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THE RELEVANCE OF THE BENEDICTINE, FRANCISCAN, AND TAIZÉ MONASTIC TRADITIONS FOR RETREAT WITHIN THE DUTCH REFORMED TRADITION: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHRISTOFFEL HERCULES SCHUTTE

PhD

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Supervisor: Prof Dr Yolanda Dreyer

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STATEMENT BY CANDIDATE

I declare that the thesis which I am submitting to the University of Pretoria for the degree PhD Practical Theology has not been submitted by me to any other university for degree purposes; and

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THE THESIS IS DEDICATED TO:

- God, the Ultimate, Uncontrollable Mystery and Source of life.
- Marietjie, Christo and Ghizela, a fabulous family ánd best friends.
- All the co-pilgrims (co-researchers) journeying to the inner mountain.
- The monks of La Pierre Qui Vire, Sacro Convento Di San Francesko, and Taizé.
- The Dutch Reformed congregations, Florandia and Murray.
- The nuns of the Benedictine cloister, Order of the Holy Paraclete
- My supervisor, Yolanda Dreyer

SUMMARY

The narrative research journey and pilgrimage into and epistemological reflection on the relevance of the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taizé monastic-mystic traditions (associative spirituality) for retreat within the Dutch Reformed tradition (disassociate spirituality) began because of a passion for, an interest in retreat and because of lack of research done on the subject. The research developed in story form as a participative active process of *story development,* interpretation, and reflection in which the researcher and the research subject as valued co-researchers (co-pilgrims) constructed a shared reality and new story together. Consequently, the observations and experiences reflected on may tell just as much about the researcher as about the action of retreat and the research participants. The action of retreat was not approached in a neutral, objective stance but with self-awareness, particular presuppositions, and a postmodern philosophical mindset with ideological-critical, deconstructive and inclusive thought processes. The research problem was viewed as a narrative situation of action, explained by means of empirical research, and interpreted via epistemological reflection and theological theories. The focus has not been on new or adapted theory formulation, hypotheses, or "conclusions" as such but on the empiric *interaction* between the experiences of Mystery (*noumenon)*, the Jesus narrative, stories of the co-pilgrims, monastic traditions, Dutch Reformed tradition, the researchers' own story, and those who might read the thesis. A potential amplifying or expanding of the repertoire of existing options and meanings were viewed as a possibility in the creative development of a new reality or research story. The aim was to listen to, understand, and interpret qualitatively the subjective dimension and experience of the reality (story/ies) of retreat as a situation where pilgrims (from different traditions and spiritualities) were in relation with God, self and others.

The research journey took me into the *life world* of the monastic-mystic traditions and my own internal dialectics and story within a Dutch Reformed context. From here arose questions, engagement, and re-engagement with the

monastic traditions and a new story. The concern was the beliefs and practices of the retreatants (co pilgrims) under study as beings in real-life human experiential reality, taking seriously their concerns, expressions of belief, practice, perceptions, and stories. The data from the empirical encounter was subsequently investigated, mapped with the major themes and interests highlighted and reflected on in the process. The main themes and focal points that were identified and researched were:

- The lives and stories of St. Benedict, St. Francis, and Br. Roger, their respective communities' monastic-mystic spirituality, the way these traditions approach retreat and the way they live or express their respective monastic rules or orders in comparison with the Dutch Reformed traditions' retreat narrative.
- The main elements of Monastic retreat namely silence, solitude, *lectio divina* in facilitating an awareness of God and the mystery of God as part of the journey to the inner mountain, ever deeper into his presence.
- Different types of retreat and especially the experience of monastic retreat, the experience of holy places (desert spirituality) as places saturated by prayer, Eucharist and the community of pilgrims, and retreat as pilgrimage experience.
- Retreat as ritual following a rite of passage structure of separation, marginality and reincorporation focusing on structure and anti-structure (power of liminality) as helpful tool of analysis and framework for planning of retreat.
- The potential therapeutic or pastoral care qualities of a monastic way of retreat facilitating in pilgrims, life story interpretation and new understanding of stories.

The research story ended in the form of findings and the posing of possible questions for future research.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Monasticism
  (Monastic Spirituality)
- Retreat
- Benedictine
- Franciscan
- Taizé
- Silence
- Solitude
- *Lectio Divina*
- *Rite de Passage*
- Pilgrimage

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