

## CHAPTER SIX: THE JOURNEY FORWARD - A PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

*The hard-won meanings should be said,  
painted,  
danced,  
dramatised,  
put into circulation.  
Victor Turner*

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

I have come to the "last" chapter of this study where it is customary, on the one hand, to reach some sort of "final" conclusion and, on the other hand, to evaluate with critical reflection the research done. The purpose of this would be to show in this case the potential and relevance of a narrative approach for a premarital conversation. Such a conclusion pulls together the threads of the thesis that have been systematically developed in the preceding pages of the text. Having read such a conclusion, the reader is left with a sense of closure, a sense that a path has been traversed and a certain destination reached.

In a certain way, this conclusion should not be viewed like that, since in many ways it would be antithetical to the discussion of postmodern approaches to attempt to arrive at an end point. Instead, in keeping with the philosophy of these approaches, it is hoped that this final chapter opens up ideas and further avenues for exploration. In so doing, the thesis will provide you with a way forward, a future journey and a quest, that would enable you to pursue your own exploration and analysis of these approaches and allow you to see how they can be applied to research into aspects of a premarital conversation (and also, therapy and Pastoral Care in general). The being a narrative journey, the study did not seek arguments or final conclusions that could be formulated in concise formulations, but the validity of the study is to be found in the story itself and therefore I tried to tell the story as fully as possible - although lots of other stories could have been added.

Thus, in many ways this thesis marks the start (and continuation) of what is hoped (and what has been expressed) will be a journey of discovery for you, the reader. This thesis has introduced you to some aspects of the development of premodern, modern and

postmodern thought, narrative theology, a pastoral involvement and premarital care. It is up to each reader to seek out more information as he or she sees fit. All of this is to emphasize whatever happens in printed form (as with any other form of text) can only be a partial and incomplete representation of the reality being presented. There is always more to be said and thought about!

## 6.2 WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

As the introduction to this chapter has emphasized, this thesis forms part of a journey of discovery with respect to postmodern approaches and their applicability to pastoral hermeneutical narrative involvement of premarital care. However, reading this thesis has been a journey in itself, and it could be a useful exercise at this point to pause in order to reflect where we are on that journey. Hence the title of this section: "Where have we been?"

The subject matter in the examples has ranged from various contexts and case note documentation to the ways in which popular media shape, and are in turn shaped by, dominant assumptions and understandings of a couple and family relations. We have seen that postmodern approaches can illuminate and challenge aspects of Pastoral Care and therapy, ranging from more micro levels of analysis such as that of individual settings, to the macro focus of social representations of couple and family issues.

Chapter 1 (Introduction and research orientation) started by giving a brief overview of the actual situation of marriage today. The supposition that if correct biblical information is passed on to Christians (or non-Christians), they will become obedient, and behavioural change will take place automatically, was questioned.

The title of the research study was next analyzed motivating why these specific terminologies were chosen. To better understand my motivation of this study I outlined my personal remembering conversation taking in consideration the different levels of communication: the conversation between writer and reader, what you as reader bring and what I as writer bring to the conversation.

The two different fields of actions were next described. The emphasis of this study was rather on the action (the now of the story) than focussing on problems.

The first chapter finished with an explanation of the different modi of research interaction and the research expectations. The research approach of this study was explained as participatory research with the preference of thick descriptions. Much of the criticism of research approaches are concerned with their apparent inability to influence practice and stems from assumptions about the research that is "deliverable"; or what Gouldner (1971) termed the "background assumptions" about what a research project and its product should be. Purkis (1994) extends this point when she writes:

*Pressure to provide answers is understood within the context of this article as a linguistic device widely employed in the literature for legitimating research efforts, that is, in response to an approach to the field of study where research is understood as fulfilling a "need" to inform practice. (1994:15)*

Thus Purkis is questioning the assumption that research must fulfil a "need" (either spoken or unspoken) to inform practice in the first place. In so doing she is challenging understandings about what research is for and what outcomes of research might and "should" be.

At times, the journey we have taken has led us over some rocky theoretical ground, with many potential paths to follow. No easy answers present themselves to the questions and issues that arise. However, we have been able to map out some guiding principles which serve both to inform our explorations and to avoid the discussion becoming bogged down in the mire of theoretical and methodological ambiguity, vagueness, and assumed understandings about the nature, conduct and purpose of the research endeavour.

