

CHAPTER TWO

Retreat and Spirituality

2.1 The Empirical Research Development Process

A four day ecumenical leadership development retreat in nineteen ninety four planted the first seed for the narrative research journey. Although not a monastic retreat, as there were many lectures, group discussions and laughter during the four days, the venue at the Anglican school of St. Marys' in Pretoria had a very special chapel where we as a group of retreatants would gather two to three times a day for silence, worship, meditation and *lectio divina*. It was in the chapel, which became a special holy place to me with the cross, altar, candles, icons, silence, and solitude that I experienced the presence of God in a deep profound sense. Very different from what I have experienced within my own church and in a soul enriching way. The times in the chapel were my first exposure to elements of a meditative, associative spirituality.

The seed of an interest in and an attraction to monastic retreat developed and grew even further during a private non conducted retreat in nineteen ninety six in an Anglican Benedictine cloister for nuns called "Order of the Holy Paraclete" in Rosettenville near Johannesburg. I visited there primarily to get away from the busyness and rat race syndrome of the ministry at that stage. I also had to get clarity regarding my calling, vision, and future leadership role in the church. I had become aware before the retreat of a first stage physical, emotional, and spiritual "burn out" in my ministry because of constant pressure, negative stress, and an unbalanced way of life. I decided to visit this cloister that welcomed retreatants on recommendation of an Anglican priest who has conducted many retreats there for members of his parish. At that stage I have been to many church camps and youth camps within my own church tradition but never before for two days at a cloister with a chapel and lots of

silence, a tranquil garden and peaceful atmosphere. Although situated in a quite big busy neighbourhood, the moment I arrived there and the big door closed behind me, I felt I entered holy secluded surroundings enclosed within the big walls. One of the nuns received me with kindness and joyous hospitality and showed me to my small and simple but comfortable room. Afterwards I had my first meal with some of the nuns and two other retreatants in total silence! I have never felt so awkward in my life and the lunch hour felt like an eternity. I could not join in their daily prayer offices or services (Divine Office) in the chapel and the sisters were available for spiritual direction when needed. The silence during the two days, the different surroundings, the solitude and at times sharing with the sisters my story and listening to theirs, the moments in the chapel and in the garden opened me up to a spiritual dimension I was not familiar with at all. After leaving the Order of the Holy Paraclete at St. Benedict's house, I felt renewed and healed. Afterwards the decision was made to read and experience more about retreat and especially retreat within the St. Benedict's monastic tradition. I began reading on the classical disciplines, contemplation, monastic, and mystic spirituality. Questions began to emerge regarding retreat and monastic spirituality. Since then I have had at least one private retreat each year.

Against this background, I finally made the decision in two thousand and two to develop a research project on the action of retreat. The first two phases of the empirical cycle of Van der Ven were thus set in motion. As researcher, I participated in the field of the subject of retreat and of the subjects (co-researchers and co-pilgrims) lives and experiences during the investigation. It was impossible to plan the entire design for the qualitative research project, because the design changed as the initial interviewing and reading/literature review developed. After preliminary enquiries and interviews, dialogue with existing literature on the subject and more exposure to the action of retreat itself the research problem was

formulated, the goal of the research clarified and stated. Some of the questions in the early stages of the research process were:

- What were the people on retreat experiencing deep within
- Why did they go on retreat?
- Could the monastic way of retreat be a justifiable or commendable way for people of my own church tradition to become more aware of the presence of God and a source of regeneration, as I have experienced it?

A need assessment process and an empirical study developed regarding retreat in order to listen to and establishing a possible story (stories) about the relevance of the monastic way of retreat and monastic way of life for retreat in the Dutch Reformed tradition. During the second phase of theological induction, progressively more exposure to the action of retreat took place, in order to discover what kind of people and cognitions, actions, affections, processes and structures I might find relevant to the research project. A literature review followed by a literature study were done, interviews were conducted, key persons asked specific questions and I began to live more and more with the research project developing into a participative research journey whilst constantly perceiving and reflecting on the research topic. During the following phase of theological deduction, a description of the theoretical view and philosophy underlying the study followed by the exposition of the narrative social constructionist model and subsequent methodology chosen for the study.

The relevant data from the fieldwork and literature study, discussed and integrated in the respective chapters (two-five) are presented as an epistemological reflection on the investigation. It is a description of what has emerged during the qualitative research plot development. It contains the observation of the simmering pot of stew or research plot development

and the adding spices of the researcher's own interaction with the action of retreat and its participants. In this way, it is envisioned that a fruitful description and discussion is offered that may lead to further understanding of the relevance of the mystic traditions for the Dutch Reformed tradition and stimulate further research. The central themes and concepts from the interviews, surveys, and documents (the stories of the conversational research partners) were categorized. The recorded data as relevant and interesting realities, the making of additional notes, the transcription of the recordings, and the data from the literature study transformed into text, are presented as written stories from the field. This reality in substantiated form, as text, provides access to the field of research as a reconstruction of the action of retreat and the people (characters) in action. A summary discussion of the story of the research journey and findings that came to the fore follows in chapter six.

2.2 Empirical Fieldwork

My view of practical theological research on the relation between text and context is hermeneutical in nature (a process of understanding of retreat in the context of society) and empirical in design with the starting point the actual situation of retreat and society. I approached the research situation as a situation of action within a social constructionist model. How the researched (co-researchers) experienced and interpreted what has happened on retreat and acknowledgement of their stories by which they gave meaning to the experiences, were valued. It is an empiric explanation of and epistemological reflection on the action of retreat, interpreted by means of theological theories as participant observer. The starting point within the participatory action research model was the lifeworld, the praxis of retreat and the experience of it as well as the beliefs, concerns, perceptions and spirituality of the retreatants. The focus was on breaking down the distinctions between researcher and researched, subjects and objects of knowledge, linking theory and

practice, and a more participative, person centred enquiry, doing research with people and not merely on them. The perspectives and experience (stories) of those under investigation as well as my own perspectives and experience of retreat form part of the listening process and taken into account. It meant an immersion in and among those involved in the study for example during a retreat, staying at a monastery, in order to generate a profound understanding of the group and its context. Ample time was spent with retreatants representative of the different mystic traditions, Dutch Reformed tradition and with monks in the respective monasteries. Documented comprehensive field notes were kept throughout and broad questions asked, phrasing it initially in an open way listening and consulting what the various conversational partners thoughts were, before inadvertently narrowing down the options for further questions. The situational action of retreat as social and religious phenomenon with structures of action was read as a text or listened to as stories and reflectively analysed with empirical questions for example what happened here (what is happening here) and in what way (who and how) is it enfolding ? This more external narrative mode of enquiry was complimented by the internal narrative (what was felt at occurrence of the action?) and reflexive narrative modes (what was felt when asking the question what does all of it mean?). The researcher approached the praxis of retreat as a particular, value-laden action, consciously and unconsciously saturated by meaning. During the inductive phase of the research, progressive exposure as participant action researcher took place participating in and conducting more retreats, interviewing, observing, and interacting with more people in the process.

