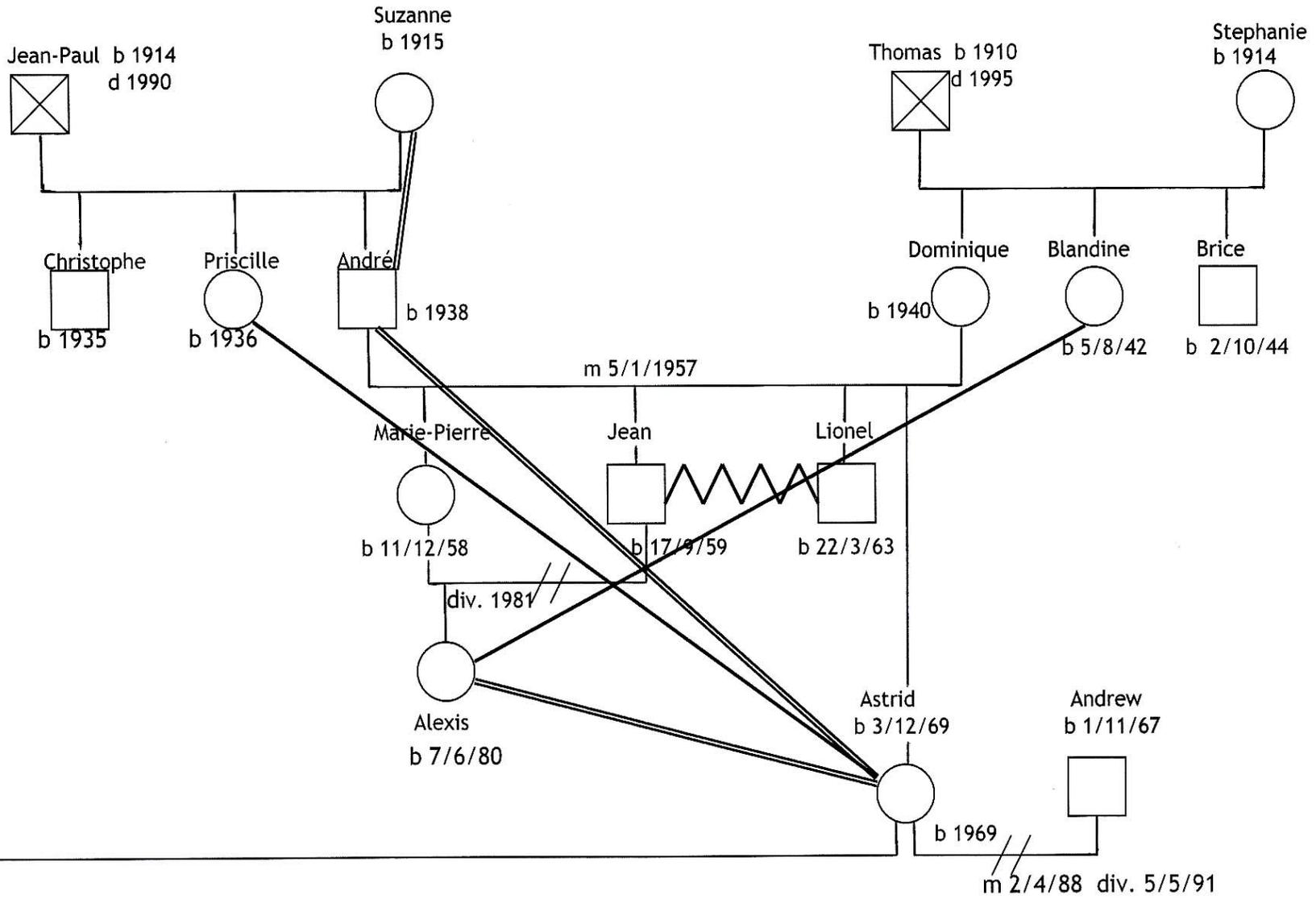
9) *What are the strengths of the family?* What are the patterns for survival or coping with stress that are constructive? What are the things that have helped your family endure over time? It is especially important to lift up the positive signs gleaned from family stories that are regarded as negative without denying the reality of pain or struggle in the family.

10) *If you want to find out more about your family, who could you ask?* Who knows the family stories? Is there a family historian? Who keeps the secrets? Who would be willing to break a family rule to tell you what you need to know about your family in order to be better prepared for marriage? These questions are particularly important when someone comes from a family in which stories are not told (Anderson & Fite 1993:54-56).

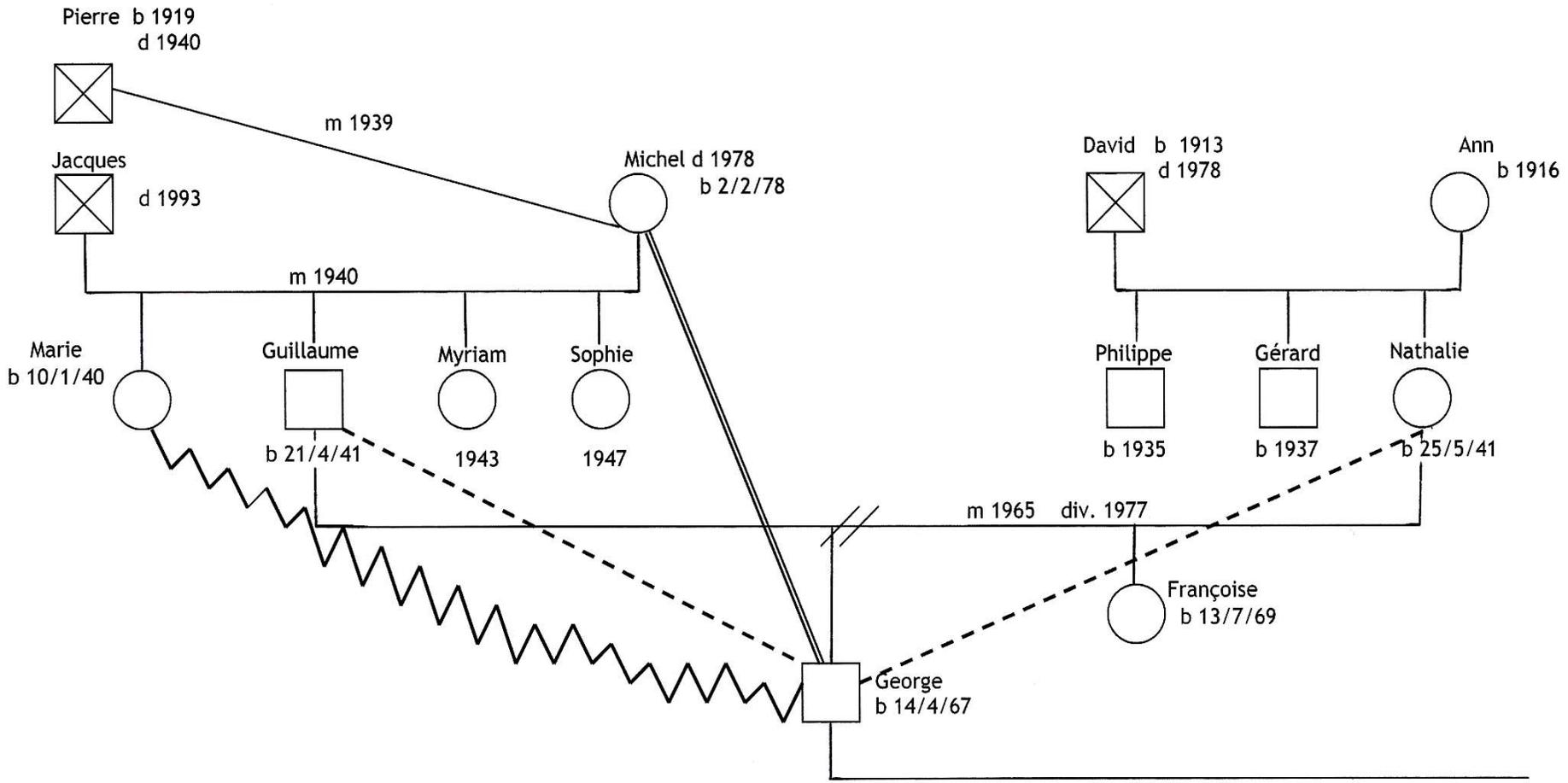
It cannot be emphasized enough that the aim of doing a genogram is not simply the gathering of data; it is the initiation of a process of storytelling that is intended to extend far beyond the time of the pastoral conversation. In the brief span of time usually available before the wedding, it is not possible to examine all the topics listed above. The most one can hope for is to foster in the couple a curiosity about their origins and initiate them into a mode of storytelling that will become a part of their process of becoming married.

Beneath is an example of a simple genogram (of George and Astrid whom I met during the marriage preparation sessions of the RCC in March 1998), followed by a list of standard symbols (Carter & McGoldrick 1989:165-166) being used in doing a genogram.

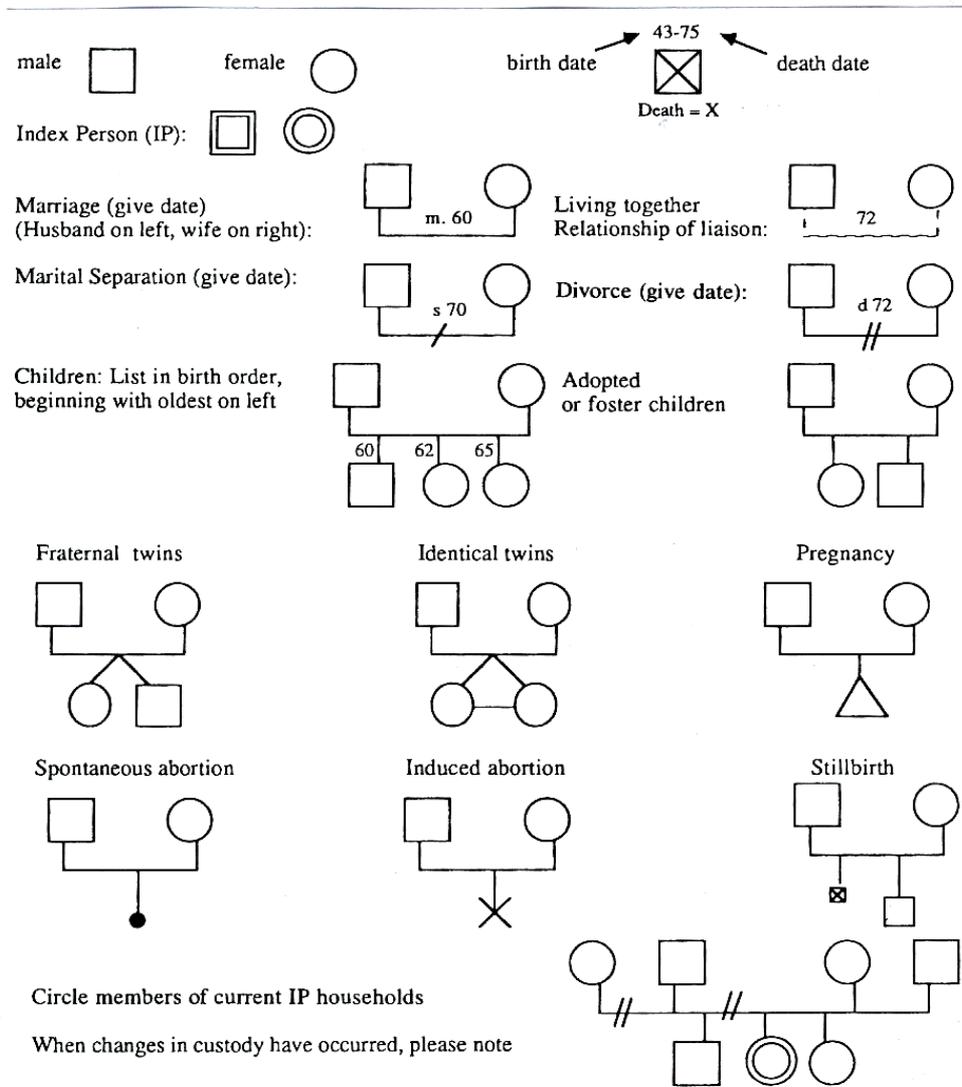
ASTRID'S GENOGRAM



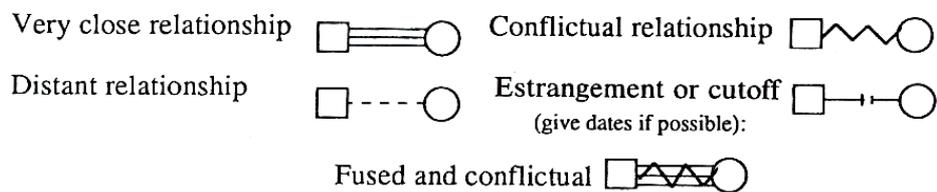
GEORGE'S GENOGRAM



Symbols for genograms



Symbols for family interaction patterns



The father of George, and George himself, were baptized in the Catholic Church. That is the reason why he expressed the desire to be married in the Church. George made the initial contact with the Church, since Astrid had no Church affiliation. George and Astrid did not think that they needed a premarital conversation, since they have been living together for 16 months. They agreed to at least do the genograms.

Three things were significant about George's genogram :

(1) His parents divorced when he was eight years old, and George was "abandoned" by them both to be raised by his father's mother Michèle. She ran a loose household, with many foster children. George learned to fend for himself in order to survive. Michèle was a generous and hospitable woman who loved children.

(2) George learned a family secret only after he told Michèle of his intention to marry. She had been married to a truck driver she called Pierre, who was presumed "dead" or who just "disappeared". She remarried, to Jacques, and shortly afterwards Pierre reappeared and demanded his rightful role as husband. Michèle would not be bullied, as she put it, and divorced the truck driver. George could understand his own caution about marrying more clearly when he learned this secret.

(3) George is distanced from his father because of a conflict with his father's second wife. He has seen his own mother (who now lives in the USA) only three times since the divorce seventeen years ago.

Astrid was married when she was nineteen and divorced three years later. Her first husband worked long hours and spent even longer hours with his male friends after work. Astrid said that she would often "go home" to her parents for several days at a time. After her divorce, she lived with her parents while finishing at a trade school. She is her father's only daughter. Astrid described her parents' marriage as friendly, but without much affection. Her favourite person as she grew up was her Grandpa Jean-Paul. He was a very funny man who loved children. His wife was very quiet and aloof and "very much like my father," as Astrid put it.

The most dramatic story in Astrid's family is not a secret, but an ongoing saga. Her brother Lionel had an affair with their brother Jean's wife, which occasioned a child and a divorce. The brothers still do not speak to each other except through Lionel's daughter, Alexis, who has been cared for by the grandparents until now. Astrid often

took care of Alexis when she lived at home. The family has asked if Astrid will care for Alexis, who is now twelve, after she and George are married.

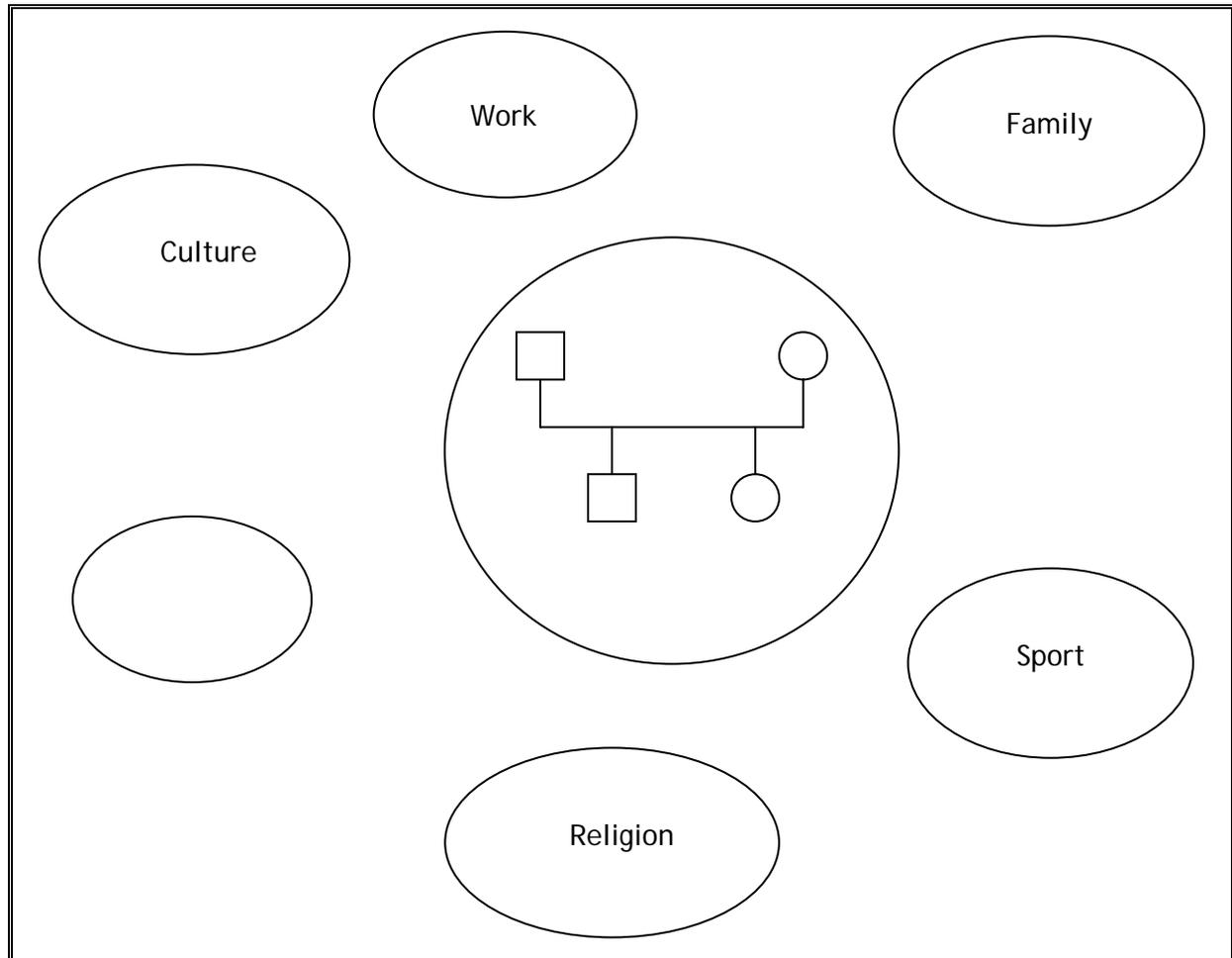
The pastoral conversation with Astrid and George after the genograms were completed focused on the lingering influence of their origins. Astrid is determined to succeed this time in making a home. She is uncomfortable, however, with the influence of Michèle on George's life. George is concerned that with Alexis there that they, he and Astrid, will not have enough time alone to make a home. They were invited to imagine what a marriage would have looked like if Michèle had been married to Jean-Paul, as a way to envision the kind of family they might like to become. Before the wedding, they were able to decide not to take Alexis into their home on a permanent basis, and George had a "big talk" with Michèle about his love for Astrid.