I wish to conclude this discussion of our journey by offering a cautionary note. It is timely to reiterate a theme that has permeated the discussion throughout this story, that is, that postmodern approaches should in some way be viewed as privileged, mandatory, or as replacing other approaches to research. Rather, this story suggests that postmodern approaches have a place in Pastoral Family Therapy research along with other theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. It is not an *either/or* situation. Instead, it is more a matter of enabling and allowing a variety of research approaches and theoretical frames to inform research and subsequent knowledge development in the Pastoral Family Therapy areas.

It is not a case of attempting to replace one grand narrative with another! At all times, the rationale for choosing a particular research approach rather than other possibilities must be stated clearly. The strengths and limitations of the various approaches must be recognized, as must the role that theoretical and methodological frameworks play in shaping research understandings, research undertakings, and conclusions reached. Postmodern, like any other approach to research, represents certain views of reality. Put another way, postmodern approaches themselves are discursive constructions, drawing on certain knowledge claims to give them presence. Thus, they are open to the same sort of challenge and scrutiny as any other theoretical frame.

The journey continued (Chapter 2) by positioning the research study within a scientific-philosophical context. This was done by giving a description of the development of premodernism to postmodernity to narrative ideas. Basic points of departure of a narrative worldview were discussed in terms of how realities are constructed through language and the social context. Social constructionism is seen as an important aspect of this worldview. The narrative approach also has important implications for the understanding of truth, knowledge and power. I sought to understand how this approach developed. The purpose was then to arrive at a working description of how to do theology in a postmodern context (Chapter 3). A narrative hermeneutical pastoral theological response was proposed. This proposal was reached by investigating the contribution of various contributions to narrative theology: Crites' understanding of the narrative quality of experience, Gadamer, Tracy and Ricoeur's contributions to hermeneutics, Gerkin's narrative hermeneutical approach, Ganzevoort's understanding of narrative and personal identity and Müller's proposal of a pastoral narrative involvement.

Chapter 4 started by examining several biblical portraits of marriage and how they can be useful in a premarital pastoral narrative conversation. Different premarital programs were also evaluated with this purpose in mind. A reflection was shared concerning the general cultural phenomenon of cohabitation. The shortcomings of this lifestyle compared to the commitment in marriage are underlined.

Chapter 5 outlined a premarital conversation in narrative mode. As guidelines, certain elements of a narrative stance in Pastoral Care are proposed taking in consideration listening skills and a not-knowing position. The importance of the deconstruction of certain beliefs and attitudes towards love, marriage and sex is discussed.

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The way that information about the family can be organized to reveal relationship patterns and changes in those patterns can be illustrated by means of several mapping tools (genogram, ecocharts, and the couple life line) and in taking in consideration the different transitional stages of the couple, family and their faith development.

The purpose of these actions is to arrive at an opening for the constructing of a new story for the married couple-to-be. Different ways of asking story development questions are proposed. After discussing the contribution of White's landscape of action and landscape of consciousness a conversation concerning a couple's decision to marry is given. The chapter closes with the story of faith. The implications and complications of using Scripture and prayer are outlined. Eventually a conjugal spirituality is proposed. The search for an audience or community of faith to support and celebrate this new rite of passage of the couple is underlined.

### 6.3 WHERE ARE WE?

The previous section in this chapter provided us with an overview of where the discussion has led us so far. Where does this leave us now? Hopefully it leaves us in a position of wanting to know more about these approaches and the research that has arisen, and can arise. The bibliography suggests further reading and should enable us to continue our explorations. This thesis is just a beginning, and a very brief beginning at that!

It is also hoped that as a result of the exploration of these approaches, we are beginning to question and explore assumptions and understandings implicit within our practice area and/or research that previously we may have taken for granted. All of this involves the development of reflexivity on the part of the reader and/or researcher.

