

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Planning and Preparation of a Retreat

Retreat and pilgrimage follow a *rite of passage* structure. Turner's conceptualization of separation, marginality, reincorporation, and especially *structure and anti-structure* (liminality) is a helpful tool in the planning of retreat as well as to understand the process of monastic retreat as a relevant ritual. Ritual theory focusing on *liminality* or communal connectivity, the centre of the rite of passage ritual development, illuminates the following reflective process. In anthropological theory, Victor Turner's approach to ritual provides a helpful tool of analysis and a framework for planning of a ritual.

#### 5.1 Chicagos' Irving Park Free Methodist Church Retreat

Scandrett-Leathermann (1999:320-324) examined the phenomenon and historical and religious foundation of the Irving Park Free Methodist Church, a multicultural and multi-racial congregation (Chicago, Illinois). He shows how the three-stage process of separation, marginality and reincorporation that produces communal connectivity in the marginal or *liminal* stage, may effect both political and social habit reformation towards resisting hegemonic racism promoting respect for all people. His empirical reflection reveals liminality as a potentially powerful reshaping centre regarding existing *ideologies* and *power structures* in history, politics, society, and religion. Turner and Turner (1978:3) observed that ritual is "not only *transition* but also *potentiality*, not only 'going to', but also 'what may be'. Ritual allows participants to resist oppressive social structures through subversive toleration or transformation of the social structure. Alexander (see 1989:109-128) used Turner's ritual theory in an African-American Pentecostal ritual study. He observed actual political participation by a church whose worship was rich in anti-structure dramas of liminality. He thus argues that the liminal experience can be a source of

motivation for political involvement. Apter (1992:116,222) takes a step further beyond Turner and Alexander by equating *liminality* with *power* (power as negation: revision, transgression, transformation, revolution). He suggests that liminality provides the place for the reconfiguration of power.

The biannual retreat activities of the Chicago's Irving Park Free Methodist Church Retreat, a multicultural and multi-racial, follows the Van Genneep and Turner's schema of rites of passage (Scandrett-Leathermann 1999:322):

- *Separation* as discontinuity with the old social identity, packing and departure from home, work and church,
- *marginality* generating new understanding for a new status and status levelling at the retreat centre for example corporate meals, humour, pranks and in a deeper profound sense during communion liturgy, and
- *reincorporation* that initiates social continuity with new status; as a pilgrim in society and new understanding for example pack up again, back to structure, and new status sustained in fellowship and small groups.

Scandrett-Leathermann (1999:321) describes how especially the Eucharist liturgy, the culminating event of the retreat and a subsequent monthly ritual in their corporate worship, provided the ritual plunge levelling the status of participants (of great diversity) and creating an occasion for *communal connectivity* where the ground was levelled at the foot of the cross. Participants experienced during the retreat liminality, a communal connectivity that revised their informal political or cultural

relationships or a social habit reformation by getting away from home based social structures. Back home within their church community, social habits were reshaped even further in home based ritual of small group meetings and shared meals (agape meals). Scandrett-Leathermann (1999:323) concludes that:

Rituals involving liminality induct persons into the religious and spiritual cosmology. mundane rituals of small groups and table fellowship bolster them in and against the social structure. Liminal and mundane rituals preserve a dynamic between the 'what might be' and 'what is'. Together, mundane and liminal rituals provide vision, connectivity, and habits essential for sustained resistance.

A direct relationship between the communal connectivity of ritual liminality and social change at the Irving Park case study cannot be "proven." However the church did experience since their first biannual and subsequent retreats significant social transformation (located in a 90.6 % white neighbourhood the most ethnical diverse institution of any kind within a 2 kilometre radius), and became transformational agents in their community and elsewhere (Chicago Sun-Times, p 24).

## **5.2 Structure and Anti-Structure (Inter-Structure)**

The liminal period in rites of passage from the Latin word *limen* signifies a threshold to indicate the *transitional phase* of the status of transformation ritual process. Liminal entities are unimportant but are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom conventions, and the ceremonial. Turner (1969:96) describes this stepping over the threshold using two mayor models for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating namely:

- The first is of society as a *structured*, differentiated, and often hierarchical systems of politico-legal-economic positions with different types of evaluation, separating people in terms of more or less,
- the second emerges recognizably in the liminal period, society as an *unstructured* or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.

The liminal phase is an *anti-structure* or an inter-structural situation. It is a transitory state; a potential process of transformation where the neophyte/initiand as transitional being or *limina persona* is defined by a name and a set of symbols (see Turner 1967:94-108,235-236). On the one hand, they are reduced or ground down, their status are levelled, humbled by the way of dressing the same or only a strip of clothing or even naked. On the other hand, they are being fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with the new situation in life. This transition (see Turner 1977:95; cf Scandrett-Leathermann 1999:314) is like death and birth where the physical birth of a baby and the ultimate birth, through death, of a spiritual person provide strong analogies for the rite's transition into the spiritual cosmology.

The liminal group is portrayed as a community of comrades in which familiarity, ease, and outspokenness thrive, not the structure of hierarchically arrayed positions. During the secluded situation distinctions of rank, age, kinship position are transcended under the principle "each for all and all for each." To identify the feeling of human bonding, Turner (1977:96) uses the Latin word *communitas* to emphasize the social relationships rather than the word *community* that often indicates special

relationships or social bonding. *Communitas* not only created via the status levelling process, but also through the general qualities of anti- or inter-structure, which are common during ritual-liminality. Turner (see 1977:106-107) develops a series of binary discriminations to illustrate the contrast between liminal anti-structure and the social status system for example Transition/state, *communitas*/structure, equality/inequality, absence of status/status, no distinction of wealth/distinctions of wealth, sacred instruction/technical knowledge, silence/speech, continuous reference to mystical powers/intermittent reference to mystical powers, and simplicity/complexity.

The initiands in the withdrawn and secluded liminal state, away also from their previous habits and schedules and actions, are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality then is therefore also a stage of reflection, *reflection on the sacred and esoteric and mysteries of life and the supernatural* (see Turner 1977:95). During this phase as symbol rich ritual, their nature may change, transformed from one kind of human being into another. It may also provide access to an antithetical realm of the spirit and accentuate spiritual meaning over perceptual or physical activity. During the process, the self-sustaining integrity of merely perceptual experience can be shattered in order to be transformed by the authentic realities of the ideal. The self is challenged to submit to the central and defining force of reality for example the transcendental other. *Silence* plays an important part during this phase of the ritual and the betwixt and between period may become a period of fruitful darkness to the neophytes. For example, the powerful may be humiliated and the weak may purge resentments as in the Incwala first fruit harvest ritual where the king of the Swazi people must move into a sanctuary or ritual hut, put under traditional rules and divested of all outward authority attributes. In this liminal period, king and people are closely identified in a mystical

solidarity (Turner 1972:243). After this period, the normal, structural order of the Swazi kingdom becomes regenerated into lightness.

Liminality cannot replace social structure as such because society is a dialectical process of successive phases of structure and anti-structure. In society well-bonded social groups, will alternate between fixed and floating worlds. The liminal areas of time and space for example rituals, retreats, carnivals, dramas, films are open to the play of thought, reflection, feeling, and the will. It can generate new models that could replace some of the structural models that control the centres of a society's ongoing life (see Turner 1977: vii, 203). At other times, as in the Ndembu ritual, while liminality finds its power in its contrast to the social system, it may serve to reinforce the social structure. Nevertheless, it usually softens the impact of rigid social structures by suggesting a deeper meaning (a communal connectivity) that underlies the status sensitive interactions of daily life. Structure is part of life for example order, organization, routine and involves organizing time, schedules with due dates, deadlines, tasks, and punctuality. Life without structure is unimaginable but Turners' insights remind us of also another reality beyond order, of other ways of being in the world. The Desert father Antonius, or Francis and the early Franciscans were *out-of-the-ordinary* ways of stepping over a threshold which led to another space or liminoid anti-structure. Some of the ritual in the Taizé, Franciscan, and Benedictine traditions are part of life in their monasteries and invite or facilitate a move into the liminal. Harris (1992:55) believes that liminal ritual is rare in modern Western societies and even in Christianity and that the subversive element in ritual is largely moving to art, music and theatres as artistic form of anti-structure where artists awakens people's sensitivity to the other dimension of life that consists of more than just roles, tasks and production. Certain rites on retreat during the monastic Divine Office for example the Taize cross-ritual, silence etc invited the pilgrims (*initiands*) into contact with God,

leading via gestures, silence, music, kneeling, times of reflection deeper into his presence moving into anti-structure liminality.

The ancient Muslim, Jewish and medieval Catholic pilgrimages were transformed by Celtic and Protestant Christians into the earlier Camp meeting (or church camp) phenomenon. These meetings could have been one of the stimuli of more recent Christian and monastic retreats (Earl 1993:52-69; cf Scandrett-Leathermann 1999:319-320). The early camp meetings were anti-structural rituals of corporate liminality in relation to the weekly structures of church and agricultural labour. The Protestant labourers, geographically distant rural farmers, and their families would come together in August to experience the communal connectivity of lowly and common accommodations and religiously fervent events. Black and white Christians together experienced the power of corporate ritual together, many times as transformation of social imagination or a rebirth in a new social world. I experienced something of this nature in 1998 when leaving the *structural* Dutch Reformed denomination world for four days going to a specific venue with Christians of other denominations and cultures living together there, in very basic plain accommodation where status, profession, denomination, credentials, education etc played no role at all. A profound closeness to fellow pilgrims and intimacy with God were the experience of many present. We returned back after the four days with attitudes, view of God and of others transformed in many ways. The distinctive elements of the four-day pilgrimage and of retreats after that during the research journey were transition, *communitas*, equality, absence of status, sacred instructions, more silence than usual, reference to the Mystical and Transcendental, reflection on life, the sacred and simplicity.

### 5.3 ***Communitas* or Relational Anti-Structure**

Turner (1969:96) uses the term *communitas* to describe person-to-person communication on an equal basis without the functioning of rank or roles, a situation of communion between equal individuals. It is a kind of *communitas* desired by tribesmen and their rites as well as by spiritual directors of retreat or monks in a monastery. *Communitas* refers not so much to pleasurable comradeship or friendship but more to seek together for a transformational experience. It is an experience of going deeper into the essence of being of each person potentially finding there something profoundly communal and sharing. An extreme form of *communitas* and transformational experience on a grand scale is for example the *lifestory of St. Francis of Assisi* who as a quintessential liminar broke away from family ties, wealth, and status by stripping of the clothes his father had given him, and entering a life of poverty and *communitas* with his followers. Francis was not keen on structure, abhorred property and the structure of business, which came with it, and the *communitas* he envisioned and practiced consisted of close unstructured relationships with his friars and a burning, passionate love for Christ. Even when writing a rule it was more, a way of life without clear canonical definition of what communal life ought to be like. As if he was shying away from possible large group relationship superficialities, he spent his final years moving from one small community to another. He also seemed to move back and forth between reaching out to the poor and adding value to the lives of others and retreating to small communities of friars combined with times of solitude.

As the friars multiplied and the Franciscan movement became more successful, the need for structure grew. The pope and cardinals in Rome wanted to know precisely what the movement was all about, thought had to be given to the education of the friars, and caring for the sick and aged among them (structure). Elias, Francis's successor was more of a

*structure* person who organized the order and who overseen the building of the Basilica at Assisi which houses his mortal remains. With Elias's leadership, *structure*, both material and abstract, had begun to replace *communitas* in the movement (cf Turner 1969:149). This could explain why much of the Franciscan scene observed at the Basilica in Assisi portrays more of *structure* than anti-structural *communitas* envisioned by Francis and his rule of life (cf Harris 1992:57). In designing retreat wisdom is needed to find the appropriate relationship between *structure* and *communitas* under each given circumstances of time and place as both are needed.

The research journey to the various monasteries within the Franciscan, Benedictine, and Taizé traditions revealed an atmosphere of *communitas* and liminoid aspects with potential transformational power. The fraternities or community of monks value their community as a community of equal individuals and the *seclusion* of the monasteries with the different rhythm of the monastic way also invites into the liminal. Data from the surveys and interviews accentuate that the pilgrims idea of a retreat, why they go on retreat as well as their experience of the retreat, tend more to the *communitas-liminal* (anti-structural) aspects. The pilgrims perceived the associative mode of monastic spirituality as more attractive, appealing, charged with life and with something magical about it. The atmospheres at the monastic retreats in South Africa were very different from the traditionally strong focus on modernistic *structure* and disassociate spirituality accustomed to within the Dutch Reformed church tradition. Many of the youth pilgrims at Taizé have already left their denominations, and were in a postmodern sense suspicious of traditional religion and church *structure* and authority, spoke of a spiritual thirst for the metaphysical and experiencing the Source or Energy of life at Taize.

