

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

CHRISTOFFEL HERCULES SCHUTTE

PhD

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Supervisor: Prof Dr Yolanda Dreyer

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STATEMENT BY CANDIDATE

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

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THE THESIS IS DEDICATED TO:

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

KEY CONCEPTS

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

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CHAPTER ONE

Epistemology: Theory, Model, and Method

1.1 Research Motivation, Relevance and Objectives

An extensive literature review revealed that retreat; especially monastic retreat is a relatively new and a less researched phenomenon in the researcher's own tradition (Dutch Reformed). Retreat is generating growing interest amongst clergy and members of congregations. More and more people in South Africa and other countries retreat or pilgrimage occasionally from the hustle and bustle of the busy marketplace to the desert of holy places (monasteries, cathedrals, retreat centres etc.) to experience silence, solitude, regeneration, divine presence and spiritual formation.

As a researcher, I am drawn to monastic spirituality and monastic retreat. I have experienced it in various ways and conducted a few retreats. I am passionate about doing research on retreat as a communication action in practice. Some of the motivational factors for undertaking this particular research project are:

- the mind enriching potential of the research process,
- the possibility of the formulation of new insights,
- the challenging influence on current views and mindsets for example in the Dutch Reformed tradition regarding monastic retreat,
- the challenge of the research process in itself and
- the potential of the research journey to be a personal life enriching adventure that could also make a contribution to existing research or stimulate further research.

I was born and bred within the Dutch Reformed tradition. It shaped my faith story, theology, and spirituality into a more rational, social cultural value system and

disassociate mould. The emphasis was on dogma, revelation, systematic certainty and clear-cut definitions about God for example his actions, justification and sanctification. This *disassociate* atmosphere did not expose me to but rather in my experience desensitized me to the depth, darkness and mystery of God; the uncontrollable source and sustainer of life. After a short journey through and interest into the charismatic spirituality for a few years, I have been drawn during the past ten years more and more into the classical disciplines and *associative* spirituality of monasticism and mysticism. This latter part of my story sensitized me to the divine presence and mystery in a new and profound way. The associative way of experiencing Gods' presence was enhanced during the visits to the various monasteries and the monastic retreat-experiences. The relevance of monastic spirituality and monastic retreat for the Dutch Reformed tradition is part of the research gap I will address. Could Monasticism be a potential source for a way of retreat designed for Reformed Christians and a way or rule of life?

No one generation has all the answers. When it comes to nuclear and quantum physics humankind may know more than previous generations. However, when it comes to spirituality the roles may be reserved. By opening up ourselves to the heritage of the rich variety of spiritual wisdom of the past, we may be enriched in the process and blind spots of our generation of pilgrims exposed by the past generation of pilgrims. The blind spots in the story of one's own church tradition for example the Dutch Reformed, can be revealed by the spiritual stories of for example the monastic mystic tradition. The research could be part of an enriching journey and a basis or framework for the writing of a new story.

The motivation for the decision to focus on the three orders within monasticism for example Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize and reflecting on them is the following:

- The order of St. Benedict is the oldest order within Christian monasticism and Benedict wrote the first official written Rule of Life for a monastic order. My first experience of retreat was a private retreat in Rosettenville at an Anglican

Benedictine monastery of nuns, called the Order of the Holy Paraclete. It was the beginning of the more monastic and mystical chapter of my story. Being part of the Divine Office in the chapel with the nuns and other retreatants and the first exposure to the practical aspects of the rule of Benedict, stimulated and stirred something in the spirit and heart for learning and experiencing more of Gods' presence within a more monastic spirituality and narrative. I soon realised after this experience how many pilgrims in many parts of the world living outside monasteries, made the Rule of St. Benedict part of their everyday life as a way of life between regular retreats within a busy schedule and the full diaries of everyday life.

- The story of the Franciscan order began a few centuries after St. Benedict, with the frail figure and simple lifestyle of St. Francis of Assisi. He literally lived out the Gospel story of Jesus amongst the poorest of the poor which came like a fresh breeze and prism of new colours in a stuffy dark era of the Catholic tradition caught up in the deadlock of rigid religion, rational ritualism, monotonous monasticism, hedonistic hierarchy and indecent ideologies. The focus of the Franciscan way of life is simplicity, solitude, and silence, balanced with reaching out to the needy, love for Gods' creation and nature (eco friendly). With time it was captured in the Rule of St. Francis followed today by Christians worldwide outside monasteries as the Third or Tertiary order of St. Francis. His story attracted me also in a more romantic sense for he grew up in a rich well-known family and had a meeting with God whilst a teenager with a voice telling him to restore the house of God which he at first interpreted literally. His life story developed since then as the radical opposite of the materialistic, hedonistic, and religious way of life of his family, friends, and most of his church contemporaries.

- The Taizé story started much later in the late nineteen fifties and has over the years become a buzzword worldwide and in South Africa amongst Dutch Reformed pastors and parishioners. It is the only monastery and order where

an equal number of monks from the Protestant and Catholic tradition live in community by the rule or source of Taizé in one monastery. Hundreds of thousands of young people most of them under the age of twenty-two from all denominations visit the Taizé monastery each year for an ecumenical monastic type weekend or a weeklong retreat. Taizés' growing "success" or popularity as an associative spirituality with the focus on old Gospel story values in a postmodern world, to my mind was worth researching further.

The main objectives of this research are:

- To approach the research problem and the objectives of the research not as development of new or adapted theory but as an epistemological reflection on the investigation (the aim of the thesis) of the relevance of the monastic-mystic tradition for the Dutch Reformed church.
- To conduct a need-assessment process and empirical study regarding retreat by *listening* and establishing a *story* (or stories) about the need or hunger for a specific lived experience of God that is more monastic, meditative and silent. Is there a growing worldwide interest in spirituality and retreat in South Africa? If so, why and what are the needs especially amongst members of the researcher's own church tradition?
- To listen to the stories being told about the action of retreat and the experience of God in the monastic context of holy places (for example monasteries and retreat centers).
- To listen to and experience the stories of monastic retreat and pilgrimage within the Benedictine and Franciscan orders and Taizé comparing them in the process.

- To listen to the stories of spirituality regarding a lived experience of God and of holy places that fulfill spiritual needs and how these traditions experience and interpret and structure retreat.
- To establish what the comparisons between these stories and the story of the researcher's own tradition are. To learn from these contextual experiences in *narration* form in order to identify pointers for a retreat structure (*way of retreat*) and a *way of life* after or between retreats that could fit the needs and expectations of the researcher's own church tradition or the broader reformed church tradition in SA.

The research process is envisioned as a *narrative research journey* (pilgrimage), with *subjective involvement* of the researcher (as participant-insider as well as observer), where all the *co-researchers* are invited to travel together on the journey. The research will develop primarily in story form as an active process of *story development*, and *interpretation* and *reflection* where the researcher and the other co-researchers construct together a shared reality. The narrative research journey is envisioned to be an *epistemological reflection on the investigation in order to indicate the relevance of the Monastic tradition, (mystic traditions) for retreat within the Dutch Reformed tradition.*

Some of the research questions during this narrative journey are:

- Is monastic retreat a justifiable, commendable, or even essential way for some people to become more aware of the *presence of God*?
- Could it be a source of *regeneration, healing, or recommitment* for some? What are the therapeutic or pastoral care qualities of such a retreat?
- What are the similarities between retreat as a pilgrimage or ritual and the *rite of passage structure*?

- Why did so many Christians (especially the young people) flock to *Taize* since 1960 as pilgrims? Why are the numbers still growing today and what impact have these pilgrimages had on the people and in their communities after the retreat? If it is a “spiritual success story” then why and what can be learned from the process?
- Could there be specific *elements* or ingredients that when they are part of the Retreat, make it worthwhile or more effective as a doorway deeper into God? What is a meaningful *way of retreat*?
- Could the various rules of life of the three monastic orders (pre modern) provide insight and function as sources from which to write a *way of life* for Dutch Reformed Christians today (postmodern)?
- Is *ecumenism* a prerequisite ingredient for a meaningful retreat or not?
- How important are the *bible, meditation, contemplation, solitude and silence* during retreat, in what way and in what relation with one another?
- What is the effect of the “*holy place*”, the atmosphere where people retreat?
- What are the major differences between for example *Benedictine, Franciscan* and the *Taize* way of or approach to a way of retreat and a way of life? What are the similarities? What is the distinguishing features?
- Is *monastic retreat* very different from other ways of retreat and in what way?

- Retreat is relatively new in the *Dutch Reformed* tradition. Why is this and why the higher level of interest in retreat among pastors and parishioners? How could insights derived from the research investigation of the other traditions way of retreat be applied to the Dutch Reformed tradition?

1.2 Theory

Theory functions within a specific paradigm or mental window through which a researcher views the world. It is the way the researcher look at things, at socialised reality, the philosophy behind the research and the way in which the hypothesis and model are described and the research question will be addressed. Theory should be able to explain relations between real phenomena and be verifiable empirically (Mouton & Mouton 1990:62, 145-150; see Kerlinger 1973:9; Pieterse 1993:50).

The research process in this dissertation develops within the postmodern paradigm as a predominantly postmodern discourse. A relevant question however is why the necessity or what practical viability does a meta, basis or practice theory framework has within such a postmodernistic discourse?

1.2.1 Paradigm Theory

The history of Christian faith communities constituted itself in three paradigms: the premodern, the modern and postmodern (see Küng 1995:61). Paradigm as view of reality that determines or influences a researcher's approach to and premises regarding the research field, may be present unconsciously or consciously and comes before rules and theories of scientific research. Kuhn (1970:viii) defines paradigm as "universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners". This means in practice that the researcher do not approach the field of study in a neutral or objective stance but with a particular presupposition determined by a specific worldview, view of life or philosophical mindset (see Vorster 1999:101). Knowledge within such a specific paradigm will then function as a point of reference or as a problem-solving model in scientific research.

A paradigm shift occurs when the old paradigm cannot provide sufficient answers on new realities anymore. The challenge to the researcher is to start searching for and to develop new areas, finding new keys as instruments to develop a new reality. In the process a theoretical, research and research results revolution may take place (Vorster 1999:101-105). In theology, the modern paradigm did not replace the premodern paradigm immediately and the postmodern one will not immediately replace the modern, but they could co exist for some time (cf Bosch 1991:186). In research practice, the paradigm that provides better or more meaningful answers to new realities could in due course develop into the more dominant one. After the beginning phase (pre-paradigm period) of a specific paradigm's religious or theological reasoning structure, usually follows a normal phase (own closed knowledge system) in which there is stability and peace because most people function faithfully within the same paradigm. When a new structure of reasoning comes to the fore, the integrity of the predominant one could become suspect. This in turn may lead to counter measures by the dominant paradigm to try to vindicate itself. This period may become quite tense until the switch takes place or the moment or era of new insight starts to dawn on many. This creative moment or crossing over is not always sudden or in an explosive, shocking sense. It could also develop over time. The transition process is characterised by the following features:

- The followers of the new paradigm may understand the old one although not endorsing it anymore but the followers of the old paradigm usually find it much more difficult to understand the new one,
- the old paradigm camp may experience the new one as a threat and react in a more intolerant and reactionary way than the camp of the new paradigm, and

- this in turn could lead to a new conservatism and an exclusive mentality among the old paradigm against the new one,
- followed by a communicative-dissonance where the new one on rational grounds will not convince the old paradigm because their rational points of departure differ.

It is apparent from the abovementioned that it may be a very difficult task for the new paradigm to convince the old one that it has served its purpose. It is only with time and with constant progressive exposure to new insights about the new paradigm and the inherent failure of the old paradigm that a paradigm shift or conceptual transformation will take place (see Du Toit 2000:45-49).