5.7.3 The ecochart as mapping tool

Ecological science studies the sensitive balance which exists between living creatures and their environment. The human sciences co-opted the ecological metaphor to promote greater understanding of the fact that humans are people-in-context. Therefore the drawing of an ecochart is especially valuable when work is being done with a family. A family's ecosystem also includes social, economic, political and other structures which determine the family's context.

An ecosystemic approach immediately calls for a whole series of complex, interdependent data. The ecochart was developed in order to gain an overview of this data and to attempt to identify connections. A meaningful conversation can be entered into with a family with the aid of this chart. To draw such a chart together with the family, can normally be quite a freeing experience for them, since the focus also falls on factors around them and helps them to realize that it is not they as individuals who are the prime foci of evaluation, but more the whole system of which they form a part.

The ecochart can be drawn from scratch on a clean sheet of paper, or a blank chart with outlines already drawn can be used and simply completed (refer to the sketch that follows). A simple genogram of the family is drawn within the large center circle. The next step is to fill in the connections between the family and the different aspects of their environment.



The drawing of the ecochart does not only lead to a balanced assessment of the family's situation, but especially leads to new decisions, since distorted relationships and one-sided interests are exposed.

As is the case with the genogram, the family should also be actively involved not only with the construction of the ecochart, but also its interpretation. The pastor can ask leading questions, but in the end they are the ones who make the discoveries (Müller 1999).

5.7.4 The couple life line as mapping tool

Another easy-to-use, but effective tool to explore a couple's relationship during a premarital conversation is to ask them to do it by means of a couple life line (CLL). It is a structured way of looking at their personal relationship narrative from the time they first

met up to the wedding. The process is that of discovering some of the basic events, dates, dating manoeuvres, and conflicts of the premarital process. The *purpose* is to help the couple become aware of how they behave with each other, how they affect each other, and the patterns they have already established.

Stahmann and Hiebert (1987:58-59) discuss the rationale of the use of this kind of tool during the premarital conversation:

First, the CLL is a way of controlling anxiety. It is possible that both the couple and the pastor experience anxiety prior to and during the premarital conversation. Obviously, the anxieties are different. The couple are anxious about the mechanics of the wedding and the future of their relationship. The pastor is anxious about being able to provide the couple with a meaningful experience. The CLL can be seen as a way of binding anxiety.

The CLL has as one of its results the creation of a sense of direction, orderliness, that something is being accomplished. This sense of purposefulness alleviates anxiety for both couple and pastor.

Second, the CLL is a way of structuring information that is useful to both the couple and the pastor. The use of the CLL will not only help the couple look at what is happening presently in their relationship, but will also aid them in making sense out of earlier happenings. The CLL will provide a methodology that will facilitate the emergence of the patterns and dynamics in the relationship in an orderly and clear manner.

Third, the CLL heightens an awareness of patterns. The process enables the pastor and the couple to become aware of patterns and to heighten them in such a way that their impact can be more fully recognized and understood.

Fourth, the CLL creates a sense of movement in the lives of the couple. By looking at where they have come from and where they have been, the couple are allowed, in the context of a reflective setting, to have a sense of the transition in their lives from being single to being in a relationship.

Fifth, the CLL allows the couple to involve themselves in the process on their own level. People perceive relationships in very concrete terms. The CLL is designed to look at and explore the dynamics of the relationship as it is viewed by the couple.

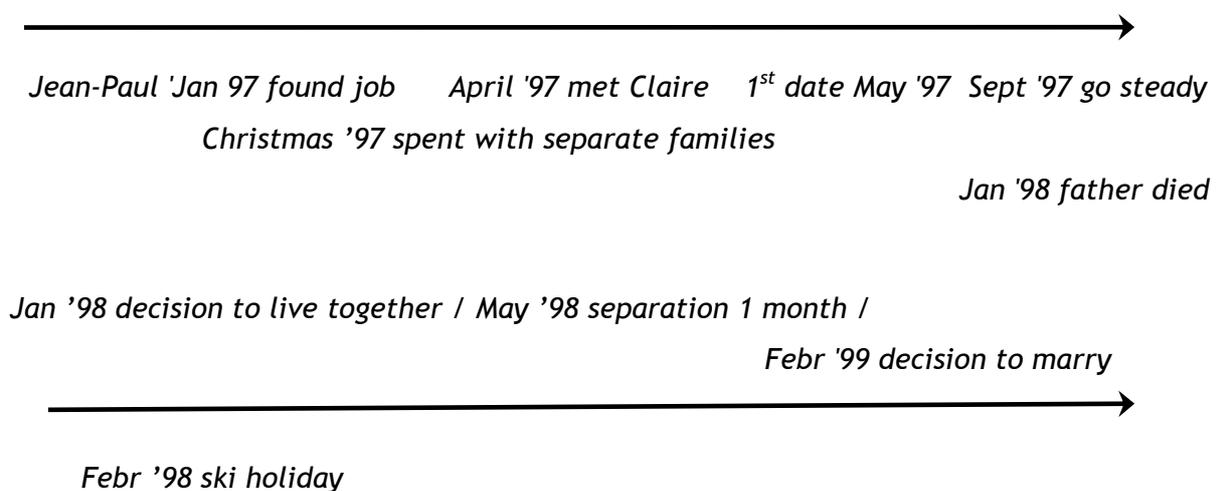
Sixth, the CLL, which involves the use of significant questioning on the part of the pastor, becomes a model for interaction. Because couples have frequently roped off certain areas from discussion, and because questioning is often taken as an attack or criticism, questioning in and of itself is difficult for them. Through the use of questions in

the CLL, the pastor models for the couples, helping them to gain some sense of the information and processes for obtaining it that are needed in order to understand another person.

The dating process is, in a certain way, an obscuring process. Couples rope off areas that they do not discuss. Part of this obscuring process is the result of the forces that impel couples toward marriage.

This couple life line (CLL) can start with the individual history of the couple which could be useful to gain an overview of their dating story. It can, however, evoke unnecessary discussions and emotions about past relationships. Their past dating experience could also be included when doing the genogram, while the CLL exclusively focuses on their relationship as a couple. The CLL can be done in many ways, and it works well if it is given as a homework exercise. It can be a line indicating different aspects of the development of their relationship, or it can be done in colour and with very graphic images. What is especially significant is the meaning and interpretation of these events by and for the couple.

Below is the CLL of Jean-Paul and Claire whom I met during a Summer camp of Family Life Missions in July 1999. What was especially striking for them seeing their story displayed in this way was how important decisions were accompanied by other major events in their lives. We traced the story that led up to each of these events and then I ask what meaning these stories had for them and what these events said about themselves as individuals and as a couple.



They said that idea/theme of the search for security was important for them as a couple and that they would like to construct their life together around this theme.

We started to look at how the search for security (or the lack thereof) played a role in their families-of-origin, and also in other aspects of their lives. They noticed that the search for security was not always an issue. It was important in "serious life stuff", but not in lesser issues, for example, recreational activities.

5.7.5 Family life cycle and faith development

The *Family Life Cycle* (FLC) is a useful tool in depicting the development and changes of the family through time. The work of Carter and McGoldrick (The Changing Family Life Cycle, 1989) is especially valuable in this regard.

Carter and McGoldrick (1989:3-4) emphasize two cautions about a life cycle perspective (that are also applicable to the other mapping tools) :

A rigid application of psychological ideas to the "normal" life cycle can have a detrimental effect if it promotes anxious self-scrutiny that raises fears that deviating from the norms is pathological. The opposite pitfall, over-emphasizing the uniqueness of the "brave new world" faced by each new generation, can create a sense of historical discontinuity by devaluing the role of parenthood and rendering meaningless the relationship between generations. Our aim is to provide a view of the life cycle in terms of the intergenerational connectedness in the family.

Within the past couple of generations, the changes in the family life cycle have escalated dramatically, due especially to the lower birth rate, the longer life expectancy, the changing role of women, and the increasing divorce and remarriage rate. There has been also a small revolution in awareness of differences in male and female development. Awareness has also increased about the importance of ethnic patterns and cultural variability in life cycle definitions of normality (Carter & McGoldrick 1989:3, 10-11).

In outlining the stages of the family life cycle, they have departed from the traditional sociological depiction of the family life cycle as commencing at courtship or marriage and ending with the death of one spouse.

Before summarizing the FLC in table form, I would like to refer to four aspects of the constitution of a couple, especially in the beginning, that could be useful for a premarital conversation (see Lemaire 1979:150 ff; Poujol & Duval-Poujol 2003:19-29). The duration of these phases depends on each individual.

Meeting or "love at first sight"	Attraction, "love is blind", love-passion, spontaneity
Honeymoon	Euphoria, idealisation of the future, joy having entered the social status of a "couple" (married or not), live outside reality, "we are alone in the world"
Return to reality	Reintegration of the world outside and their social context, organisation of life together, the expectations of each one, role definition
Minor or chronic crises	Used to express frustration, roots of disagreements, redefine the rules - they can be positive and nurture the couple

The stages in the FLC can be summarized as follows:

Family Life Cycle	Emotional process of transition : Key principles	Second-order changes in family status required to proceed developmentally
1. Leaving home: single young adults	Accepting emotional and financial responsibility for self	a. Differentiation of self in relation to family of origin b. Development of intimate peer relationships c. Establishment of self re work and financial independence
2. The joining of families through marriage : the new couple	Commitment to new system	a. Formation of marital system b. Realignment of relationships with extended families and friends to include spouse
3. Families with young children	Accepting new members into the system	a. Adjusting marital system to make space for child(ren) b. Joining in childrearing, financial, and household task c. Realignment of relationships with extended family to include parenting and grand parenting roles.

4. Families with adolescents	Increasing flexibility of family boundaries to include children's independence and grandparents' frailties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shifting of parent child relationships to permit adolescent to move in and out of system b. Refocus on midlife and career issues c. Beginning shift toward joint caring for older generation
5. Launching children and moving on	Accepting a multitude of exits from and entries into the family system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Renegotiation of marital system as dyad b. Development of adult to adult relationships between grown children and their parents c. Realignment of relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren Dealing with disabilities and death of parents (grandparents)
6. Families in later life	Accepting the shifting of generational roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maintaining own and/or couple functioning and interests in face of physiological decline; exploration of new familial and social role options b. Support for a more central role of middle generation c. Making room in the system for the wisdom and experience of the elderly, supporting the older generation without over-functioning for them d. Dealing with loss of spouse, siblings, and other peers and preparation for own death. Life review and integration

With this as background, the *stages of faith* of James Fowler (1981) can also be taken into consideration during the premarital conversation, especially when the story of faith (5.13) is brought into the conversation. These stages could help the pastor to reflect on a narrative hermeneutical pastoral response:

1. Undifferentiated faith Intuitive-projective faith	Infancy Early childhood
2. Mythic-literal faith	School years
3. Synthetic-conventional faith	Adolescence
4. Individuative-reflective faith	Young adulthood
5. Conjunctive faith	Mid-life and beyond
6. Universalizing faith	

The stage that is of particular interest to this study is stage 4. This stage coincide also with stage 1 and 2 of the FLC of Carter and McGoldrick.

The movement from stage 3 to stage 4 Individuative-Reflective faith is particularly critical, for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. Where genuine movement toward stage 4 is underway the person must face certain unavoidable tensions: individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one's strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfilment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being available to others; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute.

Stage 4 most appropriately takes form in young adulthood (it should be remembered that many adults do not construct it and that for a significant group it emerges only in the mid-thirties or forties). This stage is marked by a double development. The self, previously sustained in its identity and faith compositions by an interpersonal circle of significant others, now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles or meanings to others. To sustain that new identity the self composes a framework of meaning conscious of its own boundaries and inner connections and becomes aware of itself as a "world view". Self (identity) and outlook (world view) are

differentiated from those of others and become acknowledged factors in the reactions, interpretations and judgments one makes on the actions of the self and others. It expresses its intuitions of coherence in an ultimate environment in terms of an explicit system of meanings.

Stage 4 typically translates symbols into conceptual meanings. This is a "demythologizing" stage. It is likely to attend minimally to unconscious factors influencing its judgments and behaviour.

Stage 4's ascendant strength has to do with its capacity for critical reflection on identity (self) and outlook (ideology). Its dangers inhere in its strengths: an excessive confidence in the conscious mind and in critical thought and a kind of second narcissism in which the now clearly bounded reflective self over assimilates "reality" and the perspectives of others into its own world view.

Restless with the self-images and outlook maintained by stage 4, the person ready for transition finds him- or herself attending to what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices. Elements from a childish past, images and energies from a deeper self, a gnawing sense of the sterility and flatness of the meanings one serves - any or all of these may signal readiness for something new. Stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from one's own or other traditions may insist on breaking in upon the neatness of the previous faith. Disillusionment with one's compromises and recognition that life is more complex than stage 4's logic of clear distinctions and abstract concepts can comprehend, press one toward a more dialectical and multileveled approach to life truth (Fowler 1981:182-183).

Erickson (1998) in his article Re-visioning the family life cycle theory and paradigm in marriage and family therapy describes some of the problems associated with the adoption of the FLC paradigm. His critique is clearly an influence of postmodern ideas as described in the previous chapters. When using the above mentioned tools (which are just *tools* in the conversational process), the co-narrator should be aware of these critiques to avoid falling into the pitfall of categorizing his narrators and assuming that these tools speak the "truth" of families and that they are *the one and only* conceptual framework from which to view families across the life span.

Erickson argues that the changing nature of the family has become more and more apparent. Family forms are becoming more and more diverse, and an adequate definition of "family" is becoming enigmatic. Perhaps "family", from a post modern perspective, is a

fluid and evolving conceptualization and framework, not a completely static and unchanging structure or definition. Our ideas about what constitutes a family are imbedded within a cultural and historical context. It has been demonstrated that even our most personal understanding of family is socially constructed at both the cultural level and at a more micro level on interpersonal interaction. These changes should sensitize us to the idea of changing family forms and the possible constraints and limits of normative family ideals (Erickson 1998:342-343). By establishing what stages families will go through throughout the life span, by identifying the conflict and challenges of each successive stage, and by establishing what the family should look like at each different stage, the FLC has set up a very strict, confining and oppressive model of how families "should" be. The focus of such a paradigm centres on comparing families and persons with the normative standard to determine where they are deficient. The focus is also on describing the problems and difficulties these families and persons will encounter because of those deficits (Erickson 1998:345).

Others critiques that Erickson mentions are: (a) the marginalization and disqualification of the life experiences of women (whose lives are seen in regard to their biological capabilities), (b) the maintaining of the *status quo* (by incorporating the ideals of the dominant American culture of the 1950's which resulted in having a profound effect on social policy and thus on social control and public life), and, (c) finally, the failure to incorporate the cultural and historical context of the narrators - the FLC, as are many other psychological theories, is founded on the ideals, values, and morals of western culture. There is no inclusion of the experiences, ideals, values, and morals of racial, ethnic, religious, and many other types of minority groups (Erickson 1998:346-348).

Erickson then proposes a revisioning of the FLC that is more inclusive in understanding post modern families (1998:348ff). His first proposition concerns the research that has been done in the field of *New Action Theory* (NAT). NAT is a perspective on family informed by current feminist thought that is situated in post modern and social constructionist ideas. NAT -

is about production. In this view, persons produce or create the conditions of their lives within the context of their social environment. Sometimes their milieu prevents or constrains them from doing what they prefer. Other times, their milieu enables and enhances their goals. Very often it does both (Scanzoni &

Marsiglio 1993:107 quoted in Erickson 1998:349).