Based on the research data, pilgrims found it meaningful to move out of solitude at times for group discussions. To tell their stories they needed people (fellow pilgrims) listening with love, affirmation and creative challenging. However, structure is a relevant and important part of life and of ritual during retreat. For example after some time spent in deep *communitas* as a group during ritual, the spiritual leader can give a signal that it is time for another mode – to share with one another or having tea. The program and elements of a retreat as well as the planning of a ritual are all necessary structure. Structure and anti-structure are part of life, they exist side by side and are co-dependable, and people move back and forth between them, sometimes unsure where to settle. The challenge to the spiritual director in designing and leading a retreat is the wisdom, knowledge, sense, feeling at what stage to emphasize structure, and when a change to anti-structure or *liminoid* modality is due.

The spiritual director should encourage relational anti-structure (*communitas*) rather than demanding or enforcing it. People may need an atmosphere where they feel safe and can relate with one another without being pressured into it or being manipulated into confiding to one another or telling their stories. For example, Taizé provides an atmosphere where pilgrims are treated as persons without invading their personal space or privacy. The community of brothers staying there, permanently model an authentic parable of communion and atmosphere of unity despite the diversity of language, denomination, spirituality and culture where love, hospitality and reconciliation are at the centre. The retreatants found it easy whilst being there to tell their stories in the small groups with people willing to listen with love and creative listening and being able to listen to theirs. The atmosphere of unconditional love provided affirmation and a space where one may be oneself with a feeling of “belonging.” This creation of a empty space to reach out to fellow human beings (many of them still strangers) and inviting them to new relationships made it easy

for the pilgrims to be open, frank, and facilitating spiritual growth in the process. The experience of researcher and co-researchers confirmed that the best and central part of the Christian faith is not so much the doctrine, structure, or system of rules and regulations but an encounter with the risen Christ and being with his people in communion or part of a *communitas* of love (cf Nouwen 1986:65-77).

Anti-structure in the form of *communitas* between pilgrims was the most prevalent at the monastery of Taize where it expressed deep or seeking faith and extraordinary love of God and others. *Communitas* was not the Benedictine and Franciscan monasteries I visited although they seem to cherish it more between the monks themselves than facilitating it for pilgrims retreating there. The stark contrast between a group discussion meeting of pilgrims in Taize with one of the brothers (monks) leading it and such a group meeting at La Pierre Qui Vire monastery under leadership of a monk, emphasised the contrast between *communitas* and structure in practice. The latter was much more formal, structured, and with more focus on the verse for verse elucidation of the bible text. In my experience of the relevant rituals during the research journey, the ritual at Taizé was designed with more focus on *communitas* and *liminality* than was the case with ritual in La Pierre Qui Vire and Convent of St. Francis in Assisi.

#### **5.4 Anti-Structure, Mystery, Transcendence and Spiritual Experience**

During the liminal phase, pilgrims or initiands are in a sense outside of ordinary life. There is progressive exposure to the sacred and the transcendental and transformational power of the liminal indicated ritually in many characteristic symbolisms where ordinary behaviour is turned upside down. The contrast to ordinary life provides access to an

antithetical realm of the spirit or divine where inverted or extreme behaviours or ecstasies may happen.

*Mystery* is at the heart of Christianity and especially within the monastic tradition. God cannot be seen by human beings (Ex 33:19) or be totally fathomed or understood (Rom 11:33-36). Karl Rahner (1985:7-11) stresses the fundamental importance of mystery and transcendence as follows:

mystery in its incomprehensibility is what is self-evident in human life. If transcendence is not something which we practice on the side as a metaphysical luxury of our intellectual existence, but as rather the plainest, most obvious and most necessary condition of possibility for all spiritual understanding and comprehension, then the holy mystery really is the one thing that is self-evident, the one thing which is grounded in itself even from our point of view. For all other understanding, however clear it might appear is grounded in this transcendence. All clear understanding is grounded in the darkness of God.

The words and actions of Jesus had strong anti or inter-structure undertones although he was also teacher and leader (structure roles). For example: he reminded his disciples that leadership requires that they wash one another's feet (Jn 13), his announcing of the Kingdom of God actively in their midst challenging human structures, the meals as table fellowship in the midst of daily life where no one is excluded from worship and the world not to be divided into sacred and profane. Religion as lived experience rather than dogma continued in the early Christian communities who did not distinguish strongly between acts of worship and acts of service (Hahn 1973:30-31). However, with time religion became more organized, spirituality structured, and the liturgy more formalized.

What followed since the Reformation was the building of an enormous edifice of rational theology with a *modernistic* God as base for example there is a God, who sent Jesus, who founded a church, who taught etc. In the process of more focus on theological structure since the Reformation, the base for example the *mystery* of God was ignored, and the experience of God, the metaphysical, an atmosphere of prayer, ritual, meditation and liminality became neglected elements. The risk could be worthwhile to move into, what Turner labels anti-structure, in order for a mystic experience in the receptive mode.

I agree with Harris (1992:66-67) that it would be short sighted to categorize structure in religion as bad and anti-structure as good. Religion is primarily concerned with anti-structure for example the mystery, transcendence, and experience of God but it needs structure to achieve balance. Both need each other to control the excesses of the other. The danger is when structures become an end itself, not co-existing with anti-structure or subservient to it. The challenge is to keep this in mind when planning a way of retreat and way of life.

Reflection on self, life, God and others, as well as moving deeper into a felt presence of God, are part of religious experience and of Christian spirituality. The mystery of God, the *numinous* that excited awe and fascination in the Old Testament prophets and in John receiving Revelations, are part of monastic religious experience during the pilgrimage on earth. Retreatants experienced the divine power as present in the chapels and cathedrals of monasteries overseas and on retreat in South Africa. It was sometimes dramatic and at other times far more gentle. The idea of religious experience as a manifestation of anti-structure and not as an idea or rationality or doctrine is strongly emphasised by Rudolph Otto (1964:1-12). Non-rational ideas about God are often expressed in the word 'holy' for example in the Isaiah chapter six

experience of a prophet in the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* phase, before the mystery and holiness of God. Religious experience for Otto (1964) then is reserved for times when one feels the presence of the numinous extraordinary times, as a move out of profane existence or the usual non-religious world. The danger of this model is a dualistic separation between the sacred and profane. *Monastic spirituality* stresses that we live continuously in the presence of God with a *monastic mindfulness (coram Deo)*. However, when a mother teaches her a child to kneel before God in prayer it symbolizes something of a closing out of the noise and profane of everyday life in order to make contact with God, the *noumenon* and awe-inspiring one.

The majority of the pilgrims interviewed viewed retreat as leaving their “normal” life world behind in order to have more intense or focused contact with the Holy or Transcendental, to move away from the structures of everyday life into liminality. During this phase without trying to persuade or manipulate retreatants into such an experience, a move deeper into a felt presence of God could take place without feelings of guilt or doubt if it did not happen in a profound way or not at all. A conductor of retreat ought to be aware of a potential manipulating or pressuring of pilgrims into a prescribed (*exclusive*) manner of experiencing God during the retreat. With regard to the experience of the atmosphere and elements of a monastic retreat (*new* for many), I would emphasise that some should, none must and all may (*inclusive*).

Generations of anchorites and hermits moved away from structure (normal religious life) into liminality (desert, monastery, and cave) to meet God in a profound and direct way. Today many contemplative communities worldwide are still focusing on this aspect of Christian spirituality. Harris (1992:89) refers to research done by the Religious Experience Research Unit at Oxford which show that it may be worthwhile for established

religion to look into the body of evidence that points to such direct associative experiences of the numinous among people or the need amongst many in this regard. The spirituality and faith stories the Dutch Reformed pilgrims on retreat in South Africa revealed a growing trend to mystic spirituality as preferred spirituality. The opposite of the structural, verbal-rational, sequential, orderly, language and action mode of the modernistic paradigm, so characteristic of the Dutch Reformed tradition until recently, is the intuitive, tacit less “neat,” and more mystical of a postmodern paradigm. A shift that the psychologist Arthur Deikman (1971:481-489) regards as essential to a *mystical* experience. I agree with Ware (1995:34) that the analytical, reflective thinking of Western culture and in my view theology tended to neglect experiential awareness of Gods’ presence. This in turn limited ways of knowing in the liminal sense of the word and made mystic experience into something “accidental.” Inner mountain, authentic prayer and experience by the pilgrims of Gods’ presence occurred during the retreats in the receptive, *mystical*, anti-structure *liminoid* mode

### **5.5 Turners’ Theory on Meaning in Ritual and a Way of Retreat**

Ritual as the use of symbols to express meaning can be an instrument in the expression of meaning and a way to express what pilgrims experience; allowing them to explore feelings, not acknowledged in other ways. Ritual may emphasize either structure or anti-structure and these categories were useful in determining what the rituals during retreat should be or how symbols can be used to express meaning in the ritual and what the kind of atmosphere and framework of the retreat as a whole could be like. I agree with Nelson (1972:17-25) and the experience of fellow pilgrims that to go on retreat essentially means to withdraw and interpret, reflect and meditate on, leaving structure moving into *limitas-communitas* with the invitation or opportunity to experience the Mystery of God and being alone or also with fellow pilgrims at times. A clear break

with the usual structures and pressures of life take place for example the city, church, work and home environment departing to another venue and a *way of being*; usually in scenic surroundings (nature, gardens, chapels etc). Status, work, title, gender, age, accomplishments, clothes, and material possessions become secondary or preferably non-existent in their role and importance and everybody becomes part of a flow of things happening, in order to experience God and others. The research journey showed that planning and preparation for retreat is necessary by the spiritual director, some will plan more intensively than others, but it is commendable that anti-structure will be the primary goal of the monastic retreat experience. There could be an emphasis on relational anti-structure (*communitas*) for example during Eucharist, group discussions and feedback on spiritual matters and more playful interaction between retreatants. There could be an emphasis on liminality during the prayer times and *lectio divina* in the chapel, dying moments ritual and silent solitude outside. A flexible planning process and the eventual 'program' (structure) that can be adapted easily during the retreat could prevent structure to take over or become an end in itself. Usually at the beginning of the retreat weekend, more structural elements may be relevant in the form of a teaching on for example on monastic retreat or the aim with the retreat or on silence and meditation, then followed by a prayer service or liturgy in the chapel (with more focus on anti-structure). Before or after the service, a list of things that can be expected during the retreat can be communicated for example times of silence, music, singing, and meditation on scripture for example a format or a structure (a program). The challenge is though not so much focusing on the format itself, but rather to facilitate space and atmosphere for coming into contact with the Mystery of God or to experience his presence in a deep way or with the 'heart'. I changed the planned and meticulously prepared format many a time just prior to or even during the service in the chapel or any other element of the retreat. It helped a great deal to get together with the

pilgrims after the liminal time together, moving into a more structural mode asking them what they have experienced, what were their expectations for the rest of the retreat, did they have any recommendations or input at that stage, and what difficulties they have experienced.

The research journey made it clear that to promote *liminitas-communitas* during retreat to help people move deeper into Gods' presence as a profound experience, is not "easy," and not fully "grasped" or to be "controlled". Participating in retreat, either as leader or as pilgrim one realise what Nouwen (1989:136) refers to saying: "God should be sought, but we cannot find God. We can only be found by him." A spiritual director may plan and provide a framework and support systems for the retreat, for example times in the venue, chapel, music, readings, silence, Eucharist etc. facilitating an atmosphere for retreatants to spend time alone with God or with others in his presence, and then to keep in mind to get out of the way most of the time as spiritual director. Planners of a retreat should be *flexible* enough to allow the celebrants of ritual (pilgrims) to do it freely and in their own way. I caught myself many times during or after a retreat asking if the ritual that I designed or directed for the pilgrims got a "measurable response" and if I was satisfied with the "results." However, the question is if religious anti-structure in the form of an encounter with God being in his presence can be fully measured in a modernistic sense? There is the mysterious, and difficult to analyse and to measure, transcendental and metaphysical encounter between pilgrims and the *noumenon*. One can be tempted to focus on the success or failure of the ritual or symbols from the spiritual director's stance or viewpoint. Furthermore, retreat should not become an exploitation of peoples' emotions or uncertainties in order to accomplish predetermined outcomes envisioned by the spiritual director or any other ideological aim.

The retreats that I have planned and directed focused on *communitas* (relational anti-structure) in the form of group prayers, discussions and the optional opening up to and sharing with one another. However, the focus was on the *liminoid* (spiritual/religious anti-structure) mystery and presence of God in silence, meditation and on rituals to facilitate moving deeper into God and close contact with him. This specific aim or character of monastic retreat was clearly communicated beforehand when pilgrims were invited to journey with God on such retreat. They were reminded that not all Christians are equally responsive or open to religious anti-structure on retreat. It was then optional after receiving the relevant information to be part of such an experience or not.

Times for reflection are scarce in a busy and noisy world with many deadlines to meet, where people are swept along feeling out of control. (Such was many a retreatant's cry for help in the empirical fieldwork process). The ample time given during retreat specifically for this purpose proved to be beneficial and meaningful for many retreatants. The material I made available to the pilgrims whilst on retreat to use in the times alone with God, were not only in the form of religious or spiritual questions and bible passages, but also poems and prayers regarding God, meditating on God and his attributes and presence. It also focused on life itself and its values, relationships, emotions, trials and tribulations and the beauty of creation. Returning after the times of silent solitude there usually was an opportunity to share voluntarily some of these reflections with one another in the group. Although the focus was on liminality, ample time to reflect on ordinary life and Gods' presence in everyday life, to journey inward as well as into the past and the future, proved worthwhile and meaningful for myself and for many of the retreatants (especially young people during Dutch Reformed ACSV youth retreat where the focus were more on *communitas* anti-structure).