Porter notes that the development of reflexivity -

*entails researchers viewing their own beliefs in the same fashion as they view those held by their subjects (1993:141).*

The research process itself, in that it is a form of text that is discursively constituted, thus becomes a focus of the reflexive researcher. Apparent "givens" such as understandings of reliability and validity, or what does or does not constitute research, are

opened up to scrutiny. The same is true for the form that research texts take. Porter (1993) ably demonstrates reflexivity in action in his exploration of why certain journal editorial boards and manuscripts reviewers reject the use of the word "I" in papers submitted for publication. He argues that there is no logical reason why manuscripts using the first person, that is, "I", should be viewed as less scholarly than those which use the passive voice. Rather, such reasons stem from largely unexplored assumptions about what constitutes "good" and/or appropriate scholarly writing, which in turn, often arises from the discursive frame of the supposed disinterested objectivity that the passive voice purports to represent. Porter asserts that -

*the academic text is just as much the result of convention and contrivance as any other cultural artefact. We can not take the conventionality of texts for granted; their language needs to be treated as problematic (1993:142).*

Such reflexivity and the questioning it promotes also applies to enacted texts (Jacobson & Jacques 1997); that is, the field notes, observations, interview transcripts and so forth that purport to represent aspects of the reality under scrutiny by a researcher. In other words, we need to look at the texts themselves, rather than assume texts are simply neutral conveyors of information. Any representation of reality which takes the form of empirical materials and data collected in a research undertaking will only ever represent partial aspects of the reality being studied. Further, how those aspects are represented will be shaped and influenced by the assumptions and frameworks that researchers bring with them and impose on the research process. Thus empirical materials themselves must be scrutinized for what they reveal about the reality portrayed. Empirical materials are the textual record of what has been observed, studied and subsequently "found". As such they are open to the same scrutiny as any other form of text. Hertz captures the idea of looking at texts well when she writes:

*Through personal accounting researchers should become more aware of how their own positions and interests are imposed at all stages of the research process - from the questions they ask to those they ignore, from whom they study to whom they ignore, from problem formation to analysis, representation and writing-in order to produce less distorted accounts of the social world (1996:5).*

Reflexivity also brings into scrutiny the notion of the research "field", both in terms

of what the field is, and how that field is represented in the research text. The field for any particular research endeavour is not out there waiting to be described by researchers. Rather, the field is a construction of the researcher. It is the researcher who defines the field for a particular study and who then goes about constructing that field by the collection of research data. In turn, the role of the researcher is, at least in part, constructed by the understanding of the field in play. Turner points out that Foucault's work, for example, provides -

*us with an analysis of the forces that produce "the field" - both the lie of the land itself, and the shaping of the eye that surveys it (1989:17).*

Subsequently Jacobson and Jacques (1997) discuss the effect of destabilizing the field, that is, challenging the notion of a fixed, stable field of study. When reporting on the field for a study looking at how the social space of nursing (or Pastoral Family Therapy in our case) has been, and is, constructed and maintained, they note:

*The object of the research is not the nurse (pastor) but the lens through which the nurse (pastor) is represented. The goal is not one of better understanding what is really going on but one of understanding how any construction of the real is influenced by the relationships of power through which the structure of social reality has been produced and is maintained, often in seemingly mundane ways (1997:54).*

Thus, the field itself can be explored to expose the ways in which the field is both constructed and positioned by the researcher, and which in turn constructs and positions the researcher. Hence Turner (1989) defines the field in the following way:

*It constitutes, shall we say, an attitude towards their "clients" needed by agents of social control, a framing of the life of actual or potential subjects, a point of view which will force an intersection of the interests of the inquirer and the life of the subject (1989:14).*

Postmodern approaches enable the development of a reflexivity that can challenge and open up to scrutiny otherwise closed and taken-for-granted aspects of both the research process and Pastoral Family Therapy practice. Far from being nihilistic and

entirely destructive, as Eagleton suggests when stating that these approaches allow -

*you to drive a coach and horses through everybody else's beliefs while not saddling you with the inconvenience of having to adopt any yourself (1983:144),*

postmodern approaches offer new and different perspectives on the practice realm. In offering such perspectives, there is no claim to the last word or definitive answers. Rather, there is a desire to -

*become more reflexive about the ways that situated knowers and knowns influence the production of inevitably perspective-dependent knowledge (Jacobson & Jacques 1997:56).*

A reflexive approach can expose what we are and offer other possibilities for what we might be. In this way it may be possible to -

*avoid both the positivism of the window and the nihilism of the mirror (Turner 1989:25)*

for, as Turner points out, in refusing what we are or what is, there is a risk that we may render ourselves homeless by an act of will (1989:20).