NAT attempts to be very sensitive to both the constraint and empowerment of a person's production. The central focus of NAT in regard to production seems to be creative action, which is opposite to the constraints of "old action theory". NAT views people as struggling to create better lives for themselves and their families and rejects the view of families as deficient or as having failed to meet the norm or deal with change (Erickson 1998:349).

His second proposition concerns the use of narrative metaphors and narrative accounts of life (Erickson 1998:350). Rather than assuming that there are underlying structures to our lives and that the understanding we have of ourselves is simply a reflection of that underlying reality, the narrative metaphor encourages us to adopt a view that the stories we have about ourselves, our relationships, and our lives are constitutive of our lives. In regard to families, White (1995:18) stated:

I think that it is increasingly apparent, to all who care to look and to listen, that there are virtually as many family forms out there as there are families, and that many significantly differing forms appear to work quite well.

The focus is on the stories that govern a family's life rather than on the family's structure or interactional sequences of behaviour. Narrative accounts give up the search for the essential, universal patterns and instead show interest in diversity and the pluralism of families' stories.

The differences between narrative accounts of life and the assumptions of the FLC paradigm can be portrayed as follows:

Narrative accounts	FLC assumptions
Personalized and subjective	Impersonal and objective
Looking for competencies	Looking for deficits
Creativity in difficult circumstances	Deviance
Resistance (to oppression, marginalization, prevailing norms, etc.)	Failure, abnormality, pathology

Evolving, changing, unfixed narratives of life as lived	Static accounts of life as assumed or hypothesized
Needs of families	Problems of families
Family members as interactive agents	Family members as passive processors

Erickson then proposes a series of questions co-narrators can ask themselves in a revisioning process in order to explore their theories underlying their practices and to discover in what ways these theories incorporate values that may support the FLC paradigm and what implications this may have on their practice. The following questions may be helpful in this questioning process:

- What foundational assumptions and tenets of this theory rein the possible constraining or limiting concepts of the FLC paradigm?
- In what ways may the ideas of this theory, as relating to tenets of the FLC paradigm, be used as a subtle or overt means of oppressive social control?
- How might the assumptions of this theory disqualify the lived experiences of women and other marginalized groups through out the life span?
- In what ways is, or might this theory be, open to the experiences of women and other marginalized groups through the life span?
- In what ways does (or might) this theory assist in liberating women and other marginalized groups from the disqualifications and constraints of the FLC paradigm?
- How might this theory be moulded (or abandoned) in such a way to honour the life experiences and transitional experiences of the families, couples, or individuals currently consulting you?

Another important aspect that Erickson underlines (1998:351-352), is the influence of the personal beliefs of the co-narrator on his understanding of the FLC. This should also be understood with reference to what have already been said concerning deconstruction (5.5) and the awareness of our presuppositions (Gadamer). According to White (1991:121)-

deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so-called "truths" that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of

speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons' lives.

In the process of deconstructing our beliefs and values concerning the FLC, life experiences and relationships in order to reveal what these personal beliefs and values (see 5.5.3) in this regard might be, Erickson proposes the following questions (adapted from Freedman & Combs 1996):

- *Exploring beliefs about the FLC*

1. What values or beliefs about the FLC (including tenets, stages, etc.) lead you to be doing what you are doing in therapy work with families?
2. What influenced your adoption of these beliefs concerning the FLC?
3. What people, groups, or institutions influence your beliefs concerning the FLC?
4. Who agrees with the FLC paradigm? Who disagrees with FLC?
5. What tenets or ideas of the FLC paradigm do you find potentially helpful?
6. What tenets or ideas of the FLC paradigm do you find potentially constricting, marginalizing, or disqualifying of families' or persons' experiences?

- *Exploring the effects of FLC beliefs and related interventions*

1. What interventions do your beliefs concerning the FLC paradigm encourage you to use?
2. Who benefits from these interventions and actions?
3. What are the effects of these interventions and beliefs on *your* life and on *your* relationships?
4. How do these FLC paradigm beliefs and interventions affect the distribution of power and privilege in your relationships with the families and individuals who consult you? What effect does this distribution of power and privilege have?

- *Exploring the suitability of beliefs and behaviours in regard to the FLC paradigm*

1. Do these beliefs and interventions suit you as a therapist?
2. What kinds of therapists use these same interventions? Does this reflect how you think about yourself as a therapist?

3. Do you think it's best for this approach, the FLC paradigm, to dictate how you conceptualize and approach work with families and individuals?

- *Encouraging resistance (to the FLC paradigm, dominant cultural ideas about the FLC, etc.)*

1. What beliefs, paradigms, and interventions concerning families and to life span might suit you better?

2. Do you know other therapists who might have similar beliefs or interventions? If you feel it is relevant, what can you learn from them?

3. What would be the effects of re-visioning the FLC paradigm in the way that you view families and your own personal theory of change? Would that suit you better?

3a. In your responsibilities as a therapist, would this be providing the highest quality of care possible? Would it be ethical? If not, what smaller change might be more appropriate? Who might support you in taking such a step?

4. Are there ways in which you have already begun to challenge oppressive beliefs or ideas of the FLC paradigm?

5. What tenets of the FLC paradigm do you see as beneficial to families, which you would keep intact in your personal theory of change? (Erickson 1998:352-353).

5.8 OPENINGS TO NEW STORIES

One of the purposes for everything that has been said so far in this chapter is to search with the couple their new story, a story that they want to construct together. We have to explore what they understand by the events that have already transpired in their relationship and those that lay ahead in their life together as *married* couple-to-be. This can be done by tracing the history and the meaning that the couple attach to these experiences. An exploration can be undertaken into what these experiences (marital life) mean in terms of their desires, intentions, preferences, beliefs, hopes, personal qualities, values, strengths, commitments, plans, characteristics, abilities, and purposes.

5.8.1 Open space questions

Once the landscape of their personal narrative, reasons for marriage and a Church wedding have been explored through deconstruction questioning, there are numerous

vantage points from which unique outcomes or sparkling events concerning their future mutual narrative or for their wedding of stories might be brought forth. This is achieved through opening space questions.

Usually people will mention unique outcomes or demonstrate them spontaneously. I will anyway give examples of questions to constitute unique outcomes. The decision to marry is of course in itself a unique outcome. In such a case, we could respond to what the couple has mentioned, most likely with a preference question or a construction question.

If we don't observe openings to alternative stories or if the couple we work with don't tell us about them, we can co-construct them by asking :

1. Questions about *unique outcomes* that have occurred.
2. Or, we can ask about unique outcomes in the realm of imagination through *hypothetical experience questions*,
3. questions that ask about different *points of view*, and
4. *future orientated questions*.

We group these different types of unique outcome questions together under the name "opening space" because each inquires about the possible presence of an opening that, if taken, may lead to an alternative story.

5.8.2 Unique outcomes

As contradictory as it may sound, this is possibly the most difficult part of the pastoral conversation with couples on the path to getting married. Most couples who cohabit think that nothing will change in their current situation and that their cohabitation has stood the test of time. It is just a formalization of an existing relationship. According to Mitchell and Anderson (1981:75), living together, no matter on how intimate or serious a basis, is not the same as being married, nor does it necessarily hasten the process of leaving home. Indeed, the resistance to marriage displayed by a substantial proportion of cohabiting couples often represents - the couple's proclamations of independence notwithstanding - the inability of either one or the other or both partners to leave home effectively. On the other hand, certain Christians couples believe, in a naive way, that God brought them together and they are "predestined" to get married. But a search for exceptions should be undertaken and in this way an opening could be constructed. A unique outcome could be the result of just a slight twist of meaning of the existing story.

For example, by giving the story various endings in the future. The use of metaphors could also be employed, because a metaphor embraces the truth without demanding it (Bohler 1987:68).

- Has there ever been a time when you thought of what the particularity of marriage is like compared to your current situation?
- Have you as a couple ever stood up to some of these cultural and religious prescriptions concerning the ideal marriage?
- When you started living together / When you first started going steady, the idea of marriage was not evoked, how did the change come about? What made you think of marriage?

A unique outcome is not necessarily an earth shattering experience or idea. It could be a thought or idea that is at odds with a current belief (for example, that nothing will change). The idea of continuation between their present situation and their future situation should also be emphasised. Just as some things will change, some things will also stay the same. This can free them to describe the instances of difference:

- Even though you resisted the idea of marriage for some time, what made you change your mind?
- You said that you were afraid of the lifelong commitment of marriage. What made you come to this new point of view?
- How are these alternative knowledges generated and/or resurrected?

What are the points of entry to these other versions? As persons separate from the dominant or "totalizing" stories that are constitutive of their lives, it becomes more possible for them to orient themselves to aspects of their experience that contradict these knowledges. Such contradictions are ever present, as well as being many and varied. These contradictions or "unique outcomes" provide a gateway to what we might consider to be the alternative territories of a person's life.

For an event to comprise a unique outcome, it must be qualified as such by the person to whose life the event relates. Following the identification of events that are candidates for a unique outcome status, it is important that persons be invited to evaluate these events: Are these events judged to be significant, or to be irrelevant? Do these events represent preferred outcomes, or do they not? Do persons find these developments

appealing? Are persons attracted to some of the new possibilities that might accompany these events? If these events are judged to represent preferred outcomes, then persons can be encouraged to give an account of why they believe this to be the case.

When it is established that particular events qualify as unique outcomes in that they are judged to be both significant and preferred, the pastor can facilitate the generation of and/or resurrection of alternative stories by orienting him/herself to these unique outcomes as one might orient themselves to mysteries. These are mysteries that only the persons themselves can unravel as they respond to the pastor's curiosity about them. As persons take up the task of unravelling such mysteries, they immediately engage in story-telling and meaning-making.

To facilitate this process of "re-authoring", the pastor can ask a variety of questions, including those that be referred to as "landscape of action" questions and "landscape of consciousness" questions. Landscape of action questions encourage persons to situate unique outcomes in sequences of events that unfold across time according to particular plots. Landscape of consciousness questions encourages persons to reflect on and to determine the meaning of those developments that occur in the landscape of action.

5.8.3 Listening for openings

As I already briefly explained above, we generally focus on deconstructing people's reasons for coming for a premarital conversation (problem-saturated narratives in other counselling situations) before attempting to bring forth new stories. However, although we are presenting the processes separately for sake of clarity, the construction of preferred stories almost always goes hand-in-hand with the process of deconstruction.

Our entryway for inviting people to author and live new stories is through "unique outcomes," that is, anything that wouldn't have been predicted in the light of a decision to marry. Unique outcomes constitute openings that, through questions and reflective discussion, can be developed into new stories.

The way unique outcomes or "sparkling events" become apparent can vary tremendously.

Sometimes people offer unique outcomes quite directly, without a lot of drama.

For example, someone may be describing a situation and then say, "It's not always like that," and go on to describe a unique outcome.

It is not unusual as people become involved in re-authoring their lives to save up new unique outcomes to relate to the pastor. At other times, it is important to listen very carefully if we are not to miss the mention of unique outcomes buried in people's descriptions of their life stories. For example, if a man says, "Once in a while I get through to him, but usually ..." and then proceeds to describe the dominant story, we can be curious about the "once in a while" part, just as we would be curious about the answers to unique outcome questions.

Sometimes we can observe something happening that, given the actual story, we wouldn't have predicted - people who believe they have communication problems eloquently describing the problem or they claim everything is fine and they start disagreeing profoundly about a relationship issue, kids behaving well in a session although they are being described as always misbehaving, or a teenager showing up on time to meet other family members for a pastoral conversation although the problematic story is one of irresponsibility. In such a case, we could ask questions about how they did it, inviting them to story their achievement.

5.8.4 Asking for openings

Most often, openings develop "spontaneously" in the process of listening deconstructively and asking people about the effects of problems on their lives and relationships. If openings don't develop spontaneously, we can inquire more directly about their existence. When we are working with an externalized situation, the most straightforward way of looking for openings is to ask about the influence of the problem on the life of the their relationship. That is, we ask questions like, "Has there ever been a time when the problem tried to get the upper hand, but you were able to resist its influence?" or "Have you ever been able to escape the problem for even a few minutes?" or "Is the problem *always* with you?" When questions of this sort follow a detailed inquiry into the effects of the problem on the person, people can usually find instances in which they were able to elude the problem's influence. Each such instance is a potential opening into an alternative life narrative.

We should also take into account that people tend to forget. Not only do we try to forget dark periods in life, all too often we fail to remember the bright spots. It behooves

us to remember stories of grace, our stories of grace. When talking to non-practicing couples who want to get married in the Church - for what ever reason - they will quickly complain why they are against involvement in the Church, comfortably forgetting the positive aspects.

5.9 DUAL LANDSCAPES

Michael White (White and Epston 1990) speaks of the "dual landscapes" of *action* and of *consciousness* (in following Jerome Bruner). He believes that since the stories that constitute people's lives unfold in both those landscapes, pastors and therapists should inquire into both. These dual landscapes can easily be used while doing the genogram, ecochart and the CLL.

5.9.1 Landscape of action

According to Bruner (1986:14) "landscape of action" -

constituents are the arguments of action: agent, intention or goal, situation, instrument, something corresponding to a 'story grammar.'

This is similar to the "who, what, when, where, and how" of journalism. In the landscape of action, we plot sequences of events through time. Thus, the landscape of action is constituted of (a) events that are linked together in (b) particular sequences through the (c) temporal dimension - i.e. past, present and future - and according to (d) specific plots. In a text, the landscape of action provides the reader with a perspective on the thematic unfolding of events across time (White 1991:124).

That which is discussed under "developing an opening into a story" relates to the landscape of action: *detail in multiple modalities* involving the viewpoints of *multiple characters* in a particular *scene or setting*. What we need to add now is the action itself. What happened, in what sequence, involving which characters?

In the landscape of action, we are interested in constructing an "agentive self" with people. That is, we ask questions with an eye to enhancing those aspects of the emerging story that support "personal agency." The very act of re-authoring requires and demonstrates personal agency, and most people experience that in this work. We go a

step further in making personal agency apparent by asking in a variety of ways how people have accomplished what they have.

Asking "how", or some question that implies "how," is especially useful for inviting stories of personal agency.

The answers to "how" questions can also make stories experientially vivid and develop sequences of events through time. Examples: "How did you do that?" "What did you do that led you to feel this new feeling?" and "How did you notice this different way of perceiving the situation?". Answers to such questions almost always come in the form of stories.

We think about the *shape* of a story as it comes forth: What happened *before* the unique outcome? How smoothly did things unfold? Were there false starts involved? What did this particular episode lead to? In this regard, we are especially interested to know if there is a *turning point*, a place where the story changes for the good. Although "turning point" is not a fitting metaphor for everyone in every situation, when it is, it becomes a significant event that we can plot in time, so that it becomes a story. If there is such a point, it creates a focus for when a problematic story becomes a preferred one. As such, we believe it is useful to focus special attention on it, bringing forth even more shape and detail, perhaps even treating it as a story-within-a-story.

No matter how vivid a story is in the landscape of action, if it is to have *meaning* it must also be developed in the landscape of consciousness. By "the landscape of consciousness" we refer to that imaginary territory where people plot the meanings, desires, intentions, beliefs, commitments, motivations, values, etc. that relate to their experience in the landscape of action. In other words, in the landscape of consciousness, people reflect on the implications of experiences storied - in the landscape of action. Jerome Bruner (1986) has discussed how the interplay between these dual landscapes invites empathic and experiential involvement in the lives and minds of the characters in a story. As we read a novel, watch a movie, or listen to a friend recount an amusing anecdote, we become really involved only as we reflect on what people's actions *mean* - why they do what they do, what they hope will or won't happen next, what their actions say about their character, and so on. The sequences of events they tell us about in response to "how" questions only come to embody personal agency when people enter the landscape of consciousness and make meaning of them. Perceptions, thoughts,

speculation, realizations and conclusions dominate this landscape, and many of these relate to -

- (a) the determination of the desires and the preferences of the characters,
- (b) the identification of their personal and relationship characteristics and qualities,
- (c) the clarification of their intentional states - for example, their motives and their purposes - and, to
- (d) the substantiation of the beliefs of these characters.

As these desires, qualities, intentional states and beliefs become sufficiently elaborated through the text, they coalesce into "commitments" that determine particular careers in life - "life styles" (White 1991:124).

5.9.1.1 Landscape of action questions

Landscape of action questions can be referenced to the past, present and future, and are effective in bringing forth alternative landscapes that stretch through these temporal domains. The following questions are mainly those that resurrect and generate alternative historical landscapes; questions that are historicizing of "unique outcomes". However, some future oriented landscape of action questions will feature in some of the examples.

Questions that historicize unique outcomes are particularly effective in bringing forth alternative landscapes of action. These questions bridge those preferred developments of the present with the past; they encourage persons to identify the history of unique outcomes by locating them within particular sequences of events that unfold through time. Often, these questions assist persons to plot the history of the alternative landscape of action to the extent that they reach back and predate the landscapes of action of the previously dominant and "problem-saturated" stories that persons have had about their lives.

Landscape or action questions can focus on both the recent history and the more distant history of unique outcomes. Those landscape or action questions that bring forth the recent history of the unique outcome mostly relate to its more immediate circumstances:

- How did you get yourself ready to take this step? What preparations led up to it?