People find their identities, in the last analysis by the telling and retelling of their stories (Shea 1983:23-43; cf White & Epston 1990:10-11). Provision was made during the retreats for pilgrims to reflect on and tell their stories and the significant events of their lives. By moving away from their structural world into retreat and away from social roles, time was available for reflecting on their lives and expressing what they experienced as significant events and sharing it with God and others. The short bible meditations for example in the chapel during one of the retreats focused on questions that Jesus asked during his ministry. These questions put to people in their everyday lives invited the pilgrims on retreat to respond on each of the questions during the weekend. The motivation behind all this was that the Gospel stories could become meaningful to our lives and helpful in interpreting our own stories. In this way, the ordinary lives of people on retreat became enriched, and saturated by God via the exploration of the depths of their life-story. For pilgrims, this meant the reassessment of their lives, especially the usual structuring of it and a questioning of the dominant roles and expectations that govern their lives. Retreat provides an opportunity to move away from the usual hustle and bustle of the rat race many people are running at high speed, reflecting on it and in the process grasping a deeper insight and perspective on it for example as a powerful tyrant dominating and writing life stories. Retreatants after the time away on retreat went back to everyday life (re-incorporation) if not to change a potential destructive way of life or ideological structures, at least with more weapons and protection not to be influenced by them. Scandrett-Leathermann (1999:324) confirms the transformational power of retreat stating: “ritual liminality is a power for political revision and history making, softens the rigidity of social structures and its communal activity suggests new patterns for social existence and provides energy to resist oppressive habits.” Ritual according to Turner (1973:1102) “are a fusion of powers and a mobilization of energies that may establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and

motivations.” Pilgrims stated that after a retreat they go away with new energy and motivation to face life in a different light and many with a plan of action to make significant changes and decisions.

In the planning of relevant rituals for a retreat for example the Eucharist, Turner’s concept of structure and anti-structure is useful in deciding beforehand where the emphasis in a specific for example the Eucharist will be. The following aspects are relevant when preparing for a retreat as spiritual director:

- In a particular setting of the Eucharist one can reflect on accentuating structure – reconciliation before God by listening to the reading of the formulary by the director, coming forward to the table after repenting sins and receiving and eating the bread, drinking the wine as confirmation that all is forgiven and hearing the relevant bible reading in this regard.
- The focus can be on anti-structure in creating an atmosphere of acceptance despite failures and brokenness, for example kneeling at the cross with our brokenness, breaking the bread or wafer there as symbol of brokenness, drinking the wine as symbol of being before a loving God who welcomes us home with unconditional love. In this example there are much less words, formularies, specific prayers but more silence, candles, soft music in background, time for reflecting, meditating, waiting.
- At times, I would decide to emphasise *communitas* where the group of retreatants, by then knowing one another better, would sit together in chapel on the floor in a circle with candle and bread and wine in middle of circle. Time is given for silence, to share some of their pain or worries, wrong choices, selfish ways, and reflecting on the

suffering in the world. Later on during the ritual all would stand in a circle and pass the bread and wine on to one another saying something as: “God loves you and I also love you”, or “May his healing presence fill you”. Afterwards the pilgrims could bless one another by passing the peace and embracing one another. Bible readings are shorter, listening with the heart, meditating on a specific phrase or word or sentence.

- Another way in which to prepare a ritual for example the Eucharist with the main purpose to experience the mystery of God, a sense of being in his presence is to listen to music that accentuate Gods’ holiness and majesty, or singing short meditative phrases, and silence. Comprehension and rationality then became less important than just being with Almighty God. The Eucharist function then be more to symbolise the Mystery of the Resurrected Christ (the Paschal Mystery) in our midst symbolising the height and depth and width of God and His essence and love and life with the Mystery that is beyond human comprehension or easily being put into words.
- Movements to connect ordinary life and Gods’ action and his presence in ritual that were also implemented in the designing of ritual during retreat were opportunity for the expression of pilgrim’s lives, their stories and present needs, feelings for example during a group ritual, Bible meditation in the form of meditative questions. Emphasis on the celebration of the presence of the resurrected Christ whilst together, experienced, and recognized in symbol and act. The creating of freedom and opportunity for pilgrims to bring their life stories and the Gospel story of Jesus together either by certain symbolic actions for example writing down on piece of paper your needs and hurts and putting it down in front of the cross, and lighting a candle. In practice, opportunity for reflection on the meaning of

symbols used during the retreat ought to be provided. To make connections, ample time after a specific ritual was given to reflect on the personal meanings or experiences they attached to the symbols.

The feedback responses to rituals emphasizing anti-structure for example *communitas* and liminal-mystery, were perceived by retreatants as positive and meaningful experiences. The spiritual director may also choose to encourage open honest discussion among retreatants and reflection on their lifeworlds and their structured lives and environment with a move into *communitas* as the retreat progresses. The idea is to facilitate warmth, but also a sharing of hurts and anxieties, creating an environment for healing and making decisions for the journey forward. Another way to approach retreat is to focus primarily on the life-stories of the pilgrims inviting them to reflect on it, to write it down, remembering, and sharing it. The listening to and sharing of stories may include listening to the stories of the Christian tradition for example the Gospel narratives as well as the stories of the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taizé traditions understanding and their interpretation and application of the Jesus story. I have chosen in the planning of the retreats I directed to provide a monastic type of retreat for those seeking God and his presence in a different way (mystic-monastic) from the camp like retreats very popular in the past in the Dutch Reformed tradition. The main aim was experiencing union and communion with God, to be alone with him before returning to their daily lives. Flowing from this atmosphere of silence, solitude, meditation and being with the Ultimate Mystery, some time was also given for open and *communitas* type discussions and for reflecting on and sharing of the stories of their lives.

Another relevant question identified, relates to possible letdowns during or after the retreat or an emotional low or facing harsh reality when returning home after a spiritual highpoint during the retreat. One way to attend to

this is to discuss it with the group of pilgrims before they leave for the retreat and getting their feedback regarding what they experienced for instance during the *liminal* times and how applicable they perceived it to be to structured time in daily life. The preparation of retreatants for a return to or reincorporation into the reality of the “real” world with life as usual and all its challenges and difficulties, is an area that could be considered further and reflected upon. The challenge and opportunity is (a need of pilgrims identified in the empirical study) not only designing a way of retreat for a few days and then again the following year another retreat but also a way of life or rule to commit to between retreats.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Summary and Findings

#### 6.1 Problem Statement and Research Gap

Two retreats, one an ecumenical leadership development retreat in nineteen ninety four containing only a few monastic elements and the other a private monastic retreat at a Benedictine cloister in nineteen ninety eight prepared the ground for the planting of the first seeds of the narrative research journey. Since then and especially during the research journey which began in 2002 followed exposure to and participation in ten monastic retreats in South Africa and pilgrimages to Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize monasteries overseas to observe, experience and reflect on the monastic way of retreat and way of life and its relevance for retreat in the Dutch Reformed tradition. After preliminary enquiries, interviews, dialogue with existing literature regarding retreat and participation in the retreat-action itself, the research problem was formulated. The problem statement and research challenge identified was the *Action of Retreat*, a growing but still relatively new phenomenon, especially in the Dutch Reformed tradition with the reflective question *what is happening here now*, not yet researched. The research gap and aim of the research journey identified was to reflect in an epistemological way on the Relevance of the Monastic Traditions (associative/mystic) for Retreat within the Dutch Reformed Tradition (disassociate/rational/dogmatic).

#### 6.2 Meta, Basis, Praxis Theory and Model within the Postmodernistic Paradigm

I approached the field of study not in a neutral or objective stance but with particular presuppositions determined by a specific worldview, view of life and philosophical mindset. The research journey began, developed and “ended” within the *postmodern* paradigm as a predominantly postmodern

discourse. The postmodern view of reality determined and influenced my approach and premises unconsciously and consciously regarding the research field, before any other rules and theories of scientific research. The discussion of paradigm theory showed how Western society has since the *premodern associative* paradigm moved beyond the *modern disassociate* view dominated by scientific progress and “absolute” truth claims, to *postmodernity* with the prominence of human experience in the present, interest in individuals experience of the metaphysical or *cosmological Source*, authenticity and spiritual experience. A correlating move took place in science-theory from inductive and deductive to abductive reasoning. Although there is suspicion in a postmodern discourse towards grand theories of meaning and truth (meta-narratives) there still remains room for theory. Theory evolves from an understanding that language and knowledge are thoroughly conditioned by historical contexts, are inter-subjective and not working with “true” assertions about an “objective” reality *out there*. Although deductive and inductive reasoning were also relevant during the reflection, the postmodern approach asked for a dynamic reciprocal and interactive interplay between theory and findings or results in an *abductive* way. Meta, basis and praxis theory were not approached and described as a set of mental constructs existing independently from their embodiment in the physical, psychological and social structures of life. Furthermore although observation, theory, and model were part of this postmodern *research journey* I strived to stay constantly aware of what occurred and of what I was busy doing. *Self-awareness* regarding for example:

- my own presuppositions, interests and concerns that could influence the research narrative process and outcome,
- working back and forth between the researcher and researched,
- on being flexible and adaptable where the data required it,
- the rewrite of chapters during the research with

- an end result the formulation of findings rather than final conclusions.

A *critical-realist* epistemology, relational with the focus on inter-subjectivity and on an equal basis without dominance and at times also a more detached stance was followed within a narrative laden environment with knowledge viewed as *limited* and *partial*. Thought processes during the epistemological reflection on the monastic traditions and the action of retreat were ideological-critical, deconstructive and inclusive striving towards authentic communication with respect for the interactive input of others as co-researchers. Instead of aiming for or imposing “conclusions”, findings, hypotheses or questions for further research, the focus was rather on the *interaction* between the Jesus narrative, stories of the research subjects, monastic traditions, Dutch Reformed tradition, my own story and those who might be reading the thesis, with the possibility of shifting existing options and meanings creating in the process a new reality or story in a creative way.

The epistemological reflection on the investigation was done within a communicative-meta-theoretical paradigm based on the science-philosophical positions of Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Understanding and Self-understanding*), Paul Ricoeur (*Explanation of Existence*) and Jürgen Habermas (*Theory of Practical Intent and Emancipating Interest*). I especially recognized the significance of Ricoeurs’ hermeneutical philosophy and abductive epistemology focusing on praxis, appropriation, experience, application, ideological critique and political philosophy, as well as his approach and response to the challenge of pluralism. Ricoeurs’ work provided a distinctive postmodern resource for the theological reflection. Within such an abductive epistemology the premise of the research journey was:

- That all knowledge and meaning are relative, explanation and interpretation of texts an ongoing process,
- that signs used in language, read or listened to are symbols that ask to be interpreted indirectly (mystical element) with the potential to generate constantly new ways of understanding via experience, and
- that both the dimensions of belongingness (commonality of human experience and tradition) and dissociation (alienation mediating self-understanding, appropriation and self-criticism) are necessary for horizons during the research journey to connect.

I applied Ricoeurs' model for *text interpretation* as paradigm and analogy for my approach to the human action of retreat including a variety of possible interpretations of monastic retreat influenced by the various presuppositions and traditions of the researcher and researched. His insights made it possible to do justice to the *researchers'* life-story (past, present and future), life world, presuppositions, experience and traditions as well as the life world, tradition, experience, presuppositions and life stories (past, present and future) of the *researched*. Ricoeurs' *hermeneutical arc* (a mimetic process) as a holistic process of understanding and interpretation of narratives also provided a framework to move:

- From a first understanding, pre-understanding, pre-conception or story by both researcher and researched regarding retreat, shaped by our respective traditions (*prefiguration*),
- secondly through a critical explanation that drew on this prefigured world, via a creative process of involvement, imagination, reflection and self-understanding via the story (*configuration*),
- and finally to a post-critical understanding, appropriation and application, in which all concerned (co-researchers), were invited to become part of the narrative journey, in order to arrive at an innate

new meaningful story (stories) via interaction between the respective stories shared and listened to on the research journey (*refiguration*). I listened to and reflected on the co-pilgrims stories about God, their experience of God and of monastic retreat as well as to my own, their interpretation of the events and my interpretation in order to create a personal *new, alternative or unique* research story.

The alternative or unique story correlates with Gadamer's view that people are a kind of story written and continually being rewritten and revised over time in the light of experience and tradition. Following his approach starting from an insider, critical-interactive, dialogical and symmetrical perspective, the process of understanding developed by connecting *my horizon* of assumptions and presuppositions for example *shaped* by the Dutch Reformed tradition and my affinity and interest in monastic retreat in an creative synthesis to the *horizon of the research action*. The horizon of the researcher expanded in the encounter with the horizon of the co-researchers and co-pilgrims within the monastic tradition. Gadamer's concern with practice as well as Habermas' concern with *practice* and emancipating interest (*critical self reflection* and *ideological-critical interest*) guided the hermeneutical process of the research journey from the start. It meant that while epistemologically reflecting on the investigation (research problem) I had to adopt at times a critical stance of the "object" of retreat and the participants. I also had to be critical of own beliefs, agendas and own interests for approaching and doing the research.