Regarding the cases selected or the actions of retreat in South Africa as well as the monasteries in Europe that I visited during the study tour the following:

- The focus in South Africa was primarily on people within my own church tradition going on a one-day or weekend retreat because the main aim of the research was to establish the relevance of monastic retreat for the Dutch Reformed tradition. Most of the retreats took place at Good Shepherd retreat centre (because of its location and the more monastic setting) at Hartbeespoortdam but I also made use of other venues with the same character for example nature, quietness, chapel. I chose these venues for their *monastic* atmosphere, accessibility, and geographical convenience. I conducted seven of the twelve retreats myself and participated as retreatant or pilgrim with others on the other occasions. The total figure of retreatants (co-researchers) during the retreats was two hundred and thirty four, of which 95% were Dutch Reformed.

- The decision for visiting the three monasteries in France and in Italy was based on the three orders within monasticism for example Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize, which were relevant for the research journey (motivation for choosing these orders was outlined in The Church of Reconciliation and Monastery of Taize situated in France is the only monastery within this monastic order. The Benedictine monastery of La Pierre Quie Vire also situated in France is an old and very secluded monastery and retreat establishment and one of the more famous in Europe. The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi was included because it contains the tomb of St. Francis, founder of Franciscan spirituality and a monastery built to commemorate his life.

The epistemological reflective narrative was shaped by the following more monastic type of retreats as preparation for and integral part of this research journey. Those in South Africa were the following:

- My first two-day private monastic retreat 26-28 May 1996 in Rosettenville.
- Three-day midweek retreat at Chapel Hill 16-18 March 1999 (group of Dutch Reformed pastors of Pretoria-North diocese) led by me.
- One day retreat at Leopard Lodge outside Pretoria 17th of August 2002 (Dutch Reformed congregation members) led by me.
- Weekend retreat at the Heidelberg youth centre 25-27 October 2002 led by me (high school children aged 14 -16, Dutch Reformed and other denominations).
- Weekend retreat at Good Shepherd centre Hartbeespoortdam 28-30 October 2002 led by dr. Willem Nicol and rev Barry van der Merwe (Dutch Reformed pastors).
- One-day retreat at the St. Mary's Anglican school in Hatfield Pretoria 17th of August 2003 led by me (Small group leaders, Dutch Reformed).
- Weekend retreat at Good Shepherd centre 24-26 October 2003 led by dr. Johan van den Heever (predominantly Dutch Reformed members, a few from other church denominations).
- Three-day retreat at Good Shepherd centre 3-5 November 2003 led by dr. Willem Nicol and rev Barry van der Merwe (predominantly pastors of the Dutch Reformed church).
- Weekend retreat at Good Shepherd centre 23-25 March 2004 led by me (Dutch Reformed members).
- One day retreat at Stigmatine Catholic Brothers in Pretoria-North 13th of June 2004 led by me (Dutch Reformed small group/cell leaders).
- Two and a half day retreat at Good Shepherd centre 1-3 November 2004 led by Dr. Willem Nicol and rev Barry van der Merwe (mostly Dutch Reformed first time retreatants).
- A weekend retreat at Wortelgat centre near Stanford 28-30 October 2005, led by me (Dutch Reformed congregational church board).

I undertook a study tour or *pilgrimage* as part of the research journey during March and April of 2003 to the monasteries at Taize, La Pierre Qui Vire, and Sacro Conventio Di San Francesko, spending at least one week at each of the venues. The abbot, monks and retreatants knew that the reason for my being there was part of my research but also part of my own spiritual journey. During the qualitative research process, more prevalent in empirical theological research, the focus has been on opinions, deductions, points of view, and insights as data that were comparable.

2.2.1 Participant Observation

The research took place with the researcher part of the action of retreat either as spiritual director leading the retreat or as one of the retreatants when someone else was conducting it. Only on one occasion (November 2003), I have not been part of the weekend, with questionnaires distributed at the start of the retreat by the spiritual director and afterwards collected. The aim during the research journey was to observe over a four year period first hand the practice of retreat, and to gain insider knowledge of the research field through increasing assimilation as a participator and pilgrim. Within the narrative and participatory action research model, I followed an overt observation strategy in the observing, interviewing and surveying, by revealing to those on retreat the nature of my research and inviting them to share with me their experience of retreat or any questions or observations from their perspective regarding my role or the research questions. Furthermore, I emphasized that I regarded and valued them as co-researchers or dialogical partners, and the importance of their lived experience and stories . The participatory hermeneutical circle of Ricoeur was implemented with the apprehension that the researcher belongs to the whole of what is happening during retreat and is part of the faith community. The experiences and stories of the people and communities I worked with as researcher were valued in order to understand the practical knowledge in which the human social action of retreat enacted

and constructed culture. Although I became an active part of the observed field, I deliberately took at times an outsider or non-participant stance in order to reflect and evaluate critically myself (theological presuppositions, ecclesiological perspectives, own lifeworld, theoretical framework) and the communicative action and elements of retreat. Both the dialectics between belonging (insider perspective) and dissociation (outsider perspective) were embodied. Nevertheless, because of the qualitative nature of the research, a higher level of belonging and entering the lifeworld of the researched and action of retreat during the study tour to monasteries overseas and during the retreats in South Africa, was accomplished.

The observations because of the qualitative approach were not predominantly systematic or standardised but I rather tried to remain flexible and responsive to the processes themselves. It allowed me to get closer to the data and to engage with the subjects as an insider, being more flexible and responsive to their perspectives and experiences. The research questions were also constantly present as a reminder what the focal points of the research were. Reflexive self-observation for example personal emotions, thoughts, experience, questions, spirituality, frustrations, relationship with God, pain etc, as well as observing others during the research were both part of the observation process and documented. I tended to focus my attention specifically on the place of worship or prayer (chapel), the elements of the retreat, ritual aspects, the silence, solitude, meditation, *lectio divina*, music, atmosphere, environment, nature, as well as the people involved in it. Different roles at different stages developed for example that of complete participant or participant as observer or observer as participant or that of the complete observer. Field notes were documented throughout the observation period, initially broad open questions were asked to retreatants narrowing it down with time. I became involved and drenched with the atmosphere of monastic retreat to gain an in-depth understanding of the people and the

context. By increasing participating observation I gained more access to the research field and to people and I found that the observation moved over the years of research through a process of becoming more concrete and focused on the aspects essential to my research questions. It started with an orientation to the research field in the beginning helping me to grasp the complexity of the field of monastic retreat and to formulate concrete research questions. More focused observation followed in which the research perspective focused more and more on what were most essential for the research as epistemological reflection on for example a monastic way of retreat and monastic retreat as way of life, relevant for the Dutch Reformed tradition. Towards the end of the data collection process, the focus was on finding further evidence and examples for the processes and practices of the research questions.