- Just prior to taking this step, did you nearly turn back? If so, how did you stop yourself from doing so?
- Looking back from this vantage point, what did you notice yourself doing that might have contributed to this achievement?
- Could you give me some background to this? What were the circumstances surrounding this achievement? Did any one else make a contribution? If so, would you describe this?
- What were you thinking at the time? Have you been advising yourself differently? What did you tell yourself that pulled you through on this occasion?
- What developments have occurred in other areas of your life that may relate to this? How do you think these developments prepared the way for you to take these steps?

The pastor can encourage the participation of other persons in this generation/resurrection of alternative and preferred landscapes of action. Including members of the community of persons who have participated historically in the negotiation of, and distribution of, the dominant story of the person's life is particularly helpful. For example, other family members can make particularly significant and authenticating contributions to these alternative landscapes of action :

- How do you think your parents managed to keep their act together in the face of the fact that they didn't approve of the person you want to marry?
- What have you witnessed Jean doing recently that could throw some light on how he was able to take this step?
- What did you see Dominique doing leading up to this achievement? How does this contribute to an understanding of how she got ready for it?
- Would you describe to me the circumstances surrounding this development of your son's life? Did any one else contribute to this, and if so, in what way?

The following questions provide examples of those which bring forth the more distant history of the unique outcome. These invite the identification of events and experiences that have a less immediate relation to the unique outcomes. As with those questions that bring forth the recent history of the unique outcome, it is helpful to engage, as co-authors, members of the community of persons who contributed historically

to the negotiation and distribution of the dominant story that is repudiated in this re-authoring process.

- What can you tell me about your history that would help me to understand how you managed to take this step?
- Are you aware of any past achievements that might, in some way, provide the backdrop for this recent development?
- What have you witnessed in your life up to now that could have given you at least some hint that this was a possibility for you?
- I would like to get a better grasp of this development. What did you notice yourself doing, or thinking, as a younger person, that could have provided some vital clue that this development was on the horizon of your life?
- Please think about your son's recent action and reflect on his life as you have known it. With hindsight, what do you recall him doing that could have foreshadowed this, that could have given you a lead on this?
- It seems that what Claude and Stephan have recently accomplished is a manifestation of some behind the scenes work that they have been doing to restore their relationship. Were you aware of any signs that this work was taking place? If so, what were these signs?

These examples provide just some of the options for engaging persons in the generation/resurrection of alternative landscapes of action. Questions can also be introduced to encourage persons to bring forth the recent history and distant history of those events that have foreshadowed the current unique outcomes.

As couples begin to articulate preferred events in these alternative landscapes of action, and as they become more engaged in the arrangement or linking of these events in particular sequences through time, they can be encouraged to explicitly name the alternative plot or the counter-plot that is suggested by this arrangement. The name of the alternative plot or counter-plot is important, for it, amongst other things, (a) contributes very significantly to a person's sense of their life's going forward in preferred ways, (b) makes possible the attribution of meaning to events or experiences that would otherwise be neglected or considered to be of little significance, (c) facilitates the session by session sorting and linking of the events that have taken place between sessions, and

(d) provides for persons a sense of knowing what might be the next step in their preferred direction in life.

The alternative plot or counter-plot is often named quite spontaneously in the process of this work. When it is not, the pastor can facilitate this by asking questions that encourage persons to generate descriptions in juxtaposition to the previously dominant plot. Through these questions, persons who have been concerned about "losing their relationship" (previously dominant plot), may determine that these developments in the alternative landscape of action suggest that they are on the path of "reclaiming their relationship" (alternative plot or counter-plot). A person who concludes that "self-neglect" has been highly influential in his/her life (previously dominant plot), may decide that the developments in the alternative landscape of action reflect that s/he has been engaged in a "self-nurturing project" (alternative plot or counter-plot) (White 1991:128-130).

5.9.2 Landscape of consciousness

In order to explore the landscape of consciousness, we ask what Freedman and Combs (1993) call *meaning questions*. These are questions that invite people to step back from the landscape of action and reflect on the wishes, motivations, values, beliefs, learning, implications, and so forth that lead to and flow from the actions they have recounted. In co-authoring stories, we move between the landscape of action and the landscape of consciousness, weaving the two back and forth again and again.

5.9.2.1 Landscape of consciousness questions

Landscape of consciousness questions encourage persons to review the developments as they unfold through the alternative landscape of action, and to determine what these might reveal about -

- (a) the nature of their preferences and their desires,
- (b) the character of various personal and relationship qualities,
- (c) the constitution of their intentional states,
- (d) the composition of their preferred beliefs, and, lastly,
- (e) the nature of their commitments.

Landscape of consciousness questions encourage the articulation and the performance of these alternative preferences, desires, personal and relationship qualities, and intentional states and beliefs, and this culminates in a "re-vision" of personal commitment in life. It is through the performance of meaning in the landscape of consciousness that peoples' beliefs and desires become sufficiently coherent and well organized as to merit being called "commitments" or "ways of life", and such coherences are seen as "dispositions" that characterize persons.

The following questions provide an example of just some of the forms that landscape of consciousness questions might take. These invite persons to reflect on developments as they have unfolded in both the recent and the more distant history of the landscape of action.

- Let's reflect for a moment on these recent developments. What new conclusions might you reach about your tastes; about what is appealing to you, about what you are attracted to?
- What do these discoveries tell you about what you want for your life?
- I understand that you are more aware of the background to this turning point in Dominique's life. How does this affect the picture that you have of her as a person?
- How would you describe the qualities that you experienced in your relationship at this earlier time, when you managed to support each other in the face of adversity?
- What do these developments inform you about what suits you as a person?
- In more fully appreciating what went into this achievement, what conclusions might you reach about what Jean intends for his life?
- It seems that we are both now more in touch with how you prepared yourself for this step. What does this reveal to you about your motives, or about the purposes you have for your life?
- What does this history of struggle suggest about what Claude believes to be important in life, about what she stands for?

As persons respond to landscape of action and landscape of consciousness questions, they engage in a reliving of experience, and their lives are "retold". Alternative knowledges of self and of relationships are generated and/or resurrected; alternative modes of life and thought become available for persons to enter into. Throughout this re-authoring dialogue, the pastor plays a central role in challenging any early return to the

canonical that would suggest that the unique outcome is self-explanatory (White 1991:131).

It should be added that these landscape of action and landscape of consciousness questions are not simply about history. They are questions that historicize the unique outcome. Also, the re-authoring is not simply a process of "pointing out the positives". Instead, this approach actively engages persons in unravelling mysteries that the pastor can't solve.

5.10 AN OVERVIEW OF A PREMARITAL NARRATIVE CONVERSATION

I will now demonstrate the different aspects and principles that I have been taking about up till now. At the end I will give an illustration of a conversation with a couple concerning their decision to get married.

Furthermore, the order in which the conversation is presented should not be seen as a chronological sequence whereby the pastoral conversation should be developed. However, it seems helpful for certain counsellors (myself included) to have a particular sequence in mind when learning and practicing how to use a narrative approach. It should also be noted that, mostly because of practical reasons (especially time), the outline given below was/is not followed exactly in this way. The counsellor is led by the needs and the rhythm of the couple. In the ideal situation this outline could be applied to each theme of "traditional marriage preparation" (i.e. self image, choice of marital partner, motive for marriage, communication, conflict resolution, growth, marital roles, professions, parenthood, finances, parents-in-law, faith).

As it has already been said, a useful method is to follow people's interests. With a premarital conversation the conversation naturally moves to reasons for the interview. If, however, the information is not forthcoming, inquiry can be made. Careful attention is given to reasons for the decision(s) to marry and why a Church wedding is desired. As we listen we ask deconstruction questions. One systematically asks deconstruction questions (for example "relative influence questions" could be useful), and then one is likely to start with "story development questions" anytime there is an opening. One can always go back to deconstructive listening and questioning if the situation calls for it.

I may not use some type of questions at all during a particular conversation. I tend to use deconstruction questions and opening space questions in the early part of the conversation. I use preference questions throughout interviews, particularly in relation to unique outcomes. Once a preferred unique outcome is identified, I ask story development questions and meaning questions. Often alternating the questions by asking several story development questions and then a meaning question and then more story development questions. However, there are many exceptions to this standardized pattern. For example, one can sometimes omit preference questions, relying instead on voice tone, facial expression, and past statements of preference for guidance.

If the couple starts by describing what they want, expect and look for in marriage, one could respond to that as a unique outcome and begin inviting them to author that story. During the story development, questions that contrast the past with the present or the future might be asked, so that the authoring of the alternative story and telling of the present story are interspersed throughout the pastoral conversation.

Sometimes, one can move between a present story or preconceived idea and the alternative story in order to connect with people's experience. A couple might begin to live an alternative story and then something stops them. They feel blocked or pulled back. In that situation, one can either ask about the alternative story, which may be enough to reengage them in it, or one can listen and ask deconstruction questions about what is pulling them back.

As the story develops further, questions to create an audience are asked - that could be friends, family, church and even strangers. With the "final" meeting the couple is invited to review the story as it has developed - especially questions contrasting the past, present and future. Future-oriented questions are especially asked.

The table below gives an overview of a premarital narrative conversation taking the explanation above into consideration. The movements alluded to, are not comparable to steps or phases.

There is some logic in trying to move from deconstruction to story construction, but there is no problem if one's logic leads them differently. The emphasis falls more on circularity, rather than on a linear movement. The dance-metaphor gives direction. It

begins somewhere and ends somewhere, but is always free and asks for a creative engagement. In this sense, it differs greatly from a strategic phased model. These movements can only be applied meaningfully if they are aligned to the broad narrative approach as described in this dissertation. It depends on the creativity of the pastor. The ideal would be if the pastor integrated these "techniques" in his own unique way in the creation of stories. In a certain way, everything depends on the creativity and not-knowing position of the therapist.

The various movements naturally consist of subjective choices, but these choices have not just been randomly selected. An attempt is made with them to simply promote conversational questions. There are certain methods which simply do not fit with a narrative approach. For example, the reader will not find any questionnaires² or scales of measurement in this approach. This would be too mechanical and it seems to the narrative pastor as if the tendency was too much towards a manipulation of the companion, and therefore would exhibit disrespect for the story. The narrative approach by definition could not be at ease with hypnosis as a therapeutic method. Whenever we work with stories, we work with memories. The stories, as remembered, are the very stories that powerfully impact our lives. These remembered stories form our identity, which is what the pastor is working with and not that which lies in the sub-conscious or unconscious.

Furthermore, it can also happen that these movements which will be discussed, from a narrative point of view, can be incorrectly applied. They can be applied in a non-narrative structuralistic way. Much depends on the not-knowing position that the pastor assumes. If this position is not taken seriously, then no method can ensure a healthy narrative approach.

In narrative pastoral work, the story is not only seen as a means of releasing information, but more as a way to self awareness. This is why people are led to tell and re-tell their stories in such a way that re-interpretation and re-construction can eventually happen. New stories need to be constructed on the basis of which a new future can be envisioned.

² I include at the end of the dissertation the questionnaire that I used and which was one of the reasons that brought me to the narrative approach. It felt as if I, through the questionnaire, wanted to promote *my* hypotheses, and the participants always had various questions about the questions in the questionnaire. People's stories are too diverse to be grasped or defined by a questionnaire.

This opens up a very natural place for **The Story**. God's story can help a person or family to re-formulate both the story of the past, as well as the story of the future in such a way that new meaning can be found in the present. We can re-interpret our stories using God's story. A painful story of the past can now be reframed to produce a rock under water in the stream, on which one can find secure footing and new hope to reach the opposite bank safely.

We do not work with change techniques in this model, whether psychological, sociological or theological. It is assumed that a story which flows from the past to the future possesses the necessary potential for change (see also Müller 1996 & 1999).

Deconstruction and externalization	Openings to new stories	Story development	Story construction
Joining Decision to marry Religious story Genogram Couple Time Line Ecochart Effects or results Relative influence questions Contextual influences Interrelationships Tactics or strategies	Unique outcomes Listening for openings Asking for openings	Landscape of action Process Details Time Context People Hypothetical event questions Landscape of consciousness Motivation, hopes, goals, dreams Values, believes Characteristics & qualities	Naming the story Thickening the story Audience Rite de passage Theme

- *Example 1 : In the beginning - Joining*

As with any counselling situation the pastor introduces himself, the context and the way the conversation will be conducted, in the beginning and a real interest is shown in the couple.

Hallo, as I said over the phone, my name is X (you could add something about your work and some personal information). I would like to welcome you to, what I call a premarital conversation. I want you to see these couple of sessions that we are going to share together, as an opportunity to learn and to share from one another. I'm not here to give you a winning recipe for living happily ever after, there's no magic formula.

I work from a narrative perspective. One of the important aspects of this approach is the meaning that you give yourself to your own experiences, rather than the meaning I (or Freud, or somebody else) give to these experiences. For this we will be looking at where you come from, where you are, and where you want to go. The fact that you want to get married in the Church is also significant, and we will be looking at that too. As we go along, I will explain more about it.

From time to time I will take some notes that I will share with you - what I will write on paper about you belongs to you. The reason why I write things down is to help remember for future reference.

I would like also to assure you that what is said here stays confidential. Feel free to interrupt me, to ask if you don't understand or agree with something, or if you want to talk about something that I didn't mention.

You can begin by introducing yourselves to me (or they can introduce each other to you).

- *Example 2 - A transcript*

After the general introduction and joining I usually begin asking about their decision to marry and how it came that they decided to marry. I find this beginning interesting with cohabitating and non-cohabitating couples. Deconstruction questioning and externalization is of great use in this respect. The decision to marry can be seen as a sparkling event. This has of course a whole story behind it which can be traced. Other sparkling events or unique outcomes can also appear during the premarital conversation. In "general", there is not a "problem" in the strict sense of the word that brings a couple to a premarital conversation.

During the first part, we can ask questions such as: Why marriage? Why in the church? What made them decide to come for a premarital conversation? What are their expectations regarding these meetings? How did they take the decision to marry? Where a couple cohabit questions could be asked about how their relationship will be different

after they get married. During this time, space could be opened towards new stories. This can be done by tracing their family history and their personal relationship history. These stories can be further developed through meaning questions in order to construct a new story bringing into play the story of faith.

In the beginning a time could be spent on their **decision to marry**.

Jean-Paul and Martine have been living together for just over a year and decided to get married about a month before. Their reason for cohabiting was to make sure that their relationship would work by learning to live together and in this way rid themselves of doubt about spending their lives together. This transcript gives an idea how the different aspects of a premarital narrative conversation (as outlined in the table and the discussion above) are put into action.

CdP: So, the main reason for your cohabitation was to rid yourself of doubt concerning your decision to marry?

Jean-Paul & Martine: Uh . . . uh.

CdP: And, if I understand correctly, over the past year you've learned some things about yourselves and your relationship which confirm your decision to marry? But at the same time, it was very difficult to make this decision?

Jean-Paul & Martine: Mmm, . . . yes.

(I make sure that their decision to marry is a preferred one, seeing it as a unique outcome, and I review some of the developments they had already described in the landscape of action.)

CdP: What does this tell you about yourself? What kind of person does that say to you that you are, that you have been able to do that now?

(I inquire into the landscape of consciousness concerning their decision. I decided not to trace the history of this decision for the moment.)

(Previously it came out that Jean-Paul wanted to get married from the beginning, but Martine was very hesitant. "Usually" it is the man who is

hesitant, and not the woman. This is also the reason why I chose this example. So I let Martine talk.)

Martine: What kind of person am I? It's not quite a question that I expected, but very interesting. Many times in the past comments were made about the fact that I can't make decisions and I felt pressured. Although I was not quite in favour of cohabitating, it helped me in the process of making this decision. It took a little while, but I made the decision.

My self-worth is more than I thought it was. I'm not as indecisive and insecure as certain people think, even myself. Sometimes I will talk down to myself. Now I can say to myself and these others, "Look, I made this decision, an important one also, and I'm proud of it".

CdP: You refer to people who think that you are indecisive and insecure. If you think back over the years who - friends, family, teachers - would be the least surprised to see you making this decision?

(Here I ask questions about past events that have something in common with the present unique outcome.)

Martine: Who would be the least surprised?

CdP: Yes, who would say, "I knew she had it in her."

Martine: Well, my aunt Dominique. She is the one person who would say "I knew she could make an important decision. Good for her." Many others will say, "She's just out to prove something, it won't last."

CdP: What was it that your aunt Dominique saw as different about you?

(Martine identified a person from the past who would appreciate this sparkling event in her present life. I invite her to explore the meaning of her life from aunt Dominique's view point. When she takes up my invitation, she experiences a flood of memories. She tells several stories about past experiences. These stories are rich in detail and she spontaneously develops them in both the landscape of consciousness and the landscape of action. On her own she also introduces another figure, uncle Gérard).

Martine: She's a lovely person. She was always able to understand me for some reason. I don't know if it because she's kind and gentle and she always took time to listen to me. She is the youngest sister on my mother's side and is only 10 years older than I. I always tease her about this. Just after she finished her studies - as a medical nurse - she got married and had kids - she worked as a nurse for a very short time. I remember her coming to visit us one weekend and we went to the local mall. She was 20 and I 10. It was as if I was shopping with my big sister. There were some teenage friends around. It was great, you know . . .

We drank tea and ate cake like two old lady friends . . . it was so funny . . .

I still ask her about that time, and she still remembers it.

She always talked to me, not down to me. Yes, she always talked to me. There was something special about her that I connected with.