The following practical theology theories provided the basis and framework for the research journey: an existential-hermeneutical-dialogical approach to understanding, symbolic-interactional theory, narrative-hermeneutic theory, constructionist-narrative theory, empirical-theology and myth-theory. During the narrative journey the

epistemological reflection on the investigation developed in the following way:

- The researcher was part of the social reality of retreat as interpretative subject to determine what meaning retreatants attached to the action of retreat. Interpretation of the stories heard evolved as a dialogical process within the social and spiritual context of monastic retreat. The research-story as an epistemological reflective observation, description and understanding of monastic retreat focused on the role of shared meaning, authentic communication and self-actualization in an evolving dialogical relationship between the research-participants.
- The empirical starting point was the subjective meanings (to see the world from the perspective of the research subjects by getting involved in it) of the individuals and groups on retreat attributed to the experience for example the place, elements of the retreat, events, and rituals as well as meaning as a process of social interaction and hermeneutical activity. Reflective inner-dialogue took place in the form of viewing the researcher also as an object and anticipating the response in/of the co-pilgrims.
- The ongoing narrative-hermeneutic approach within the immediate storied context of retreat provided an inclusive framework of thought to accommodate different theories making them operational. In order to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves during the research journey, experiences were consciously and unconsciously storied (shaped in story form) and it was this *storying* that determined the meaning ascribed to the retreat-experience. Many stories occurred simultaneously and the different stories about retreat were shared and listened to. These events, the interpretations of others as

well as the researchers', meant that the research story could not be determined beforehand and it was only through involvement that a new story could be created.

- Within the context of postmodern narrative theory I had the opportunity to become part of the communication action of retreat, involved in the process of construction of a new system. Consequently the observations and experiences I have reflected on and written about; tell just as much about myself as about the action of retreat and the research participants. The knowledge generated in story-form is therefore not a philosophical, theological or psychological construction within the observer/researcher but product of a listening process deconstructing master-narratives and constructing authentic narratives within the interpreting monastic and Dutch Reformed communities. This approach asked for a symmetrical interaction between myself and co-subjects (participants), critical self-reflection not aiming for a one and only "final truth" (modernistic) to be deductively discovered by a "rational" subject (the researcher). Both the researcher and the other characters in the research story-development and interpretation were involved in this process.
  
- I followed an empirical intra-disciplinary approach of borrowing, adaptation and integration of concepts, methods and techniques from other social sciences.
  
- The following principles were honoured during the epistemological reflection:
  
- ✓ The study progressed from the researcher's own prejudices being conscious of them during the encounter with the data.

- ✓ Participation in the life world of the fellow-pilgrims and being influenced by it.
- ✓ Peoples' lives were not studied (listened to) in a vacuum or island situation but within their religious, spirituality, ecological, economic, political, social and cultural multi-dimensional context.
- ✓ I strived to maintain a hermeneutic of suspicion in which the thoughts, praxis and feelings of the subjects under investigation as well as my own were explored and explained also from an ideological-critical stance.

Regarding what we know and how we justify what we believe to others (truth, perspective on the bible and epistemology), I chose for a critical-realist epistemology combining elements of correspondence, coherence and pragmatist theories. In critical-realist epistemology knowledge are viewed as limited, partial and revisable in the light of external reality. Truth is relational within an interactive interpretative process between insight, knowledge, and experience. During the research journey perceptions of the present reality of mystic traditions and retreat, memories of past experiences as well as the different stories of reality of scholars and monastic communities provided data for a *listening* process upon which informed interpretations were made. Consciousness and reason provided sources for frameworks and concepts; interpreted and evaluated via empirical data collected. The bible in my view is a faith document containing testimonies of communities using analogical, metaphoric language that offers interpretations based upon practice. It provides a basis and interpretative framework or symbolic universe from where reality may be understood and where an encounter with God may be experienced to be reflected on in an analogical way. Three aspects regarding the discussion on the bible and truth and what faith communities believe about the bible are its pre-scientific, premodernistic character, the tradition for example dogma and the acceptance of and sensitivity for the

current paradigm and life world. The bible is not revelation as such (“objective” truth) but relational testimony of revelation, narratives of people and their experience of God and his Mystery within a historical-cultural context. In postmodernism there is a tendency for the personal subjective world of individuals and the experience of it to become the “ultimate truth” for the individual.

### **6.3 Research within the Social Constructionist Model**

The research was positioned within the postmodern social constructionist paradigm and the world of *experience* focusing on *epistemology* and concepts as meaning, interpretation and the inter-subjectivity of knowledge. Understanding and interpretation took place via narrative involvement in the retreat journey as a listening virtual reality experience with the co-pilgrims becoming co constructors of a shared new reality. As a participant observer of different retreats, knowledge came to the fore as a shared construct and communal interpretation within the interpretative communities/traditions. The narrative discourse shaped scattered events and experiences into a meaningful coherent plot, and the events began to speak for themselves (with the narrator at times fading away) to become a confession, a witness and reflection on the experience and interpretation of what occurred during the research journey.

The research within the narrative mode took a form that:

- Privileged the lived experiences of each person/group/tradition.
- Realised that as researcher one becomes one of the characters in the research story and not distinct from own experiences.
- Acknowledged that personal life stories (researcher and researched) find meaning in the interaction with the stories of others.
- Encouraged a perception of a changing world through the plotting or linking of lived experience through the temporal dimension.

- Invoked the subjunctive mood (liminal or betwixt, the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire and focus on human possibilities rather than certainties) by triggering presuppositions, establishing implicit meaning and generating multiple perspectives.
- Encouraged polysemy (polyphonic orientation and encouragement of multiplicity) and the use of ordinary, poetic and picturesque language in the description of experience and in the endeavour to construct the new stories.
- Invited a reflexive posture and an appreciation of the participation of others in the interpretive actions.
- Asked reflective questions regarding people's *current* experience of retreats for example *who, why, what, with whom, against whom* to reveal how they view themselves for example either as agents or victims in the narrative.
- Encouraged a sense of authorship and re-authorship of the lives and relationships of those on the research journey in the telling and retelling of the research story.
- Acknowledged that stories are co-produced and endeavoured to establish conditions where the researcher and co-researchers (subjects) could become privileged authors.

Following Ricoeurs' process of understanding, critical theological reflection during the research journey progressed both from:

- An *insider-belonging* perspective including personal impressions and experience (participatory understanding) and
- an *outside-distancing* perspective with distance between self and the praxis of retreat (critical explanation).

In this way both interpretation (human sciences) and explanation (physical sciences) could be integrated complimenting one another within a hermeneutical framework of holistic understanding. The three phases (*circular progression*) of the narrative understanding differentiated during the study were:

- Firstly a participating understanding and experience of the narrative of retreat where I became one of the pilgrims or retreatants within the respective contexts of retreat in South Africa and overseas.
- Secondly followed a phase of explanation of the context taking a distancing and critical stance to look at the pilgrims and traditions from the outside and how they experienced and understood the retreat action.
- Thirdly a second participatory understanding process where the interpretation of the first phase was brought in a critical-hermeneutical way in relation with the results of the second phase.

Because of a listening approach to the research journey and being drawn into the retreat-stories with possible contracting/enlarging of horizons, the issue was not trying to be an “objective” observer or to bring about “change” at all costs or on “comprehensive/ unique” knowledge. The goal was rather to understand and interpret *qualitatively* the subjective dimension of the reality of retreat (a situation where people are in relation with God and each other), the human experience of it, the deeds and the intentions and values behind the actions. To achieve such understanding as an ongoing process, I reflected while *participating within* the action of retreat (*experiential*), I reflected *on* the action (*experimental*) and teleological reflected *within/on* the action (*transformational-new story development*). During the reflective process the focus was on the content of the conscious experience of retreat there and now in the present (the experience of the *now*). But also keeping in mind that the three *temporal*

modalities past, present and future for example the now of experiences of the past as *memory*, the now of experiences of the present as *awareness* and the now of the future as *anticipation* coming together, all determined the content of the experience of the present. The listening process included the stories about past, present and future that developed from one temporal source, for example the present representative of the unity of the storytellers' whole life. These stories which led to self-understanding included symbol, myth and narrative as mimesis of human action interlacing meaning and time, and shaped and expressed what was deeply significant for the monastic communities or pilgrims on retreat.

Narrative reflexivity within the narrative process model of Angus, Levitt and Hardtke (1999) made it possible for the researcher to listen on different levels to the stories of the researched. This threefold mode of enquiry (listening process) in order to transform the retreat event into meaningful stories was:

- *The external* narrative mode entailed the description and elaboration of the action of retreat asking questions as “what happened”, “who and why”.
- *The internal* narrative comprised of the description and elaboration of the subjective feelings, reactions and emotions connected with retreat and addressed both the questions:” what was felt at the moment of the retreat occurring” as well as “what is experienced after it took place”?
- *The reflexive* narrative mode included the reflexive analyses of issues attendant to what happened during the retreat-event and what was felt when the question “what does it mean”? or “what was experienced during the question ‘what does it mean’”? were addressed. I linked meaning to my experience in interaction with that of the story-tellers. This was done based on needs, motivation, and

expectations regarding self and others who played a significant role in the listener, storyteller and the characters.

Regarding pastoral, therapeutic thought processes I acknowledged stories that were powerful shaping the lives of those I met on the research journey for example dominant and alternative stories, dominant plots and alternative plots, events being linked together over time with implications for past, present and future actions. Together with the pilgrims on retreat and monks in monasteries the different stories were explored. The focus was on the way of storying (different lenses through which to listen, look and interpret) their lives, relationships, spirituality, and their effects, their meanings and the context in which the stories have been formed and authored. The understanding that developed via the stories told (shared) and ongoing dialogue about new stories being created, prepared the ground for the therapeutic/regenerative potential of the monastic retreat-experience.

The research journey proceeded and developed from the current particular praxis of retreat as hermeneutic-communicative praxis saturated with meaning, value-directed and theory-laden. The focus has been on the acts as such, on the stories told about it, the theological understanding of it and analysis of the relevant concepts. It unfolded as an epistemological reflection on the stories of the Benedictine, Franciscan, Taize and Dutch Reformed traditions about retreat and formative spirituality in order to determine the relevance of the monastic traditions for retreat in the Dutch Reformed tradition. During the epistemological-empirical analysis of the situation, critical and creative interaction took place within the mind processes of the researcher. The epistemological reflection within a dialogical narrative context and hermeneutic process meant that *theological theory* as synthesis of experience and insights as well as *empirical analysis* of the current practice of retreat were cybernetically

involved in the process of *understanding*. During the research journey, empirical analysis played a major role and the process developed in a critical hermeneutical and dialogical way. A bipolar tension relationship developed between theory and practice (not dualistic) with creative critical interaction during the research journey. An *integrated circular model* of working back and forth between theory and practice was followed. The movement was from practice to theory and back to practice again because theory is always embedded in practice with practical activities both preceding and following it. The practical theological research of the relation between text and context was hermeneutical by nature, but empirical by design. It was *hermeneutical* by nature because the research was directed to a process of understanding for example the understanding of the significance of the monastic tradition in the context of modern Dutch Reformed community. It also required an *empirical* design because practical theological research chooses as starting point the actual situation Christian tradition and society. The research question was approached as a situation of action, explained by means of empirical research and interpreted by means of epistemological reflection and theological theories.

The praxis orientated and action reflection approach viewed tradition, context and experience as shaping factors and questions were put to all engaged in the research journey. The empiric reality of retreat investigated and the involvement of the researcher intertwined. I started with and engaged with the *life world* of the mystic traditions with my own internal dialectics and story, within the Dutch Reformed context and spirituality. From the life world arose questions, engagement and re engagement with the respective traditions and spiritualities and a new story. The concern was the beliefs and practices of the subjects under study as beings in real-life human experiential reality, taking seriously their concerns, expressions of belief, and practice and perceptions. The focus remained on the actions

as such and the stories about it as well as the symbols, traditions and their praxis. This information in turn was constantly in dialogue with more theoretical literature from other sciences as well as the literature study of the different traditions under study and meta and basis theories. The data from the empirical encounter was subsequently investigated and mapped with the major themes and interests highlighted in the process. The working back and forth between praxis and theory (creative analysis of data and theological reflection) generated new insights.

#### **6.4 Methodology**

A predominately *qualitative* approach was followed studying people in terms of their own definitions of the world (*insider* perspective), focusing on the subjective experiences of the individuals or groups while remaining sensitive to the contexts in which they interacted with each other.

*Quantitative* surveys were also used that were statistically quantifiable not so much for the statistics of the data but to identify focal points and tendencies in the relevant stories on the research journey. 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 beforehand 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 and research questions clarified and stated.