2.2.2 Documents

Documents relating to the three monastic traditions for example the newsletters from Taize, songbooks, media reports, the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize rules or sources of life, as well as documents about the essence and history of each and their founders were studied before, during and after the study tour. It provided essential background, added nuances, and helped to give more insight into the way each tradition approached God and monastic life in his presence, retreat and their way of life. A comprehensive literature study of other documentary sources and books, for example on aspects of the key concepts of the research, has been done and compared to data already gathered. Every item or aspect that had bearing on the research topic was traced and worked through. I approached the literature study as part of the dialogue with and especially listening to the stories of other pilgrims and thinkers, past and present. Notes were taken with anticipation for the research story to develop.

2.2.3 Interviews

During the research journey overseas and the retreats in South Africa there was ample opportunity to utilise qualitative interviews. I actively participated in these interviews with the aim to provide the interviewees many opportunities to give their voice and tell their stories. I spend time listening to what the retreatants or monks had to say, sometimes without posing detailed and focused questions and at other times the focus was on specific subjects I have chosen with more active questioning on my part. At other times, there would be alternation between listening and more specific active questioning. Unstructured, structured, semi structured, focused, semi standardized, problem centred, expert, group and ethnographic ways of interviewing were conducted. Detailed notes were kept of these interviews or tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. Elements of the questionnaires or surveys were also used as questions during some of the interviews. I did not follow the schedule of questions rigorously but rather followed up interesting lines of conversation even if it meant missing some questions in the interviewing process. Overall, I had a rich repertoire of clear answers to the main questions regarding the research objective and was able to gather useful information as background in the process. New questions also emerged at times and were incorporated. I interviewed people individually as well as in groups. When I conducted a retreat, time was sometimes set aside quite early in the retreat, halfway and towards the end to interview the whole group or part of the group or in smaller groups. It concerned the elements of retreat for example the symbols and rituals or their experience of the day or weekend or any of the aspects of the retreat. When I was not the spiritual director of the retreat, I did this more with individual retreatants and with the consent of the spiritual director of the retreat.

2.2.4 Narratives

Constructing stories and narratives as data from some of the interviewee's experiential world in a more comprehensive way were also done. Part of the narrative approach I followed was listening constantly to what people were saying or not saying in the different types of interviews and conversations about the now of the action of retreat. I did it also from a not-knowing stance, and invited respondents to tell in their own way, to speak in their own voices, and to control the topics raised. But in a few cases I specifically did a narrative interview which started with a question such as " Could you please tell me the story of your spiritual journey and how it unfolded up to now at this retreat, you may start as far back as you wish....?. One of the retreatants at the Good Shepherd centre during the March 2004 retreat volunteered after a reflective question of Jesus I asked in the chapel: "do you want to be healed?", to share with me her personal and spiritual life-story and especially her spiritual journey up to then.

2.2.5 Surveys

During the early stages of the empirical fieldwork I realised I had to identify more specific focal points and tendencies in the stories about and experiences of retreat in a different way. A quantitative questionnaire was developed (although not usually part of qualitative research). I used it not so much for the statistical analysis thereof but to find out more about retreatants preferences and experience of specific elements of a retreat and implemented it at most of the retreats in South Africa. It provided a rich repertoire of relevant data regarding the research questions. Each retreatant would receive such a survey questionnaire just before the retreat started stating the motivation for such a survey. Nearly all took one and the return rate was exceptional high, I collected most after the retreat and some were returned by mail, more than 83 % in total were received back. I then quantified the responses under each heading manually and tabulated it (cf Appendix).

I did not restrict the empirical fieldwork only to the above mentioned methods. Group discussions, the observation of specific behaviour, spontaneous conversations, were also used which produced valuable data in the process.

2.3 Discussion of aspects of the Fieldwork Data

Information collected from the field research through interviews, surveys and observations, integrated more extensively with other data (for example with the literature study), are discussed here and where relevant in the rest of the chapters containing the epistemological reflection. The personal observations and interpretation of the researcher are also discussed here and subsequent chapters. A summary of the research journey and findings are presented in chapter six.

2.3.1 Motivation or Purpose for Going on Retreat

The main reason for retreatants going on retreat was to be in the presence of God, drawing closer to God, having a spiritual experience of moving deeper into Gods' presence. The monks or brothers at the three monasteries mentioned the *mystery of Christ* with his unfathomable riches as the main attraction for retreatants coming for retreat. I found that people were attracted to the monastic parable of celibacy, commitment, community, compassion, dedication, ritual and responded to it, sensing the mystery of the Absolute. There was also a very strong transformational need identified, an anticipation of spiritual renewal, inner healing, or regeneration. The need for silence was expressed by most and spiritual growth by many. To be with others as motivation for going on retreat was less important amongst those interviewed and surveyed. Prayer, Solitude, and getting away from the hustle and bustle of life (worries and negative stressors of the *rat race*), and to hear the voice of God (spiritual direction, wisdom) were the other strong motivation factors amongst retreatants.

Many retreatants at Taize pilgrimaged there because they have heard from others that it is a very special or “holy” place to experience God or have had exposure to Taize type liturgies in their own parish or denomination or in the case of many young people, they went because of friends going there. A growing interest in spirituality or sense/hunger for the Mystery or Presence and not necessarily dogma, faith, religion or church denomination brought others to the different monasteries. There were also those with a strong anticipation of going on the retreat to deal with important issues, to get out of the tsunami type circumstances of daily survival to regroup and to return back home different and stronger.

2.3.2 The Retreat Venue

The research results emphasise the importance of the place for retreat for example a venue with a tranquil, quiet, serene, prayer like atmosphere preferably in nature for example gardens, water, mountains etc. A chapel or cathedral as place of beauty and welcome with symbols, icons, colours, candles and paintings, participation in the liturgy/prayer offices, were also important for retreatants to experience Gods’ presence. The accommodations and food were not important, as long as it was simple and clean. The retreatants I listened to on the overseas research journey nearly all specifically went to the three monasteries because of the to them “holiness” or uniqueness of the venues regarding setting, spiritual or symbolic dimensions or connectedness to the three spiritualities and founders of the respective monastic traditions.

2.3.3 Preference regarding the Type of Retreat

The most preferred type of retreat for Dutch Reformed and the other respondents and interviewees was a Monastic type of retreat at a retreat centre or monastery. The monastic type of retreat was understood as a retreat that included for example a chapel, divine prayer-office meetings (community prayers), silent meditation, listening prayer, solitude, short

scripture meditations, some group discussion and a more subdued worshipping or liturgy. The least preferred were a charismatic (more lively praise, bible studies, and gifts of the Spirit) or Pentecostal type. A church camp type (big hall, bible studies, group activities, games, singing, and discussions) of retreat was not popular at all with adults interviewed and surveyed. Most of the Dutch Reformed young people (14-17 years of age) preferred a monastic retreat if group discussions and activities form part of such a retreat and some of them were quite happy with a church camp type of retreat. Only two respondents were not drawn to any type of retreat at all.