Various social-science disciplines today agree that a major paradigm shift on a macro scale has been taking place since the nineteen sixties (Vorster 1999:103). Lamberth (1997:205) sums it up in this way: “in the years since the uprisings of the late 1960’s swept the cultures of Europe and America, the emergence of a radical new critique of modernity and the heralding of a corresponding transition into postmodernity have increasingly occupied the minds of many cultural critics, philosophers and theologians alike”

Barker (cf 1996: xv-xvii) divides the history of Western civilization into three periods of macro paradigms for example premodernity, modernity and postmodernity and identifies within each a dominant leitmotif regarding philosophy, politics, religion and culture.

1.2.1.1 Premodernity

Within the premodern paradigm, everything was perceived to be dominated and controlled by metaphysical forces and church and religion were highly valued. The focus was on basic things like food and survival with a more pessimistic view of man and culture. Patriarchal and

hierarchical systems structured society in definite patterns and dominance was achieved because of instrumental value. Dreyer (2002:924) describes the hierarchy as consisting of men with less or more status with no place for women, slaves, and children within this system. Society for example under Roman Rule was organized according to the rules of patronage in which patron-client relationships, with top to bottom relationships rather than democracy characterized civil government (see Riggs 2003:11-13). No division between the world of God and the world of people was perceived. The development of science and technology was seen as unimportant in the pre-scientific paradigm. In Christian faith communities, God and faith issues were not questioned. The omnipresence of God and mystical experiences were perceived as self-evident (Vorster 1999:103). The world was viewed as being flat and humankind as being influenced by the interaction between God (the good, angels) and Evil (the bad, anti-godly, satanic forces) with people seen as the battlefield between good and evil. God in the Old Testament was viewed as the cause of all things and events, of good and bad and in the new Testament there is a movement to opposition between God and evil as main adversary of God (see Du Toit 2000:14-23). A growing obsession developed with avoiding hell and going to heaven that became part of Christianity with corresponding efforts of rites of purification and appeasing an “angry” God (cf Ozment 1980:190-222). Although a bygone era, Christians should still take the premodern era into account, as the bible is a product from this paradigm (see Du Toit 2000:13-61).

1.2.1.2 Modernity

A paradigm shift towards a new era began during the Renaissance with the gradual questioning of the dominance of the metaphysical. With time came the dominance of reason as the basis of human existence. The essence of modernity according to Riggs (2003:29) lies in the claim that all ideas are open for public criticism because of human experience and

reason and that no claim is believed simply because some authority claims it to be true. The emphasis is on the notion that people are free to think critically, on self-determination with no acknowledgement of inherent external authority over human beings. It was the coming of age of people and the start of the scientific and technological era with the process of liberation from the old premodern view of the world. Big political and social structures were developed and the early feudalism with its different classes was rejected (Vorster 1999:104). Cognitive instrumental rationality (cf Habermas 1984) became the driving force of modernity and everything else, not rationally controllable or justified, excluded from discourse. According to Ackerman (2001:22) thinkers (scientists) schooled within the “Enlightenment” paradigm developed a bias against tradition with the exclusive enshrinement of reason.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century an unending optimism was taking place in the inter-disciplinary science networks of Europe regarding the intellectual and technological capabilities of the new paradigm (Du Toit 2000:24). The so-called “enlightenment” paradigm strived to improve the human condition through the natural sciences, the human arts, and politics. A unprecedented optimism about the intellectual and technological capabilities of this “scientific” era together with a conviction that people (or rather *scientists*) can explain, interpret and even control past, present and future. However, when looking back the legacy of horrific world wars, genocides, Western individualism, ecological rape and growing consumerism, began to put a question mark to the success of the optimism and so called newfound freedom promised by the paradigm. By the end of the eighteenth century a feeling of pessimism was paramount and by the end of the nineteenth century a mentality came to the fore what Van Peursen (1995:9-10) refers to as “sadder and wiser” with growing scepticism and feelings of irony. Another feature of modernity was the conviction that “reasonable” answers

to nearly all the questions being asked could be provided and that fundamental truth does exist which are knowable (Riggs 2003:29). This quest for freedom and focus on the human and natural sciences, also had its effect on Christianity and its subsequent process of demythologizing. The fact that the world was not flat thanks to Galilean insights, Descartes popular phrase that because I think therefore I am, deconstruction by Kant, evolution of Darwin, Einstein's relativity of matter and energy, Feuerbach and Nietzsche's questioning of God as such; all contributed to a new secularism and radical new criticism of the bible (cf Du Toit 2000:24-30; see Venter 2004:438).

Other characteristics of modernity are objectivism; a permanent a-historical framework with a need for "absolute knowledge" with a foundational truth. The approach to knowledge therefore was viewing it as a set of building blocks systematically built, brick by brick on a firm philosophical base according to a rigorous methodology. There was a craving for certainty; in empiricism, it meant an appeal to indubitable sense experiences and in rationalism an appeal to indubitable propositions. The focus on certainty left no room for doubt and ambiguity. An intellectual dualism developed where thought processes were sharply separated from the body, emotions, and the natural world. Radical individualism is another characteristic with the negation of tradition and a tendency to start all over for oneself (cf Stiver 2001:5-10). However, the critique against "absolute knowledge" is not paramount to relativation in the sense that anything goes. In his book, *Introduction to philosophical hermeneutics* (with a foreword by Hans-Georg Gadamer), Jean Grondin (1994:141) states: "that the universality of understanding differently is not the same as historical relativation and that it need not demolish the whole notion of truth". Each person that tries to understand is simultaneously trying to find something true where truth refers to a meaningful account that corresponds to things. People understand differently in their unique

way by bringing the truth to language and applying it to their situation or inner conversations. The fact that people understand differently need not lead to the conclusion that truth is relative in the sense that anything is acceptable or as acceptance of everything as equally justified and equally valuable.

1.2.1.3 Postmodernity

The disillusionment after two world wars, with the process of destruction during world war two defying the optimistic ideal of objectivism and pure reason, the growing realisation about the impact of psychological, ideological and even metaphysical components in the whole scenario, created a spirit of realism and questions about the abilities of people to create a better world (see Du Toit 2000:50-52). At the end of the nineteenth century, the atmosphere became more and more pessimistic. Questions were being asked about the power and promises of reason, science, technology, and the superstructures it created over time. The liberation struggle that began in the nineteen sixties, started to ask questions about being in a world in which social, political and economic forces within a modern paradigm produced brutality and ideologies of power and exploitation (cf Vorster 1999:99-119). In an expanding postmodernistic era, thought became more ideological-critical with plurality and inclusiveness being acknowledged as part of life. It reflects a hermeneutics of suspicion approach that in a deconstructive sense denaturalizes and demystifies practices of dominion. All hidden ideological interests, both in the bible and those of exegetes became suspect and distrusted. All people are viewed as important and approached as co subjects (cf Dreyer 2002:926-928). The postmodern thought structure developed over time into the postmodern paradigm. Postmodernism was much more evolutionary in its conception than modernism and is still evolving in its aspiration to provide an alternative approach to reality that could yield a significantly new and improved way of understanding the

world (Vorster 1999:104-105; see Riggs 2003:31). Van Aarde (1995:13-24) describes it as a moderate and not a dramatic macro paradigm shift because of the continuity between modernity and postmodernity. The rationality of the modern era broadened in postmodernism to accommodate the affective and pragmatic together with the cognitive-rational. Postmodernity accommodates the different dimensions of individual, subjective experience as well as the marginalized view of what is *scientific*. “Wij zijn meer dan ooit aangewezen op intersubjectiviteit binnen werkvormen, waarin mensen, vanuit een gedeeld engagement, in hun handelen werkelijk subject kunnen worden van hun eigen ervaring” (Heitink 1993:151). Postmodern pilgrims have a need not only to experience God cognitively but also in an affective way. According to Leonard Sweet (2000:27) the personal subjective world and its experiences have become the ultimate truth for postmodern individuals.

Postmodernism is a complex and multi faceted paradigm. It is a portable or container concept to enter with a repertoire of ideas about characteristics of the world. It has a strong critique of the traditional paradigm rather than reconstructing a new one although an outline of a new distinctive paradigm can partially be discerned. I agree with Stiver (2001:5) who sets postmodernism in a framework of the broad movement within post-structuralism thought for example Jacques Derrida (1998) *Of Grammatology*, Michel Foucault (1994) *The Birth of a Clinic*, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Paul Ricoeur (1981) *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*, Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001) *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus*, neopragmatist Richard Rorty (1991) *Objectivity, Relativation and Truth*, the Yale post liberal school of theology's Hans Frei (1974) *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics* and George Lindbeck (1984) *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.

Rather than perceiving postmodernism as a label for an object or human condition or as something easily definable, it may be linked to a set of ideas about the world and people's relationship with the world. Glen Ward ([1997] 2003:15) defines postmodernity in terms of signalling "deaths" or "ends":

- The end of history relating to the scepticism of postmodernists about progress and the debates about the way history is written and the lack of unity or direction of events.
- The end of humanity because new technologies are moving humankind into a post-human stage and the questioning of humankind as a historical and social invention.
- The death of real as the abandonment of the pursuit for absolute truth with its preference for the apparent, superficial and temporary and the view that reality is increasingly constructed by signs.

Some of the characteristics of postmodernity are the following (see Vorster 1999:112-114; Stiver 2000:10-22, cf Van Peursen 1995:10-11):

- It functions within a non-fundamental epistemology with an embodied and holistic conception of the self and the world in which experience is integrally embodied and social.
- The epistemological approach is holistic with the emphasis on the way in which concepts are embedded in traditions and practices.
- Different dimensions of rationality are acknowledged as well as practical and expressive dimensions of life that also constitute meaning and truth.
- A hermeneutical turn was made to a view of knowledge that is embedded in hermeneutical acts of judgement that cannot conclusively be demonstrated or proven.

- A linguistic realization dawned that knowledge is always mediated through language for example that language is much more than primarily reference to or descriptive in nature but also figurative (metaphors and narratives) not only as ornamental additions but fundamentally cognitive.
- Arguments usually proceed in a dialogical way, are always local and timely, never certain but have warrant and backing with consensus worked out by dialogue and conversation and not by knockdown arguments.
- A developing social, psychological, and spiritual pluralism with growing scepticism and a relativistic attitude where reality tends to dissolve in the individual experience.
- A tendency towards a simplicity of premodernity for example the accentuation of simple values, humanness and in religion warm and intimate worship, flexibility, meaningful traditions, authenticity and a spiritual experience. This could explain in part the growing number of pilgrimages to *premodern monasteries* of for example Taize and Santiago de Compostela.

The epistemology and status about claims of truth were being criticised with the emergence of the postmodern science philosophy. In an effort to determine the status of claims about truth of scientific findings and verdicts, more focus was placed on the subject, the person and the pre-questions or prolegomena, on feelings, faith and spirituality (Cartledge 2003:132; cf 1.4.2). The decisive role and impact of pre-suppositions in a researcher's mind during scientific discourse and scientific results as well as in the investigation of things are acknowledged (see Vorster 1999:105-106). The subjective experience in the interpretation of data and knowledge makes it impossible to formulate absolute and objective truths, "final" conclusions or pure truth and therefore more than one possible truth about the same matter is indeed possible. There is a suspicion of people

who want to provide final answers as well as of hierarchy and dominance and value judgements. Postmodernism tend rather towards asking questions within a more relativistic and subjective approach with multiple and multi-faceted angles on truth (see Venter 2004:438). The modernistic idea that there is only one truth or absolute universal truth that may be known by a rational subject is replaced by the idea of a variety of repressed discourses and different perspectives on truth (cf Dreyer 2002:930). Concepts as *right and wrong* are replaced by *valid and valid*. Fundamentalism where only one code of ethical rules is described as a rule or framework for persons is rejected. Pure logic and knowledge is viewed as an illusion and the researcher or observer's experience plays a crucial role in the development of knowledge. Each person's approach to reality is influenced by their presuppositions, background, and faith and cannot experience absolute or complete truth. Truth is therefore relative and more than one conclusion about something can be valid. Interpretation and the underlying psychological processes that direct it ought to be acknowledged. Authority structures are suspect and may be symptomatic of underlying uncertainties.