I also have an uncle Gérard who's the same way. He is the youngest brother on my father's side. He's something special. We actually only met, re-met, 10 years ago. They lived not far from us, in Arles, but they then moved to Paris and we didn't see them for many years. One of my cousins was killed in a car accident and he came down for the funeral. The night after the funeral we started talking and we almost talked right through the night. Before eventually going to bed, I told him that I had been talking to my mother with "long pants". But a sober "my mother", because she was an alcoholic. He just laughed.

After that he called me once a week. Just to see how I was. I didn't have anybody else. And to this day, we talk at least once a month. And when they come down south, they stay with me for a night or two. It's just a given.

When I talked to him a couple of weeks ago and told him that "we" decided to get married, he was delighted and encouraging - he knew about my trouble making the decision.

The other day, it was a Saturday, I went early to do the shopping and returned home at about 10 o'clock. I unpacked everything and was in a good mood. I just had the urge to call uncle Gérard. I wasn't going to wait for him to call me. I got up to go to the phone, and as I was about to pick up the phone, it rang. It was him. I yelled, I could not believe it. I went, "I can't believe this."

And he said, "What? Did I interrupt something? What's happening?"

I replied, "No, uncle Gérard. I was on the point of picking the phone up to call you."

He giggled and said, "I been thinking about you this morning."

"Oh yeah," I said.

"For once I got up early for a Saturday morning. Do you have good news?"

And I went, "Y-e-s." Trying not to sound too out of this world.

He went, "Do you have a smile on your face?"

I went, "Yeah. It's about as wide as the Rhône. We're going to get married."

He went, "That's great. Congratulations."

You know? But it was a strange feeling . . . so strange . . . yeah.

Once they came down for my mother's funeral. I told him that my mother and father always made me feel or told me that I was only adequate, "But that's fine because it was the best that you can do. But, you're not as good and motivated as so and so."

I remember so well the fire in the eyes of my uncle. He was furious. And it was the first time.

CdP: Now when was that?

Martine: Three years ago.

CdP: OK.

Martine: My mother died three years ago this Summer. It was the first time that I can vividly remember thinking to myself, "Maybe, maybe, it's not true. Maybe those feelings aren't true. Maybe I'm pretty good in what I do."

CdP: Now, what was it about this interaction that made it possible for you to think that?

Martine: Because of his instant reaction to the statement I made. That, you know they made me feel like . . . they told me I was only adequate at best. And you know how you can see in somebody's look on their face like they were shocked? That was the last thing they expected to hear?

CdP: Yeah.

Martine: When I saw his initial reaction. . . . Of course after his initial reaction, then came the typical uncle accolades and, "No. No. You're wonderful. You've done a lot for your family." And . . .

CdP: But it was more the reaction than the words?

Martine: It was more the reaction that got through to me.

CdP: Yeah.

Martine: People's reactions get through to me faster than words I've come to. . . . They do, because words mean nothing. Most of the time.

CdP: Now . . . so he has known something about you for a long, long, time. . . .

Martine: Uh-huh.

CdP: . . . that that adequate stuff just didn't fit with at all. It just made his blood boil.

Martine: Yeah. It did! Instantly.

CdP: So, what do you think you would see if you were able to look at you when you were a kid through your Uncle Gérard's eyes, and see that kid the way Uncle Gérard saw her? What do you think he saw back then? What do you think you would see?

Martine: Well, through my young adolescent years, he wasn't around. He stayed in Paris.

CdP: But if we go back to when he did. . . .

Martine: Before that?

CdP: Yeah . . . what do you think he saw that maybe nobody else except possibly your aunt Dominique saw? What did he notice in you?

Martine: I don't know. I think that. . . .

CdP: Well, what would be your guess? Best as you can imagine, kind of crawling inside his body. . . .

Martine: That here is a kid that has overcome what for some people would be insurmountable odds. I think.

CdP: So if I were able to go back and interview him, back then, at that time, and I'd say, "What insurmountable odds? What are you talking about? What is it that she's overcome?" What do you think he would say?

Martine: "Taking care of her family during really rough times. Keeping them together." Because that's what I did. I did do that. At a very young age. I did do that. He would have seen a girl that had a lot of potential but wasn't able to develop it because she wasn't given the opportunity.

CdP: And if I said to him, back then, if I somehow could do that, "You say potential. Potential for what? What kind of potential do you see in this girl?"

Martine: Hmm . . . Uncle Gérard's response would be, "She should get a better education to reach whatever she would want to be. Be it a doctor or lawyer or an artist or an author, whatever it would be."

CdP: So he saw somebody that had a lot of . . .

Martine: Yeah . . . yeah.

CdP: . . . lot of stuff . . .

Martine: Yeah. Uncle Gérard's kids are all well educated except for his oldest son. They all went on to . . . you know, it's his daughter who's the Ph.D. in Biology. He has another daughter who's an accountant. And he has another son who's. . . . He has a daughter who's a social worker and another son who's a very successful businessman. And then he's got two that are a little goofy, but you know, out of seven kids he/they did pretty well. He always told me later. . . . That week that they stayed with me, after my mom died, he and I did a lot of talking.

And he said, "It used to always anger me that you kids weren't given the opportunities that you should have been given."

CdP: What difference did it make for you to hear that from him?

Martine: Back then it made me feel real sad and real hopeless, like, "Gosh, I was cheated. I was cheated." Now I feel that it's time to stop blaming other people and just get on with it, and stop dwelling on the past. Which I don't think I was doing consciously, but subconsciously I think I was. I had a lot of years of garbage to get out of myself. You know?

CdP: Yeah.

Martine: After my mother passed away, when it came up to my dad's birthday time, and I couldn't stop crying, which made me go in to see a therapist back then, she very kindly said to me, "Oh, and you miss your mom and dad, don't you?"

And I looked around and went, "No. I'm sorry but I don't. They weren't nice people to me." They weren't nice people. I mean, if you sat down and met them, you would have enjoyed their company. They weren't nice people to me. I don't think. So no.

I was mourning. I don't know what I was mourning but it wasn't their passing. I was mourning probably their living, instead of their passing. I think that's what I was mourning all those years. All these past three years.

And now it's like, "Okay, so you did the best you could do." You know, they danced as fast as they could, and God bless them. And so you just . . .

CdP: And now you're in a position where you can realize some of that potential that uncle Gérard always saw in you?

Martine: Yeah. That's what I'm seeing this decision to marry . . .

CdP: Yeah. So, if you sit there for a second, and you think back over everything you've said here today . . . What stands out for you? What pieces of that are . . . If you kind of think of yourself as somebody that's been sitting here off to the side (gesturing to an

area in a corner of the room) listening to Martine over there, (gesturing towards Martine) what stands out?

Martine: What stands out . . . well, I think I was a lot better person. Much better than I realized. At a much younger age. . . . But I'm just coming to realize it now, I think.

CdP: What difference does it make to be . . . not just realize that you're a good person now, but to realize that you've been a good person all along? That you were a much better person than you realized at a much younger age? What difference does it make to come to that realization now?

(Here I am inviting Martine to connect the meaning of the past experiences she has been relating to the context of her present life. She goes one better by extending the past and present meaning into the future.)

Martine: My feelings won't get hurt as easily as they have in the past. So I will be a lot stronger. I will feel a lot stronger within so people won't walk all over me. It's been almost like a vicious circle. You know? My feelings get hurt because somebody walks all over me, and somebody walks all over me because I let them hurt my feelings. And it's like, suddenly I feel like this circle is going to be ending. You know?

CdP: Yeah. Cause the possibility for . . .

Martine: Expansion.

CdP: Yeah, who knows what . . .

Martine: Yeah, I know. I know. I remember earlier we said something about . . . I said, "God, you know, if I just didn't have all that stuff happen to me when I was a kid, what could I have been?"

And I remember you saying, "What? Is it too late now?" And I thought, "Yeah." But now I think, "No, it's not. Who knows what I'm going to be?" I mean who knows? Who knows?

The effects or results of their decision on different aspects of their lives can also be traced. Most of the time, couples who cohabit are of the opinion that nothing will be different or that nothing will change in their relationship after marriage. This gives another occasion for deconstruction. Marriage is externalized and/or can also be given a name (companionship, for example). A series of questions can then be asked about the ways in which marriage, compared to just living together, will affect their lives:

- The person's sense of self: what they think of themselves as a person

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- Their view of themselves as a parent, partner, mother, wife, sister, brother, worker, etc.
 - Their hopes, dreams and sense of future
 - Their relationships with children, parents, partner, community members, colleagues, etc.
 - Their work
 - Their social life
 - Their thoughts
 - Their physical health
 - Their spiritual life
 - Their moods or feelings
 - Their everyday life

When the couple's relationship has been explored by means of deconstruction, externalization and the mapping tools we can start to ask story development questions.

5.11 STORY DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

Once enough space has been opened to reveal a unique outcome or preferred development, we can ask questions to develop this alternative story. All of the questions we will talk about in this section are used to invite the re-authoring of stories. By referring to "story development questions" in this section we are referring to that part of re-authoring that turns events into a story in the usual sense. That is, story development questions invite people to relate the process and details of an experience and to connect it to a timeframe, to a particular context, and to other people. In this way an event is expanded in space and time, it is peopled, and it is re-experienced in a detailed way. It becomes a story. Such stories can be constructed either from actual events or from hypothetical ones.

Our hope when we ask story development questions is that people will come to experience their lives and themselves in new ways as they focus on previously neglected and unstoried aspects of their experience, aspects that lie outside the realm of the problematic stories they find themselves caught up in when they seek a pastoral conversation. To that end, it seems to be important that these stories be developed in ways that are compelling and experientially vivid (Freedman & Combs 1993).

Freedman and Combs points out that their use of the terms "story development questions" and "meaning questions" are different from those adopted by Michael White from Jerome Bruner (1986). White (1991, 1995), followed by many other therapists, uses the terms "landscape of action" where they use story development and "landscape of consciousness" where they use meaning questions. He also uses a third category, "experience of experience" for questions asking people to adopt another's point of view. Rather than putting these questions in a separate category, Freedman and Combs have incorporated them under "story development questions" or "meaning questions". That is, they call these questions either story development questions or meaning questions depending on whether they develop the story or its meaning from another person's point of view. For example, "If I had been there and seen you take that step, how do you think I would describe what had happened?" is a story development question and the question "If I then were to tell someone what I saw in you that led you to take that step, what qualities do you think I would describe?" is a meaning question.

- **Process**

In asking questions about process, we invite people to slow down an event and notice what went into it. As a person works to retrieve the sequence of important elements involved in a unique outcome, he relives it. In this process, he has the opportunity to create a map that will then be available to follow during the future challenges. Since they ask people to review their own actions, these questions almost always contribute to stories of personal agency.

- What were the steps you took in doing this? What did you do first? Then what?
- How did you prepare yourself to see things in this new way?
- As you look back at this accomplishment, what do you think were the turning points that made this possible?
- Were there particular things that you said to yourself that supported this new resolve?
- How did you do it?

- Details

Details help make an event vivid. Questions about detail offer people the opportunity to remember aspects of events that may have been neglected or forgotten. Full, detailed descriptions foster an intensity of experiential involvement that generalized accounts do not. This is true even for hypothetical events. Also, some of the different details brought forth may play a more significant role in the re-authoring than those details that are most readily remembered.

- What was the look on his face when you told him you won the award?
- What particular things would I have noticed if I were there when you two experienced this breakthrough?
- What was it like to grasp that award in your hands? Did you hear the sound of the crowd or make out any particular faces?
- What was happening in the rest of the room while you were coming to that realization?
- What exactly did she say when you told her the news?

- Time

Finding the *historical antecedents* of unique outcomes and preferred developments can lend particular significance and credence to the preferred self-identity stories that result from this work. Often, unique outcomes have historical roots to which problems have blinded people. "History questions" can help people identify and reclaim them.

- Who would have predicted that you would have made this shift in your understanding? What would have led them to make this prediction? Would they recall a particular memory or event?
- When in the past has your partner shown this kind of courage?
- Was this a new development or do you have a history of speaking out in difficult situations? What situation comes to mind?

Asking *future-orientated* questions can extend alternative stories into the future, changing people's expectations about what is ahead for them and, as Peggy Penn (1985: 301) notes, they can ". . . cut into ideas of predetermination."

- What do you think your next step might be?
- Now that you've discovered these things about your relationship do you have a different vision of the future?
- Do these new developments inspire you to make any predictions about the future role of power in your relationship?
- Three months from now, who do you think will be more pleased by the consequences of this new understanding? What are consequences that will please them so? (This question could also be listed under "people", see below).

Questions that *contrast* the past and either the present or future emphasize the changes a story has undergone over time. In answering these questions, people can notice many changes and differences that they have tended to take for granted.

- How is this different from what you would have done before?
- Okay, so this time you didn't let *laisser-faire* trick you into staying away from a social situation. How is that different from when *laisser-faire* controlled your life?
- You seem very pleased about the feedback you're getting from Linda. What did it used to be like when you experienced a lack of giving attention? And now . . .?

Questions that *link the past, present, and future* dramatize the time span and directionality of a narrative and add relevance to the events in different time frames.

- If we link the self-confidence from your past with your current ideas, where do you think you might go along these lines in the future?
- You said that in high school you stood up for yourself on a number of occasions and that just recently you've been back in touch with that ability and told your best friend what was on your mind. If we think of these events as a kind of trend in your life, what do you expect might happen next?
- Who from your past would have predicted this new development in your life? Knowing what he does about your past, if he were in on this current development, what would he predict about your future?

- Context

Stories develop within particular contexts. Problematic stories may be coached or supported by different sociocultural contexts than preferred stories. As people construct alternative stories, new contexts may become important. Some narratives are more highly dependent on context than others, but every story has a setting. Asking questions about context can anchor a story to a particular place and situation. Sometimes questions about context invite people to extend stories into new places and new situations. Context questions can also invite people to notice the role their culture plays in evoking and supporting preferred stories.

- Are there particular organizations or contexts that would support your new resolve?
- Where did this happen? What was going on at the time?
- Has your newly discovered competence shown itself more at work or at home?
- Would you say the circumstances supported your doing this? How?
- Is this process you describe part of your culture? According to your culture how should one deal with this and similar challenges?

- People

Most stories have more than one character. "People questions" invite individuals to recollect the cast of characters contributing to an emerging narrative or to consider how particular people could play a role in the development of a story. These questions point to the importance of other people in alternate narratives. They also invite people to consider the effects of their alternative stories in the lives of other people - family, friends, sometimes even strangers. Since meaning is constructed in social interaction, it fits that stories should be "peopled."

- Who played a part in you retaking control of your life?
- Who will be first to notice that you've conquered this fear? How will it affect them?
- Has your correspondence with your mother played a part in this? What's the most important thing that she has written to you?
- How long do you think the rest of the family will have to see you following the rules before they relax about this change?

- If you keep your brother in your heart as you face this problem, what difference will it make?

In this regard, experience of experience questions could also be added. According to White (1991:132) these questions facilitate the re-authoring of lives and relationships, and often they are more generative than those questions that encourage persons to provide an account of what they believe or imagine to be another person's experience of them.

These experiences of experience questions:

- (a) invite persons to reach back into their stock of lived experience and to express certain aspects that have been forgotten or neglected with the passage of time, and
- (b) recruit the imagination of persons in ways that are constitutive of alternative experiences of themselves.

Some examples of these experiences of experience questions follow. In the examples, these questions are oriented first to alternative landscapes of action, and second to alternative landscapes of consciousness. In the third place, examples are given of questions that encourage persons to bring forth the "intimate particularities" of future developments in these landscapes of action and landscapes of consciousness.

Of course, these questions are not asked in a barrage-like fashion. Instead, they are raised within the context of dialogue, and each is sensitively attuned to the responses triggered by the previous question.

(a) If I had been a spectator to your life when you were a younger person, what do you think I might have witnessed you doing then that might help me to understand how you were able to achieve what you have recently achieved?

- What do you think this tells me about what you want for your life, and about what you have been striving for in your life?
- How do you think that knowing this has affected my view of you as a person?
- What do you think this might reveal to me about what you value most?
- If you managed to keep this knowledge about who you are to yourself over the next week or two, how would it affect the shape of your life?

(b) Of all the people who have known you, who would be least surprised that you have been able to take this step in challenging the problems influencing in your life?

- What might they have witnessed you doing, in times past, that would have made it possible for them to predict that you could take such a step at this point in your life?
- What do you imagine that told them, at that time, about your capabilities?
- What would they have assumed to be your purposes in taking that action at that point in your history?
- What did that tell them about you, and about what you believe to be important?
- Exactly what actions would you be committing yourself to if you were to more fully embrace this knowledge of who you are?

(c) I would like to understand the foundations upon which this achievement rests. Of all the people who have known you, who would be best placed to supply some details about these foundations?

- What clues did this provide them with as to which developments in your life were most valuable to you?
- What conclusions might they have reached about your intentions in building up these foundations?
- What could this have disclosed to them about the sort of life-style you are more suited to?
- If you were to side more strongly with this other view of who you are, and of what your life has been about, what difference would this make to your life on a day-to-day basis?

These examples serve only as an introduction to some of the options for developing questions that encourage the re-authoring of lives according to preferred stories. Among the many other options is the construction of questions that might bring forth future developments in the landscape of consciousness. These questions encourage a reflection on future events in the alternative landscape of action (White 1991:132-133). For example:

- If you did witness yourself taking these steps, how might this confirm and extend this preferred view of who you are as a person?