2.3.4 Definition or Idea of Retreat

Only a small group of respondents defined retreat as going away to a specific place to worship, pray, have group bible studies, relax and enjoy the presence with God with other Christians (for example the main focus on group interaction and bible study). The overall idea of a retreat was to go away from the normal/usual environment and circumstances to a specific place to be alone with God. To leave the hustle and bustle of a busy, hurried lifestyle to be in Gods' presence in a more silent and focused or concentrated manner. Many saw retreat primarily as spending time with God but also secondary as a way of interacting with other retreatants.

2.3.5 The Experience of Monastic Retreat

The majority of retreatants responded that the retreat experience was meaningful to them and that their expectations were met. Some of the Dutch Reformed Christians found it difficult to get used to the silence or periods of silence especially at the beginning of the weekend retreat. Many of the youth retreat group felt distracted by others in the group who were too noisy and in their view "not so spiritually inclined." Some retreatants experienced sitting or kneeling on the floor of for example the

chapel very uncomfortable. There was a general tendency that the respective retreats (weekend) were too short and that at least a day or two longer were needed to really integrate and internalize the experience more intensively. Some welcomed the introductory one day or half-day retreats as orientation and preparation for a longer monastic retreat.

2.3.6 Elements of Retreat

Regarding the question what would significantly contribute to make a retreat a meaningful experience in the presence of God? , the following elements stood out: silence, liturgy (Divine Office) in chapel, subdued or meditative type of music for example New Age, Taize, Gregorian or Monastic, visual elements (icons, candles, cross, banners, images), the leadership role of the spiritual director, solitude (time alone with God), group discussions and *lectio divina*.

The following are prominent ideas and recommendations based on the empiric data obtained from co-pilgrims regarding a meaningful way of retreat:

- A balance, harmony and unity between meditation, music, silence, solitude, visuals, group discussions etc.
- Ample time for the opportunity to rest, sleep, pray, experience healing.
- More direction on the periods of silence and goal and content thereof.
- Silence, *Lectio Divina*, Eucharist, Group caring and sharing.
- Silence, Worship, Group discussions.
- Solitude, Silence, *Lectio Divina*, Prayer.
- Serenity, peaceful atmosphere and surroundings.
- Scripture meditation, Prayer, Peace, Tranquillity.
- *Lectio Divina*, Prayer of the heart.
- Teaching on Meditation and *Lectio Divina*.

- Spiritual Director available for meeting one to one.
- Some retreatants who were more advanced than others regarding Retreat experience preferred more specialised/focused or intense monastic retreats.
- Silence, Holy consecrated prayer saturated atmosphere.
- Most retreatants do not prefer silence during meals.
- Ample time alone with God but also time for some group discussions.
- Periods of Silence with also some time for wordiness.
- Preference for more secluded and quiet venues.
- More time periods for Silence.
- Chapel environment and atmosphere with the Divine Office three times daily.
- Nature; beauty of gardens, water, mountains, flowers.
- More time available for one-to-one discussions with Spiritual Director.
- A Team (a support group) to assist the Spiritual Director.
- Some preferred that married couples should stay in separate rooms.

2.3.7 Preferred Spirituality and Faith Stories

Most of the retreatants' preferred spirituality tended towards the emotional/feelings/heart spirituality type and the mystical/meditative/silent spirituality. I anticipated a bigger rational/head spirituality contingent than mystical/meditative. This could be ascribed to a possible postmodern shift taking place in the Dutch Reformed church to mystic experience or because of an attraction to the opposite quadrant of the spirituality circle (the head spirituality was the dominant spirituality in the Dutch Reformed church in modernistic era). The spirituality of the Dutch Reformed youth retreat group as well as young adults interviewed at Taize was more emotional/exhibitive/joyful/charismatic. There was a strong need despite preferred spiritualities to experience God in a deep and profound way.

The faith stories of the Dutch Reformed youth retreat group revealed elements of rebelliousness, many questions, and a spiritual hunger for God and his

presence. A few were so called “drop outs” or troublemakers who went only on retreat to play and have fun. Most of them talked about a need for healing, forgiveness, to be touched by God, and new hope for the future. Many of the young adults I interviewed at Taize were there from all over Europe and the United States and India. Some were active in their respective denominations or parishes while others were not religious or interested in church at all. Most felt drawn to the “different” way (monastic/mystic) of worshipping at Taize. Others came for a different type of holiday experience. Many young people had no faith story to share except that they were seekers on a pilgrimage to find “something spiritual” in the monasteries. Most of the adults I met at Taize called themselves Christians but were not part of a specific church tradition anymore. Their view of God were less dogmatic and rational/intellectualistic and more “new age” for example God as cosmic energy, as the source, being in everything and connecting all. Some of the interviewees have not only been on Christian monastic retreats but also Buddhist retreats with elements of silence, relaxation, yoga, and meditation. Interviewees at the Benedictine and Franciscan monasteries were predominantly Catholic and those at Taize representative of the ecumenical circle of Christian tradition

Nearly all of the adult Dutch Reformed retreatants had a very churchlike/denominational upbringing, dogmatic and with traditional value systems. Their faith stories spoke of a long history of being part of a more disassociate spiritual environment. Many experienced a conversion or regeneration when they were teenagers. They felt drawn over the years more and more to an associative experience of an authentic walk with God. They lead very busy and complicated lives. Most of them were quite involved in their respective churches’ programmes and activities. They shared their feelings of tiredness and guilt and they felt they neglect God in the process of hectic pace and full diaries. Most retreatants spoke of a hunger for more intimacy with God and living more spiritual and balanced lives. The stories shared were at times drenched with deep feelings of pain and wounded ness as well as serious and

deep doubt and questions about God and suffering and the meaning of life.

2.3.8 After Retreat

Regarding the way forward retreatants witnessed about a positive influence or impact after the retreat for example in their relationship to God, self and others. There was a definite need identified to make retreat part of their lives in future as well as making some of the elements of the monastic way for example silence, contemplation and solitude, art of their walk with God. Most required further guidance in this regard, for example how to apply the life enriching experience of retreat into normal everyday busy schedules? There is a need for spiritual direction on the journey through life after or between retreats. Pilgrims at Taize, La Pierre Quie Vire, and Sacro Conventio di San Francesco I interviewed, make an annual or biannual pilgrimage to monasteries like these. The Taize pilgrims spoke about going to churches when back home that have some services with Taize type liturgies. Many make use of or want to implement the different rules of the three orders as guidelines in a variety of ways in their walk with God. Pilgrims mentioned making time in busy schedules to become still and alone or going alone to secluded places in nature to have some quiet and time alone and to pilgrimage to other sacred venues.