The focus is on pluralistic experience rather than a single authoritative voice and the historic Christian tradition may be used as a toolbox, accepting some but not all of the worldview for the job at hand. The role and rights of the individual ask for a more pragmatic attitude that is more open for alternatives. Each individual in a world where the old, allegedly comprehensive charts no longer command confidence is constantly compiling his or her own collage of symbols and practices in the light of what coheres with their own changing experiences in the journey through life. It results in a radical and personal form of spirituality. There is also a shift from the cerebral to the intuitive, from the analytical tot the immediate, form the literal to the analogical, and a movement to inter-subjectivity or to inter-textuality where people want to participate rather than merely observe. The focus shifted from not just *what* people might

know, but to *who* knows and in *what context* someone knows (Van Peursen 1995:14-20; see Du Toit 1999:105-106). A relevant question is whether relativisation, a pick-and-mix attitude towards values and beliefs, and a fragmented rationality are unavoidable by products of postmodernism thinking. Universal ideals, values and purposes are indeed becoming extinct within such a paradigm but I agree with Van Peursen (1995:34-35) that it need not imply a complete break with rationality but rather a different way of reasoning. It is a type of reasoning and philosophy that initially may look fragmented and incoherent, but showing a unique consistency that flows from the specific, the concrete, local knowledge, incidents not focusing on the general and long-term story and principles. This is more consistent with a view of life shared by many that prefer shorter more intense news clips than long general news reviews, a close up snapshot rather than a family photo and power phrases becoming more popular than long speeches. Physics changed from a Newtonian view of the world or mechanical certainty, to the mystery found in the expanding universe and “the inner dance of the atom” (Ackerman 2001:23). Relativity, uncertainty, and new discoveries questioned the myth of scientific certainty and objectivity. There developed awareness and a place for spirituality as well as an attraction to the archaic and mystical codes of perception and to inductive as well as abductive ways of reasoning. Sweet (2000:28) writes about “postmodern pilgrims in the twenty first century with first century (premodern) passion”. With postmodernity comes renewed interest in the metaphysical, not as a static universality, highest certainty, meta-narrative, a foundation of everything behind the surface of occurrences or higher hidden reality. Rather as an appreciation of the individual’s life and relationship within the cosmos as spiritual within a holistic view of reality and the role of unending energy in the macro and micro cosmos (see Van Peursen 1995:21; cf Du Toit 2004:55-56). In premodernity, faith in the dependence on the metaphysical controlled people’s lives. In modernity reason, science,

technology, and macro-social systems were dominant. In postmodernity human experience becomes more prominent (see Vorster 1999:106). It is the experience of especially the present, the incidental, and the local against general universal values. People view reality differently and from different angles and therefore with different conclusions and experiences of God or the Source or the Metaphysical are possible and all are equally valid. Metaphysical truisms cannot be denied because they are *necessarily* presupposed by any conceivable activity. Charles Hartshorne (1962:285) explains it in the following way:

Metaphysics we may now define as the search for necessary and categorical truth-necessary in that, unlike empirical truths or facts, it excludes no positive possibility, and thus imposes no restriction upon the process of actualization, and categorical in that (unlike mathematics interpreted as deduction from unasserted postulates) it applies positively to any actuality.

These claims or metaphysical truisms then cannot be denied because they are necessarily presupposed by any conceivable activity that for him led to the idea of God. Critical reflection on human experience could then lead people to theism. I agree with Riggs (see 2003:144-146) that such metaphysical assertions could build a potential bridge between Christianity and postmodern culture as well as between postmodern Christianity that seeks plurality and more traditional Christianity that seeks universal assertions. The starting point could be the reflection on the encounter people had with Jesus (God represented) which suggested a divine reality that was personal.

1.2.2 Theory of science

Empirical reality is encountered in this research dissertation in an inductive, deductive and especially in an abductive reasoning way. Deduction and induction are more typical of positivism where knowledge is

only “true knowledge” when it builds on both the positive criteria of rationality and empiricism (Van der Ven 2000:56-57). Abductive reasoning is a non-positivistic approach and new way to construe reality (cf Pierce 1957:236-237). The three processes are, for example combined in the drawing of conclusions from the observations of others and of those of the researcher for example an abductive process; from the conclusions, hypothetic forecasts are deducted and tested in an inductive way (cf Van der Ven 1998:108).

1.2.2.1 Deductive Argumentation

Philosophers like Wisdom (1952) regarded the discovery of new ideas as mere chance, guess, insight, or some mental jump of the scientist. He (1952:49) writes:

There is no rational machinery for passing from observational premises to an inductive generalization but that hypothesis is attained by some mental jump. The function of observations is not to lead then to a hypothesis but to test it by means of a hypothetical-deductive system where the hypothesis is expressed in a particular statement, and a conclusion is deduced and tested by experience.

Deductive argumentation works from a fixed empirical point seen as valid. The focus is on the positivistic ideal of true knowledge with an idealistic and optimistic view of people and society as good. In nineteenth-century logical positivism the focus was not so much on fixed scientific laws but on the premise that science can only make a contribution when it produces valid claims (laws), which can be verified by empirical data (see Swingewood 2000:11). The goal of deductive reasoning is to prove the final truth of a hypothesis or set of rules in order to confirm the final truth. In practice, it means that one decision follows another according to a pre-

programmed plan (Mouton & Marais 1990:32). It is applied in the form of a specific argumentative structure containing two premises and a conclusion. The first premise is a general statement, which includes the conjecture to be tested. The second premise serves as a description of the case at hand and the conclusion represents the application of the general statement to the case at hand. Van der Ven (1993:116) warns against naïve deductive logic stressing that the researcher cannot arrive at general conclusions from specific instances. However, by verification and falsification the validity of the application supported by argument may be tested empirically. Verification asks whether the deductive conclusion, arrived at via argumentation, is observable also in the real world based on all possible empirical instances. In contrast Ricoeurs' emphasis on the legitimate character of interpretation is postmodern in the sense that objectivity no longer has the meaning of verification but takes a postmodernistic holistic nature of understanding turn that involves evidence, arguments, and conclusions that are probable but not proofs (Stiver 2003:61). Falsification asks whether it does apply in a single instance.

The argumentation that deduction follows is that if all premises are true, then the conclusion must be true too. Deductive inferences or deduction involve drawing conclusions from premises (other statements) that necessarily follows from such premises. The conclusions are then already contained (explicitly or implicitly) in the premises. The most common forms of deductive reasoning are deriving hypotheses from theories and models and when the meaning of a concept is clarified through the deductive derivation of its constitutive meanings. The use of the phrase “following this”, “on the basis of he aforementioned,” “hence”, “thus”, “therefore”, “this leads to” are an indication of deductive inferences being made. Research done in this way will be a clear conceptual framework (model, typology, and theory) that leads the conceptualisation, operational and data

collection process rigidly, and analysing and deducing from the data a conclusion or truth. It is suitable for the testing of hypotheses and explanatory studies. The disadvantage being that no room is provided for the uniqueness of phenomena without scientific laws or universal principles. The goal of the researcher is to objectively observe and analyse the object. From the data the researcher in a casual way works deductively reaching a “conclusion” or “truth.” Deductive and inductive reasoning are science-theory applied within a modernistic paradigm. Deductive reasoning requires coming to conclusions based on knowledge available and requires proof of the basic premise and of the process followed in reaching the conclusion.

1.2.2.2 Inductive Generalisation

The proposing of a new hypothesis need not be a mere guess or mental jump instead, there could be a logical relation between and movement from observations to the new hypothesis. The logic involved here is the logic of inductive inference which Reichenbach (1938:383) puts it as follows: “There is an inductive relation from the known facts to the new theory...we shall never have a definite proof of the theory; the so-called confirmation consists of the demonstration of some facts which confer a higher probability upon the theory, for example, which allow rather simple inductive inference to the theory”.

In a general sense, induction refers to the observation, directed by a reflection of phenomena in the empirical reality. It includes the discovery and naming of classes of phenomena, patterns in it, and the uncovering of comparative correlative and causal relationships between them. Inductive argumentation originated in place of the objectivistic ideal and a model forms the starting point for research. Although a more subjective process, the objects of research done in this way still will not become co subjects in the research journey in a critical epistemology of participation or reflection

as in abductive reasoning and the way in which my research journey evolves (cf Swingewood 2000:203-208). Hypothesis is set in the beginning and determines the outcome. In practice, induction should be followed by deduction. In the inductive phase, the focus is on selected individual cases that exhibit certain patterns seeking to identify such regularities within another population. Deduction occurs between induction and testing (which is done on a different set of empirical information) in which the general occurrence of such regularities is conceptualised by means of theories, conjectures, and hypotheses. Before these conjectures and hypotheses may be applied concretely, they must be stated in the form of general knowledge and shaped into established theological theories, which are then adapted, modified and restructured. Then they could be declared hypothetically by deduction applicable to other concrete cases and the application tested for validity (Van der Ven 1993:115-116; see Swingewood 2000:119-22; cf Dreyer 2002:921-922). Inductive reasoning goes beyond the information that exists, takes what is observed or known about one situation and applies or generalise it to other situations. The researcher should be aware of the danger of over-generalisation, missing the individual differences in particular cases and assuming that relationships between events are stronger than they really are. Inductive reasoning according to Collins (1999:71) does not so much require proof of its conclusions but rather clarity.

Inductive reasoning involves applying references from specific observations (such as a sample of cases) to a theoretical population. The researcher uses statistical inference and generalises from a sample to the target population. Research begins not with an explicit conceptual framework but with common hypotheses or presumptions that lead the research process although less structure than in deductive approach. Through processes of inductive generalisation, data is analysed and interpreted and ends in a systematic explanation of a conceptual

framework for example a model or typology (Mouton & Marais 1990:32). This approach is suitable in hypothesis generating studies with an exploring goal. The supporting premise provides only gradual (from less to more) support for the conclusion, if all the premises are true, the conclusion is probably true but not necessarily true. Another form of inductive reference is retroductive reasoning that uses inferences from observations or data to construct or infer an explanation of such observations. Hypotheses are created to provide plausible accounts and explanations of observed events and data. The shortcoming of inductive reasoning according to Van der Ven (1990:133) is a predetermined outcome and a view of knowledge as only true when it is based upon positivistic criteria of empiricism and rationality. This in turn makes it impossible for the “object” of research to become co subject. Distance is kept between researchers and researched and distance between researcher and the cultural or religious traditions that shaped the researcher.

In qualitative methodology, both deductive and inductive processes may be combined in that during the course of the investigative process the researcher encounters the empirical phenomena twice (Pieterse 1993:189). During the induction phase, the researcher emerges out of the empirical material and after deduction goes back into it and in this latter phase examines new data material. By combining during the research the two approaches, the dangers of objectivism, positivism and empiricism may be avoided. Deductive approaches that start from the text and inductive approaches that start from the actual cultural context could be complimentary to each other.