A need-assessment process and an empirical study developed regarding retreat in order to listen to and establishing a possible story (stories) about a monastic way of retreat and monastic way of life within the Dutch Reformed tradition. During the second phase of theological induction, as

*participant-action researcher* 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 in going on more retreats, interviewing, observing and interacting with more people followed. 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 also in an abductive way and integrated in the respective chapters were 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 research plot development and the researcher's own interaction with the action of retreat and its participants. 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, were 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.

I valued the experience and interpretation of the researched (co-researchers) of the action of retreat and acknowledged the stories by which they gave meaning to the experiences. The journey developed as an empiric explanation of and epistemological reflection on the action of

retreat, as participant observer. The starting point within the participatory action research model was the life world, 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 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 were taken into account and formed part of the listening process. It meant an immersion in and among those involved in the study for example during a retreat, staying at monasteries, in order to generate an in-depth understanding of the group and its context. In the monasteries ample time was spent with retreatants representative of the different mystic traditions as well as with the presiding monks. 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 unfolding? The more external narrative mode of enquiry was complimented by the internal narrative questioning of 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.

Regarding the retreat case selection 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 part of the research was to establish the relevance of monastic retreat for the Dutch Reformed tradition. I conducted most of the twelve retreats myself, six in total and participated as retreatant or pilgrim with others on three occasions. The total figure of retreatants 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. 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. A study tour or pilgrimage was undertaken as part of the research journey during March and April of 2003 to these monasteries, where I participated for at least one week in the monastic rhythm and retreat. 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 my empirical theological research, the focus has been on opinions, deductions, points of view and insights as data that were comparable. The research narrative was shaped by the participative experience in the monastic retreats in South Africa and in the respective monasteries overseas.

During the research journey I observed, participated and experienced over a four year period first hand the practice of retreat, gaining an 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. I implemented the participatory hermeneutical circle of Ricoeur with the apprehension that I belonged to the whole of what was happening during retreat and part of the faith community. The experiences and stories of the people and communities I worked with were valued in order to understand the practical knowledge in which the human social action of retreat enacted and constructed culture. Although I became actively 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 and spirituality perspectives, own life world, theoretical framework) and the communicative action and elements of retreat. Both the dialectics between association (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 life world of the researched and action of retreat during the study tour to monasteries overseas and during the retreats in South Africa, was accomplished.

Therefore 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. This 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

regarding personal emotions, thoughts, experience, questions, spirituality, frustrations, relationship with God, pain etc as well as the observation of others during the research were 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.

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 provided 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.

*Qualitative interviews* were utilised extensively during the research journey overseas and the retreats in South Africa. 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 (their stories), 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. In other instances, 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 the 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 a retreat was led by me, time was occasionally 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 the pilgrims' experience of the day or weekend or any of the aspects of the retreat. In those instances where 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.

Because of the qualitative research approach, the findings are not presented as "final" or as "final truth" but as an invitation to view the reality of retreat in the Dutch Reformed tradition also from a *different* angle and to enable the search for meaning in a complex postmodern world. People involved in the research were not viewed as "objects" but as conscious, purposive actors with definite ideas about their world, attaching meaning to what is happening around them and constructing a social world of meaning that they inhabit. There was a sustained engagement with the people in the study with an insider, flexible approach, more responsive to

the subject's perspectives. The approach therefore was to recognize the value of a more detached and structured approach that uses methods of distance as well as the engagement with the life world of those under study. It is knowledge revealed or gained by participation and by reflection, by engagement and detachment. The research journey followed a predominantly qualitative approach.

Constructing stories and *narratives as data* in certain instances of the interviewees' 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 tried to do it from a not all 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 broad 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...?"

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. Therefore 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 could take such a survey questionnaire just before the retreat started after stating the motivation for such a survey. Nearly all participated 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.

The empirical fieldwork was not restricted to the above mentioned methods. Group discussions, the observation of specific behaviour, spontaneous conversations, were also utilised which produced valuable data in the process. 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 in order 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 people. The observation progressed during the research journey 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 to grasp the complexity of the field of monastic traditions and 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 has been on finding further evidence and examples for the processes and practices regarding the research questions.

Although the focus in this research project was empirical in nature, the literature review was also necessary and part of the study. It began as an identification and review of existing scholarship regarding the research theme, identifying key concepts as well theories, models and methods in the field covering the main aspects of the study, topical in nature and based on the research problem under study. Then followed an extensive

study of available literature related to the key concepts, objectives of the research and research questions.

Ultimately the empirical fieldwork and literature study culminated in the analysis and interpretation of data, for example quantitative survey data, experimental recordings, historical and literary texts, qualitative transcripts or discursive data. Analysis involved breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. The aim of this analysis was to understand the various constitutive elements of the data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts, constructs or variables and to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, or to establish themes in the data. Preliminary data analysis began while the first interviews were conducted revealing how the questions had to be redesigned in order to focus in on central themes as the interviewing progressed. After the interviewing was completed, a more detailed and fine-grained analysis followed. In the formal analysis, additional themes and concepts were identified to move towards overall explanation. In the final data analysis, all the material from all interviews that related to one theme or concept was put into one category. The material within the categories was compared looking for variations and nuances in meaning as well as comparison across the categories to discover connections between themes. The following step was to integrate the themes and concepts into one framework, in order to present an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of the research arena.

In order to approach and write the thesis in a narrative way, I made use of Alice Adams' story development model (*Action, Background, Development, Climax, and Ending*) as framework in order to write one consistent, yet non-linear story:

➤ Action

The research story began with the action of the story of retreat and the story of the action of retreat especially the stories of the monastic traditions and retreat in the Dutch Reformed traditions. The focus was on the now of the story and its dynamics, asking “what is happening here”. It entailed an empirical look at the people on retreat and an honest and serious effort listening to and describing it. When it became necessary to go back or forward, to move away from the *now*, I made an effort to return back from the past or future to focus again on the now. Instead of working with hypotheses of what should/ought to be, the aim was to understand the environment of practical knowledge that enacts and constructs culture. The *co-researchers* were allowed to tell their own stories in their own ways uninterrupted. The action mode consisted further of interaction between the researcher and the people and their actions, where I became part of the action of retreat, being aware of personal interests, and being transparent about it.

I listened to the various stories by reading applicable literature, observing and talking to the people, observing the art forms, rituals, symbols of the monastic communities and via notes kept track of the stories. Structured, half-structured and unstructured conversations and other qualitative methods were relevant. There was a constant awareness of the variety of discourses in the different traditions relevant to the retreat-action action and those involved. In the process the researcher’s own story became part of the research journey together with the feedback from the co-researchers (co-pilgrims).

➤ Background

The *now* of the story was then set against the socio-political, ecumenical, spirituality, and background of traditions of the researcher and co-researchers (setting design/horizon analysis). I began to see and know

who the co-pilgrims were, how they came together and what was going on before the current retreat story. Associations and connotations with the past as well as systematic concepts already developed, concerning the specific or related relations were relevant in this process. For example, the role and history of the monasteries, desert fathers and mystic spirituality's regarding retreat in order to understand and interpret it better.

➤ Development

I could not know beforehand exactly what the research-picture was going to look like further on during the journey (outcome, findings). A gradual process in waiting for the plot to emerge, of seeing progressively more detail (Polaroid picture developing process), at times quite surprising and provocative that asked a lot of the researcher in terms of patience and curiosity! I followed an active, realistic, and interpretative social-constructionist approach using the stories and input of characters (co-researchers) in the active process of story-development, by getting to know them better, with a growing compassion for their stories. The constant challenge was to let the different stories (background, own story, literature, their stories) converse with each other during the research process, reflecting on it, involving others in the integration and interpretation as well as to involve the co-researchers (continuously) during and after and between retreats in the reflection on preliminary interpretations.

➤ Climax

I did not know the final answers or outcome or the way the plot would develop but did envision a temporary destination on the journey allowing the characters in the research story to develop in their own time and in their own way towards the end of the research journey. At that stage the expectation was for example that retreat could be an effective way deeper into God but the challenge remained to wait for the climax to happen

instead of trying to manipulate the outcome. The writing of the research story (thesis) aimed to be an honest development of character and plot, listening to the different stories in the different traditions unto the emergence of a new story.

➤ Ending

And then the epistemological reflection ended with the question: “what is the sense of who these people (co-pilgrims) are now, what are they and me left with, what happened on the journey as story development and what does it all mean?” The methodology of the research equalled the writing of a story, the creation of a book involving many of the stories of those involved in the research journey. It is more than an epistemological reflection on these stories but also a new writing, an own research story with new possibilities. Therefore, the narrative reflective approach to the field of research as active process of story development, interpretation and reflection, constructing together with co-researchers a shared reality or new story end not with a conclusion but with an open ending, a possible preface to the next text, that could stimulate another new/alternative story and new research.

## **6.5 Ending**

### **6.5.1 Monastic Retreat and the Presence of God**

*Monastic retreat is a commendable, meaningful or even for some pilgrims an “essential” way to become aware of and experience the presence of God.*

The main reason for the pilgrims to go on retreat was to be in the presence of God, to draw closer to God, to have a spiritual experience of moving deeper into Gods’ presence. The mystery of Christ with his unfathomable riches was the “main attraction”. People were attracted to the monastic parable of celibacy, commitment, compassion, dedication,

ritual and they responded to it, sensing the mystery of the Absolute. A growing interest in spirituality, a sense and hunger for the Mystery, the Presence of the Uncontrollable Source and not dogma, faith, religion or church denomination brought them to the different overseas monasteries and monastic type of retreats in South Africa. The monastic retreat experience met the expectations of the pilgrims in this regard. The Eucharist, *lectio divina*, silence and the liturgies of the Divine Office were key stimuli to facilitate the movement deeper into Gods' presence. The mystic traditions view on Christianity and the experience of God being so much more than the sum of dogma, theology, revelation, rationality and dependence on virtues, provides a valuable source for the Dutch Reformed tradition in the search for or the experience of God by postmodern pilgrims. Against the background of and within the atmosphere of monastic spirituality, a relevant question would be if man and woman is able to live an authentic holistic spiritual life without a desert experience in the form of a monastic retreat or elements of desert/monastic spirituality in a dehumanized deluded and denatured world. The desert metaphor provides a mindset or setting to move away from what is pretty to what is beautiful, from the superficial to the profound, from hectic programmed ministry to being consciously in the presence of God who ministers, from mere existence to abundant meaningful relationships. The desert has the potential to evoke in people a latent capacity for initiative; exploration and evaluation by interrupting the ordinary sometimes conventional and routine piety pattern of life. Retreats provide an opportunity for pilgrims to immerse themselves in the atmosphere and language of life lived in depth and prayer, being embraced by the divine mystery and moving deeper into God. God is the quest, seeking union with him, to be alone with him and silent before him. Retreat facilitates a way of going beyond mere knowledge about God and religious truths to the experience of God and truth. There is a growing yearning for a greater deeper meaning in life, for something beyond

material success and scientific achievement, for example for the spiritual. This inner advance or journey to the inner mountain is gaining momentum in the hearts of pilgrims and monasteries and retreat centres.

The experience of the desert proved helpful to retreatants to become quiet, alert, more perceptive, recollected, and reflective. In the process, certain issues became clearer and reality more recognizable and unambiguous. It opened windows to the mysterious, mighty, sovereign God and his very real presence.

### **6.5.2 Monastic Retreat and Pastoral Care**

*Monastic retreat is a source of regeneration and healing.*

A monastic retreat does have therapeutic or pastoral care qualities. Regular retreats, personal (private) as well as group retreats could be one effective way of creating space and time to receive Gods' healing for brokenness, Gods' presence for emptiness, and Gods' companionship for loneliness and Gods' enabling strength for ministry. The monastic way of retreat and way of life is a holistic health generating way inviting pilgrims to look at their pain and wounded ness honestly and giving them opportunity to open up their hearts to Gods' unconditional ever-embracing love. Gods' love led pilgrims forward on the path of healing, transformation and new life. The atmosphere and environment of a monastic retreat facilitated story-interpretation and new understandings of the story. Monastic spirituality reminded pilgrims that they were not alone with their stories of anguish and pain but part of a compassionate community of wounded healers reaching out to comfort them. The retreats provided a constructive framework for people to share their stories with God (in solitude), with the spiritual director and with the community. Stories were shared, listened to, accepted and respected and together a new story or new reality developed together in a process of re-contextualization. The listening process was characterized by compassion without judgement,

pride or resentment, a suffering with, sharing in and feeling the hardships of others, reaching out to the wounds, sharing in the brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish of fellow pilgrims.

The parable of community and compassion lived out by the monks provided a regenerative atmosphere that under girded this process. Solitude provided a way for caregiver (spiritual director) and retreatant to understand and articulate their inner world. Being alone with the Alone brought pilgrims closer, deeper into the healing presence of God. The experience of the prayer of tears by some in the times of solitude and silence, the tonality of consciousness changes during meditation and thoughts for example breathing, heartbeat, metabolism, brain waves, blood pressure had a relaxing, calming, healing effect. The periods of silence and solitude made pilgrims more receptive and open for listening, sharing and spiritual direction. This made personal spiritual counselling more natural and possible. Pilgrims opened up to the eternal Presence which in turn heightened all other sensibilities. For example in the silent dialogue with God, the door to others opened up. In the presence of God and in silence new dimensions of God, self and others were discovered. The retreat place, the silence, meditations and prayers provided a healing, transparent atmosphere of truth and honesty, awareness of God in self and in fellow retreatants in an authentic way. In the meeting of one another, being there as you are and the others as they are, and in the presence of God, the sharing could deepen and the light each received from God shone forth so much more brilliantly and in a healing way.