2.4 Spirituality

An accentuation of the *local narrative* rather than universality is typical in postmodernity as well as a focus on *experience* as prime mediator of truth and reality. The researcher and the researched belong to particular spiritual traditions that is culturally and historically mediated (Cartledge 2003:18). Spirituality is better experienced than described. Words do not succeed (Lombaard 2001:60-61; cf Kagan 2002) to portray adequately the “sense-sational” dimensions of spirituality. It is like dancing; play; sex and pleasure (cf Kourie 2001:4); taste and touch and the other senses (Gorringe 2001:1-27), breath and wind (McGrath 1999:1-2).

2.4.1 Trends in Spirituality

It is quite common today hearing about people who experience a deep spiritual hunger. Those who are familiar with spiritual traditions with roots long, deep, strong and far back into history know that this is nothing new. What is striking though is the great variety of ways in which people are satisfying this hunger today. Many of the books on the new spirituality focus on the soul and the sacred and are concerned with addressing the loss of soul so pervasive in contemporary Western cultures. In many of the recent developments, a sharp line has been drawn between spirituality and religion with an implicit or explicit conviction that what really matters is spirituality. Religion, religious traditions and religious affiliations have often been negated in the process for example in the emergence of the secular retreat movement in North America and Switzerland. Armstrong (2005:11) refers to it as “a godly move into a post-religious age to be welcomed”. A phrase frequently heard for example at Taize in conversations was “I am not religious but definitely spiritual.”

Some notable trends of contemporary spirituality are:

- A New Age form of spirituality with elements of psychology, occult, health programs, transcendental meditation, the esoteric and dream work. Webber (1998:18-19) states that because people are starved for the supernatural in a hedonistic and secular age, looking for mystery they rush to the gods of the new age and embrace all sorts of powers in order to experience spirituality. This new trend functions what Downey (1998:8), describes as a “spiritual smorgasbord, a sort of salad bar approach to spirituality which invites a nibble here and there on whatever suits one’s taste.”

- An increased appreciation of psychological insights especially regarding the experience of the spiritual quest and the therapeutic aspects thereof.
- A trend to turn to the Eastern religions for inspiration and practical guidance for instance Zen Buddhism practices.
- There is a growing awareness of a sacredness of the earth, aura of magnetic fields and of the sacred in the non-human life and the cosmic elements.
- There is a proliferation of various self-help or how-to movements to achieve healing or wellness, to help people to let their days go better and not for the sake of the sacred itself.
- There is also the current of emergence of feminist spirituality (Conn 1983) and masculine spirituality (Nelson 1988).

The research journey identified a growing interest regarding spirituality in general and in the ancient mystic traditions of Christianity and other religions. It could be because of the corresponding paradigm shift taking place. People are reading the spiritual writers of the past in ever-increasing numbers. More and more retreat centres and monasteries especially in England, Italy, and France cannot keep up with the demand of pilgrims booking retreats at these centres. Previously thought of as primarily a Catholic concern the interest today in retreat and spirituality is widespread among Christian of different tradition. Interest in retreats, spiritual direction and discernment is growing, an increasing number of persons enrol in spirituality courses offered through seminaries, universities and institutes and an increasing number of professional organizations for example Retreats International. The trend in South Africa

seems to be moving in this direction too, for example, a place like the Good Shepherd Retreat Centre be fully booked months in advance, the growing numbers of institutes for and conferences on spirituality (especially mystic spirituality). More and more pastors are going on or directing retreats. This search or interest in spirituality in South Africa might be also the result of the big cultural and political changes that occurred in the society since 1994. According to Senn (1983:95), a study of the history of spirituality showed that some of the most creative periods in the history of Christian spirituality occurred during times of historical transition. Although for many the strong interest in spirituality is probably not much more than romantic fascination or naivety for some, for others it may be because of feeling left without a compass on the journey of life. The cultural, religious, political, social “ruins” of violence, AIDS, abuse of power, questioning of a tightly knit belief in a divine plan or provident God may create a sense of chaos, fragmentation, and disorientation in some people. Downey (1998:54) states that “there is a growing awareness of the need to rely on hidden reserves, inner strength, the life of the spirit in the human heart and as outer worlds collapse, there seems to be a movement inward” This notion was tested as part of the empirical research project. Long (2001:21) refers to a need of some people within a Christian liturgical context for “an experience of God that is *real* to them”. They wait for the miracle that the liturgist will not only say that God is present (he/she has said it many times before) but somehow make it real to them for example through the experience of the sacraments or sacrament of words or creative use of ritual and symbol. Pilgrims on retreat, who wanted to be moved deeper into the presence of God while being there, confirmed this need.

2.4.2 Defining Spirituality

In view of this tidal wave of interest into spirituality, various trends are developing regarding spirituality and the concept is cropping up more and more in the media, and with so many books on spirituality the question emerges: what then is Spirituality?

- The encyclopaedia of world spirituality describes it as “that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions the spirit. This spiritual core is the deepest centre of the person. It is here that the person experiences ultimate reality” (Cousins 1985:i).
- Joanne Wolski Conn (1986:3) speaks of spirituality in terms of the capacity for self-transcendence.
- In the various spirituality movements today, there is a growing awareness of levels of reality not immediately apparent; that there is more than meets the eye. There is a quest for personal integration in the face of forces of depersonalisation and fragmentation. One of the results of the shock of history and forces of contemporary culture for example wars and violence, abuse of authority, narcissism, pragmatism and unbridled restlessness is a turn inward, a greater reliance on self instead of relying on outer worlds of meaning and purpose and value (Downey 1998:16-22, cf Senn 1983:95).
- For Cunningham & Egan (1996:6) spirituality refers “to that dimension or dimensions of human experience which provide the spiritual aspect of our lives by enriching and giving thickness to our ordinary existence.”
- Ewert Cousins (1985:xiii) describes spirituality as “the inner dimension of the person where ultimate reality is experienced”.
- Gordon Wakefield (1983:v) views spirituality as “the constituent of human nature which seeks relations with the ground or purpose of existence”.

- In the very broad sense of the term, spirituality concerns a “progressive, consciously pursued, personal integration through self-transcendence within and toward the horizon of ultimate concern” (Sneiders 1989:684). It refers to the experience of consciously striving to integrate ones’ life not in terms of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives. There are many different kinds of spirituality and although some of them may have no explicit reference to God at all, they may be authentic spiritualities nonetheless. Spiritual in this sense refers to the realisation or actualisation of the human spirit.
- Downey (1998:15) defines spirituality as “a way of consciously striving to integrate one’s life through self-transcending knowledge, freedom and love in light of the highest values perceived and pursued”.
- Roof (1998:22) distinguishes clearly between spirituality and religion and feels that spirituality is essentially part of being human and that religion is optional for and even obstacle on the spiritual journey.
- Nelson (1988:21) sees the ways and patterns by which a person relates emotionally, physically and intellectually to that which is real and worthwhile for that person as spirituality.
- Spirituality can refer to those aspects that have to do with the immaterial and intelligent side of people, the part that can experience the transcendent. It can also refer to all the activities and attitudes characteristic of a persons attempt to connect with Deity (see Ware 1995:10).
- Spirituality in my view refers to a spiritual journey, a *pilgrimage* where the direction and support of spiritual accompanists, guides, or directors may be of value. I agree with Waaijman (cf Waaijman 2000:467-468, 675-677) that a *mystical* perspective determines and frames this pilgrimage as an intensification of the *inner experience* of the *Divine Mystery*.