Doing Pastoral Care in this way, it is important that the pastor encourages his co-researchers to tell their stories and to be involved in their stories. Parry and Doan (1994:30) says:

*As therapists, we continue to deal with the stories people tell us about the disordering of the text of their lives ... Each text is the story of someone's efforts to live in this Zone called the postmodern world, in which, in the collapse of common rules or stories, we can only hope to be able to make "arrangements" with one another through our inescapable participation in one another's stories.*

Parry and Doan go on and distinguish three tasks of a postmodern therapist (pastor). The first task is -

*that of encouraging people in the legitimizing of their own stories* (1994:27).

The second task is to encourage people to use words that convey emotions and feelings when they tell their stories:

*A story is a person's own story, and he/she is the poet* (Parry and Doan 1994:72).

The third task of a postmodern therapist is to empower people to realize that their stories about themselves are unique and these stories belong to them.

*... when there is no central story against which to evaluate that of either an individual or family, then, not only do all persons' and families' ways of being themselves through the stories they tell, become legitimizing, but each person is freed from the assumption that a grand narrative tends to foster - namely, that each person is entitled to only one self. In a time of different worlds and different languages, different selves will be called upon to perform the many different deeds expected of people in their different worlds* (Parry & Doan 1994:27).

One of assumptions of this research is that people can be taught that there are many different stories. White identified two types of life stories: the *dominant story* that gets told over and over again and is constituting of a person's life, and the *alternative story* that forms part of the subjugated knowledge and thus does not shape the person's life to same extent. To bring about change, new meaning and unique outcomes in these stories one can make use of externalization and deconstruction.

As pastor, I must remember that it is not only the story of the couple or family that is at stake and that is told, but also my own story and the Biblical Story. The involvement and the bringing together of these different stories should play a prominent role in the pastoral conversation.

Looking then reflexively to where we are after everything is said and done, I have found that postmodern society also implies a post-Christian society. Many of the material discussed in this study (especially chapters 4 and 5) were experienced by couples, which

could be considered as non practicing "Christians", as new and strange. They just want to prepare the wedding service, get married, and get on with life. This gives an opportunity to share understandings of the Christian concept of marriage.

On the other end of spectrum are those Christians that are committed to their faith and who are searching in this postmodern society for rules and guides of how to have a successful marriage. These couples had and have to discover their own road make use of the Biblical portraits of marriage.

It was interesting to notice that both of these groups had similar "misconceptions" concerning love, marriage and sex (as discussed in the previous chapter).

#### 6.4 THE JOURNEY FORWARD

Postmodernity has been used in this thesis to convey the opportunity that exists for Christian theology to engage with thought forms and practices which have lost or are in danger of losing contact with it. The location of ourselves at or towards the end of modernity has also enabled the developing theology of Christian marriage to be linked with wider social, cultural and intellectual upheavals. The vision of marriage after modernity has not abandoned its premodern roots; on the contrary, as it has tried to listen and respond to the postmodern crisis, it has been able to appreciate its historic rootedness in different ways. A new context generates new questions, which in turn make new discoveries possible. The new questions have been frequently awkward to handle, and the answers have frequently incorporated premodern practices.

The Christian understanding of marriage is set in the long premodern period prior to the changes of modernity. It will be necessary to refer continuously to the diverse premodern traditions of marriage while reinterpreting what is found there in the light of the demands of the postmodern social and cultural situation. The Bible has no guidance for us about the right age for marriage, nor about any ceremony. There is clear tension in the New Testament between the concessionary view of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:19) and the estimation of it as the great mystery symbolizing the union of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32). Marriage was discouraged within the early church in the light of the imminent return of Christ. In the next century it was discouraged because of negative attitudes to sexuality and because of the moral priority given to celibacy. A wedding ceremony was, until modern times, never a requirement, and the principal justification for the inferior way of marriage was that of having children. Only in the second millennium

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did marriage become a sacrament, and the meaning of "sacrament" has changed completely since then. The engagement (fiançailles) was a common means of entry into marriage, and vows could be made when the parties were as young as seven. The cultural discontinuities between premodern times and our own will render the premodern legacy strange to us; yet its very strangeness, its power to surprise and sometimes to amaze, will help to provide a critical resource for reviewing our own practice.