### **6.5.3 Retreat as Ritual and Rite of Passage**

*There are definite similarities between retreat as pilgrimage and ritual and the rite of passage structure which are relevant for the planning, experience and understanding of a meaningful retreat.*

Within many church traditions, ritual and the involvement of church members in meaningful liturgical ritual are declining. However, outside church walls, for example in monasteries and on retreats old and new rituals are being revived and implemented. Retreat and pilgrimage follow a rite of passage structure; a ritual process of status transformation during phases of transition. Turner's conceptualization of separation, marginality (*liminality-communitas*), reincorporation, and especially structure and anti-structure (liminality) is a helpful tool in the planning and analysis of retreat as well as to understand the process and experience of monastic retreat as a relevant ritual. Ritual as the use of symbols to express meaning is a powerful tool in the expression of meaning and a way to express what pilgrims experienced; allowing them to explore feelings, not acknowledged in other ways.

Ritual may emphasize either structure or anti-structure and these categories are useful in determining what the rituals during retreat would be like, how symbols would be used to express meaning in the ritual and what kind of atmosphere and framework for the retreat as a whole would be relevant. To go on retreat essentially meant to withdraw and interpret, reflect and meditate, leaving structure behind moving into *communitas-liminality*. The retreat was an invitation or opportunity to experience the Mystery of God and being alone or with fellow pilgrims at times. A clear break with the usual structures and pressures of life took place for example the city, church, work and home environment departing to another venue and a way of being; usually in scenic surroundings (nature, gardens, chapels etc). Status, work, title, gender, age, accomplishments, clothes and material possessions became secondary or preferably non-existent in their role and importance and everybody becomes part of a different flow of things happening, in order to experience God, self and others. They were being fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with the new situation in life. Away from

their previous habits and schedules and actions, they were encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality is therefore also a stage of reflection, reflection on the sacred and esoteric and mysteries of life and the supernatural. During this phase as symbol-rich ritual, their nature may change, transformed from one kind of human being into another. It may also provide access to an antithetical realm of the spirit and accentuate spiritual meaning over perceptual or physical activity. During the process, the self-sustaining integrity of merely perceptual experience was shattered in order to be transformed by the authentic realities of the ideal. The self was challenged to submit to the central and defining force of reality for example the transcendental other. Silence played an important part during this phase of the ritual and the betwixt-and-between- period became a period of fruitful darkness. Ritual liminality has the power for political revision and history making, to soften the rigidity of social structures and its communal activity suggests new patterns for social existence and provides energy to resist oppressive ideological power structures. Rituals are a fusion of powers and a mobilization of energies that may establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations. Many pilgrims went home after a retreat with new energy and motivation to face life in a different light and many with a plan of action to make significant changes and decisions.

In the planning of a monastic retreat it is commendable that anti-structure will be the primary goal of the monastic retreat experience. There could be emphasis put on relational anti-structure (*communitas*) for example during Eucharist, group discussions and feedback on spiritual matters and more playful interaction between retreatants. There could be an emphasis on liminality during the prayer times and *lectio divina* in the chapel, dying moments rituals and silent solitude outside. A flexible planning process and the eventual “program” (structure) that can be adapted easily during

the retreat could prevent structure to take over or become an end in itself. Usually at the beginning of the retreat weekend, more structural elements may be relevant in the form of a teaching on for example on monastic retreat or the aim with the retreat or on silence and meditation, then followed by a prayer service or liturgy in the chapel (with more focus on anti-structure). The challenge is though not so much focusing on the format (structure) itself, but rather to facilitate space and atmosphere for coming into contact with the Mystery of God or to experience his presence in a deep way or with the 'heart'.

To promote *liminitas-communitas* during retreat to help people move deeper into Gods' presence as a profound experience, is easier said and planned than done in practice. It comes down to setting up a framework and support systems for the retreat for example times in the chapel, music, readings, silence, Eucharist etc. to provide an atmosphere for retreatants to spend time alone with God or with others in his presence, and then to get out of the way most of the time as a spiritual director. Planners of a retreat should be flexible enough to allow the celebrants of ritual (pilgrims) to do it freely and in their own way. I caught myself many times during or after a retreat asking if the ritual that I designed or directed for the pilgrims got a measurable response and if I was satisfied with the results. However, the question is if religious anti-structure in the form of an encounter with God and being in his presence is easily measurable or any modernistic assessment possible? There is something mysterious, and difficult to analyze and to measure, something transcendental, metaphysical and profoundly deep between the pilgrims and God although they were asked to respond on this in the surveys and interviews. The temptation is to focus on the success or failure of the ritual or symbols from the director's stance or viewpoint. Manipulation should be avoided where retreatants are told how they should feel or respond on retreat or "pressured" to experience something deep or meaningful as any

experience is acceptable, freedom to be you, authentic in response, not to compare the experience of the retreat with those of others; there is no recipe for a meaningful experience, or a prescribed way what to feel or only one possible explanation of a ritual or complex symbols. Retreat should not become an exploitation of pilgrims' emotions or uncertainties in order to accomplish predetermined outcomes envisioned by the spiritual director or any other ideological aim.

I have chosen in the planning of the retreats I directed to provide a monastic type of retreat for those seeking God and his presence in a different way (mystic-monastic), to have union and communion with God, to be alone with him before returning to their daily lives (focusing on liminality). Flowing from this atmosphere of silence, solitude, meditation and being with the Ultimate Mystery, time was also given for open and relational-*communitas* type discussions and for reflecting on and sharing of the stories of their lives.

#### **6.5.4 Retreat, Pilgrimage and Holy places**

*There is a growing popularity in pilgrimages (retreats) to "holy" places.*

The concept pilgrimage in the broad sense of the word refers primarily to a person *on the way to*, a passing guest travelling towards new horizons, who undertakes a personal adventure to a holy spot or for that person a sacred place. Pilgrimage, making one's way to holy places, as an ascetic (premodern) practice may be helpful for the Christian to find salvation or experience deepening of faith through the difficulties and devotions of a temporary exile and by coming in contact with the divine, obtaining grace at the pilgrimage site or offering gratitude there. A spirit of community is integral part of pilgrimage. It is the identifying with something bigger than self; sharing a bond with others journeying on the same path of aches, pains and triumphs. Yet the pilgrim is also utterly alone because the journey is not only to a physical place with others but into the individual's

soul. Pilgrimage is not only for the religious or for those that are part of a church denomination. The pilgrim is no ordinary traveller and his/her map is in the heart. Pilgrimage is a communal rite of passage through space, home and away from home, a journey to a sacred place. It serves as metaphor for the inner journey to the inner mountain.

Many Christians (especially the young people) flocked to *Taize* since 1960 as pilgrims because of disillusionment with religion back home, as postmodern pilgrims with premodern passion, renewed interest in the metaphysical and the parable of community and reconciliation lived by Protestant and Catholic brothers. The numbers are still growing today and these pilgrimages continue to impact the lives of the people and in their communities after the retreat. It is a “spiritual success story” because of the atmosphere, “holy place”, and monastic way of life lived there. There are also a growing number of pilgrims going to Benedictine and Franciscan monasteries for retreat. Modern day pilgrimages are growing in popularity in Europe, the United States and the East (Buddhist shrines) after a decrease in the popularity of pilgrimage in the period of modernity. The growth is accompanied with high devotional tones and many adherents for example pilgrimage to Taize in France, Assisi in Italy and Camino de Santiago in Spain. More and more young people from different traditions are taking part in these pilgrimages giving it a universal and ecumenical character.

Pilgrimage to for example the monasteries is an invitation and a challenge to detachment, to be constantly on the move; together with the pilgrim-God and fellow pilgrims, nourishing, nurturing, evoking alternative perception and consciousness than the dominant consciousness and perception of culture and society. Part of these pilgrimages is the spirit of community that comes from identifying with something bigger than you. The pilgrim may set out alone but shares a bond with others who journey

on the same path as great companionship develops on the road. Talking to religious pilgrims at Taize especially young people, reflected a thirst for communion with God and fellow pilgrims, a thirst for freedom from religious and ideological powers and blind conformism and for radical authentic commitment for example symbolized in the full-time monastery way of life of the brothers. To go on retreat is an invitation to enter into a place or a dimension of stillness, solitude and prayer. This place is in the heart or in a monastery, garden, retreat centre, or chapel reading and meditating on the word of God, the Eucharist is offered and received and the interior dwelling of God is continually experienced within the inmost of the heart. The research narrative contains the witness of pilgrims on life-giving and life-enriching moments at places to which they pilgrimage to retreat. The experience of the researcher and pilgrims interviewed are that the holy land, monasteries, cathedrals, retreat centres, mountains that one visited over the years exuberated power, holiness, silence and the mysteries of God. To be able to add personal prayers, solitude and silence to that of the people living there or who have visited over the years, became a special spiritual experience. Every monastery, friary and retreat house encountered, had its own story as place of prayer, love and community. Pilgrims went there perceiving and experiencing it as places hallowed by prayer, sacrament and the community of the saints, where the word of God is recited, read, lived throughout the day and night. These places filled with Gods' mysterious presence and with his people provide powerful transforming contexts within which to pilgrimage to for a retreat.

#### **6.5.5 Elements of Monastic Retreat**

*There are elements (“ingredients”) of monastic retreat, that makes it a worthwhile, meaningful and an effective doorway deeper into the Ultimate Mystery and facilitating monastic mindfulness. Monastic retreat is very different from other ways of retreat for example*

*Church Camp* type atmosphere retreats with a big conference hall, dormitories, bible study discussion, lots of group interactions, many small group activities, playing games, singing and talking, lively worshipping songs, laughter, playing and *Charismatic* type retreats that is more noisy, wordy, making a joyful noise to the Lord, focusing on the gifts of the Spirit, praise and worship, bible teachings on the Holy Spirit, proclaiming prophecies, intercessory prayers etc. A *Monastic* type Retreat at a Retreat centre or a “Holy Place” (monasteries) creates a different atmosphere by means of a chapel/cathedral, specific divine offices or prayer times in the chapel, ample time for silent meditation, listening prayer, alone and together with others before God, short Bible meditations, more time to spent time alone with God, longer periods of silence alternating with shorter periods for group discussions, relevant ritual, symbolic actions, with more subdued worshipping and meditative music.

The elements of monastic retreat Silence, Solitude and *Lectio Divina* (*lectio, meditation, oratio, contemplatio*) opened the doorway deeper into God and journeying to the inner mountain of the heart (inner sanctuary).

➤ *Silence*

Silence since the modernistic era tended to become the lost art in a society and many church traditions made of noise, surrounded by words, sound and clatter. Inner and outer noise (surrounded by sound) is an integral part of life and silence for many is a fearful phenomenon leading to an itchiness, anxiousness or nervousness. Silence is the prevailing atmosphere experienced in the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize monasteries visited with an emphasis on control of speech, insisting on the practice of good or edifying language. It is a virtuous silence expressing respect due to God, and creating an atmosphere of recollection, facilitating a process of listening to God and others. The Desert Fathers treasured silence as the mystery of the age to come, and

words were viewed as trivial instruments of the world. Going into the silence of the desert was considered a first step into the future world from where wise words born out of silence could bear fruit. The power of Gods' silence stimulates words of wisdom, as a reminder of the pilgrimage of life to the inner mountain. Silence within monastic spirituality is cherished as the oxygen that keeps the inner fire of the Spirit of God within burning. It could be the sober silence of solemnity, fertile silence of awareness, active silence of perception, expectant silence of waiting, tacit silence of approval, eloquent silence of awe and peaceful silence of communion. In monasteries silence kindles the deep profound peace that characterizes the monastery. The right balance of silence and speech is helpful to reach inner silence or silence of the heart. In the state of interior silence, the words of the Gospel can transform the soul and culminate in a deep experience of the presence of God. In order to hear this language during a retreat within the Dutch Reformed tradition, people (pilgrims) need to learn to become still and rest in God, although there is no immediate tangible satisfaction to it. Silence is a meaningful and essential element of monastic retreat in order to move deeper into the presence of God. The times of silence in the chapel during a retreat, could be enhanced by the play of soft instrumental music at certain stages of the period of silence. This indeed proved to be helpful to some of the retreatants to move deeper into silent communion with God. Images/icons either visual or as feelings and as clear defined thought patterns, could also guide and confirm the heart becoming restful in silence. Because mages hold together conscious and unconscious knowing in fused forms both what we know and how we feel about what we know, the non-verbal dimensions of liturgy, ritual and sacrament during retreat address the wombs of images within pilgrims. They evoke and direct convictions. The appreciation, that many of the pilgrims interviewed, showed for the symbolic and the esthetical in the form of images, music, art as elements of retreat, underlines the value of symbolic language (and non verbal) in the

experience of God. The primary purpose of the silence during a retreat is to prepare the way for a dialogue and communion with Christ; it is not an end in itself. The real test for the reality and creative power of monastic retreat with the emphasis on silence is in its fruit. The challenge actually begins when going back home after a retreat, sent by God right into the noisiness and clamour of the world. The study showed that silence for many, especially at the beginning of the retreat, was difficult to cope with. For those introduced to silence for shorter periods for example during half day or one day retreats before, it was much less “threatening” or less uncomfortable. A slower exposure to silence at the beginning of the retreat with progressive longer periods to the end of the retreat is commendable.