The concept spirituality, functions as a container covering many ideas and notions, difficult to pin down into precise meanings. The sense people have of the sacred or the spiritual on the pilgrimage of life and their definition of spirituality are mediated through texts, traditions, experiences in the past and communal realities, which embody the sense they have of lifes' purpose, value, and meaning. Spirituality describes a way that human beings want or need to express their commitment to the transcendental or spiritual side of their being in certain behaviour. The concept spirituality may also be pointing to an orientation to life or ascribing meaning to life that gives a sense of direction on the pilgrimage through life. People could furthermore experience spirituality as a dynamic force or inspirational drive, which provides energy for the spiritual journey (Wissink & Zweeman 1989:9). It is necessary for spirituality to reflect both the element of mystery (keeping it dynamic and alive) and material aspects (keeping it practical in everyday life).

2.4.3 Christian Spirituality

Cunningham & Egan (1996:7) defines spirituality as follows: "Christian spirituality is the lived encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit and is concerned not so much with the doctrines of Christianity as with the ways those teachings shape us as individuals who are part of the Christian community living in the larger world." Cunningham & Egan (1996:9-21) describe the contours of Christian spirituality as a way of life, which has direction and a goal with the realisation that as pilgrim one has not arrived yet. It could also refer to a life of discipleship, where to know or understand Christ is perceived as a journey, a pilgrimage, and not abstract philosophy, code of beliefs and dogma. Christian spirituality has always had at its heart the imitation of Christ in the patterning of one's life on what is known about him (see Ware 1995:14). The call to discipleship is a call to belong to a community of love that finds its highest expression in the sharing of the Eucharist. To be authentic, Christian spirituality becomes

real by the gift of the Holy Spirit that inspires the relationship with God in Jesus Christ. McGrath as systematic theologian (1999:2) defines Christian spirituality as follows: “Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith”. Both the communion with God in Christ, and the ways in which that communion is initiated, maintained, improved, and lived out in life are essential in Christian spirituality to be authentic. God is the source of spirituality on a journey of grace (interiority) which is part of everyday life to be lived out in practice (exteriority) (Ludik 1998:34-40; cf Van der Merwe 1990:26). The experience of and communion with God, provide the lens through which life and reality are viewed, shaping a new reality in the process. In this sense, spirituality refers more to a total *holistic life orientation and lifestyle* than to fragmented spiritual aspects for example faith, doctrine, or mystical union with God. Human beings are by nature spiritual and this spiritual dimension provides the ability to transcend or break out of the limits of self-absorption, self-isolation, and self-preoccupation. Peck, a psychiatrist claims that everyone has a spiritual life, whether they acknowledge it or not (in Ware 1995:10). The human spirit is drawn to unfathomable mystery, which believers call God. Spirituality becomes according to Downey (1998:35) *Christian Spirituality* “when this quest for God is actualised by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which brings about a relationship with God in Jesus Christ and others in the community, which bears his name and lives by the Spirit.” To these aspects or parameters of Christian spirituality could be added the formulations of insight about life, for example by tradition in written form, in music, ritual, liturgy as well as the scholarly disciplines and research which studies the experience of Christian life. Conn (1987:972) refers to spirituality as “both a lived experience and an academic discipline.”

The following factors could influence and shape spirituality:

- Context that form the background for the experience of God in a specific historical context of economics, social and cultural factors. Spirituality cannot be neutral but is like theology itself, contextual (Leech 1987:9).
- Psychological components for example temperament, type of personality, intellectual and emotional capacities. Ware (1995) make use of Holmes' (1980) circle of four spirituality types who used Jung's theory of personality interpreted by Briggs-Myers as basis for the typology.
- Church tradition, for example symbol, text, music, theology, architecture, worship styles, ritual, ethics, and history. Johnson (1988:68-70) identifies seven traditions: evangelical, charismatic, sacramental, activist, academic, ascetic, and mystic. For this research journey, the shaping influence of the Dutch Reformed (rational, academic, evangelical) and Catholic, Eastern Orthodox (sacramental, mystical) traditions are relevant.
- Narrative refers to the crisis, relationships, seasons, and many daily experiences that influence people's lives. It is the stories about abilities, struggles, actions, competencies, desires, work, interests, conquests, achievements, and failures (Morgan 2000:5, 6; cf Ludik 1998:97). Spirituality is thus presented in story form and the biblical stories can lead to reinterpretation and refiguration of personal stories.

All this mean that the lived spiritual experience of people can be articulated and formalized in different ways. Spirituality will not and need not take shape the same way in everyone. In the Franciscan, Benedictine and Taize traditions, the influence of an outstanding spiritual leader gave rise to or formed spiritual experiences. For example the spiritual

experiences of St. Benedict is expressed in the rule of St. Benedict's and the orders of Benedict and this rule in turn have given rise to numerous other writings on the rule and have been deeply formative of the spiritual lives of generations of Benedictine monks and lay followers of the rule. These writings and those of St. Francis and Br. Roger are part of the data investigated in this study. Christian spirituality is rooted in a sense of belonging to a people who together express their sense of the sacred through gesture, word, action, tradition, event and community and this presence of the sacred is mediated through persons for example St. Benedict, St. Francis or Br. Roger and pre-eminently the person of Jesus Christ. Although the Christian traditions' spiritual wisdom with the elements of narrative, symbols and praxis (see Cartledge 2003:18) has its shortcomings and cannot provide ready answers for everything, it is important to remember that all those who seek for a formative and authentic spirituality are part of an ongoing story of which the roots are deep, strong and long.

There seems to be a growing interest for deeper familiarity with monastic communities, mystic figures, and movements who have gone before on this journey and the classical spiritual disciplines. The aim will not be so much to seek refuge in monastic-mystic narratives but to retrieve riches and relevance for retreat in a modern Dutch Reformed environment. The relevance of these narratives for the way retreats are conducted and experienced currently within the researcher's own church tradition, is a focal point. The history of Christian spirituality as living in Christ by the Spirit is a story of flesh and blood people who lived in very different situations than today. The challenge is to seek ways of allowing them to speak to the current situation not forcing own agendas into their writings and lives. What is needed are also a self-criticism and a willingness to constantly rework own presuppositions and assumptions. Downey (1998:65) urges researchers "to resist the temptation to see in earlier

periods what we want to see, thereby validating our present beliefs by our naïve reading of history.”