These questions can be followed-up by further landscape of action questions, and so on. For example:

- And what difference would the confirmation of this view make as to how you lived your life?

- **Hypothetical event questions**

We can also construct a story that builds on a unique outcome by adding details, process, time, context, and people from the realm of imagination by asking about hypothetical events or circumstances. Future questions are always about hypothetical events, but they can be very important in constructing actual lives.

After people make a distinction about themselves or their relationships that they find useful, they are invited to author a speculative history. For example, in a pastoral conversation Jacqueline and Marc realized that when they talked together about parenting they were both more confident about parenting. Because Thomas had been born in Jacqueline's previous marriage, dominant ideas of what it meant to be a "real" father had kept Marc from expressing his ideas about parenting. Dominant ideas about the responsibilities of motherhood had convinced Jacqueline that Thomas was her total responsibility. The two did not collaborate, and each of them often felt overwhelmed and alone. When they realized that they would both like to share ideas and negotiate about their parenting of Thomas, they were asked hypothetical questions to develop a speculative history. These were questions such as, "If, when you were first married, you had known how well you could share and negotiate parenting ideas and how much you would both enjoy doing so, how would things regarding Thomas have been different between then and now?"

Once such a history is established, people can speculate on process, details, context, and people. These hypothetical pasts, once experienced, often have real effects on people's present lives.

The following are examples of "hypothetical event questions" that can be used in story development:

- If your mother had not died, how do you think growing up would have been different for you?
- If you were to take on such a project what would you do first?
- What do you imagine you would look like as a student? Would you change your style?

5.12 MEANING QUESTIONS

The idea that it is the meaning which persons attribute to their experience (for example, the decision to get married) that is constitutive of those persons' lives has encouraged social scientists to explore the nature of the frameworks that facilitate the interpretation of experience. Many of these social scientists have proposed that it is the narrative or story that provides the primary framework for this interpretation, for the activity of meaning-making; that it is through the narratives or the stories that persons have about their own lives and the lives of others that they make sense of their experience. Not only do these stories determine the meaning that persons give to experience, it is argued, but these stories also largely determine which aspects of experience persons select for expression. And, as well, inasmuch as action is prefigured on meaning-making, the stories determine real effects in terms of the shaping of persons' lives.

This perspective should not be confused with that which proposes that stories function as a reflection of life or as a mirror for life. Instead, the narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories - that these stories are life-shaping, and that they have real, not imagined, effects - and that these stories provide the structure of life (White 1991:123).

Through story development questions, people plot the action and content of their preferred stories. Through meaning questions, we invite people into a reflective position from which they can examine different aspects of their stories, themselves, and their various relationships. These questions encourage people to consider and experience the implications of unique outcomes, preferred directions, and newly storied experiences. In naming the meaning of these experiences, they are constructing them.

For example, "What does it say about what's important to you that you said what you thought about the role of the Church in your marriage rather than what the pastor

wanted to hear?" "I only meant that we should be accepted for who we are, and not because we adhere to certain doctrines."

This was a significant performance of meaning for this couple. They said that *they would not have known this about themselves* if they hadn't reflected on the conversation in the way that the question invited them to. This self knowledge allowed them to identify other experiences where they had stood behind themselves, and these, too were significant to discover. Through these discoveries the couple saw a different side of themselves. We do not mean to imply that this performance of meaning was all that was needed or was even a turning point in the session. It was, however, a significant experience that helped the couple recognize how, although dominant ideas and practices in the culture had excluded their experiences and their identity, they could choose to support their own thoughts and identity and that this choice was personally rewarding.

We ask meaning questions about the answers to "opening space," "preference," and "story development questions." We also ask "opening space," "preference," and "story development questions" in relation to the answers to "meaning questions." Meaning questions are woven in and out of these other kinds of questions, especially story development questions.

In addition to asking about the general meaning and implications of stories as they unfold, we also ask about personal qualities, relationship characteristics, motivation, hopes, goals, values, beliefs, knowledge, and learnings that people derive from their developing narratives.

- **Meaning and implications**

Questions about *meaning and implications* of their life as a married couple are the most open-ended kind of meaning questions. The answers may well speak of personal characteristics or values or one of our other listed categories. Through these questions couple draw meanings in whatever way makes sense to them.

- What does it mean to you that your partner would do this?
- If you were to apply this knowledge to your life now, in what context would it make the most difference? What difference would it make?
- What does this new perspective tell you about yourself?
- What is the significance for you as a family that you are here together talking about this new development?

- **Characteristics and qualities**

In asking about *characteristics and qualities* of people and relationships, we are focusing meaning on self-image or "relationship-image." These questions are very helpful in updating the identity of a person or relationship to fit with a developing alternative story.

- What does it say about you as a person that you would do this? What characteristics does it show?
- In the light of having accomplished this together, how would your partner describe the kind of relationship you have?
- What qualities are evident to you about your partner now that you've heard the steps s/he has taken to put temper out of her/his life?

- **Motivation, hopes, and goals**

Questions about *motivation, hopes, and goals* invite people to notice, how particular developments reflect larger life projects. Constructing the two as related adds to the significance of these developments.

- What do you think motivated him to take that step?
- Do you think the way that you two stuck to the task is reflective of what you hope for yourselves as a couple?
- We've just listed a number of things that you went ahead and did on this project. Does reviewing this make your goals in this area clearer? What would you say your goals are?

- **Values and beliefs**

Questions about *values and beliefs* can invite people to look beyond specific events and reflect on their moral, ethical, or spiritual dimensions.

Jill Freedman (Freedman & Combs 1996:138-139) gives the example of a family that came for one two-hour meeting and six weeks later heard from Elizabeth, the daughter. The

members of the family were white, middle-class Catholics of Irish descent. When Elizabeth became engaged to Jared, a Muslim engineering student from Iran, fear captured the family. The fear seemed to be fuelled by the movie, "Not Without my Daughter" about an Iranian man married to an American woman. The Iranian man in the movie seemed to be a loving husband when in this country, but became an abusive stranger when the family visited Iran. The American woman barely escaped with the couple's child. A second phenomenon stoking the fear was a flurry of calls from family and friends, all of whom knew people who knew other people in American-Iranian relationships that had turned out to be disastrous. Thirdly, the church would not recognize a marriage such as the one Elizabeth was contemplating.

For the purpose of this illustration, Freedman limits her comments to a brief portion of their phone call six weeks after the consultation. Elizabeth called to report that her parents were actually getting to know Jared, something they had not been interested in doing previously. Freedman asked what she thought made the difference so that this could happen. She said that the most important thing was the way her parents answered a particular question. The question Freedman asked was, "You've told me that you made up your mind to have nothing to do with this marriage; yet you're here, seeking a consultation. What do you value that has led you to seek a pastoral conversation?"

"When they thought about that question, it was like they melted." Elizabeth said, "They had been frozen, turned against me for months, but when they heard that question, they started talking about how much they loved me, how they wanted to be part of my future, how they wanted the best for me, and it was like I had my parents back. After that, they began doing some things to actually get to know Jared. Now, Mom calls their house the United Nations."

With these questions we ask people how unique outcomes reflect their values and beliefs:

- Why does this new way of thinking suit you better than the old way?
- From what I have heard, what would I say you value in friendships?
- Now that we've reviewed what happened at your partner's work, what do you think she must believe to have taken the stand she took?

- Knowledge and learnings

Since we often see therapy as an "insurrection of lost knowledges," we believe that it is important to bring forth people's specific local knowledge concerning unique outcomes and preferred directions in life. This is especially true when dominant cultural knowledge has played a role in the constitution of their problem-saturated stories. Here are some questions we might ask to highlight learnings and knowledge that counter the problem:

- As you think back on that event, what did you know about your relationship then that somehow you have lost track of since?
- Is there something you can learn from this that might be important in other aspects of your life?
- When you see how far you've come what do you learn about yourself?
- As you reflect on this incident, what do you know as a result of it that "the friends of self-hatred" wouldn't want you to know?

5.13 STORY CONSTRUCTION

We could think of "story development questions" and "meaning questions" as our questions for story construction (rather than deconstruction or opening space). They build on unique outcomes, inviting people to use unique outcomes and preferred experiences as a basis for developing alternative stories and meanings, for example, constructing a mutual project or goal for their marriage. Although we see the stories that develop in a pastoral conversation as people's own, we have also thought about something that Karl Tomm (1993) points out in a discussion of Michael White's work. He writes that White picks the events he invites people to story and that the picking powerfully determines the kind of stories that will be constructed. The questions therapists ask clearly play a part in which events, both lived and imagined, will become storied. The unique outcomes that become candidates for story development are chosen by therapists when they ask more questions about them, but they are also chosen by the people we work with when they name them as preferred developments in response to preference questions.

Our values, the narrative metaphor, and our experience influence both our choice of questions and our decisions about which "sparkling events" to focus on. Since our choices have a hand in shaping the kinds of stories that are constructed, it is important

that we situate ourselves; making our values, ideas, and the experiences that they are based on clear enough that people can understand that they are not neutral (White 1995). We offer our ideas as those which are based on particular experiences, not as truth claims. We also invite the people we work with to ask questions about our questions and our intentions as we work with them.

In a pastoral conversation, particular strands of narrative are selected and thickened by weaving back and forth between story development and meaning-making. That is, as someone begins to develop an alternative story, we ask questions that invite them to perform meaning on that story. We may then ask what story developments result from the meaning that emerges, and so on, so that a tapestry of story developments and their meanings is woven.

5.14 STORY OF FAITH

In the process of developing and constructing the story, we will at a certain time also touch on the story of faith. The process of becoming married does not occur in a vacuum, but in a context that includes what we believe about marriage. The content of those beliefs in turn shapes the process. Becoming married occurs within a framework of established religious teachings and social traditions about the meaning of marriage. It is also a process shaped by implicit expectations and beliefs about what marriage means that are drawn from our experience and from the common culture. My intention with this section is to describe some religious aspects of importance during the premarital conversation which could propose a way of being married that reflects the tradition of faithful Christian living.

There are two questions that we need to ask in order to understand the relationship between content and process: How do traditional theological understandings of marriage affect becoming married? What are themes from the tradition that might become a couple's vision for marriage and family living from a Christian perspective? The first question asks about a theology *of* marriage; the second is about a theology *for* marriage. It is important for people planning to marry to ask both questions in order to make explicit unspoken assumptions about their meaning of marriage, and in order to identify a vision of life together that might become a goal for becoming married.

Articulating underlying beliefs and expectations of marriage is necessary in our time for three reasons:

(1) There are powerful forces in the wider culture that are likely to determine the way people think about becoming and being married unless couples are able to utilize their faith as a resource for understanding the meaning of marriage.

(2) Because people are experiencing a growing freedom in relation to traditional religious expectations, there is a widening gap between official church teachings and the operational theologies by which people live. For that reason, even people who come from the same faith tradition or denomination may believe different things about marriage.

(3) People more frequently marry outside their racial or cultural or religious heritage than in former times. Different beliefs about marriage in the same relationship are likely to be the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, because we are often dislodged from our cultural and religious roots, there is less reinforcement from our social context for the beliefs we have been taught and may still hold in tentative ways.

Everyone has some understanding, however vague, of the meaning or purpose of marriage. That understanding, even if unspoken, creates the framework by which people determine gender roles, establish boundaries between the family and the outside world, make and keep friends, and decide how and for what money is spent. Those assumptions become an operational theology when the authority of God or the church is invoked in support of a particular view of life. The growing secularism and the corresponding decline of traditional forms of authority mean that the theologies by which people live have less and less to do with deeply held traditional values or official church teaching (see the section on "Deconstruction" 3.6).

In addition to these particular and often highly personal operational theologies, there are differences among Christian churches regarding the meaning of marriage. In the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage is a "symbol and sacrament of love resulting from the covenant between Christ and his Church." Similarly, Orthodox theology regards marriage "as a form of human community in service to the Church and the Kingdom of God". When husband and wife become one flesh in marriage, they are an ecclesial reality that expresses Christ's love to the Church. The Protestant perspective varies widely, but generally connects marriage with God's creative activity (see the earlier discussion in 2.9).

Because marriage is common to all humanity, it is first of all a civil rather than an ecclesial concern.

5.14.1 Five suggestions for conjugal spirituality

In exploring the story of faith, we could also discuss with the couple a certain "conjugal spirituality".

First, married couples may find it helpful to apply the symbols of covenant and union to their marriage simultaneously, and to counterbalance each with the other, for *covenant* clearly maintains the separate identities of the spouses as they undertake a common project, whereas the one-flesh union clearly maintains their oneness, *a union of hearts and lives*. Ironically the term *contract* which is rightly criticized as a description of marriage successfully maintained the separateness of the contracting parties and in one matter at least (sexual access to each others' bodies), full (albeit theoretical) equality. It may be helpful for spouses to see themselves as simultaneously separate persons and united partners, and to regard their separateness and togetherness as dialectically related, that is, one polarity cannot function properly unless the other one does, and that is a role that applies equally to both. Nearly 50 years ago Derrick Sherwin Bailey warned against couples regarding their union as an -

amalgamation in which the identity of the constituents is swallowed up and lost in an undifferentiated unity or as a mere conjunction in which no real union is involved (Bailey 1952:44).

Or, drawing on Hogan's convincing argument that the subjects who constitute the marriage have specific identities as spouses, as parents, and as individuals (Hogan 1993:102), we might say that a marriage is more likely to flourish when each of these three roles is attended to and nurtured. A husband and a wife are simultaneously a person, a partner, and (probably at some time) a parent. Attending to one another's needs in all three roles might constitute the first basic task of marital spirituality.

Secondly, couples may wish to distinguish for themselves between oppressive and non-oppressive elements which together comprise their marital union. A married union which creates dependence or assumes a fusion of individuals into a single synthesis, is a distortion of marriage: conversely a union which exists through mutual presence, intimate communication and reciprocal love may be said to represent *the mystery of Christ's incarnation and the mystery of his covenant*. André Guindon warns against wives -

falling prey to an ideology (which macho males will inevitably encourage) of

pseudo-intimacy, a sort of "togetherness" which sacrifices healthy autonomy and self-care to the illusory security of continuing dependence (Guidon 1986:97).

A beginning to the project of union may be discerned in a couple's discovery, across the sexes, of their *common humanity*:

When a man and a woman leave their parents and start living together they will find the same humanity in each other. Together they will face existence, sharing the same life conditions, running the same risks (Guidon 1986:97).

Guidon's understanding of the dialectic between wives and husbands as persons and as spouses sets an agenda for the development of conjugal spirituality. Any arrangement whereby a spouse abandoned his or her freedom or was required to surrender it would compromise the spouse as a person - nothing of worth would be left for the other to love. The very basis for human otherness would be lacking. Equally, any dissolution of oneself into a kind of two-in-one being would amount to a moral suicide. What is needed, rather, is -

an interchange of intimate communication between the spouses which gradually makes them uniquely present to each other - to each other's bodies, minds, needs, feelings, hearts, desires, fears, hurts, joys, and dreams. From the new vantage point which this conjugal presence and sharing gives them, spouses acquire an original insight into the nature and the fecundity of human affiliations (Guidon 1986:98).

One might add to these remarkable intuitions that insofar as married couples realize a divine presence in their being present for each other, they acquire an experiential insight into the fecundity of the divine love made present in Christ.

Thirdly, any attempt to practice a conjugal spirituality has first to stare into the hiatus that confronts it. Traditional spirituality sees discrete individuals as the locus of spiritual value and the couple as two individuals on separate journeys to spiritual growth. Conjugal spirituality is the loving *ethos* of a marriage, each trying to love the other as God loves them in Christ and recognizing Christ in each other. It empowers the couple to grow together and each partner to grow separately, each enabled by the other. It points to the possibility of a shift of the centre of spiritual attention from within individuals to the

spaces between them, to their encounters and to the interpenetration which sometimes results. It is a spirituality which looks for the presence and action of God in relationships and in their impact, and which affirms the couple as a spiritually and theologically significant unit (Oliver *cited in* Thatcher 1999:215).

This is surely an area where the experience of married couples is vital. It ought to be possible for innovative and exciting investigations to be carried out among Christian people to measure the hiatus in conjugal spirituality, to find out whether *couples even think of finding and serving Christ in and through one another*, and so on. While sociological and psychological research into marital difficulties is pervasive, marital spirituality, and especially the blocks that prevent it from happening, is a genuinely new field.

Oliver's terms *conjugal soul* and *conjugal body* convey a remarkably fresh approach to the dynamics of one-flesh unity. The *conjugal soul* of a couple is born:

When the outward pull of attraction becomes strong enough to cause interaction and to create relationship, a new density of being becomes necessary to re-establish the individual's stability in the face of the continual and progressive "de-centering" which is taking place... The inner core of the individual who persists in relationship becomes subtly and over time substantially different from its previous self. In this sense, every soul is a conjugal soul, one which links a person affected by relation (Oliver cited in Thatcher 1999:216).

While the term *conjugal soul* has its application early in the life of a couple, and may be predicated in different degrees, to all close human ties, the *conjugal body* is the basis for *conjugal soul* in its most fully developed, archetypal form. Each, neither absorbing nor being absorbed becomes more and more permeable to the other. A substantial interpenetration of being takes place. Using the familiar geometrical figure of two overlapping circles, she says:

The circles actually begin to overlap, creating a spiritual reality which is both 'I' and 'not I', 'Thou' and 'not Thou', significantly and recognizably both two and one. When a pair goes from closeness to commitment, each comes to be partly other as well as self. It is no longer spiritually accurate to consider one alone, in isolation from the conjugal dimension which pervades it (Oliver cited in Thatcher 1999:216).