➤ *Solitude*

The message prevalent in the monasteries is that of detachment, avoiding attachment, striving for life in simplicity because Christians are considered pilgrims and solitaries not to be tied down by anything. The ascetic impulse and throwing of the yoke of the world (excessive dependence on possessions, family, friends, own will and desires) to become empty in order for God to fill, lies at the heart of all the spiritual disciplines, be it Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu. In order to create a monastic mindfulness for example an awareness of the mystery and sacred presence always everywhere, solitude is not the solution but a way to detachment of the false self and the tenets and values of the world and to attachment to God and his healing transforming presence. The term solitude could be misleading as it was interpreted by some retreatants as being alone in an isolated place. Such Loneliness can be fearful, dry and painful whereas solitude perceived and communicates as time alone to be with God, could become a garden of growth. To live the spiritual life one must first find the courage to enter the desert of loneliness and to let it be changed gently and persistently into the lush garden of solitude.

Retreatants during retreat move into solitude (a secluded place or retreat

centre) and spend ample time alone. Many have experienced this solitude as a place of encountering God, leaving behind convictions, fear, opinions and projects and entering his presence open, receptive, vulnerable and naked. Some found the availability of prayers, poems, spiritual passages, bible readings, stories to meditate on whilst in solitude, helpful on a retreat. In addition, they realised that he alone is God, love, care, forgiveness and hope. Even when a retreatant does not hear or experience God in the beginning, the discipline of solitude as a simple, though not necessarily easy way may free people from the slavery of occupations, preoccupations and compulsions. Solitude helped pilgrims to begin to hear the voice that makes all things new.

Solitude as being alone with the Source of Life, the Ultimate Mystery was for St. Francis, St. Benedict or Br. Roger of Taize not so much a place to gather new strength (a private therapeutic atmosphere) to continue more efficiently the rat race or ongoing competition of life after the time of solitude. Monastic spirituality views solitude more as the place of transformation or conversion where the old self dies and the new person emerges in the furnace of Gods' presence. The aim of solitude during a retreat should not be to separate people from one another but instead to bring them into deeper communion with compassion for one another. Solitude as part of the journey of life with God and others can open our eyes to respect more the uniqueness, sacredness privacy and solitude of others in whose Gods' presence dwells and embraces with his love. Within the communal part of monastic life, space is left for private living, for communion with God and for reflection. The challenge after a monastic retreat or pilgrimage is for solitude to become a state of mind and heart rather than merely being alone with God in specific places at for example a retreat centre. The solitude of the desert is not only a dry place where people can die form thirst. The desert is also a vast open landscape where God reveals himself and offers in love his promises for those who wait

silently and in anticipation. Retreat and monasticism do emphasize withdrawal from a distracting world to a specific place or situation to be alone for a limited period of time or more or less permanently. However, the solitude that is strived for is the solitude of the heart or interior solitude that is more of an attitude or an inner quality.

➤ *Lectio Divina*

Considerable time is spent in monasteries on sacred reading *Lectio Divina*: *Lectio* (reading), *meditatio*, (reflecting) *oratio* (responding) and *contemplatio* (resting) for example sacred reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. It is a process of moving from a slow repetitive reading of a sacred text as base, to intensified prayer deeper into contemplation. It is one of the main aspects of monastic spirituality and monastic retreat. The following principles of *lectio divina* are relevant: It breaks into the subjective worlds of people by giving God carte blanche in their lives, it is a long-term activity that provides provision for life not a quick trip to the fridge for junk food, it is connected to a person's personal sense of vocation and hearing the call of God in the present, it applies revelation in the life-situation, it is surrounded by an atmosphere of peace and leisure and quiet rather than work and bible study, it is not merely an inner experience but a whole body exercise for example posture, relaxation, reading aloud, and when something that really speaks to the heart during *lectio divina* is encountered, the idea is to retain it in memory making it part of one's being. The effect of the cognitive-instrumental rationality of modernism (also prevalent in Dutch Reformed tradition) was that everything that was not rationally justified or manageable was excluded from discourse. However, the practical and expressive dimensions of *lectio divina* have the potential to open the eyes/ears of the heart for another horizon and to direct to a more intimate, relational, holistic way to become immersed in the text and in God whilst reading and reflecting on it. It opens a window to spiritual nourishment on different levels of being

for example senses, feelings, reasoning, and the heart uniting them in the search for Gods' presence.

✓ *Lectio* refers to a thoughtful, reflective reading and an immersion in the lessons/stories of the bible and within the Benedictine tradition also other holy books. It can be described as the monastic practice of reading small passages daily, reading it aloud more than once, listening, using the senses and milking for meaning any word or phrase or situation that stands out, provokes, interests you Monastic reading (additional to studying of scripture/Bible study) is more like prayer than studying. It is not so much an intellectual exercise in order to gather information or doing research or achieving theoretical personal synthesis, but a full voluntary immersion in the word of God. In lectio the idea then and goal is to allow the bible passage or word to touch awareness, to flame desire, to direct understanding and eventually to serve as guide or incentive to a life worth living for example the Gospel life Monastic mindfulness (living constantly consciously in the presence of God).

✓ *Meditatio* stresses the importance of *nepsis*, which refers to sobriety, a watchfulness and spiritual attention directed to God. In mysticism the tendency is to focus on meditation as a way of going deeper into you where God is waiting in order to reach a form of contemplation that is in essence a becoming one with God or reaching a higher state of consciousness. Meditation invites retreatants to welcome the word of God into their hearts, to remain open to the Holy Spirit, to reflect, think, use the imagination and memory, to enter into the text or passage, to identify with the scene and characters, internalizing and personalizing the message with humble hearts. Retreatants are invited to take a single word, or sentence or event or parable after reading or listening to it more than once and to really spend time with it seeing, hearing, touching, and experiencing the story as active participant with mind and heart

(imagination and emotions). Rather than dissecting and analysing concepts, the invitation is to enter the story, atmosphere, or phenomenon and to become absorbed and enveloped in mystic traditions, life is not an endurance exercise or to rush through, but a mystery waiting to be unfolded. Gods' presence is not a faraway cloud somewhere but the very Energy that animates everything.

✓ *Oratio* is the response of the heart during *lectio divina* to the cosmic God, and the personal and inner, enkindling God. God is life; God is the end of life, the fulfilment of life, the essence of life, the coming of life. Dutch Reformed pilgrims became accustomed over many years to a modernistic and disassociate way of viewing and practicing prayer. Intellectual capacities, activity and wordy intercessions were accentuated regarding prayer. The underlying dominating conviction was that everything could be analysed and understood and when understood could be controlled and even manipulated. However in *oratio* praying become prayer of the heart, a personal dialogue using the heart, feelings and emotions, first and foremost listening to Gods' voice and touch, then responding to him in an associative way. Pointers helpful on the way to *oratio* are the choice of a love name or metaphor for God uttering or breathing it while kneeling or sitting in a meditative posture. Uttering phrases of love and intimacy or dependence to God and constantly inviting him to kindle a fire of love for him within or to evoke a hunger or thirst for his presence are part of the atmosphere in *oratio*. All words are inadequate and that pilgrims need analogies and images as part of prayer language in the presence of the One who is perfect beauty and love and being (not merely a Being).

✓ *Contemplatio* as way of communion with God is a process of interior transformation, a conversion initiated by God and leading, when one consents, to divine union. One's way of viewing reality changes in the

process. A restructuring of consciousness takes place which empowers one to perceive, relate and respond with increasing sensitivity to the divine presence in, through, and beyond everything that exists. Alter states of consciousness follow as conditions in which sensations, perceptions, cognition and emotions are altered characterized by changes in sensing, perceiving, thinking, and feeling. The relation of the individual to self, body, sense of identity, and the environment of time, space, or other people is altered. Contemplation begins as a practice of prayer through breathing exercises and posture, making use of a prayer word, silencing of everyday consciousness and the surrendering of self. Then follows an awareness of one's own being and the prayer of quiet. The next stage is a growing awareness of the Ultimate Reality moving towards divine union and enlightenment. Finally, the process completes itself in the personalization of the experience integrated into personality as a whole, with no more distinction between sacred (enlightenment) and profane (everyday consciousness). God is perceived as present during the stages, and one may become aware of God not as image, concept, form, analogy, and word but as a luminous cloud, wave, or fountain from above or below or within overtaking, enveloping one's being. It as a sense of deep quiet, with no self-reflection, no imagination and memory and just resting in God.

The goal for the movement from *lectio, meditatio, oratio* into *contemplation* is a growing into a contemplative way of life in which the Centre of being filters and saturates everything else that is encountered and experienced. I have been on retreats in South Africa with ample time provided to “practice” contemplative prayer and with specific guidelines to “get hold of it”. Most Dutch Reformed retreatants at such retreats interviewed about this aspect experienced such an approach to contemplation much too mystical, abstract, and complicated to grasp or implement. Therefore it is commendable to remind pilgrims that prayer is also much more than words inviting them to let go and let God touch and speak as and when he

wishes to during the times of contemplation, to just be in his presence in a sense of being with a loved one holding hands and saying nothing, not trying too hard or to experiment with “techniques” to achieve a mystical union with God. It would probably be “easier” with groups that have been on many a silent or contemplative retreat to go through these stages on the way to enlightenment. When *contemplatio* is a specific element of a conducted retreat, some form of teaching or orientation on it is advisable as well as regarding its mystical roots.

There need not be a “final formula” for a retreat, or to conduct only one type of retreat, nor is it necessary for a so-called one “ideal setting” as venue for a retreat. Creative varieties of different ways of retreat at various venues are possible that may be meaningful for retreatants of which monastic retreat is but one approach. Within the monastic approach of conducting a retreat, there are again varieties of possibilities and a combination of different elements that may form part of such a retreat. The combination of silence, solitude and lectio divina were the main elements practiced, experienced and researched during the monastic retreat journey.

#### **6.5.6 Monastic Traditions: Way of Life and Way of Retreat**

*The differences and similarities between the Benedictine, Franciscan and the Taize way of retreat and way of life provide an inspiring parable for the Christian-pilgrimage outside outside monasteries. The similarities are:*

- A burning *quest for God* in a variety of ways (inclusive) and renunciation of the world in monastic community-life as image of heaven and transcendental life inviting all to journey together on the monastic journey to the inner mountain.

- A striving for *inner peace* and tranquillity via discernment of and detachment from desires that may prevent union with the Divine Mystery within oneself.
- A focus on *silence and solitude* in the monastery and in the heart with the monastery a metaphor for the desert experience of the Desert Fathers and Mothers.
- *Hospitality* in which overflowing humility, love, acceptance and holiness overflow in the welcome of pilgrims visiting the monasteries as Christ knocking at the door and Christ being welcomed.
- *Work* and tasks are considered sacred and part of the monastic journey developing virtues like humility, generosity, obedience, detachment, purity of heart and alleviating temptations like sadness and despondency.
- United with the heavenly choirs, the *community life* of the monks praise God the Ultimate Mystery in the name of the Universe, participating in Christ's life giving sacrifice represented in the Eucharist, bonded in a common quest and love embracing with him the whole world and offering it to God.
- The life of *celibacy* is viewed as a means to worship and serve God and neighbour in a more intense and focused way.
- Everything in the monasteries revolve around the daily rhythm of the *Divine Office* (community prayer /liturgy) as the heartbeat of the community. It is announced by bell ringing and takes place within an atmosphere of simplicity, solemnity, music, *lectio divina*, rich in ritual and symbol as an instrument to facilitate and pillar-support

spontaneous unceasing prayer and continual communion with God and monastic mindfulness of his presence. In the Divine Office including reading and singing Psalms, silence, litanies, prayers, benedictions, canticles, musical chants, Eucharist the monks celebrate together Christ's mysteries and Source of life.

- The monastic *Rule* or Way of life in Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize is a guideline for a specific way of life in the monastery. Carefully prescribed rituals, gestures, words, elaborate ceremonies and liturgy, usually surround life in monasteries. The monks dedicate themselves to a life of prayer and constant communion with God. The holy rule is for the prayer life or devotional life of the monk like the golden setting for a precious diamond. The function of the rule is to reveal the real beauty of prayer and contemplation and to allow it to be fully practiced and experienced with authentic peace and joy.
- ✓ The Holy Rule, for example the Rule of St. Benedict is a Book of Wisdom not so much a set of spiritual exercises, prescriptions, devotions or disciplines but more a plan of life or way of life, a look at the world and everyday life through interior eyes. It is more a set of principles to guide as in the Latin meaning of the word *regula* as a law and to be interpreted by the abbot of the monastery. It functions as a guidepost or railing to hang onto in the dark and that leads into a given direction and is a piece of wisdom literature designed to deal with the great questions in life for monastic and lay people. Four elements in Benedictine spirituality are what make the Rule a living rule and not a historical document or law: the bible, the text of the Rule, wise Leaders and the insight, life experience and circumstances of the Community. The divisions deal with: Persons, Officials of the monastery, Monastic Virtues, The Divine Office and Disciplinary Regulations. The rule further comments on the following

themes: Listening, Prayer and *Lectio Divinia*, Community, Humility, Monastic Mindfulness, Work, Holy Leisure, Giftedness, Hospitality, Obedience, Stability, Monastic Practices, Peace and The Monastic Vision.