The social changes associated with modernity and postmodernity are crucial for this study - as described in the previous pages. Modernity is associated with the rise of state bureaucracy, with "the classificatory, controlling impulse seen in sphere after sphere". A legal marriage act represents the apex of modernity as it affects marriage, for during the premodern time, ecclesiastical ceremonies and official registration were not legally required for a valid marriage to be enacted. The entry into marriage was less formal, and in some periods engagement licensed sexual intercourse prior to the actual marriage ceremony. Courtship and attitudes to sexual intercourse prior to marriage were different prior to the legal aspect and it will be necessary to "lift the veil of modernity" in order to suggest that the informal entry into marriage via cohabitation, which our contemporaries have largely accomplished for themselves, is a partial return to premodern nuptial orthodoxy. In the eighteenth century the entry into marriage is effectively policed, and law becomes a principal means of enforcing social compliance. But these changes had more to do with the handing down of property than with the gospel, and we will need to be wary of them.

Marriage within modernity becomes increasingly associated with romantic love, the growth of individuality, the choosing of partners by each other, and (in Protestant countries) the ending of clerical celibacy. The most far-reaching change of all in the modern period is the mass production of reliable contraceptives, in particular the sheath in the nineteenth and "the pill" in the second half of the twentieth century. The vigorous opposition to the use of contraceptives, even within marriage, by the Roman Catholic Church is a correct discernment that contraception changes sexual experience forever, since sexual intercourse need no longer be associated with the transmission of life.

For this study, postmodernity will be understood principally as a new opportunity for Christian thought and practice, coincidentally situated at the beginning of a new millennium. The seizure of a new opportunity does not overlook that Christian theology is in some respects in a weaker position than it was even half a century ago; that it has lost

many of the privileges it once had in the academy; that religious pluralism and moral relativism render it more difficult for Christian theology to obtain a hearing; and that indifference to anything that might be said in the name of Christ may be growing. Theology is still able to earn a hearing, insofar as it speaks positively and meaningfully to people's experience, to the immediate context of human experience. The intention of this process is the transformation of the human story, both individual and corporate, in ways that will open the future of that story to creative possibilities.

The following scenarios of postmodern families were described by a recent judge (G. Cornu, judge in Civil Law) in France:

*There are certain couples that are married and who live united, others live in hate, others have just given up, or they have separated, with or without children. There are those that have been married and who are not anymore - because of a divorce or death - and who live alone - widowed or divorced - and sometimes they will decide to live together again with someone, or they remarry, and they have in all of these situations more children, some of which will return to cohabite with their first/previous husband and/or some that will live with the new partner who has also children from a previous relationship(s). There are those that are not married and that can live together as a couple, or that can stay single, with or without official ties - according to the personal preferences and precautions of each one concerned - with few or a lot of children, with the same partner or with several partners. There are those that have children within the household of others and others that accept in their household the children of others. There are those that welcome, acknowledge, legitimate, adopt and those that abandon, contest and disown. Chaos in diverse situations. It is not the law that is complicated. It is people. Each one lives as he/she likes or can. "And they married, and they had a lot of children". This also exists.*

The story that you are about to finish reading has been an attempt to create a "writerly" text as opposed to a "readerly" text.

*A "readerly" text assumes a passive reader seeking to understand an author's intentions. It is the opposite of a "writerly" text that is purposely vague, open to many interpretations, and deliberately encourages the reader to rewrite the contents of the text (Rosenau 1992:167).*

As a "writerly" text, the thesis has attempted to engage readers reflexively in the discussion. In so doing it has offered challenges to readers to explore their own taken-for-granted assumptions about research and the health arena.

It may remember that the preface of this story it was indicated that the impetus to write this story stemmed, at least in part, from my own and others' experience of the lack of information and research in this field of study. Such absence and need led me to question the assumptions that were being made about research, and the "product" of research and cultural discourses. This questioning enabled me to understand more clearly what was going on in terms of discursive constructions of research and social family issues. In the same way, I hope that this story increases the reader's ability to serve their audiences for their research and pastoral counselling which draws on these approaches.