The researcher will attempt to honour the history of the relevant traditions under study while trying to understand persons, writings, and movements within their own context. The great figures of the monastic spiritual tradition may today appear traditional or old fashioned but they gave expression to the life of Christ in the Spirit in ways that the mainstream church at that stage did not always understand or accepted as is shown in how many of these figures were not honoured, or recognized even outcasted by the traditions of their eras. Therefore, I grasped the opportunity to listen the stories of these groups and persons who have been marginalized and disenfranchised not only by historical processes but also in the way in which accounts of history have traditionally been passed from generation to generation. An appreciation of Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan movement will be deficient unless it is considered alongside Claire and her sisters (nuns) who sought to live the gospel in the same way that the brothers did, but were restricted from doing so by powerful ideological-ecclesiastical structures in the Catholic Church. It is only in recent years that the strength of her legacy has been integrated within the Franciscan consciousness.

In view of the above discussion, it is probably more appropriate to refer to Christian spiritualities. Spirituality refers to, as already described, to the whole of Christian life in response to the Spirit. Different responses gave rise to different forms of expression or diverse spiritualities. The different traditions show that various figures and movements in Christian history have approached the quest for God and self-transcendence and community life in different ways, even within monastic spirituality. Even more so regarding the different approaches between Protestant,

Charismatic, and Catholic Christian experience and pursuing of ultimate values and ideals. More examples of this variety are:

- St. Francis of Assisi to whom the ideal of the word of God was to be lived out by a literal imitation of the life of Jesus Christ especially the poverty principle.
- St. Benedict pursued the ideal of listening to God in the constant rhythms of work and prayer throughout the day (later divided in 7 Divine Offices).
- The Taize community puts emphasis on ecumenical unity among Christians in the praxis of reconciliation and forgiveness (name of church: "Church of Reconciliation").

2.4.4 Spirituality Types

Corinne Ware (1995) used and reworked the spirituality typology of Urban T. Holmes (1980). Anthropologist Victor Turner under whom Holmes studied developed a parallel theory on human relationships and society describing it as *structure* and *anti-structure* (cf Chapter 5). It corresponds to thought patterns of *doing* (action) for example rational, verbal, sequential, and orderly and *being* (receptive) for example tacit, intuitive, diffuse in operation, less logical and neat. Wares' spirituality circle provides a contemporary circular model relevant for someones' personal spiritual experience within the context of the experience of others. It is a helpful instrument in this study to reflect for example on the prevalent or preferred spirituality within the Dutch Reformed and Monastic traditions. The circular way the types are presented, emphasises that each of the spirituality types as types of authentic religious experience is important and essential as part of a balanced whole. Ware rightly (1995:29) stresses the idea that each person or group represented by each of the quadrants of the circle, has a tendency toward favouring one type of spirituality over other types. There is also an attraction although many times

unconsciously to the opposite quadrant of the preferred spirituality. The types or quadrants are (Ware 1995:37-45, 84-92, cf Ware 1980:7):

2.4.4.1 Head Spirituality

It is an intellectual *thinking* spirituality favouring what can be touched, seen, and imagined vividly. Content is important to this group and systematic congruence of thought and belief. Study groups, analytical/dogmatic sermons, order, coherence, words, dogma, and theological reflection are their preferred way of relating to God. Excess within this quadrant could result in rationalism as an over intellectualization of the spiritual life which may become dogmatic and dry with the loss of feeling. The growth or challenge here would be to help these people for example during a retreat to gradually sense their interior connection with God and increase attention to the feeling and experiential side of spirituality. The unstructured and solitary and silence elements of monastic retreat are difficult at first for these pilgrims to grasp.

2.4.4.2 Mystic Spirituality

Listening to and *being* with God, waiting rather than speaking to God or analysing is prominent within this spirituality type. The aim within mystic spirituality is union with the Holy as a journey. Representatives of this type usually are by nature more introspective, silent, contemplative, and intuitive and focused on the inner world. The mystery of God, ascetics, simplicity of life, spiritual direction, solitude, and silence are their preferred way of journeying in Gods' presence. They may tend to be uncomfortable in Western Protestantism church gatherings especially charismatic ones. This spirituality can provide an inspirational and uplifting spiritual experience of everyday life with a sense of the Holy. Excess here would be a quietist stance, an exaggerated retreat from reality and relationships in the form of spiritual (kingdom) passivity. The growth challenge for this

group would be interaction with others also when on retreat and providing teaching techniques of meditation and contemplation.

2.4.4.3 Heart Spirituality

This is an affective charismatic spirituality with the aim to achieve in transformational sense holiness or personal renewal in life. A focus on a close walk with God emphasising evangelism, witnessing, testimonials, and music in corporate worship is typical of this spirituality. This spirituality type tends to stress more the immanence of God who is very much here and now than his transcendence. Prayers are less formal than the head quadrant but still wordy and extemporaneous. Characteristic is the need to use television networks showing a specific exhibitionist style of worshipping and spreading the Gospel globally. Excess here could result in pietism becoming too *exclusive* against the world or others that experience God differently. The growth potential may be in realising that God is not the punitive parent but nurturing one who accompanies each pilgrim on his or her personal journey. Retreats within this spirituality type tend to be noisier, emotional and group orientated. The next type discussed will be this group's opposite potential attraction.

2.4.4.4 Kingdom Spirituality

This group take responsibility for change, assertive in their desire to implement a vision of the world as the kingdom of God. They are not necessarily interested in organised religion and are prepared to sacrifice personal lives for the realization of the kingdom on earth. Kingdom spirituality equates prayer and theology with action. Excess may result in moralistic tunnel-vision syndrome and single-mindedness.

There are different ways of journeying with God, experiencing his presence, different styles of prayer, meditation, spiritual expression and conducting a retreat. Differences are legitimate and reflection of the God-

given variety of created things. The circle of spiritualities has in it the possibility of *inclusiveness*, productive dialectic, and fostering within oneself and ones' church tradition the development of a balanced and "healthy" or holistic spirituality. In monastic mystic spirituality a receptive or listening mode, an experiential awareness is predominant as an alternative or complementary strategy for engagement with the world and with God (*associative*). It is very different from the active or doing/busy mode and the more verbal/rational stance so characteristic of the Western Protestantism and in the history of the Dutch Reformed church (*dissociative*). Anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) *The Ritual Process*, under whom Holmes studied, developed a parallel theory dividing human relationships into two types: anti-structure/mystic experience and structure/order/predictability.