- ✓ St. Francis had a simple and more naïve perception regarding the fraternity of brothers in that anyone who simple heartedly accepted the rule of poverty in their following of Christ should be admitted to the *Fratres Minores* or Minor Brothers, and thereafter, be left free to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is probable that Francis knew something about other monastic Rules, but it is unlikely that he wanted to attempt anything on such a large scale for example like the rule of Benedict, for him and his disciples. The original (first) Rule has long since disappeared but probably contained words on the selling of all possessions and giving everything to the poor, very little on worship and prayer offices because they didn't have services or a church, monastery or priest in the beginning years, something on work and manual labour and also preaching.

The rule is essentially Christ-centric with Christ at the centre of devotion, ministry, community life, authority and charity. Central themes in the Franciscan Rule or Way of Life are: Following the Footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ, The humility of the Incarnation, The poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus, The Divine Office and Fasting, Living among the poorest of the Poor, The Active and Contemplative life (Hermitage and Workplace and in Praise to God for all his Creatures), Penance regarding Friars who sin, Admonition and Correction of Friars. This way or form of life translates the Franciscan spirit and vision into a lived experience. It is essentially a framework for the evangelical life or Gospel life. The relationship between Francis and Clare is fascinating in a way and many an icon

portrays the two together. Their love was a spiritual love with God as source, a form of spiritual romance without the erotic or physical flavours. Their relationship brought a feminine, motherly, intuitive or softer spirit into Franciscan Spirituality. The feminine element in Franciscan spirituality is reflected in tenderness when Francis gives instructions on religious life in the hermitages: “not more than three or at most four friars should go together to a hermitage to lead a religious life there. Two of these should act as mothers, with the other two, or the other one, as their children. The mothers are to lead the life of Martha, the other two, the life of Mary Magdalene Poverty: the Incarnation as poverty of God.

- ✓ The Source of Taize expresses for the Taize community the essentials, which make a common life possible. Central themes are: Community life, Prayer, Discipleship, Commitment, the Prior, the Council, Meals, New brothers, brothers on Mission, Welcoming, the Mystery of faith, Peace of heart, Joy, Simplicity, Mercy and Trust .It is nothing like the more traditional monastic rules for example it does not lay down the exact hours of prayer or details or rules about clothing but is more the fruit of and inspiration of the experiment of living a parable of community for ten years. The Sources of Taize or Rule suggests more a spirit, a way of life to inspire and to motivate the community to the essentials of common life. The focus is on a sober life in simplicity of heart; joy and love living daily the essentials of faith in community.

The *distinguishing* features are:

- The Divine Office of the Benedictine monastery of La Pierre Qui Vire were divided into seven offices with the early morning liturgy starting at 2h05. The Franciscan monastery of Sacro Conventio di San

Francesco has only two liturgies early in the morning and late at night. The community of Taize centred on three times of communal prayer namely morning, midday and in the evening.

- The Benedictine community, more secluded far from the nearest towns focused more on the contemplative mode than the active mode (reaching out to others), the Franciscan community in Assisi less solemn or “high church” orientated focused more on the active mode in serving the needs of the pilgrims (and tourists) and the Taize community although at times filled with thousands of pilgrims (not tourists) harmoniously balancing the contemplative and active mode of life.
- The Benedictine and Franciscan monasteries (with all the presiding monks Catholic) received more Catholic pilgrims than any other denomination and the pilgrims at the Taize community (Protestant and Catholic monks) represented all spheres of the ecumenical traditions.
- No retreat group feedback or discussions took place at the Franciscan monastery, some group activity at the Benedictine monastery and at Taize daily group Bible discussions with a variety of pilgrims actively participating conversing in different languages.
- The monks at Taize are actively involved worldwide for longer and shorter period of time especially amongst the poorest of the poor. Struggle (action) and contemplation could not be separated just as contemplation could not overlook struggle because in the struggle for the voice of the voiceless to be heard, for the liberation of every person, the Christian finds his place – in the very front line. And at the same time the Christian, even though he be plunged in Gods’

silence, senses an underlying truth that this struggle for and with others finds its source in another struggle that is more and more etched in his deepest self, at that point in which no two people are quite alike. There he touches the gates of contemplation. Struggle then reflects and unites inward dimensions of prayer and contemplation with such outward dimensions as aiding the poor and oppressed.

- Silence during meals and even between Divine Office times was prevalent only at the Benedictine monastery and ample time for silence during Divine Office liturgies in all three of the monasteries. Although the Benedictine chapel and the Taize church of reconciliation were beautifully designed and rich in image, symbol and icon conducive to become aware of the Divine Mystery, the awesome Basilica in architecture art and splendour containing the tomb and remains of St. Francis was breathtaking beautiful even in its *excessive grandeur*. Although one can understand the desire of his successors and the great multitude of followers to pay tribute by visible tokens in buildings and paintings, I just could not reconcile the poor and simple saint and his way of life with this magnificent shrine built in his memory. Even the thousands of visitors and pilgrims that knelt at his tomb and visited the cathedral in their thousands daily, were most if not all of them that I saw upper middle class affluent people. I did not see many “lepers”, poor or the very humble of society there!

### **6.5.7 A Monastic Way of Life and the Dutch Reformed Tradition**

*The rule or source of the respective monastic traditions (premodern context) provide a valuable source of insight for constructing a way of life in the Dutch Reformed tradition (postmodern context).*

The research journey identified a need amongst retreatants or pilgrims to receive further guidance on the journey after or between retreats. Such a rule or practical framework would be an asset or tool to live the by the principles of the Gospel in a monastic way. Without a way the pilgrimage through life could become non-directional, not focused enough on God, the Ultimate Mystery and source of Life. A spiritual rule or way of life could function as an ark of human and eternal values bringing people safe to land and provide opportunities sailing on the at times stormy seas of postmodernity. When constructing such a “Rule”, the context of each pilgrim’s own unique spirituality, needs, environment, abilities as well as the Dutch Reformed tradition and South African context should be taken into account. The following are guidelines and a starting point to assist an individual or a group of Christians wanting to practice Gods’ presence more consciously after retreat:

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Psalms provide the basis within the worshipping, church, small group, family (cell) community.
- A spiritual director (spiritual companion) or soul-mate to give guidance or support during the process of drawing up a Rule of life and to whom one will be accountable regarding progress and living the rule.
- The basic framework for the drawing up of the rule may well begin during a retreat (a directed or personal retreat).

- The resolve to have a rule of life could be linked to a community of believers in a variety of ways for example Taize type of worship services, centring prayer groups, centre of spirituality of South Africa, or any of the monastic orders.
- It is advisable for Christians who may feel drawn to a specific order to become a novice, companion or associate following the Benedictine, Franciscan or Taize rules.
- Others may choose to plan and write out their own personal commitment or way of life individually or as 'n group under guidance of a spiritual director in writing out of a personal mission statement for personal- and/or family life.
- Such a plan, statement or rule may then be shared with a spiritual director for scanning and affirmation.
- The commitment could be sealed within a cell group or during a retreat with the Eucharist and renewing it annually.
- Regular retreats may provide the atmosphere to expand the rule or to meditate on it.

The following elements could become part of a Rule of Life:

- Weekly Eucharist.
- Prayer and meditation for example two to three times a day.
- Penitence or self-examination and seeking spiritual direction (confession, guidance).

- Life-style including work, study, spiritual awareness or monastic mindfulness, diet, works of mercy etc.
- Retreat, annually a weekend or three day directed retreat and shorter retreats (directed or non-directed) or a quiet day for reflection once in a while.
- Studying the bible, group discussions, reading the classical spiritual disciplines and monastic spirituality.
- Making simplicity, charity, mercy, hospitality, “downshifting” or living at a slower pace and less focus on materialistic things core goals.
- Practicing Gods’ presence continually, being more alert and attentive to his presence even during busy schedules, deadlines or routine- and mundane tasks.
- A sense of accountability or obedience, humility, trust, discipline, humour, responsibility and peace in the living out of the rule and consulting someone on a regular basis direction, reflection and self-evaluation.
- The being part of a community of Christians, worshipping with others, participating in meditative or silent type of meetings, and maintaining contact and open communication with those sharing in the monastic way of living.

Further Guidelines from the research are:

- A contemplative reading of the bible for example *lectio divina* complementary to Bible study and analysis.
- Quiet time alone with God in his presence, specific planned periods, just being there, doing nothing but silent alone with the Alone in order to hear the language of the Spirit born in silence.
- A spiritual director or counsellor to help distinguish between the voice and vocation of God and many other voices and vocations, someone to confide in, to be accountable to, to be encouraged and directed on the pilgrimage through life.
- Learning from the spiritual wisdom of other Christians and Christian writers who have completed the journey or still on pilgrimage who in the course of history, have dedicated their lives to the monastic way. They offer by their own lives and wisdom and the lives of their disciples and faithful students, a frame of reference and a point of orientation in an attempt to live an authentic spiritual life of monastic prayer.

The adopting of a rule of life or commitment should not be anything more than explicating, elucidating and applying Gospel principles in one's personal and communal life. The monastic rule of Taize, Benedictine and Franciscan is nothing more than this and did not aim to add to the Gospel or to be kept in a legalistic way. The research narrative showed that a rule of life for Christians in the Dutch Reformed tradition may fill a need for those who wish to live Gods' presence daily in a more disciplined and monastic-associative way. A rule could facilitate a way of life where spontaneity, spiritual discipline, commitment , joy and simplicity in the presence of the Divine Mystery are channelled to greater good, adding more value not only to one personally but especially to the lives of others.

### 6.5.8 Retreat and Ecumenism

*Ecumenism is not a prerequisite ingredient for retreat, however the parable of ecumenical community and reconciliation at Taize underlines the high value of ecumenical retreat.*

The first manifestations of ecumenism at Taize were in the domain not of theology or doctrine but within spirituality and worship. The Taize ecumenical community of priests (brothers from Protestant and Catholic traditions) where thousands of pilgrims visit is fully ecumenical. The pilgrims from all over the world represent Evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox Church and other traditions. The basis and vital core of the ecumenical experience on the Taize hill is not dogma, creed or theology, but prayer (the daily Divine Office in the church of *reconciliation*) as communion with God the Source of Life, the source of communion between human beings. Together people of a great variety of background, races, cultures, spiritualities and age groups for example Unitarian Universalists, Reformed and Catholic theologians, non-religious and non-denominational people, very religious and committed to their church, Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians participate in liturgy available in at least ten different languages, meditative and accessible to all. The cross fertilization of insights and emphasis of the representatives of the different church traditions (e.g. *Evangelical* warmth, zeal, enthusiasm, personal redemption experience, *Catholic* sacramental mystical life and the church that sanctifies, and *Eastern* orthodoxy liturgy drenched with heavenly ritual and symbol) together for retreat, added value to the whole retreat experience of the pilgrims interviewed. Also identified was a similar depth of desire to find and experience God or moving deeper into his presence regardless of tradition or denomination.

## **6.6 Relevant Questions for Further Research**

### **6.6.1 A Source or Rule of Life**

The preparation of retreatants for a return to or reincorporation into the reality of the “real” world with life as usual with all its challenges and difficulties is an area to further consider and reflect upon. The challenge and opportunity is (a need of pilgrims identified in the empirical study) not only designing a way of retreat for a few days and then again the following year another retreat but also a way of life or rule to commit to between retreats. To formulate an authentic “indigenous” Dutch Reformed way of life.

### **6.6.2 Ecumenism and Retreat**

The relevance of the Taize ecumenical way of retreat experience for retreat in South Africa (e.g. Dutch Reformed context).

### **6.6.3 Different Types of Retreat**

The relevance, experience and potential value of *different types of retreat* other than the more classical-monastic-mystic way of retreat focused on and described in this study.

### **6.6.4 *Liminitas-Communitas***

The relevance of the *liminitas-communitas* experience of young adult pilgrims of the *noumenon mystery* during the liturgies at the monastery of Taize compared to Dutch Reformed liturgies and experience of *liminitas- communitas*.

### **6.6.5 Monastic Spirituality and Prayer**

Investigation of possible different ways to practice *lectio divina*

represented by the various Spirituality types and/or the Maier-Briggs temperament-personality preference profile. Or focusing on the *Contemplation* aspect of *lectio divina* as mystical union with God.

#### **6.6.6 The Feminine Influence or Relevance of Women within Monasticism**

For example the relevance of the Desert mothers or St. Francis' relationship with Clare.