Giroux (1992:22) has promoted what he terms "border crossing" in order to create "borderlands" or "alternate public spaces" where it is possible to rewrite "histories, identities and learning possibilities". This story has promoted the crossing of borders in order to move into and to create new spaces from which to view and research aspects of Pastoral Family Therapy. Postmodern approaches to research open up new territories, pushing beyond the constraints of the discursive borders of taken-for-granted understandings of Pastoral Family Care. As in any journey of exploration and discovery, the way forward is fraught with dangers and difficulties. Nevertheless, the potential offered by such a journey for opening up and rewriting histories, identities and research possibilities (to paraphrase Giroux) is enormous, and well worth the risk and the unsettling effect of challenging aspects of reality we have come to take for granted. This story has been a small part of such a journey forward. I hope that it encourages readers to continue on this journey of exploration. In the words of Anne Lamott:

*You move them along until everything comes together in the climax, after which things are different for the main characters, different in some real way (Lamott 1995:62).*

Until everything comes together . . . It sometimes takes a long time to reach a *preliminary* conclusion. The more complex the situation and the plot, the longer it takes. Anne Lamott (1995:82-3) has also written a passage from the perspective of the reader. She says:

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

This is about "understanding" too quickly and therefore not to understand at all. This is also about the desire to maintain control. Lamott says (1995:85) that her students always assume that well-respected writers, when they sit down and write their books, know pretty well what is going to happen because they have outlined their plot and this is why their books turn out so beautifully. And then she reacts by saying: "I do not know anyone fitting this description, on the way to finding a plot and structure that work. You are welcome to join the club." Likewise, therapists and pastors shouldn't know and therefore shouldn't control the plot and climax of a story. You may perhaps envision a temporary destination, but you must allow your "characters" to develop from there in their own way towards the end. This does not mean that we cannot share certain biblical values concerning marriage. We are co-authors together with the couple. Walking with them on the life journey.

Lamott uses a wonderful metaphor to describe how the writer should allow the plot to develop into its own climax.

*If you're lost in the forest, let the horse find the way home. You have to stop directing, because you will only get in the way (1995:114).*

And another striking metaphor:

*. . . we (writers) need to align ourselves with the river of the story, the river of the unconscious, of memory and sensibility . . . (Lamott 1995:121).*

The way towards the climax is not an easy one. The premarital conversation, like writing, is seeing people develop, engage and disengage and finding meaning therein.

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*But you can't do that if you're not respectful. If you look at people and just see sloppy clothes or rich clothes, you're going to get them wrong (Lamott 1995:97).*

And further:

*I honestly think in order to be a writer, you have to learn to be reverent. If not, why are you writing? Why are you here? (Lamott 1995:99).*

If writing is more than mere technique, if it is about reverence and awe, how can a pastoral conversation be only a technique? In the end, the pastoral conversation, like writing, is the development of an extraordinary relationship with your characters/co-researchers.

This often involves God and religion. Both good writing and Pastoral Care moves on the edges of life, are interested in the essence of life and of relationships. Like the writer, the pastor doesn't bring God in from outside, he or she discovers God in the writing and in the pastoral conversation.

*And then there is the ending: what is our sense of who these people are now, what are they left with, what happened, and what did it mean (Lamott 1995:62).*

During the premarital conversation, we can get discouraged, especially towards the end of the encounter. It may feel as if the necessary change that *you* envisaged, did not and will not take place, there will be no encounter between their story and the Story.

*You may feel a little as if writing (the pastoral conversation - CdP) a novel is like trying to level Mount McKinley (the Drakensberg for the South African and the Alps for the French) with a dentist's drill. Things feel hopeless, or at least bleak, and you are not imaginative or organized enough to bash your way through to a better view, let alone some interesting conclusion (Lamott 1995:177).*

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*The problem is acceptance, which is something we're taught not to do. We're taught to improve incompatible situations, to change things, alleviate unpleasant feelings (Lamott 1995:178).*

After our involvement with people in a premarital conversation, and after we have waited for our "characters" to develop within their own plot into their own climax, we have to accept the ending that is appropriate for them. We have to allow them to draw us into their story and to make us part of their lives. We must be able to imagine with them and within their boundaries. The narrative approach wants to teach us to sacrifice our own created endings and to be happy with our "characters" imaginative endings.

To be a pastor, like being a writer, is to be able to dream for and with people. Lamott (1995:231) says:

*You are lucky to be one of those people who wishes to build sand castles with words, who is willing to create a place where your imagination can wander. We build this place with sand of memories; these castles are our memories and inventiveness made tangible. So part of us believes that when the tide starts coming in, we won't really have lost anything, because actually only a symbol of it was there in the sand. Another part of us thinks we'll figure out a way to divert the ocean. This is what separates artists from ordinary people: the belief, deep in our hearts, that if we build our castles well enough, somehow the ocean won't wash them away. I think this is a wonderful kind of person to be.*

To be a "narrative" pastor is to be engaged in writing. Novel writing, autobiographic writing, re-writing, all kinds of writing. To live is to write. Living is authoring. Although life is a gift which we merely receive, it is also the raw material for the lives we are creating. We author our stories.