Finally, the difference between traditional and conjugal spirituality can be illustrated by the contrast between centrifugal and centripetal forces. Traditional spirituality emphasizes centrifugal movement, away from the self as the centre of the world. Conjugal spirituality emphasizes centripetal movement, revolving around the axis created by its own being, the axis defining two as standing in relation. That is why the primary spiritual task of conjugal love is the creation, maintenance, and growth of that unique reality which is each new relation, the necessary foundation for joint outward-looking service (Oliver *cited in* Thatcher 1999:216). The hope is maintained that a loving relationship of itself produces anti-bodies against egotism and provides a training ground for creating wider and wider circles of love (Oliver *cited in* Thatcher 1999:217).

While conscious of the havoc caused by exploitative relationships she affirms that attraction, desire and longing are spiritually worth the risk, for they force us continually outward to learn the lessons of unity. Love and longing are good for us, for they break down our ego boundaries, allowing the self to be enlarged and enriched by knowing others, by learning from them and interacting with them (Oliver *cited in* Thatcher 1999:217). Conjugal love, she says, is itself a *spiritual discipline* because it can pleasurably tempt one toward self-forgetfulness and self-transcendence. What moves us in the other may be nothing less than a revelation of God - The recognition of "God" in another, our attraction to this revelation, and the affinity it brings into being are the basis for spiritual friendship as well as for the more intimate conjugal relations (Thatcher 1999:217).

5.14.2 Marriage as *perichoresis*

Michael Lawler (1995:49-66) suggest that marriage could be understood as a form of *perichoresis*, the term used (from the sixth century onwards) for the relations between the divine Person of the Trinity and the two natures of the Son. The word derives from *Χορειν*, *to make room for another*, and from *περι*, *round about*. It is defined as the dynamic process of making room for another around oneself. Perichoresis helps us to visualize what it is to be a person-in-relation on the basis of the communion of the Persons within the Trinity. It prompts us towards affirming our own identity as a person while recognizing that other persons make us who we are and we help make other persons what they are. Marriage is of course unnecessary to experience finitely the infinite communion of the Trinity, since, as bearers of the divine image, our destiny is communion with others and with God. But marriage is an intensification of relationship at its most personal and

enduring.

Perichoresis depicts persons as made for communion with each other: with persons love can be a relation. It embraces both. While affirming that the communion which is marriage and the communion which is God participate in each other, attention to particular details of the perichoresis is likely to have a radicalizing effect on the meaning of marriage. For example, perichoresis as a mode for marital communion subverts patriarchal marriage completely, for just as the model of friendship was finally incompatible with ruling and obeying, so the model of perichoresis is incompatible with theories and practices of gender which announce masculine superiority (e.g., the theory which says a *woman's head is man* [1 Corinthians 11:3]). The Persons who together make up the one God are in every respect coequal. Subordination of the Son and/or the Spirit to the Father is expressly ruled out in the Church's doctrine and by the Church's great statement about the Trinity. Perichoresis does not allow one Person power over the other. In marriage understood as perichoresis, partners do not exercise power over each other, but give themselves *to* each other. Domination impairs communion and so is a form of sinfulness. Spouses share in Christian redemption when loving communion is realized between them. *Making room for one another* is particularly appropriate to partners who are constantly in each other's company, and often in each other's way. It is an art which requires attentiveness, intuitiveness, indeed, nothing less than divine grace. Just as the divine communion goes beyond itself to create a world and share its being, so the communion of marriage may empower each partner in turning their love for each other outwards to the wider community, to children and to God.

Perichoresis is an appropriate term to describe a relation to another person in whose care we place ourselves and for whom we care. Perichoresis may imply a continuity of presence that friendship does not. Language which has been historically reserved for reverent musings about the holy mystery of God is especially appropriate for filling the hiatus in compiling a theology and spirituality of marriage (Thatcher 1999:232).

5.14.3 The use of Scripture and prayer

The Bible is essential to Christianity. It is the main link between contemporary Christians and their founder, Jesus Christ, and his followers. No service of corporate worship is complete without readings from it. Churches in the Protestant tradition owe their existence to the assertion of the primacy of Scripture (*sola scriptura*). Thus, during theological training and in the ministry much emphasis is placed on the critical analysis of

Biblical texts. The Bible is consulted on many aspects of Christian life and education, and it is regarded as authoritative and indispensable. But when we examine pastoral care literature, we might draw the opposite conclusion. It is also significant to notice that after many years of biblical studies, pastors seem largely unable to integrate that which they have been taught with their pastoral ministry. Some of them reject the use of the Bible altogether, whilst others apply the Bible in a fundamentalist manner (see Pattison 1988:106-107).

Pattison (1988:107-114) gives the following reasons why it is so difficult to employ the Bible in a pastoral ministry:

- Pastoral care is largely a product of the post-biblical Church. At best, there are some parts of the Bible which may be deemed to relate tangentially to contemporary problems, but a great deal of this literature is of a completely different kind, e.g., history and narrative. The Bible is not a handbook of pastoral care (or of anything else, for that matter). Thus, it is often not easy to find a text that corresponds to a contemporary situation.
- The nature of theological education and the way in which biblical studies are approached are also significant. Theological study over the last century or two has gradually fragmented and become more specialized. Modern exegesis of the Bible makes it difficult to apply the Bible to our contemporary problems.
- The historical-critical approach to the Bible has created problems for the use of the text not only by its methods but also by its findings. Furthermore, it challenges the authority and inspiration of the Bible, and leads further to the questioning of the uniqueness of the Bible. It also emphasises the compilation of the canon as the work of a human institution, the church, and not directly as the action of God. This approach underlines also the cultural relativity and distance of the Bible from our own time. The diversity of the nature and purpose of the various writings which comprise the Bible has been highlighted. The Bible contains many different types or genres of literature (poetry, narrative, law, wisdom, etc.) written in very diverse circumstances over many centuries.

This critical approach to the Bible has produced a counter-reaction, which complicates the issue even further (fundamentalism and Biblicism).

- The diversity of biblical perspectives and the cultural distance of the Scriptures from the present day have pointed to the need for interpretation, i.e. hermeneutics.

Pattison (1988:114-129) then describes how five contemporary pastoral care theorists use the Bible in their work. A thorough discussion of these approaches falls outside the domain of this study, but I will only name these approaches together with their advocates. They are:

- The fundamentalist or biblicist approach (J.A. Adams, L. Crabb, D. Buchanan).
- The tokenist approach (H. Clinebell).
- The imagist or suggestive approach (A. Campbell).
- The informative approach (D. Capps).
- The thematic approach (W. Oglesby).

Louw (1993:392-394) claims that the following ways of using of Scripture are wrong: moralising, illustrative or typological, an abstract, a biblicist approach, homiletical, dogmatic, and critic destructive.

Pattison (1988:129-133) then develops some implications for Pastoral Care from what has been learned of the nature of the Bible from modern scholarship.

In the first place, the importance of the Bible within the ecclesiastical context should be acknowledged. The Bible is the church's book. It was compiled by and for groups of believers and its main historical use has been in corporate public worship. Smart (1970:23) writes –

No part of it (with the possible exception of a few passages) in its origin was intended for private consumption. It is distinctively a public book.

He goes on to criticize the devotional use by individuals of the Bible rather harshly:

The Bible is marching orders for an army not bedtime reading to help us sleep more soundly (Smart 1970:23).

These remarks may be somewhat exaggerated, but they do serve as a warning to those who would individualize and personalize the message of the Bible in order to apply it simply and directly to Pastoral Care. The Biblical writings do not form a handbook of personal Pastoral Care, nor can individual passages be used as a spiritual bromide in every pastoral situation.

Pattison (1988:130) claims that the main role of the Bible in Pastoral Care is to shape and form the consciousness and character of the Christian community and the individuals who comprise it. Pastors and those in their care are in a constant dialogue with the text of Scripture. This conversation with the text is a long, gradual and indirect process of growth in the worshipping community which embraces the totality of Scripture in all its pluralism and not merely texts congenial to moments of intense personal need. In this process the importance of social constructionism becomes evident.

Because of this, the Bible needs constant re-interpretation if it is to be related to contemporary needs and situations. This interpretation does not mean repeating the words of a text verbatim in each new situation, -

it is finding new words to convey the contemporary meaning of a text as it emerges from the critical hermeneutical dialogue (Pattison 1988:132).

The implication of this in Pastoral Care is that being faithful to the Bible does not necessarily mean that pastoral encounters have to be bedecked with a multiple quotations from Scripture.

Biblical faithful Pastoral Care is not a matter of including lots of words from the Bible at every opportunity, but of re-expressing new meanings in different words appropriate to contemporary situations. Sometimes the actual words of a text may be helpful in a pastoral encounter, sometimes not. Sometimes the use of actual biblical words can even be a betrayal of the need to interpret and make relevant (Pattison 1988:132).

In this process the pastor needs to be careful not to fall into one of two traps. The *first* is that of escaping from the immediacy of honest personal encounter in pastoral care by hiding behind the words of the biblical writer. It is tempting, if one feels inadequate, to want to do, or say, something helpful and the Bible may seem a useful resource for finding the right words. Unfortunately, the right words for relieving the pastor's uneasiness may be the wrong words from the point of view of conveying immediate and honest personal care to a needy person. The *second* trap is that of failing to realize that a text may mean one thing to the person who selects and quotes it, and quite another to the person to whom it is quoted (Pattison 1988:132-133).

Hiltner's (1972:189) reference to the dual nature of the salvation history can also be used to warn against a superficial use of Biblical narratives. He says that in the Christian religion and in Judaism where faith is based on principles which developed out of a history of events, the expression of faith can take on two forms: (1) the telling and interpreting of events; and (2) the description and explication of principles (dogmas):

Thus the dramatic as well as the expository form of expression is inherent in these two faiths. Probably the most effective communication is achieved with some combination of the two methods (Hiltner 1972:189).

Without reference to the events (the narrative), the principles tend to get detached from situations and thus become irrelevant. On the other side, the narrative alone without the principles or dogmas is a narrative which is nostalgic, but not liberating.

But when the reading of Scripture and prayer are employed in the right way, there is not a more effective way to bring the Vertical dimension into the conversation.

Within the narrative approach it could be useful to emphasize the narrative passages in the Bible. But these passages should not be used in a nostalgic way with the result that an encounter cannot take place. An evenly balanced use of Scripture is needed in which the purpose is not just a general religiousness, but an integration of faith in the narrative of the couple (Müller 1996:175).

5.14.4 The transmission of values of faith

Possibly one of the most difficult tasks of a pastor is to be a transmitter of Christian values. It is difficult for at least two reasons. Firstly, values are not just taken over from another person, even if it is from a trusted pastor or therapist. Furthermore, it can happen that subjective values be subtly forced onto the couple. Regarding this, Gerkin gives the following advice:

. . . the vision of the good Christian life is best communicated to persons by the caregiver in the language of metaphor, image, and narrative, on the one hand, and of relationship, attitude, and behaviour, on the other hand (1991:18).

The mediation of the Story cannot take place by a technically correct use of the Bible and prayer as methods. Such mediation only takes place where an authentic believing pastor operates within a caring context of the community of faith. In this way it is also one of the "easiest" tasks of the pastor. "All" that he has to do, is to live from Scripture. According to Friedman (1985:8) the "pastoral" has to do with the fact that the pastor listened (and is listening) to Scripture. If the pastor represents a life long communion with Scripture, the transmission of these values could take place:

. . . our spirituality and our tradition will spring naturally from our being."

It has to do with something that mediates the presence of God. Such a presence has to do with a deep communication that transcends words, style, technique, theory or theology. Augsburg claims, -

It is a presence gifted by Presence (1986:37).

The words of the writer Anne Lamott can also be added:

If something inside you is real, we will probably find it interesting, and it will probably be universal. So you must risk placing real emotion at the centre of your work. Write straight into the emotional centre of things. Write toward vulnerability. Don't worry about appearing sentimental. Worry about being unavailable; worry about being absent or fraudulent . . ." (1995:226).

5.14.5 Audience/community of faith

Asking questions is probably the easiest way for pastors to encourage the people they work with to identify and recruit an audience. The following are examples of questions that encourage people to name candidates and consider recruiting them:

- Who would be most interested to learn of this step you've taken? Why would that interest her so? How could you let her know?
- Who in your current life would have predicted that you would make this kind of commitment? What do they know about you that would have led them to make this

prediction? How would knowing about this step support this knowledge about you? Would that be helpful to you? How? How could you let them know?

- Who would most appreciate this event we've been talking about? What might he learn about you if you let him in on it that would be of interest to him? What might he say to you about this? How could you initiate such a conversation?

These questions all presuppose that the person might actually initiate a conversation. Such conversations, when they occur, are very valuable. They constitute lived experiences that can become important incidents in people's life narratives. Simply entertaining the idea of such conversations often motivates people to initiate them.

We've found that even if the conversations do not actually happen, an audience still develops in people's thinking or imagination. Even an imaginary conversation can constitute the real experience of a supportive audience. It is not unusual for someone to name a particular person who would be interested in their story and then, without ever letting that person know, assume support and appreciation from her. This assumption makes it more likely that the person will perform preferred versions of himself when he is around the unknowing audience. In this way, the unknowing audience becomes an actual audience! Questions that don't go as far as suggesting conversations with other people can also be useful - either in creating audiences in the imagination or by implication reminding the person that she is a member of a supportive community.

- Who will be most pleased to discover that you have taken this step? How might she discover it?
- Who will be most affected by this development? What will he notice that will let him know?

Even if a particular person is not available in the current situation, it would be helpful to name her as a potential audience member.

- Who from your past would have predicted this development? What did she know about you that would have led to that prediction? Was there a particular incident that let her in on this about you?
- Who would you like to talk with about this that you have not yet talked with? It could be anyone, living or dead, here or far away. What might they say?

5.14.5.1 Inviting an audience

Anderson and Goolishian, among others (Anderson & Goolishian 1988; Anderson, Goolishian & Winderman, 1986; Goolishian & Anderson 1981, 1987; Hoffman 1988; Levin, Raser, Niles & Reese 1986) have emphasized the idea that problems are maintained through language and social interaction. In accordance with their emphasis, they have invited members of the "problem-determined system" - those who are in language about a problem - into the therapy room. The Brattleboro team members (Lax 1991) routinely ask, "Who is involved with this situation?" when someone calls to set up a pastoral conversation. During that first phone call they introduce the possibility of everyone involved coming to the meeting. We appreciate the phrase "introduce the possibility" because a direct request for the presence of friends, relatives, co-workers, or representatives of involved agencies can be an occasion for distress. When most people originally seek a pastoral conversation, the dominant discourses lead them to assume that something is wrong with them. If we suggest including other people in the process, they may imagine experiences of embarrassment, shame, and possibly of social control. As their assumptions about a pastoral conversation are deconstructed in the course of our work together (including the initial phone conversation), people tend to be more open and even enthusiastic about inviting others to join in. The final choice about who should attend pastoral conversation meetings is, of course, always in the hands of the people who consult with us.

5.14.6 The wedding as a *rite de passage*

With the high rate of cohabitation one could question the relevance of the wedding ceremony as a *rite de passage*. It is also unfortunate that modern Western society has lost the importance and the emotional impact of rituals. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the wedding ceremony is not the *rite de passage* itself. The wedding ceremony celebrates that which has already been determined and developed in the couple's relationship. It is the celebration of a commitment.

Without going into detail of all the different kinds of rituals, I will limit myself to that which is applicable to our current subject.

Reflecting on the different definitions of rituals the following themes often reappear in literature:

Firstly, they are symbolic acts which are accompanied by *words* and *gestures*. Blom and Lindijer (1986:17) claim that rituals are prescribed symbolic acts which are performed in a specific way and in a specific sequence. They can also be accompanied by verbal formulas.

According to Tellini (1987:241) a ritual -

even in its simplest form, . . . is composed of word and gesture. Words alone fail to engage the dimensions of the body and may therefore lack the power to convince . . . Together, word and gesture may become not only a skilful instrument of communication but also a moment of disclosure.

Secondly, rituals have to do with *communication*. They are *symbolic acts of communication*. Meerburg (according to Blom and Lindijer 1986:17) emphasises that a conscious and symbolic communication takes place during the execution of the ritual. With conscious communication she makes reference to verbal communication and with symbolic communication she means gestures like music, kneeling, laying on of hands, etc.

Thirdly, communication should be understood as giving an answer to a particular situation or event, to a specific person or community, to previous or prospective generations, and in its profound sense to God. According to Heitink (1990:128) rituals are symbols, but the emphasis is on the act. These rituals are most of the time an existing or given act by means of which previous generations also gave answers to drastic events in life.

Wittstock *et al* (1992:118-119) refer to Bateson who emphasises that rituals are the confirmation of relationships through fixed patterns of action which have been previously developed and established. And referring to Bernstein the symbolic function of rituals is to join individuals to the social order. It is the facilitating of respect for and strengthening of procedures which maintain and promote the social order.

Fourthly, we can say that rituals refer to *formal* and *structured* gestures over which agreement exists and which occur over and over again within particular circumstances. Although they are not pragmatic of nature, they fulfil a specific function (Renner 1979:164).