The Dutch Reformed (a church tradition that for many years accentuated the analytical, the orderly, rational reflection on religious experience and a growing interest in charismatic/heart spirituality) pilgrims on retreat had a meaningful mystical experiences (opposite spiritual quadrant). The monastic way of being into his presence via solitude, silence and *lectio divina* expanded their spirituality borders and enriched the walk with God. The mystic experience as opposite quadrant of rational spirituality (for many years dominant in Dutch Reformed tradition) provided and added a new dimension to their spirituality. The suspending of logical rationality (active) stance while waiting on God meant that to just be with God became an end in itself on retreat. Retreatants could discover in them latent capabilities and new dimensions by exploring mystic spirituality type on the retreats. A new appreciation of the way God is experienced in other traditions is developing. The challenge is not to give up what is characteristic within the Dutch Reformed tradition unless it is narrow exclusiveness but to expand the horizon of spirituality.

2.4.5 Protestant Spirituality

Since a new focus developed regarding the bible, it shaped the heart of Reformed spirituality. This new focus was on the bible's word and revelation character versus a law and hidden/concealed character in the pre-Reformation church environment. Ebeling (1962:275) refers to this as "an exegetical discovery with hermeneutical implications." The bible became an open or clear book, not in a semantic sense but on the plane of religion and faith viewed as its own interpreter (Berkouwer 1966:180). Since the Reformation, for example the justice of God was not anymore merely a description of a metaphysical characteristic of God demanding from people to do specific works and fulfilling laws to attain redemption or justification. A shift took place from active to passive justice because of the emphasis on the gift of faith by grace. The Holy Spirit was, as the primary author of the bible the one who created in people faith in the central message of redemption and making it possible to live in a personal relationship with God. A *Coram Deo* life in the presence of God through Jesus Christ was accentuated as well as that by grace alone through faith redemption could become practical in a life of obedience (Krusche 1957:294). The Reformed spirituality, as a world-formative spirituality, was influenced by its view of the bible as the means to know God, his grace, salvation and his will. It meant in practice that the tradition became uninterested in for instance the wordless mystic of Eastern-Orthodox churches' *associative* spirituality, or the contemporary revelations of God through Pentecostal prophets but more focused on an articulated, sober, *disassociative* way of relating to God (König 1998:35).

In contrast to mystical spirituality (piety) in Eastern-Orthodox traditions, sacramental piety in the Catholic tradition, and an enthusiastic spirituality in the Charismatic tradition (see Ramon 1994:81-85), Protestant spirituality (e.g. Dutch Reformed tradition) could be described as austere or sober and rational-modernistic (cf König 1998:34). An analytical rational way of reading the bible replaced a meditative, listening with the heart

attitude. For many years the Dutch Reformed tradition was characterized primarily by such a modernistic-disassociate spirituality. It is part of the legacy of the Church reformation at the start of modernism when the emphasis was more and more on austerity and rationality. Symbols and icons functioning within an associative mystical intuitive spirituality were removed from liturgy. Another example was children who had to undergo rigorous catechism for years before allowed to partake in the Eucharist and during communion-liturgy, long detailed explanation prevailed by means of long formularies. This was in contrast with the Eucharist in the Eastern-Orthodox and Catholic traditions, “presented” as mystery and drama with less focus on rational knowledge and explanations. A stronger emphasis developed in Protestant spirituality on the mind (logic, facts, knowledge), as only conductor between God and people (Nicol 2002:23). If experience did come to the fore, it was always within the context of experience focused on God, for example always understood in terms of the word of God (Burger 1995:80). Protestants tend to function more with the *revelatory* character of God than with the *mystery* of God. It is characteristic of a disassociate spirituality focusing on certainties, exclusivity, rationality, and trying to “control” the Uncontrollable Mystery with conceptualisation and dogmatic formulae.

Within a postmodern era, such a rational mindset in spirituality is becoming less predominant or unpopular. The associative mystical, symbolic, experiential aspects of spirituality are coming to the fore again also within the Dutch Reformed tradition. The question or motivation is not so much what is true but what works or how and where can God or something spiritual be experienced. Van der Merwe (see 1995:11, 12, 16-37) rightly points out that in practice through history many Protestant Christians in the Dutch Reformed church didn't really develop a lifestyle being constantly aware of the presence of God (monastic mindfulness). What did develop in practice were a *divisional* view and way of life

focusing on *God* doing things for example salvation, wisdom, justification and *people* doing things for example conversion, spiritual growth, good works.

The research journey shows that spirituality as an experiential way of life and pilgrimage with God in the Dutch Reformed tradition could develop further or renew in three areas into a *way of life*: introspection (reflection) or interiority, *koinonia* or church community life and life in society including values, ethics, and deeds in action. Burger (1995:81, 82) states that spirituality as it was perceived and practiced over the years within the Dutch Reformed tradition is not one of the high points or more positive aspects of the church' history. Therefore, much can be learned from and experienced within other church traditions in this regard, for example the Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican monasticism that could enrich or complement the Dutch Reformed way of living in the presence of God. One of the main aims of the epistemological reflection during the research journey was investigating in an empirical way the way of retreat and the way of life within monastic spirituality, and its relevance for example to open up new horizons for retreat in the Dutch Reformed tradition.

2.4.6 Studying Spirituality

Spirituality concerns religious experience as such, not merely dogma, concepts, and obligations. The study of spirituality is concerned with the human person in relation to God focusing on the relational and the personal dimensions of this relationship. Downey provides a practical workable approach or framework for studying spirituality. He (1998:120) puts it as follows: "Christian Spirituality is concerned with the work of the Holy Spirit in tensive interaction with the human spirit within a culture, in relation to tradition, in the light of the contemporary events, hopes, sufferings and promises, in remembrance of Jesus Christ, in efforts to

combine elements of action and contemplation, with respect to charism and community and as expressed and authenticated in praxis.”

As researcher I worked within such a framework while considering the lives and stories of St. Benedict, St. Francis, and Br. Roger, their communities and spirituality, the way in which they remember or experience God or uncover the predominant image of Christ that emerges in their writings (stories) and experience. They represent a spirituality with a mystic tendency telling us that it is possible to know that God *is* and not necessarily, *who* God the Ultimate Mystery, the transpersonal and the transcendent are. Eastern Church tradition and Mystic traditions emphasize a reflective, contemplative listening to and being with God. Also relevant are the way they approach retreat and the way they live the specific rule or order in practice. I compared these mystic traditions in a reflective way in order to identify similarities or significant differences and in turn compared with the Dutch Reformed narrative or tradition. The aim was to show the relevance of the monastic traditions for the Dutch Reformed tradition (Western Church tradition and Protestantism emphasise rational analytical thinking about and relating to God). The praxis of retreat, monastic life, and Reformed tradition are different in the way they experience God for example because of the central understanding of God by each tradition and because of the culture from which each had emerged. There has been according to Ware (1995:113) over the years a strong move towards the affective or spirituality of the heart away from mainline intellectualism of many mainline churches and a growing trend toward the mystic as part of a corrective process towards balance or towards a more integrative spirituality.