The therapeutic process equals the writing of a story, the creating of a book. It involves many of the stories of those involved: the clients; the families; the therapists; the patients. But the therapeutic process is not only a mere reflection on those stories, it is also a new writing.

A pastoral conversation creates its own story.

Having a pastoral conversation is as uplifting, inspiring, exhausting, and painful as it is to write. Those who are called to do it will continue to do so because it gives meaning, in spite of and through suffering (Müller 2000).

Writing, and a pastoral conversation, can only be done when one has the commitment and patience to do it "bird by bird". I would like to close this article with the story of the title of Lamott's book:

*...thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write, which was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin in Bolinas, and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, "Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird" (Lamott 1995:19).*

It should be kept in mind that the degree of participation which is possible is a function of a combination of factors and that each situation determines how much room there is for the people involved to co-operate with outsiders (Babbie & Mouton 2001:317). For example, regarding this study, the premarital narrative conversation as outlined in chapter five has been initiated by the participation and consultation of the co-researchers (or narrators). Due to the practical problem of availability of narrators proficient in English the evaluation and conclusions expressed in this study could not be done with the involvement and participation of the narrators/co-researchers. This is a future aspect that could be developed. Couples should be convinced about the necessity and the need for evaluation and follow-up.

For future research in this field more attention should be given to the influence of cohabitation on the later marital situation. The difference in lived experience between cohabitation and marriage, at not legal differences, need to be addressed.

Couples should also be made aware of the time involved in evaluating and constructing their marital life together. Women seem generally to be more open to this kind of relationship development. Although couples were very hesitant to complete questionnaires, the conducting of small workshops where experience was lived rather than information given, were appreciated.

An advantage of situating the inquiry undertaken by this thesis in a postmodern narrative context is that it relativizes our own time, and requires both an appreciation of the past and openness to God's future. The treatment of a premarital conversation *after modernity* provides a sufficiently broad canvas for wide, far-reaching social changes to be brought into the frame.

It is propose at the end of this writing that if the understanding of marriage as a lifelong covenant is to survive Christian marriage should be *non-patriarchal*. It should be also admitted that non-patriarchal marriage will be difficult to achieve. Christian traditions of marriage have been carriers of patriarchy - that much is sadly obvious. However, there are grounds for hope that the understanding of marriage within the churches will continue to grow in the direction of non-patriarchal mutuality. Nonetheless non-patriarchal marriage by itself is not enough.

"Reinvented humanism" arrives at profound insights into that equality of worth of human beings which a hierarchical view of human relationships inevitably loses sight of, while it dismisses the transcendent source of love which may yet be found to be the guarantor of the very equalities the new humanism celebrates. The pragmatic ethic needs something more than vague appeals to *responsibility*, when the chosen complexities of sexual experience engulf the individual. What happens when the proclaimers and practitioners of the *secular religion* of romantic love move on to *their own* post-religious phase, much as contemporary people are assumed by these writers to have done, in evacuating themselves from the formal requirements and disciplines of faith?

As a "post-Christian" writer, I announce sexual relationships which celebrate mutuality and equality. While there is undoubtedly room for a critical examination of what these concepts entail, where they come from, and how theology is able to contribute to them, Christians should welcome these achievements. But while post-Christian writers proclaim also a post-patriarchal present, Christians can justifiably point out that these social arrangements have so far done little to foster commitments that empower couples to arrive at a deepening love for each other which thrives on mutual acceptance and forgiveness of each other, and on the spiritual growth which works to remove the need for forgiveness in the first place. While the churches from a contemporary perspective have been slow to proclaim the equality of partners within marriage, they have always proclaimed the enduring nature of marriage through felicity and adversity. While certain

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post-Christians appear to have removed Christian marriage from among the various forms of being-with-another currently on offer, marriage is able to provide precisely what the new provisionality conspicuously lacks.