1.2.2.3 Abductive Reasoning

According to Habermas (1984:397) social science will lose its freedom when it is bonded to predetermined categories, model or norms. Social science has no objective data to work with as the data is already arranged

within the context of institutionalised social structures. Therefore, dynamic interaction between premise or approach and results should be the goal that in turn could develop both or change or correct it. Interaction and inter-narrativity is viewed according to Curt (1994:235) as: “social practices which are productive of experience and which construct realities in which we live”. Abductive reasoning then does not become a strict logical argumentation to discover useful hypotheses, and the starting point is not existing knowledge. Knowledge is regarded as *relative* and all signs in actions of language viewed as *symbols*. It brings in experience for example worldview, as metaphor it generates new possibilities of understanding, transforms conventional perspectives by challenging it and providing new ways to construct reality, and is an epistemological approach that is part of the postmodernistic paradigm. Abductive reasoning or retroduction involves a process of back-and-forth movement of suggestion checking in which a dynamic reciprocating between premise and outcome may take place (Dreyer 2003:923). The logic in this way of knowing is neither exclusively inductive (from material to hypothesis) nor deductive (from model to material) but includes both in a procedure called abduction. Mouton (see 2001:118-119) describes “retroductive reasoning” or “inference to the best explanation” as another form of inductive inference in which inferences from observations or data are used to construct or infer an explanation of such observations. In practice it means that the researcher reflectively think up an explanation or hypothesis that would explain the observed events. This is done on the basis of the observations made, and the perceived trends and patterns in the observations.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the nineteenth century thinker avoided the danger of empirical one-sidedness in both the deductive and inductive approaches in positivistic epistemology. His non-positivistic approach is called abductive reasoning (Peirce 1957:236-237). Something novel is

associated with something conventional in order to transform conventional practices in a metaphor. Abductive argumentation, according to the New Testament theologian Brawley (2003:605-608), “would begin with a shock, a challenge or a disorientation breaking the frames of conventional thinking and confronting people with a new way to construe reality.” The development from one sign to another in communication can be described as a language action. During this process of communication and symbolic reference, ideas are being transferred because symbols receive meaning while becoming new symbols in the process. Usually it entails an infinite referral process. Signs, imbedded in a bigger network of relations, will refer meaning because the sign as object produces an interpreting or meaningful idea. In the process as meaning is attached to words and ideas or concepts, the development from one sign to another becomes a necessity. Meaning develops as the interpretation of a sign from one network of signs to a sign in another network. The implication of all this being that final interpretation is not possible and that a sign as object can never provide the same meaning for everyone under all circumstances (cf Peirce 1932:136-138, 152-153). According to Fann (1970:4) Peirce insisted upon that the birth of new ideas could never be cleared up satisfactorily by sociological, historical and psychological investigations alone but that philosophers should also conduct logical, conceptual investigation of discovery. Scientists then do not start with hypotheses but start from data and Peirce’s theory of abductive reasoning is concerned with reasoning which starts from the data and then moves towards hypotheses. In explicative inference (analytic or deductive) the conclusion follows from the premises necessarily. In ampliative inference (abductive and inductive), the conclusion does not follow from the premises with necessity. The conclusion amplifies rather than explicates what is stated in the premises.

Abductive reasoning is a means to interrogate and explore or scrutinise theories but not to formulate theories. Although it implies inference like induction, it is more concerned with explanation rather than with a process of description. In *inductive* reasoning, the idea is to move from the sample to the whole. In *abductive* reasoning, there is movement from the whole to an interpretation or explanation. The abductive process is an active and reflexive process (Curt 1994:88). It is active as it assumes that knowledge cannot be derived canonically as with induction and deduction but only in a reconstructive sense by way of interpretations, understandings, and explanations. The “practical craft” (Curt 1994:232) of abductive reasoning explores the possibility of knowledge in a retroductive, reconstructive way that describes the steps that led to the result, giving reasons for adopting a hypothesis. If deduction includes statistical ratios, induction the operation that induces an assent to a proposition already put forward then abductive reasoning covers all the operations by which theories and conceptions are engendered (see Tomas 1957:237-245). It views theological discourse as interaction and as inter narrative consisting of all kinds of statements (not only those of scientists and professionals) which reconstruct the reality of for example spirituality. The nature of the discourse as social constructed practice of persons in the cultural context as well as culture in the persons is approached by way of understandings, interpretations, and explanations. The preliminary product could be in typical postmodernistic sense in-conclusive rather than conclusive (Fann 1970:17-18; cf Dreyer 2003a:328). Abductive reasoning is more concerned with the reasons for adopting a hypothesis and with the development of new ideas. Therefore, deductive reasoning explicates and proves that something must be, inductive reasoning evaluates and shows that something is actually operative, and abductive reasoning merely suggests that something may be or may be not (Fann 1970:51).

1.2.3 Meta, Basis, Praxis Theory, and Postmodernism

The discussion on paradigm theory showed how Western society has moved beyond the modern view dominated by scientific progress and absolute truth claims, to postmodernity as well as the correlating move in science-theory from deductive and inductive to abductive reasoning. Although there is in a postmodern discourse a suspicion towards grand theories of meaning and truth and in the words of Carthledge (2003:249) “a pick-and-mix attitude towards beliefs and values,” there still is room for theory in such a discourse. Theory evolves from an understanding that language and knowledge are thoroughly conditioned by historical contexts and are inter-subjective and not a matter of true assertions about an objective reality out there (cf Riggs 2003:79, 111). Such an approach asks for a dynamic reciprocal and interactive interplay between theory and findings or results in an abductive way. Context theory is not described and viewed as a set of mental constructs that exist independently from their embodiment in the physical, psychological and social structures of life (Anderson 2001:21). Observation, theory, hypothesis, and model could be part of the research journey in a postmodern discourse as long as the researcher stays aware of what is happening and of what he/she is busy doing. It further means that no specific predetermined established categories and norm-models will be chosen also taking into account that in social sciences there are no objective data available and that all data are already arranged in one or other way within the context of institutionalized social structures (cf Habermas 1984:397).

This asks for a self-awareness on behalf of myself as the researcher for example regarding own presuppositions, interests and concerns that may influence the research process and outcome. During this abductive reasoning process hypotheses may be adapted, the data in turn be subjected to hypothesis, and working back and forth between the researcher and researched, also being flexible and adaptable where the

data requires it, rewriting where necessary chapters while doing research and during the process formulating findings rather than final conclusions. A *critical-realist* epistemology approach will be followed which views knowledge as limited and partial. As a relational epistemology (not a detached approach), it functions in a person-centred way within a narrative-laden environment (see Wright 1993:32-46; cf Cartledge 2003:17, 26- 27, 44-45). Thought processes during the epistemological reflection on the action of retreat will be ideological-critical, deconstructive and inclusive while striving towards authentic communication with respect for the interactive input of others as co-researchers. People, concepts, and truths are viewed next to one another on the same level and in constant dialogue with each other to enhance subject-subject communication (Dreyer 2002:930).

The recommendations for or articulation of further research questions will not be imposed within postmodern narrative theory and model. Rather a new story may develop from the interaction between the Jesus-narrative, stories of the research subjects, researchers' own story, and those reading the research paper in a creative way. Within the specific Christian faith communities being part of this research process, the gospel values of Jesus Christ may be what is best for them but Christianity could also be experienced as an open narrative that may or may not break through other narratives (De Pater 1996:201). The aim will be to create the space and atmosphere for co-researchers to tell their stories and "unstories" and listening with respect and attention to it. People's interpretation of reality and the meaning they make of it are socially constructed according to narrative theory with the capacity to shift meanings and change the options available into a new reality or story (Neuger 2001:86-87).

1.3 Meta theory

Meta theory as mental window within which researchers works is the scientific point of departure that practical theology shares with other disciplines. The epistemological reflection will take place within the communicative-theoretical paradigm based upon the science philosophical positions of Gadamer (1991) *Truth and Method*, Ricoeur (1995) *Figuring the sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*) and Habermas (1993) *Na-Metafysisch Denken*.

Firet (1987:260) describes the communicative-theoretical paradigm as follows:

Centraal staat in deze omschrijving het werkwoord handelen; het bijvoeglijk naamwoord communicatief kwalificeert het handelen nader. De woorden in de dienst van het evangelie geven niet alleen het specifieke aandachtsveld van de praktische theologie aan, ze duiden ook het normerende en kritische element in de matrix aan; wat er ten aanzien van communicatief handelen ook te vernemen en te zeggen valt, vanuit de vraag of het strookt met de dienst van het evangelie moet bezien worden of het een bestanddeel van een praktisch-theologische theorie kan worden.

The focus is on the inter-subjectivity of the actions of people within a concrete empirical ecumenical setting. Communicative actions in the living world are viewed as taking place in a subject-subject relationship, on equal footing and with the freedom to create a living world where there is consensus on norms or a shared understanding within a domination free situation. In such an action scientific approach, reality is grounded in an action of communication and part of the fundamental search for meaning and the unlocking of meaning. The scientific theoretical perspective of a hermeneutic or interpretative paradigm that focuses on shared meaning through dialogue within a social context and with a broad understanding of

rationality can provide the opportunity to gather adequate practical knowledge with adequate rationality during the research process (cf Pieterse 1996:11, 132, 143, 151, 152).

I recognize and will make use of the significance of Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy as a postmodern philosophical resource for this research dissertation. The relevance of his focus on praxis, appropriation, experience, application, ideological critique and political philosophy as well as his approach and response to the challenge of pluralism is acknowledged. As a postmodern stance that points away from a pristine, universal, clear cut source of theology apart from interpretation and interpretive communities as well as the emphasis on the significance of texts, Ricoeur's work provides a distinctive postmodern resource for theological reflection (see Stiver 2001:30-31). However, the discourse will not focus primarily on any one foundational support.

1.3.1 Hans-Georg Gadamer: Understanding and Self-Understanding

Heidegger's 1962 work, *Being and Time* contains the provocative insight about human beings or *Dasein* as ontologically and irreducibly hermeneutical, and took hermeneutics from a theory of interpretation in general to being the key to understanding human beings (I am and I am with the others). His insights were taken further by his student Gadamer (cf Stiver 2001:38; Collins & Selina 2001:63). Experience in many ways is unavoidably and inherently hermeneutical and not just one of the various possible behaviours of the subject but the mode of being of *Dasein* itself (Gadamer 1991:xxx). People (and my retreat story) are a kind of story or project that is being written over time and this story is continually being written and revised in the light of experience.

Gadamer took the basic paradigm of interpreting a text and extended it to the universality of hermeneutics. He provides a perspective on the hermeneutical meeting with and experience of historical texts as a way to further understanding and self-understanding. His approach starts with an insider perspective where the researcher is a subject that tries to understand a text and the person behind it from within and where text, horizon, and context are interwoven (Vos 1996:14). The hermeneutical approach has important implications for social sciences as all understanding is seen as a form of communication within historic-situated contexts (Dreyer 2003:315). Gadamer (1982:5-7) emphasizes that understanding emerges through dialogue within a wider context of the historical in which this dialogue occurs. He also underlines the shortcomings of the positivistic method for social sciences and therefore the need for a hermeneutic approach. His main objection against the positivistic inductive and deductive methods was the distance it created between researcher and study object for example keeping a distance from the religious or cultural traditions that shaped the researcher. Therefore, it is not possible to find truth in the tradition through inductive methods with its ideal of objectivism trying to put a distance between the researcher and study objects, or distancing self from cultural and religious contexts and influences. Knowledge and truth are more than scientific testing of knowledge via testing but also part of human experience that may be found in philosophy, art and literature or the deposit of the communication expressions of people. Interpretation of for example art is not something observed at a distance, as scientists saw themselves doing with regard to the physical world. Rather, there is interaction between text and interpreter and the meaning of a text will go beyond its author and interpreter. That is why understanding is not merely a productive but a reproductive activity as well (see Gadamer 1982:101-110).