Fifthly, there is often, although not always, a religious element involved:

Rituals are repeated, normative, symbolic, and functional behaviours often associated with religious expression (Couture 1990:1088).

Mulder (1992:507) says that a ritual is symbolic gesture which bring one in contact with a deeper reality and grants an intense experience. He describes this deeper reality as a transcendent reality, the eventual Reality.

When all these elements are taken into consideration, a ritual could be described as a symbolic, formal, structured, and often a religious communicative gesture by which an individual and/or community gives an answer to a specific event (Müller 1993:3).

The wedding is a ritual event that occurs in the midst of a process that has two parts: leaving home and becoming married. Sometimes the wedding is *the* leaving-home event, or at least close enough to that process that leaving-home issues dominate the wedding. In some instances, the work of becoming married is delayed until one or both partners in marriage have emotionally left home.

The wedding and all the rituals that surround it are a *rite de passage* from the social status of being single to that of being married. In his work on wedding rituals, Stevenson (1987) reminds us that the modern marriage liturgies combine what were separate rites until the end of the Middle Ages. The betrothal was the rite of separation, which initiated a rite of engagement. It was distinct from the rite of incorporation, the celebration of marriage. The modern wedding ceremony is a blend of both rites, although the emphasis is more clearly on incorporation and joining.

Because a wedding embodies both leaving and cleaving, Anderson and Fite (1993:68ff) propose that it would be useful to recover something of the connection between the rite of separation and the rite of connection. There are at least two ritual choices. We can reinstate the rite of betrothal as a separate and earlier event that symbolizes the leaving home that has happened and is happening for each individual anticipating marriage. This ritualization of the leaving-home process would give new meaning to publishing the banns. The second option would be to plan a wedding ritual that reflects both of the processes. The latter is more likely, because it is difficult to

imagine reconstituting the betrothal rite in modern, mobile societies. One possibility would be to create a ceremony for the parental blessing of children that may be added to the wedding itself or celebrated around the time of the wedding rehearsal.

The word that is most frequently used to describe this time of transition between separation and the incorporation of the wedding is *liminality*. In his classic work on The Rites of Passage, van Gennep (in Anderson & Fite 1993:69) maintains that -

the passage from one social position to another is identified with a territorial passage, such as the entrance into a village or a house, the movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets and squares.

In traditional cultures, marriage involved an actual change from one family, clan, village, or tribe to another. It was a territorial passage with social consequences.

During this transitional or liminal time, participants in the process are temporarily without social status and rank. This temporary loss of identity often results in confusion. In order to ensure some stability in the midst of the chaos and anonymity of a liminal time, there are prescribed forms of dress or behaviour. It is not surprising, therefore, that people who are non-traditional in every other aspect of their lives will insist on very traditional dress and symbolic action as part of the wedding.

The benefit of understanding the liminal character of the wedding event is that it helps people anticipate the inevitable stress it evokes. Getting married ushers in an in-between time, a time in which the old status as a single person is no longer entirely true but the new status has not yet been bestowed or internalized. It is an inherently confusing and, therefore, a stressful time. It is a time when people are most vulnerable, when the blemishes (and more serious dysfunctions) are likely to show, and when self-reflection is particularly difficult. One way that people cope with the chaos is to plan weddings that are picture-perfect.

The wedding is usually an emotionally charged moment. It is more so if the leaving-home work is still unfinished. Even those who have lived apart from their homes of origin or lived together as a couple are surprised by the intensity of the emotions around planning a wedding. The situation is further complicated by separate portfolios and careers and separate furnishings and pension plans that must be merged in a responsible and just way. What makes the time around a wedding so difficult for everyone is that major transitions are taking place in a person's identity and a family's stability. It is like

manoeuvring between two boats in choppy waters. Few of us are surefooted at such times. We need rituals of transition that acknowledge the reality of contradiction and chaos at this liminal time. We need weddings that are more like parable than myth.

5.14.7 Religious deepening

In spite of a secularised society, people still get married in the Church. This gives the opportunity of acting out the religious significance of the ritual of the wedding, and also a possible religious deepening of the couple and participating community.

According to Lukken (1984:24-40) the functionality of rituals can be summarized as follows:

1) A freeing and canalising function:

Weddings are often emotionally charged events, and serve as a way to acknowledge, canalise and structure existing emotions.

2) A mediating function with relation to the past:

The wedding as ritual, although future orientated, tells us something of our past, something about our origins. In this way we can have renewed confidence in the future.

3) An ethical function:

In the case of a mature and authentic wedding, it concerns life. It broadens and deepens perspectives, and leads to corresponding actions. The execution of the wedding as ritual contributes to a reorientation of basic life values.

4) Attesting function

Through the ritual the mystery of evil is deprived of its horrifying power. In a certain way through the ritual we exorcise evil and we confess in a concrete way that evil does not have the last word.

5) Expressive function:

Although rituals are not a personal creation, it is indeed an essential expression of self and for this reason there should be room for a creative addition. It helps us to give expression to our feelings.

6) Condensation function:

The ritual condenses reality. It becomes a resting place next to the road. The ritual intensifies of our experience of reality. As such, an added dimension is given to reality which would otherwise not have been possible. The past and the future are condensed

into the present and are made tangible. They are brought into reach and made controllable.

7) Social function:

If the ritual is correctly implemented, it creates communication. During the ritual a reaching out to the other takes place with a call to participate in the communication. It helps to save an individual from dysfunctional isolation.

5.14.8 The needs of planning

This section is about a pastoral approach to planning the wedding. In the schema that we are proposing, conversation with the couple about the wedding itself will take place in the *ending* phase between the minister and the couple. The context for planning the wedding is wider than just *their* relationship. The sequence is not accidental. It is an extension of the emphasis on the wedding as a public commitment by the couple, in the midst of a significant community (audience), concerning their intention of getting married.

The importance of planning the ritual as a part of premarital conversation is a consequence of at least three related factors. There is, first of all, a growing recognition of the need to recover symbol and ritual in human life. The growing complexity of our lives increases the need for rituals of transition. That need extends beyond the process of becoming married, but certainly includes it. The wedding is a ceremony that negotiates power and realigns relationships for a wide range of people. Meaningful rituals are as crucial for making a marriage as the moral seriousness of the couple.

In a study of marrying and burying, Ronald Grimes (cited in Anderson & Fite 1993:66) has described the need for ritual in this way:

No matter how deeply couples "share" on retreats or learn, under priestly or therapeutic guidance, to "talk through" everything, they are not prepared to wed until their insights are somatized, made flesh, in ritual. It is a mistake to assume that couples automatically incarnate their own insights, just as it is courting disaster to relegate the work of embodying to the bedroom.

This is a bold word with which we agree. Our marriages are seldom different from the rites with which they begin. Becoming married is a process that surely takes time, but how we begin matters very much.

The second factor that requires more careful attention to planning the liturgy as part of pre-wedding work is that most religious traditions allow and even encourage the couple to participate in planning their own wedding ceremony. As we will suggest later in this chapter, there are some standard elements for a ritual that occur in the context of Christian community. Within those parameters, however, the couple is encouraged to plan a liturgy that reflects their values and the vision of family towards which they would like to grow. Even when there are differences regarding the religious meaning *of* marriage, it is both possible and necessary for couples to find common themes from the Christian *tradition for* family living.

The third element that supports this perspective on pre-wedding work is the widespread longing to recover the distinctly pastoral dimension of the church's ministry. As we have seen from this dissertation, most of the categories used to counsel couples prior to marriage have been drawn from psychological resources. We do not wish to return to an earlier pattern of premarital pastoral work in which catechesis was the dominant mode and human process was ignored. The model for a premarital conversation presented here takes seriously what we have learned from narrative theory about becoming married as a process. It suggests a way for couples to identify the values from their faith traditions that might express the vision of family they intend to become. And it encourages couples to plan a celebration of fidelity that initiates a process *and* affects a new reality for the couple and for the community of their friends.

5.14.9 Discovering a theme for the wedding

Nico ter Linden, the pastor of the Westerkirk in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, introduced a process by which couples are invited to discover a theme for the wedding and the marriage it inaugurates. Although ter Linden has developed his approach within a social context that is thoroughly secular, the method works equally well within a framework in which religious symbols or traditional Christian stories and values are still part of the common culture. The task is to identify an image or theme that can be used to link the narrative the couple is forming from their many stories with *the* Christian story.

The process actually begins at the conclusion of the meeting with the couple that immediately precedes the one in which the focus is on planning the wedding. Each individual is invited to think about stories, songs, plays, movies or sayings *from any source* that convey something about their hope for the family they are forming. The emphasis is on *their* hopes or dreams more than on the source of the image or story. For that reason, anything can serve as a place to begin. The section of scriptural texts may be a springboard for this discussion. The pastoral task is to find a way to move from those images to themes and stories from the Christian tradition that will reflect and undergird the kind of family they hope to become.

With ter Linden's idea as the background, I introduced it to a couple as theme for their wedding. This is also an example of rituals, rules, beliefs and values that could exist in a family of origin and with which a couple could be confronted with.

Paul and Françoise had planned their wedding for the fall. Just before the summer holidays they decided that they would spend the first week of the holidays with Françoise's parents at their summer holiday home. During this time Paul learned the following : We enter into this family with a complete program : Lunch each Sunday at exactly 12:30 at her parents' home (who live 30km from where the couple were planning to settle), the first week of August will be at the family holiday home, there are compulsory get-togethers for Christmas and for other announced feast days. One should not forget to take off his/her shoes and put on slippers when entering the house (so as not to dirty the house); then there are/were conversations spangled with "If I were you, I would . . ." In the morning one has to finish the stale baguette of the day before, before buying fresh bread, and water and (red) wine are drunk from the same glass - which gives your water a reddish colour. At first Paul didn't say anything and his sisters-in-law-to-be found the situation amusing, but said nothing. Françoise didn't find these habits out of the ordinary. During one of the conversations they discussed having children, and her mother was quite clear about how they (she = Françoise) should raise them and what role she herself would play in their upbringing. This was the opportunity to set their boundaries as a couple-to-be and the beginning of the so-called leaving and cleaving process. I asked them to name the aspects of their families that they didn't want to keep and those aspects that they wanted to keep as part of their new life together. They came up with generalisations for their families-of-origin and "not having enough" for their marriage to be. They said that it felt as if there were so many things linked to their families of origin that they would need to renegotiate and to rethink, and they didn't know if they would have enough courage to do that. Françoise was afraid that she would eventually run out of love for Paul, although she didn't doubt her love for him. Concerning children, she felt that she would not have enough resources to provide for their emotional nurturing. The previous day I had read the Bible narrative of the feeding of the five thousand and realised that this might have a unique outcome. Because they had some religious background I asked them if they knew this story. They did and said that it was one of the few stories that they remembered (talk about divine intervention!!), so we read the passage together (Matthew 14:13-21). We used the story

as imagery for their life together, illustrating Françoise's feeling that she would not have enough loaves and fishes to feed her family. With this in mind, time was spent looking at their families of origin and the rituals that accompanied them. We traced their history and its influence on their past, present and future in different aspects of their lives. Paul and Françoise were quite surprised at how certain pre-conceived ideas were actually the cause of some friction between them. We spent a lot of time on the meaning they attached to these family rituals. Together they renegotiated their position towards their families-of-origin, and found certain positive rituals that they decided to keep as part of their own family-to-be. This provided them with enough loaves and fishes to feed their relationship and gave them hope that eventually their relationship could be one of God's miracles.

Developing a theme or image that anticipates the kind of family the marrying couple would like to become is a way of linking the stories from families of origin with the Christian story. This means learning to weave one's individual, family, and future marital story with the narrative of God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ. It will be awkward for some couples who have never thought about their story in relation to God's story. For that reason, we use planning the wedding ritual as a tool, like the genogram, to invite the couple to explore ways in which they might envision their life together in the light of the Christian story. Ultimately this means an invitation into a relationship with the God whose presence these rites mediate.

As the couple's preparation for the wedding proceeds and aspects of their personal and family stories begin to unfold, certain values, commitments, and life themes will quite naturally become evident. As they do, even before the conversation about planning the liturgy, these themes can help shape the larger wedding ceremony in a way that honours each individual's past narrative and anticipates the couple's common future narrative. Some themes will develop out of families of origin. Others will become apparent from the couple's own history. Still others will embody the faith traditions of the couple.

The image of being married as "loving the distance between them" is consistent with the paradoxical essence of human life. It acknowledges contradiction or paradox as an inevitable dimension of faithful living and an inescapable reality of family living. The stories or images or sayings that a couple presents initially may not always reflect this understanding of marriage. For that reason, the pre-wedding pastoral conversation may

need to include "saying the other side" (i.e. the story of faith), so that the themes that a couple finally chooses will be consistent with the parabolic way of Jesus. We could identify three contradictions that are present in wedding preparation but also characteristic of being married.

- **Continuity and discontinuity**

The first and most obvious paradox of becoming married is reflected in the simultaneous beginnings and endings, the continuities and discontinuities, which characterize every wedding. The wedding launches a new adventure, that of becoming married. At the same time, it brings to a close a host of possibilities that were part of being single. We leave elements of our personal history "behind", and yet nothing ever really leaves us. It is simply transformed at a deeper level. The wedding as we have it today has condensed two distinct ritual processes of separation and incorporation into one event. It is about leaving as well as cleaving.

In the new version of the old classic film *Father of the Bride* the father awakes to discover his bride-to-be daughter playing basketball in the driveway. In a wonderfully tender conversation that describes the paradox of holding on and letting go, the daughter says this to her father:

I just kept thinking about how this is my last night in my bed, and kind of like my last night as a kid. I mean, I've lived here since I was five - and I feel like I'm supposed to turn in my key tomorrow. It was so strange packing up my room. You know how you always trained me never to throw things away? I couldn't throw anything away, so I have all these yearbooks and ratty stuffed animals, my old retainer, all my old magic tricks. I've actually packed it all. I just couldn't let go. I mean, I know I can't stay, but I don't want to leave."

There are a variety of patterns for leaving and letting go. Sometimes parents are ready to let go before children are ready to leave. Other times parents hold on to children who are ready to leave. This is *the* psychological drama of a wedding. If the process is allowed to unfold in a parabolic way, there *can* be a giving up and a getting at the same

time. We need to develop wedding rituals in which parental and family relationships are acknowledged and honoured at the same time as being symbolically severed.

- **Bonds and boundaries**

The second paradox is about bonds and boundaries, connectedness and separateness. One of the greatest gifts we can give those to whom we are married is to love the distance between us. The wedding ritual, however, has all too frequently emphasized being "one flesh" at the expense of honouring human separateness. The focus of a wedding is on the process of bonding that is being intended by the couple, and that is as it should be. Unless, however, an individual marrying has sufficiently left to establish clear and flexible boundaries in relation to the family of origin, that bonding may eventually come to feel like suffocation or invasion.

People marrying after living on their own want to be assured that they will not lose their hard-won sense of self in the process. The wedding liturgy needs to give expression to these polarities, which will characterize the long process of becoming married that is only now beginning. Rilke has said it well:

It is a question in marriage, to my feeling, not of creating a quick community of spirit by tearing down and destroying all boundaries, but rather a good marriage is that which appoints the other guardian of his solitude, and shows him this confidence, the greatest in his power to bestow.

- **Private event, public context**

The wedding is a public event that celebrates, at least in most cultures, a private, voluntary covenant. This third paradox of the wedding also describes the entire process of becoming and being married. We have already suggested that making public the private decision to marry may, in some instances, be another leaving-home moment. In every instance, how a couple negotiates this transition from private relationship to public status is a significant part of becoming married. The rituals that precede a wedding, such as showers or engagement parties (which unfortunately are less and less celebrated), support this movement from private to public. They enable the communities of family and friends of the couple to recognize their new public status. We need to find more and more ways to emphasize the public nature of marriage.

The corollary of making marriage more public is for the public sphere to take on qualities of recognition and nurturing previously confined to the private sphere of the family. A marriage needs to be private enough to provide a safe place for individual selves to be sustained and intimacy to be nurtured. Those values cannot be sustained, however, if they belong only to the private sphere of the family. The family cannot alone sustain qualities like nurturing and recognition if the public world is defined as a place in which care for others is impossible, and atomized selves protect their autonomy by denying the reality of others. Those who would keep the traditional split between the private, female world of nurture and the public, male world of achievement are likely to insist on keeping marriage private.

Marriage is a sign of God's love and faithfulness, but it is also a place from which we are sent to serve the world for God's sake. People who rarely close their doors find little occasion to nurture intimacy; those who rarely open them run the risk of deadening self-absorption and perpetuating a society that cannot support family living. If the wedding ritual is to enhance a more fluid relationship between public and private worlds, it will always be paradoxical. It will be necessary to balance the public and private realities of becoming married.

5.15 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have continued our journey in looking at how a narrative approach can be practiced in the context of a premarital pastoral conversation. We looked at how conversations can be deconstructed and how new stories can be written. The externalization of events and different mapping tools were and can be used in this process. The way the story of faith can play a significant role in this conversation was also described. In the pastoral narrative conversation all these stories (pastor, couple, biblical and Church tradition) meet and horizons overlap. This coming together of different stories leads to a new understanding of the whole.

In the next, and last chapter, we will be looking at the road that lies ahead.