Postmodern, yet Christian, marriage, offers the vital prospect of marriage which is post-patriarchal yet enduring. The crisis for marriage is that its patriarchal form is outmoded and rightly rejected while nonpatriarchal versions of marriage either remain in infancy or are simply unacknowledged as a real possibility. Marriage has generated its own transformations in the past: the present transformation from patriarchy to equality remains an imperative for all the churches. The removal of patriarchy from marriage may also dislodge many of the factors contributing to marital breakdown and to the reluctance to make permanent, open-ended commitments to a single partner. But the end of patriarchy does not mean the end of unprovisional commitment: it merely removes the main obstacle in the way of exercising it. The obligation on husbands to love their wives *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it* (Ephesians 5:22) remains undiminished by the admission that the obligation is based on an offensive patriarchal theory which requires the submission of women to men, and the assumption that such heroic other-regarding acts could only be performed by men. The removal of the theory is a wholly positive development. The obligation is not diminished, but rather, intensified, because, after patriarchy, it becomes a shared one, and consequently one that is likely to have a higher chance of being carried out.

The handling of the Ephesian marriage text to eliminate ancient assumptions about male superiority remains instructive in indicating what is involved in advocating a non-patriarchal form of Christian marriage. Patriarchy has to be faced, not evaded. Since the theology of Christian marriage has been in the hands of men since the letter to the Ephesians was written (and still largely remains so), it is not surprising that it is proving difficult to dislodge. The disowning of the patriarchal premises in this text is essential for husbands' sake, for wives' sake, for Christ's sake, indeed for everyone's sake. In a non-patriarchal marriage the husband has an equal partner in giving and receiving married love as Christ loves the Church. The love the husband has for his wife will be deeper because she will be his equal, but not a dependent being capable only of obedience, submission and reverence in relation to him. Because she turns out, after patriarchy, to be able to love reciprocally and thereby exercise freedom, his love can be more genuine. If she loves her husband as Christ loves the Church she becomes an equal partner in the joint project of the marital covenant and the androcentric calling into question of her abilities is

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removed. Non-patriarchal marriage makes the couple jointly subject to Christ, thereby intensifying the place of Christ in the marriage. Under patriarchy the wife submits to Christ through her husband; after patriarchy each submits to each other and Christ is the 'head' of both of them. This does not tamper or jeopardize the place of Christ within a couple's marriage: it gives it the possibility of greater realization because the authority of Christ in the marriage is given a higher status by not being mediated through maleness. What happens in reading the Ephesian text *after patriarchy* is able to illustrate a different kind of reading - the *reading* of the contemporary *context* of marriage also as a breaking away from patriarchy. But there is much that Christian marriage can never be *post-* because the loving communion on which it is founded is the communion of the Trinitarian God, and the invitation to share in it is given by the selfgiving of the Trinitarian God in the Person of Christ. The tragedy for postmodern marriage is that while patriarchal versions of marriage are rejected, marriage itself has been gravely weakened and taken on forms which, while stressing equality, also incorporate elements which are inimical to the preservation of marriage in any form. A version of marriage which is emphatically post-patriarchal, while emphatically not post-Christian, will alone meet the demand *both* for genuine equality between partners *and* for a deepening and enduring relationship between them.

This is the hope for Christian marriage after modernity. If it is to become a reality it is likely that Christians practising it will need increasingly to become critical of postmodern trends which seem to marginalize marriage completely: in short they will become increasingly *counter cultural* in respect of marriage. This will be no new matter. Christian attitudes cannot fail to be influenced by the wider social attitudes to marriage. That is, the temptation to regard marriage merely as a private matter must be resisted, since there are public influences, expectations and consequences surrounding a couple's supposedly private decisions. The ever-increasing demands of employers easily militate against the cultivation of successful marriages.

It was also proposed that practicing *conjugal spirituality* will deepen a marriage by deepening their joint relationship with God.

The above considerations concerning marriage should be taken into account in the conducting and the construction of a premarital narrative conversation.

As reader of this story I leave you with the following words of Jacques Brel:

*I wish you everlasting dreams  
and the strong desire to see some fulfilled.  
I wish you love to love that which needs to be loved  
and to forget that which should be forgotten.  
I wish you strength to resist the slide into indifference,  
and the negative values of our times.  
I wish you deep enthusiasm and the delightful cries of children  
and the songs of birds on awakening.  
Most of all my wish is for you to be you.*