Gadamer (1982:269) argues that people are formed by tradition that provides presuppositions (which cannot be escaped) that make understanding possible. Tradition offers questions to ask and a foothold to grasp new ideas. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias in order for the text to present itself in all its *otherness* (uniqueness) and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore meanings. People are historical beings who have become conscious of being effectuated by history, and the ontological point is that we cannot avoid the tradition's influence, nor should we strive to do it (Gadamer 1982:300-307). This could be interpreted that he is either uncritical of tradition always favouring it or that either past or present could be favoured keeping in mind that tradition enables both.

Insights within tradition itself are important and can only be discovered through understanding, through interpretation. Understanding is part of people's existence in the world, part of the tradition and appropriation of it. Knowledge and truth are much more than knowledge acquired through method but are also locked into human experience. For Gadamer (1982:xii):

Scientific research is concerned to seek that experience of truth that transcends the sphere of control of scientific method wherever it is to be found, and to enquire into its legitimacy. Hence, the human sciences are joined with modes of experience, which lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.

To acquire knowledge in social sciences, symmetrical interaction between equal participants in communication is necessary with openness to all the different insights and communication, neither manipulative nor regarding one's own viewpoints and communication as better or more important. Thus, understanding has a communicative, dialogical nature and not just another method but always acquired within a tradition, in Gadamer's (1982:230) words: "Understanding is the original character of the being of human life itself." He also affirms the linguistic nature of understanding and the realization that knowledge comes in linguistic form. Gadamer's (1982:378) phrase "being that can be understood is language," emphasizes that human beings and philosophy and theology are irreducibly hermeneutical. Language connects history and the present and truth is discovered by an authentic meeting with the past where present and past are in dialogue in an equal relationship. Language then is the way in which experience is expressed and also the carrier or vehicle of truth (cf Vos 1996:18). Science and knowledge ought to be in an ongoing communication process of discussion about the reality or life worlds that people experience.

Interpretation cannot be done from a distance but as interaction between text or action of retreat and interpreter. There is an ontological relationship between language and reality, between text and interpreter. The text or monastic traditions are not entities wholly within the interpreter's or researcher's control but involve a creative rendering of the text, a process he calls "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 1982:306). Gadamer moved away from an author centred hermeneutics to focusing on the text where the text has a subject matter (*die Sache*) that must be interpreted. The fusion of horizons is not so much between the author and the reader but between the subject matter and the reader. It is a process of understanding in which the interpreter connects his/her horizon of assumptions, culture, and traditions to the horizon of the text in a creative synthesis of for example

researcher and researched. It does not result in an even match between the ancient and modern horizon or that the current horizon floods the ancient one of the text. It is a process of understanding as an ongoing merging (fusion) of the contemporary and the horizon of the tradition and never final. Therefore it is not possible to discover what a text meant via exegesis, afterwards asking what does it mean which is the task of the hermeneutic. It involves a creative interplay from the beginning. Application then is not added after the second stage of hermeneutics but from the discerning of the text-stage all the suppositions and assumptions are involved (Gadamer 1982:307-311). These preconceptions can productively be used in the hermeneutical to-and-fro movement and may be influenced by the tradition or by others. Understanding is never a closed constant final entity but a continuous fusion of the unique present and the horizon of tradition that produces a new bigger horizon. Because hermeneutics is the understanding of the same tradition within a specific situation and always new, it is always also application. Stiver (2001:47-48) describes the interplay of horizons, that cannot be isolated, as an *expanding horizon*. The horizon of the interpreter or reader is expanded in the encounter with another and understands the other horizon through his/hers. A variety of results are possible during this dynamic process. The claims of the text may be rejected but the interpreters' horizon still enlarged in the process. The claims of the text may be accepted, which result in a refiguration of your horizon as interpreter. Alternatively, the claims of the text may be appropriated in a new creative way, modifying the text. However, to be grasped by the ancient text, a synthesis is always involved. There is a relative distinction between the meaning of the text and the appropriation of it. Understanding is always dialogical and involves a back and forth movement between two horizons that are never distinguishable completely (see Gadamer 1982:267, 278, 297-306).

Another outstanding theme in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic is the claim that understanding itself is a form of practical reasoning and practical knowledge what Aristotle called wisdom or phronesis. Gadamer writes (1982:289), "If we relate Aristotle's description of the ethical phenomenon and especially of the virtue of moral knowledge to our investigation, we find that Aristotle's analysis is in fact a kind of model of the problems of hermeneutics." The hermeneutic process aimed at the understanding of a classical text is thus like a moral conversation and concern for application is present from the beginning. Application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co determines it as a whole from the beginning and an essential moment of the hermeneutical experience. Understanding, interpretation, and application are not distinct but intimately related. This proposes a way beyond objectivism and relativation to knowledge based on phronetic or ethical-critical considered judgements. This will not necessarily convince everyone and cannot be fully justified by method. All knowledge then is rooted in practical judgement even natural sciences in their presuppositions. Lyotard (1984:xxiv) refers to "many different language games-a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to institutions-local determinism." Therefore, "exact" sciences will therefore only be "exact" in as far as they are containers of knowledge protected in an artificial way by certain assumptions that in themselves may be considered suspect. In Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, concern with practice guides the hermeneutic process from the beginning; breaking through the theory to practice (text to application) model (see Bernstein 1983:38,174; Stiver 2001:42-43). The practical nature of the hermeneutical process is also accentuated by Gadamer's theory of effective history (cf Gadamer 1982:273-274, 337-341). Events of the past shape present historical consciousness and there is a fusion of the whole of the past with the present. When classic texts of the past are interpreted for example religious texts, these texts are already part of the reader even

before interpretation because the cultural heritage shapes the fore-concepts and prejudices and the practical questions brought to the interpretation process.

Gadamer (1982:5-7) placed rationality within a dialogical model with the emphasis on understanding that rests on the symmetrical relationship in interaction within a historical situation. Existence in the world as well as understanding is dialogical in nature. The practical application of insights that flow from understanding is the result then of a communication process, that presupposes rational consensus (Pieterse 1993:85). The *shortcomings* of his theory is that he is not critical enough of tradition to expose ideologies and power issues in the tradition and that the researcher's presuppositions including myths and narratives do not receive adequate attention (Dreyer 2003a:316). His approach also tends to absolutism of language and tradition (Vos 1996:19). However, *to his credit* he points out that each faith community finds itself within a specific tradition history and should expose itself critically to a tradition that is experienced through texts. Everyone that hears or reads these texts has a life situation in relation to the text or a context or horizon that should be considered with a possibility that the horizon of understanding could shift or enlarge and a fusion of horizons between text and reader may emerge. This consideration is relevant regarding the Benedictine, Franciscan, Taize and Dutch Reformed communities and their texts as well as the researcher's horizon and dialogue with these texts and their horizons. The ancient world cannot be understood except in relation to my horizon and as researcher, I do not have to or cannot *get out of my skin* becoming "objectivistic" in the process. However, the horizon of the researcher can be enlarged in order to understand. It entails an understanding across horizons that Gadamer (1982:292) calls a "miracle of understanding."

Gadamer rejects the positivistic paradigm of “enlightenment” but he is still concerned with the question of truth that arises through dialogical encounter with other traditions. He views the text not merely as an expression of life but to be taken seriously in its claim to truth (Gadamer 1982:297). His philosophy is a challenge to modern and premodern conceptions in his emphasis on the hermeneutical essence of knowledge involving interpretive judgements. These then will flow from the interpreter’s situated ness in history and from his/her presuppositions. He still allows for considered judgements based on evidence and reasons but in a postmodern way considers them to be undetermined by such evidence and reasons (Stiver 2001:53). It is not an embarrassment then for reasonable people to disagree. Furthermore, the influences of presuppositions and traditions are not impediments but also necessary grounds for understanding. Critical judgement means not to try and extricate one self from the human situation to be totally objective but from the horizons that the traditions themselves set in critical dialogue with one another.

1.3.2 Paul Ricoeur: Explanation of Existence

The non-positivistic postmodern “logic” argumentation of Ricoeur is the same as what Charles Peirce (1957), *Essays in the philosophy of science* and Ernest Cassirir (1955), *The Philosophy of symbolic forms*, described as abduction. In such an abductive epistemology, the premise is the relativity of knowledge and the symbolic nature of language. All the signs in language generate constantly new ways of understanding via experience.

1.3.2.1 Text Interpretation

For Ricoeur hermeneutics is in essence explanation of existence and answers the question of what it means to be a human being from the world of the text? and where “the text is the mediation by which we

understand ourselves” (Ricoeur 1973:141). The explanation of texts is an ongoing process in which meaning is never final, and the process of understanding never stops. Therefore, the dream of a hermeneutical ontology cannot be realised and to be human means to be dependant on ongoing interpretation (Ricoeur 1974:6-24). Although the text hides meaning, it invites the reader to a relationship where it could reveal meaning. Ricoeur functions within a hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition and uses imagination, language, dreams, metaphor, and narrative to shape the process of understanding as a creative event (Ricoeur 1974:160-208). He works with symbols and texts in history combining suspicion and hope in a hermeneutical way that avoids both gullibility and scepticism (White 1991:312).

He rejects a foundational approach emphasising the mayor role of the reader’s presuppositions and that thought flows form pre critical, naïve experience. Symbol gives rise to thought and pre reflective and first order language is filled with symbolic and figurative language that motivates the reader to critical reflection who in turn does not leave primary language behind (Ricoeur 1967:17). Hermeneutics is concerned with expressions in symbol, metaphor and narrative with regard to not only the meaning but also concerning the very being of humanity (Ricoeur 1991:16-19). The model of the text can be used as a paradigm for the interpretation of events and actions, where actions for example monastic retreat become a kind of text for others to interpret in multiple ways and influenced by the various presuppositions and traditions of the interpreters. A broadening of hermeneutics develops with his growing emphasis not only on texts but also on history and human life. Narrative dynamic of plot and character become essential to understand self and history beyond the confines of history. A fusion of horizons is inherently involved in such interpretation in which the interpreter (researcher) cannot leap out of his/her own history into the past but should allow for a fusion of horizons (see Stiver 2001:54-

55). Ricoeur's insights provide a possible way to do justice during research to both horizons in a postmodern context namely the life worlds, presuppositions, traditions, experience of both the researcher and those met on the research-journey.

The focus on the text rather on the author of a text provides a focus and substance that may be easier to grasp or to interpret than the internal experiences or thoughts of an author of the text. Ricoeur (see 1981:131-144) does not only focus like Gadamer on the dimension of *belongingness* or commonality of human experience and tradition that make it possible for horizons to connect at some level, but also on *dissociation* and alienation. His thoughts on this arise especially from the distinction between direct speech and texts or the move from direct speech to writing. The dissociation of the text from the writer opens the way for the text to be seen as projecting a world, which may or may not coincide with the actual, conscious intentions of the author. The emphasis is then not so much on the world behind the text but on the world in front of the text (what was expressed) where interpretation is to explicate the type of being in the world unfolded in front of the text. Self-understanding, appropriation, and self-criticism are mediated through dissociation of the writing from the author. The text is not limited to a specific conscious intention of the author but viewed as a rich or fertile source of interpretation with various possible readings.

This process of understanding asks for a deeper reading of the text and the problem of understanding concerns the situation (context) of the reader/listener (Ricoeur 1973:213-215). Understanding is not merely an attempt by the reader to put him/herself into the shoes of the author of the text but an event between reader and the text itself. It is not an event by which meaning behind the text is sought but it is the events that take place before the text and in interaction with the text (White 1991:317). He sees

text as an autonomous entity apart from its originating background. Understanding and explanation is inter-dependent and interpretation signifies the dialectical relationship between understanding and explanation, and takes place between reader and text. It is a process of giving meaning and appropriating meaning within relationships of texts, things, and interpretation by others (cf Ricoeur 1981:36, 52, 150; 1987:252). Ricoeur's hermeneutical model can also be extended to human action and experience for example retreat and this action already involves meaning and is symbolically mediated (cf Ricoeur 1984:57). The interpretation of an action is as such, a text that asks for its own history of interpretation (Stiver 2001:98). In practice, it means that the action of retreat has many possible interpretations which in turn allows for further ramification and development in research.

1.3.2.2 A Hermeneutical Arc

Ricoeur developed a framework for a threefold process of figuration or mimesis divided into prefiguration (mimesis 1), configuration (mimesis 2) and refiguration (mimesis 3) which he called the hermeneutic arc (see 1985: 52-87, 157-179). Mimesis refers to the transformation of worlds into symbolic worlds that encompasses both practical and theoretical elements. It is a general principle with which to map out a person's understanding of the world and of text (and of the action of retreat): the individual assimilates himself or herself via mimetic processes. Mimesis makes it possible for individuals to step out of themselves, to draw the outer world into the inner world and to lend expression to their interiority. It produces an otherwise unattainable proximity to objects and is thus a necessary condition of understanding (Flick 1998:33). Mimesis is the textual imitation of human actions and reality is being imitated in a narrative way that can make new (Ricoeur 1987:243). Mimesis has to do with the texture of the narrative (cf Dreyer 2003a:326). It denotes the pre-understanding of human action and rearranges these actions in a way to

change the reader's view of his/her actions (cf Vos 1996:31). Ricoeur (1981:180) puts it as follows: "Mimesis is poesis that is construction, creation. " It refers to the pre-understanding of human action and imitates the gods in the ritual, playing out the human condition in the theatre to rewrite in the process actions in the narrative. In the narrative questions and answers of existence emerge and the way to self-understanding is via the story (see Vos 1996:32-33). The aim of hermeneutics is to arrive at refiguration where the reader/listener may reach his or her own story. The hermeneutical arc relates further to the distinction between sense and reference and provides a way to answer questions about plot and context of faith communities and their own narratives for example asking what is behind what people say when they tell the innate story of the group, what do they really say? *Sense* parallels the more critical, analytical mode of thought for example explanation regarding the structure of the text for example code, rules and lexical meaning of ideas in language. *Reference* parallels appropriation where one moves beyond the world of the text opening up a new world in front of the text or how the text depicts reality and the meanings in narrative that refer back to the past or projecting forward in the future. This movement concerning time is possible because of language's symbolic/metaphoric quality. Language as signs is referential in nature and provides the creative potential in narratives (see Ricoeur 1984:77-81; cf Dreyer 2003a:325). Sense in different terminology relates to a semiotic analysis and reference to semantic analysis. His hermeneutical arc as a holistic process of understanding shows a move from a first understanding, then through critical explanation to a second, post critical understanding. The differentiation of Ricoeurs' threefold mimesis should not be segregated into modes of watertight compartments, appropriation for example affects also the configuration of the world of the text (Stiver 2001:64, 72).

- **Prefiguration**

Prefiguration (mimesis 1) refers to the pre-understanding (pre-concepts) a reader/listener/ researcher brings to the text, to the opaque world on which an author draws to write and on which the reader draws to interpret (Ricoeur 1984:53). The self of people acts as an agent and although not written yet, already contains a proto-plot in the prefigured world. Mimesis 1 or prefiguration (pre-conception) is the activity of the author or storyteller in the creation of a text. It is the pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, symbolism, and temporality. From this pre-understanding arises fiction and with fiction comes the second form of mimesis that is textual and literary. This tacit narrative activity of the self or construction of an ongoing narrative (proto-narrative) is possible, although not as a fully coherent outcome, because human action is already articulated by norms, signs and rules or symbolically mediated (Ricoeur 1984:57). The lives of people are not full-blown narratives as such but provide a basis of narratives that in turn help mediate, without eliminating the tensions of time. Tradition constitutes and shape people, which in itself is a kind of story (Stiver 2001:67). Prefiguration of the narrative is that which comes before the text, the reality within which certain acts and experiences take place, which has a narrative structure with symbolic value. The researcher's and the researched have a pre-understanding or story regarding God, retreat and spirituality. The prefiguration implicit in people's lives is an upcoming and developing story that points towards and is being shaped by configuration.

- **Configuration**

Configuration (mimesis 2) draws on this prefigured world, and refers to the author's imaginative construction of the text especially the emplotment and characterization as well as the way a reader construes the narrative world of the text. It is the involvement of the reader/listener and his/her productive imagination or configuration of action and the mimetic

transformation in processing experiences of social or natural environments into texts. These texts may be the everyday narratives recounted for other people in certain documents or in producing texts for research purposes. Such configuration is equally true of history and fiction. At this point, the reader and author artfully order the more chaotic prefigured time into a synthetic whole (Ricoeur 1981:20-26; 1984:68). Stiver (2001:68) questions where critical explanation fits into Ricoeurs' arc as he seems to go beyond the analytical, critical middle moment of explanation in the arc. Then the narrative reading as such by the reader could become a holistic act of reflection that is in it also a creative process. My research journey will aim to be a *narrative reading* of the monastic texts (actions) and a holistic epistemological act of reflection on the investigation (journey).

▪ **Refiguration**

The aim of the hermeneutical process is to reach refiguration where the reader arrives at an innate new story that becomes meaningful by interacting with the stories of other readers (Ricoeur 1981:186). There is more than one possible refiguration of a text as texts have surplus of meaning. A fusion of horizons occurs between the text and an appropriated world in front of the text where the text resembles a musical score lending itself to different realizations (Ricoeur 1984:157-158). Refiguration parallels his earlier use of the terms appropriation and application and refers to a possible world in which the reader may live by being open for the world of the text or a letting go in the process. The point is to move beyond critical explanation to a post-critical stance. The reader receives the self of the text and this new self or uniqueness of the text provides another view of the situation, and may move to action or creation of the new story (see Ricoeur 1981:184-193; cf Stiver 2001:69; Pieterse 2001:81-82).

Narrative hermeneutic is used to determine how memory was shaped in the past with the starting point current practices and the meaning attached to it. *Phronesis* is the next step as reflective action of the researcher that focuses on texts and events in the texts that provide these actions with ideals and norms. The reader/listener becomes part of the narrative, which has the capacity to change the reader. Ricoeur calls this a reflection on the working of mimesis. The mimetic transformation of texts in understanding occurs through processes of interpretation for example mimesis 3. It happens in the everyday understanding of narratives, documents, books etc. as well as in the scientific interpretations of such narratives, research documents, or scientific texts. Mimesis 3 marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. It is presented as the ongoing lifestyle of the listener/reader as a changed life or refiguration (cf Ricoeur 1981:20-26; see Flick 1998:34; Dreyer 2003a:326).

This is part of the process or strategy that I follow in listening to the different retreat stories in the different traditions and the new story that may develop. There is a correlation between the action of storytelling and the temporal nature of human experience. "Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Ricoeur 1984:52). The aim of telling stories and reflection on the story or the involvement with story gives birth to a new future story. The outcome of this research story cannot be determined beforehand and the time framework of the different stories where past and future are combined with the present should be kept in mind constantly. In applying these considerations to qualitative research and to the texts used within the research, the following mimetic elements can be identified (Flick 1998:33):

- The transformation of experience into narratives, reports etc. on the part of the persons being studied,
- the construction of texts on the basis of and in the interpretation of such constructions on the part of the researcher and
- the reading of the presentations of these findings when such interpretations are fed back into everyday contexts.

Ricoeur (1981:203) correlates the methodology of text interpretation and human actions by viewing human action after the analogy of texts. In this way action situations correlate to texts, which are established in writing, and these actions have a lasting form in the structures of socio cultural time or social patterns for example the actions of Benedictine monastic spirituality in the monasteries. These actions as social or religious phenomena function as texts addressed to those who can interpret (read). These then can be interpreted as “documents” and influence those (for example the researcher) who become involved with it (for example retreat) and can be understood differently within different contexts. I agree with Pieterse (1996:88) that Ricoeur’s theory creates the opportunity for empirical research as explanatory, critical dialogue between the researchers’ own context and the context of text perspective within a hermeneutic approach.

1.3.2.3 Symbol, Metaphor and Narrative

▪ Symbol

The linguistic turn in the twentieth century not only recognized the significance of language for thought but also figurative language as much more than ornamental. Stiver (2001:100) states that figurative language became even of greater significance than non-figurative language especially in religion. This is a challenge to theology’s non-figurative reflections and conclusions on figurative scripture language over the

years! Ricoeur (1967:171-174) was convinced that only symbolic language with its richer texture can describe for example the irrational phenomenon of evil and symbol develops for instance from a more physical description of evil to less physical and more ethical. This also undergirds his view that theology is second order figurative language. The reader cannot exhaust symbol because rich symbols cannot be reduced to literal language. Symbol has rich multi-dimensional semantic meaningfulness, elements of mystery as well as a reminiscence function, is embedded in the psychological, cosmic and linguistic dimensions, and influences the existential selfunderstanding (Ricoeur 1967:347-357; see Ricoeur 1973a:221, 222). Symbols ask to be interpreted in an indirect way, have a concealing function (mystical element) to make readers/listeners think about and ponder on it and lead to understanding (Ricoeur 1967:351). His hermeneutic approach opens up the potential that symbols through a process of creative interpretation may lead to a better self-understanding (cf Vos 1996:34-35). In hermeneutics the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavour to understand by deciphering or critical reflection are therefore interwoven.

- **Metaphor**

Ricoeur (cf 1977:12-24) agrees with the observation of Aristotle that to be master of metaphor is the greatest thing by far and reveals that imaginative judgement is at the heart of his approach. He is part of the movement in the latter part of the twentieth century away from figurative language as merely ornamental, in relation to more straightforward prosaic exposition, to recognizing its central position in language. His interactionist approach in which metaphor involves a sentence or an entire work instead of the substitution of individual terms emphasizes the process in which the literal meaning is replaced with the aim to construct an imaginative new meaning (see Ricoeur 1975:78-79). This approach allows for meaning to be let loose, provoking new insights and meanings that escape the

repertoire of careful hermeneutical control and where the best explication of metaphor may be another metaphor. Explanation in metaphor is one of probability and not positivistic scientific explanation, and concerns the sense aspects or immanent pattern of the discourse (see Stiver 2001:107,109).

▪ **Narrative**

Ricoeur regards narrative in the same way as metaphor not as dispensable and ornamental in serious philosophical discourse, but as necessary and the way in which people story their lives as the framework for understanding human identity and existence (Ricoeur 1984:6). Narratives are not reducible to prosaic paraphrases. Rather, narrative *story* things in a unique way as creative arts of productive imaginations. Therefore, one cannot evaluate or explicate the meaning that narrative conveys about reality in terms of positivistic science. Rather the interpretation of narrative follows the contours of Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc (see Stiver 2001:114-115). Ricoeur (1984:72) suggests regarding the tension of the interplay between chronological and human time, that human beings are inherently shaped by narrative or story shaped, with narrative offering a way of configuring a discordant concordance of time. Narrative is therefore indispensable and central to self-identity and any attempt to deal with the temporality of the self should allow for both continuity and discontinuity because people change. Narrative may function as a mediator between these two poles. People are not absolute authors of totally separate stories in the creation of their stories but at best co-authors with others who are also attempting to do the same. Personal identity exists in interaction with the surrounding society (cf Ricoeur 1992:118, 158-163). The development of identity can thus be described as construction of a life-story or configuration of personal events into a personal life-story including the past, present and anticipated future. This narrative capacity of self as the author is made possible because the self

can reconstruct the past from the present as well as give shape to the future with the self as actor.

A practical theological anthropology is not only concerned with a person or the person or people in general but with a person with a life-story, a person with a past, present and future. Every person has a core narrative around basic life concepts for example work, money, marriage, religion etc. from which new stories are being constructed into new specific situations. The core narratives may function as life maps for the interpretation of experience in the present and as ways of living the past in the present as well as roadmaps for the future (see Müller 1996:22-24; cf Stroup 1981:105-111). Therefore personal identity as primarily an event of interpretation becomes a hermeneutical concept where memory could use certain events from the individual's past to interpret it in terms of the meaning for the whole.

Ricoeur views theology as second order reflection on first-order narratives that should not be indifferent to the historical dimension. Theology may connect to *the* story (biblical story), *your* story, and *my* story (biographies, autobiographies) or to *our* story (the broader cultural narrative in which identities are formed). Ricoeur also manages to set important narrative concerns in a wider framework of philosophy.

1.3.2.4 A Narrative Hermeneutical Approach

The oscillation between the following opposite or different positions is relevant:

- **History and Fiction**

Referential unity refers to historical unity that addresses itself to events that actually happened or actual deeds in the past as historical reality (documentation and archives). Fictional narrative ignores the burden of

providing evidence of this kind because character, events, situations, plots are imaginary. It has no unity of reference in the structural unity of sense but narrative genre as a whole refers to historicity as a whole – all narratives have in some sense a referential claim. They intersect on the plane of historicity (the form of life that correlates with the language genre of telling) or the historical condition of man for example the hermeneutics of narrative function – basic historicity of human experience. There is a close relationship between the act of telling and the historical experience of which it is part. The narrative's referential component is the meanings in the narrative that refers to the past and projects to the future (see Ricoeur 1981:171-176, 280 - 287; Van den Hengel 1982:188; cf Ricoeur 1984:56). The sense aspect of the narrative refers to the immanent meaning of the narrative and includes the internal system of codes, rules, lexical aspects, and associations within language usage. Fiction and historiography are knitted together closely and both can be viewed as work of the productive imagination, both involving reference to history and a configurative or mimetic element. Ricoeur (1978:177) puts it as follows: "History by opening us to the different opens us to the possible. Fiction by opening us to the unreal opens us to the essential." The dialectical interaction between the story character and historical character of the narrative is important for the process of understanding or making sense of it all. History is not only a description of how it really happened (what was the case) but also the imaginative construct of a historian who represents it in a coherent and rounded form (what could be the case). This refers to the story-character of history. Fiction projects a world in which people might live. In an act of fusion of horizons, people move from the fictional world to relate to their world. He identifies "an interpretation of history and fiction, stemming from the criss-crossing processes of a fictionalization of history and historization of fiction." The complex interplay integrate lived time, chronological and broader historical time into a narrative identity (Ricoeur 1984:246).

On the sense level historical and fictional narrative both share the common form of the story which is prior in the writing of history to a search for laws; at the level of reference, historical narrative refers to events outside the narrative – fictional narratives do not. However, both have an intersecting reference in common for example a reference to history – to the fundamental fact that humans are historical beings that make their own history (see Van den Hengel 1982:134-138). Fictional narrative is never completely free of historical references because it reflects the humaneness and historical living of people in order for them to identify with the story (Dreyer 2003b:347). The value of the fictional dimension of history is its informative character without which it would be only cold clinical facts about what really happened and difficult for people's ideas about the world to relate to. The information thus provided give insight in the worldview of the storyteller. The value of the narrative function is in the historical and fictional working together to make sense of the world and creating opportunities for human action. The aim of narrative hermeneutic is not to judge the stories as true or false on the ground of historical authenticity, but to view their experiences as authentic despite of what may be historically true or false (see Ricoeur 1970:123-141; cf Ricoeur 1978:188; Pambun 2001:287).

There is also structural unity between historical and fiction narrative: in history as narrative, general laws function differently than in natural sciences in that the historian does not establish laws but only employs them (cf Van den Hengel 1982:180). Historical explanation is a discourse with a narrative form and singular statements in configurations that constitute a story. Plot provides the connecting link between historical and functional narrative: the organization of facts or events, successive actions, thoughts and feelings as having particular directedness and the reader is pulled forward by the development and respond with

expectations concerning the outcome (Ricoeur 1978:182). As story, all history is about some mayor achievement or failure of men living and working together and the reading of these histories derive from the reader's competence to follow stories. All narratives combine chronological (sequence) or episodic dimension and non-chronological (pattern), the attempt to grasp together successive events to elicit a configuration. The writer of narrative strives to combine sequence and pattern through reflective judgement. To tell and to follow a story means to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successive wholes. Through narrative art the story and a storyteller becomes related; a relationship between teller and tale and teller and audience develops (essence of narrative art).

History, for example of the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize traditions is more than the unearthing of facts buried in documents which are to speak or simple factual description (a positivistic modern view of history). Modern thought led to dualism of mind versus matter, to a dependence on logic and mathematics apart from inner perceptions, to a mechanistic view of the world and to the domination of nature by humanity. The twentieth century postmodern turn was primarily a linguistic turn (deconstructive, context-orientated) without positing universal assertions about reality. The trend is thus complicated nexuses of meanings that allow people to structure reality and to communicate (see Riggs 2003:66-73). History is an imaginative reconstruction (meta-history) with a great gulf between what actually happened and what is historically known. All knowledge is historically conditioned by the world people inherit and by the involvement in the historical condition with others. Knowledge is inter-subjective and the current meaning of a text which comes through the historically conditioned understanding (interpretation), opens up a new horizon of meaning beyond any authorial intention (Ricoeur 1980:125). The historian does not merely tell a story but makes an entire set of events as a

completed whole into a story; an explanation by emplotment (romance, tragedy, comedy, satire). There is also an explanation via ideology or ethical element in history because the historian has a position in the present world of social practice with all its ideologies (anarchism, conservatism, radicalism, liberalism). The historian seeks to explicate the point of it all within feminist, mechanist, and contextual discursive arguments (Ricoeur 1978:189-190). The events are truly made into a story but are still claiming to be a representation of reality (verification function).

Narrative affirms its relationship with reality through the encounter and mutual interaction between historical narrative and fictional narrative. Meaning is generated in the dialectical exchange between the story-like feature and history-like feature of narrative (Pambrun & Meier 2001:285). On history's side, no historical text consists of a mere description of events as they really occurred but of a selection of events that are ordered or configured, by drawing upon representative or imaginative constructions. Ricoeur (1978:188) invites us to understand and assent to what has happened "as if" – an imaginative reconstruction. It is an act of configuration as dynamic operation to organize events into a completed entity that sustains the structure of the entire storylike feature of history at work. From the side of the fictional dimension no operation of configuration is completely independent of a historical reference (Pambrun 2001:286). Otherwise, the readers cannot identify with the story. The narrative must reflect a familiarity with the historicity of people. For Ricoeur then the value of fiction is its cognitive power, the implicit idea of the world that is much more than positivistic data.

Therefore, to determine then what the faith stories of a community or a tradition are and what comparisons and differences there may be, the narrative strategy proves to be helpful in the going back to the plot and context of their stories to determine what lies behind their group-story,

what does it really say? The *hermeneutical arc* of Ricoeur is a practical way to arrive in a hermeneutic way at refiguration (at reception of the story) or to develop as reader/listener a new personal story. The personal life stories of the researcher and the researched find their meaning in the interaction with the stories of others. This story about the characters deeds, words, and experiences are communicated in such a way by the author that it may change the personal stories of the listeners/readers. The configuration process provides a bridge, between the prefiguration of the emplotment/activity of narration and the process of refiguration. Whilst reading/listening the receiver can create unity in the mimesis process, the texture of the narrative or imitation or representation of the action. It should consist of a reflection by the reader/listener/ researcher on the activities, norms, ideals to which the text refers and being absorbed or pulled in by the narrative. Mimesis one or prefiguration is the creative action of the author, mimesis two is the involvement of the reader/listener or configuration and mimesis three is the changed or new life of the reader or new story, a refiguration (see Ricoeur 1983:46-92; cf Dreyer 2003a:326). The outcome of the research story or new story cannot be identified beforehand but through the involvement of the reader/listener, a new future story might be born (a process of *prefiguration, configuration and refiguration*)

Mimesis as the transformation of worlds into symbolic worlds (practical and theoretical elements) or the creative imitation or representation of action, especially their logical structure and significance, then reenacts the reality of human action according to its essential magnified traits. Fiction is the productive imagination that refers to reality not in order to copy it but to describe a new reading. All symbolic systems make and remake reality. Cognitive import makes reality appears as it actually does. Fiction reorganizes the world in terms of works, works in terms of the world, and describes again what conventional language has already described

(Ricoeur 1984:31-48). Both history and fiction refer to human action; history in compliance with the rules of evidence common to the whole body of science (truth claim) and fiction in claiming to describe again reality according to the symbolic structure of fiction.

▪ **Character in Narrative: Victim and Agent**

Characters have a set of distinctive marks, which allows the re-identification of an individual as being the same and being recognised. The character is the one who performs the action in the narrative. The identity of the character (numerical – finitude perspective and qualitative – uninterrupted continuity or permanence- in- time) is comprehensible through the operation of emplotment transferred to the character. Characters are plots themselves. The character in a story for Ricoeur (1993:147) is not an entity distinct from his/her experiences. As a researcher within such dialectic, one will become one of the characters in the research story and not distinct from your own experiences. The narrative constructs the identity (narrative identity) in constructing that of the story told. The identity of the story makes the identity of the character. Characters can be identified, designated by proper names, and held to be responsible for the actions ascribed to them and as such, they are their authors or victims (Ricoeur 1984:193).

To tell a story is to say who did what and how by spreading out in time the connection between the various viewpoints (joining together of action and character). Stories are about agents and sufferers (victims). The agent considers options open, deliberates, and chooses one of the options contemplated. The agent initiates the processes of modification or conservation. Characters are agents that fulfil certain functions for example helper, subject, and protagonist. Agents are responsible (as determined by the narrator) for the effect of their action. Both *the who* (identifying an agent) and *the why* (the agent's motives) question

regarding the agent are complimentary actions. These processes also affect the victim (sufferer). There is an essential dissymmetry between the one who acts as agent and the one who undergoes and culminates in the violence of the powerful agent. Action are always interaction with others either in the form of cooperation or resistance with the potential of positive change or negative obstruction. The reflective questions regarding monastic traditions and the action of retreat; the *who, why, what, with whom, against whom*, are related and a problem of identity that can mark a return to what is really happening and to the self (Ricoeur 1984:55; Ricoeur 1995:306). To answer these questions, the experiences of people in the present (retreatants, monks) in story form should be taken seriously. The interpretation of the experiences of people may reveal their needs and how they see themselves, as agents or victims. Narratives have the potential to open up new possibilities in the lives of people and the involvement of the listener/reader of these stories opens up possibilities not to be victims in their own life-story but agents in symmetrical subject-subject interaction with others (Dreyer 2003b:349).

1.3.3 Jürgen Habermas: A Theory of Practical Intent and Emancipating Interest

Habermas appropriated Gadamer's approach as a way to fulfil people's interest in public dialogue. He was convinced that Gadamer's approach was to assume meaning and not being critical enough of the deep distortions of knowledge to fulfil the emancipating interest of people. Habermas (see 1985:181-211) is concerned what will happen when one is subjected unconsciously to pernicious ideology or when communication is systematically distorted while the interlocutors are unaware of it. His theory is critical of society in order to accomplish a better and more just society. He emphasises the embeddedness in time of scientific knowledge and the need for a communicative model of rationality. Every positivistic approach, in hermeneutics too, has a hidden knowledge interest for

example a *technical interest* to dominate and by not explicating it, it creates an illusion of objective, value free knowledge. In the process, scientific knowledge could dominate the social process instead of people controlling it. The hermeneutic scientific approach is further lead by a knowledge interest for example a *practical interest* aiming to reach inter-subjective communication. All knowledge is a product of specific interests and humankind should be helped to control future development through goals obtained by communication. (see Habermas 1972:51, 195, 302-304). In the reflection on own interests and by the mutual discussion and formulation of mutual goals, people may determine their own destiny. In the process, society can be freed from the technical and scientific domination that depletes the sources of value and meaningful existence. Reality and the obtaining of scientific knowledge are approached in different ways depending on the knowledge interest involved:

- Firstly, a labour or physical existence focus with technical domination and an empirical analytical approach to reality,
- secondly, a linguistic approach in order to understand and choose the best or appropriate communication actions by inter-subjective consensus and hermeneutical orientation, and
- thirdly, an emancipating knowledge interest, where power imbalances and dependent relations, ought to be corrected through critical self-reflection. In this approach, there is always an interactive relationship between subject and object and between theory and praxis (Habermas 1972:310-324).

A hermeneutic is needed that focuses on the uneven relationships and power imbalance in communication to reach an ideal communication situation that is domination free and that provides symmetry in the fusion of horizons (Habermas 1972:192). Social sciences should lead by *emancipating interest* and hermeneutics complimented with an

ideological-critical approach. It entails furthermore a critical self-reflection in order to identify and abolish the obstacles in communication actions for example relationships of power and dependence. The task of hermeneutics should include a critical stance regarding tradition by exposing hidden ideologies when trying to make it meaningful in later contexts. Ideal communication action will take place when there is an unconditional acceptance of one another in the interaction, communication on an equal footing and when aiming for mutual understanding and consensus (Habermas 1982:72-84). The following conditions to prevent pressure or force, should apply:

- discussion without pressure to act/react and the freedom to share arguments freely,
- all partners in the discussion to have equal opportunities in the communication process, and
- all participants free to vent feelings and wishes and with the opportunity to command, to make promises or to be accountable or hold others accountable and to disagree (Habermas 1982:47; 1984:177).

In practice it means that the researcher while investigating in critical stance the “object”, is also critical of his/her own beliefs, ideologies, agenda and stance for instance his/her interests for doing research in a specific way. During the research journey, an interactive relationship between subject and object and theory and praxis will be maintained. The aim will be to reach inter-subjective consensus in a subject-subject relationship about truth, correctness of premises and authenticity of subjective experience. Three spheres of interpretation or areas of reality provide the context for actions of communication to take place in:

- objective reality of things and events (instrumental actions, theoretical discourse),
- social reality of values and norms (strategic practical discourse),
- and the subjective reality of intensions, needs and emotions (communication actions-identity discourse).

The rationality of these actions is found in the argumentative praxis where subjects may articulate themes of claims of validity and either confirm or refute it. In this way the scientific rationality within a communicative-theoretical perspective may be viewed as a communicative-rational learning process where people in the inter-subjective conversation can reach consensus about validity claims. In the process, normative premises as well as subjective experience may be put into words and be discussed (see Habermas 1981:384-385; 1993:65-74).

Within the scope of a theory of practical intent and emancipating interest then it is possible to view scientific-rationality, within a communicative-theoretical perspective, as a communicative-relational learning process. During this process, people in an inter-subjective dialogue relationship may reach consensus about statements of validity, normative premises and subjective experience can scientifically be described and argued. Bernstein (1983:43) summarizes Habermas's theory as follows: "he argued for the necessity of a dialectical synthesis of empirical-analytical science and hermeneutics into a critical theory that has a practical intent and is governed by an emancipating cognitive interest".

1.4 Basis Theory

Basis theory is fundamental practical theology theories that provide the starting point relevant to this research process opening up new perspectives and directions regarding the research problem. It also provides a framework to understand the communication processes of the

praxis of research, testing, and evaluating it critically it (see Pieterse 1993:51-52, 132-133).

1.4.1 Practical Theology and Theories of Communication

1.4.1.1 An Existential, Hermeneutical, Dialogical Approach

Existentialism focuses on the role of shared meaning. Authentic communication and self-actualisation assume an evolving relationship between participants during a communication encounter, that what happens to them during this process, determines the existential significance of the encounter (Jansen & Steinberg 1991:57). The reality of the experience, and actions of people can only be studied adequately by understanding what intentions, values and meaning lie behind it (*Verstehen*). The idea of *Verstehen* or to understand originates with Max Weber (1864-1920) who viewed the primary objective of sociology as understanding because human action is a combination of behaviour and meaning assigned to it. Two forms of understanding are relevant: direct *observational* understanding of the subjective meaning of a given act and *explanatory* or motivational understanding which puts a particular act or action within a sequence of activity that facilitates explanation (Cartledge 2003:79). The researcher is part of social reality as interpretative subject and uses the process of *Verstehen* as method in social sciences and study human actions in order to understand the meaning or sense thereof and especially what meaning the person attach to his/her actions. Understanding as an active process of construction involves the one who understands and is a creative process of invention (see Flick 1998:35; Pieterse 1996:73).

The hermeneutical approach emphasizes the interpretation of messages by people during communication, specifically the messages in communication as a dialogical process within a social context. The subject

and object converse with each other in this interaction process. The social context in which communication takes place is also emphasized (Slabbert 1992:49). There is a suspicion of the object but the object of study does not become the subject in the research process. People seek self-actualisation or for true human existence (meaning). This takes place within a context of dialogical communication as meeting, relationship, and interpretation among people and with God (Pieterse 1996:152-155). During such encounters, relationships may develop between people and between people and God. The world, people and God may be interpreted in a meaningful manner to find authentic existence in a free and responsible way.

Therefore, all understanding will proceed in the form of a dialogue or conversation. In doing research, the researcher's description of monastic retreat, reflecting on it epistemologically, takes place in the form of a conversation. In this dialogue the questions, spirituality, and commitments of the researcher are brought to the monastic traditions under study and in turn the researcher is confronted and questioned by their commitments, spirituality and practices. It is dialogical in the sense of a simultaneous event of all participants in a continuous and ever evolving constitution and exchange of meaning between them. Inter subjectivity; mutual understanding, freedom, and equality are key aspects (cf Jansen & Steinberg 1991:13). Mutual understanding by way of informing and interpretation of ideas and messages is possible as well as achieving consensus between participants. Boundaries may be shifted and horizons enlarged during the process. (see Browning 1991:15). The fundamental tenet according to Pieterse (1990:223-240; cf Pieterse [ed] 1995:57-73) regarding the perspective of dialogical association between people is that their communication is interpersonal; occurs in freedom and on an equal footing; is rational in that it provides good reasons for views and ideas; gives rise to mutual understanding through the exchange, communication

and interpretation of ideas and messages and is essentially existential communication.

Van der Ven (1999:46-49) views hermeneutical work as always concerned with revealing the meaning of texts produced in the past. The construction of a bridge between the past in which the text was created and the present, are necessary resulting in a new text representing a new reading of the old texts. The meaning that is contained in the text itself is uncovered and illuminated from the perspective of the present. This process takes place not without personal involvement or interest for example the reader/listener/ researcher may seek to better understand his/her own existence in the mirror of the text. Two sources are to be considered during this poly form and polyphonic meeting within an ideological-critical paradigm: the religious text from the past containing the reflection of the beliefs of people in the past as well as the present day situation in which the faith of contemporary people finds expression in non-verbal and verbal forms. Authentic communication and self-actualisation takes place in an evolving relationship between the participants in the encounter (Jansen & Steinberg 1991:57). It bridges the time gap between the past and the existential present, it is a dialogue of relationships regarding the relationship of the old text to the old situation and the relationship of the modern text to the contemporary situation. During the dialogue, the existential significance of the encounter is determined and the meaning of the ancient texts may emerge. Such an interpretative interaction and the process of the hermeneutical circle are not only applicable to written texts, but also to the actions of people that can be interpreted in the same way as texts (Ricoeur 1991:20-30). This hermeneutic communicative action as verbal and non-verbal interpretation and communication can be understood as linguistic praxis, praxis-coordination, and praxis-reflection. It provides a framework for empirical research. In linguistic praxis, to speak is to act and it is performed in three

modes: the objective mode that is concerned with truth, the social mode with correctness and the subjective mode with authenticity. In all three modes the speaker's intent is that, the recipients will receive the message and accept it. In this sense, the communication activity is aimed at the establishment and development of understanding, with the hoped-for result of agreement or consensus. In hermeneutic-communicative praxis, people (researcher and researched) reconstruct, reflect and reinterpret their own praxis that comes to the fore in the midst of the hermeneutic-communicative praxis. As Ricoeur (1992:143-168) shows, it is the narrative connection between contemporary actions and those of the past and the future that gives direction and meaning to the communication actions of people in contemporary contexts.

1.4.1.2 Symbolic Interactional Theory

The empirical starting point of symbolic interactional theory is the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their activities and environments. The focus is on the processes of interaction for example social action characterized by an immediate reciprocal orientation and the investigation of these processes stress the symbolic character of social actions (cf Flick 1998:17). The different ways in which individuals as pilgrims on retreat give meaning to the action and elements of the retreat give, the way they and the researcher give meaning to objects, events and experiences, are the central starting point for the research journey.

Symbolic interactionists view social life as an unfolding process in which the individual interprets his or her environment and acts based on that interpretation. This interaction is based on meanings that are assigned to the world. Social life is expressed primarily through symbols of which language is the most important. Prior to action there is a stage of deliberation or examination about how the situation is defined and how others are perceived to be viewing these actions. The reflective part

concerns how the action will be perceived socially (Cartledge 2003:78-79). The symbolic interactional view of meaning is a process of social interaction and hermeneutical activity that rests on the following premises: Human beings act towards things based on the meanings the things have for them. The meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction that one has with others. These meanings are handled and modified through an interpretative process (see Bryman 1996:55; Blumer 1969:2). The reconstruction of such subjective viewpoints becomes the instrument for analysing social worlds, which in turn means that the researcher is challenged to see the world from the perspective of the research subjects. Participation observation is crucial in this theory although other methods are also used (cf Flick 1998:18; Cartledge 2003:79).

Communication is approached as a dialogical dynamic process focusing on the continuous and ever evolving constitution and exchange of meaning between participants. The sender, message, and recipient are approached in a holistic way as inter human communication (see Pieterse 1996:148). There is shared involvement by the sender and recipient regarding a subject on which they are communicating. During this interaction, the goal is to reach agreement about meaning by using a system of symbols. Within each interaction, there are dynamic variables that may influence the sender and receiver's conceptualisation process (Vos 1995:158). The idea is to mutually deepen and enrich their understanding of the subject. Language or communication via symbols within a shared culture or social context about the same subject may lead to deeper understanding of a subject and to an enrichment of knowledge about the subject.

Three key concepts are relevant here (Vos 1996:174-177; cf Pieterse 1993:153):

- *Society's* role in creating an own self and an organized self through a shared system of symbols or language that is part of a culture. People receive symbols from their life world and create their own worlds by using the symbols. In this way, they are socialised within a social context where inter-subjective, collective rules of behaviour and similarities apply.

- *Self* as the core of the process of social comparison, experience of capability, situation, and context and group membership. It involves the internalising of individual experiences as well as the development of self by getting involved with the viewpoint of others. The self has a reflective capability to have inner dialogue by viewing self as an object and to anticipate the response in others. All forms of social interaction begin and end with self and the subjective understanding of reality surrounding the self.

- *Consciousness* as a process of self-interaction and part of each social action, especially in problematic situations where alternative potential behaviour is being considered.

1.4.1.3 Narrative Hermeneutic Theory

Contextualization, locality, and pluralism are important aspects within a narrative paradigm; which in turn are being shaped by contextual experiences within a narrative frame. A Narrative approach provides an inclusive frame of thought to accommodate different theories and to make them operational (Müller 1996:4). Gerkin (1986:54-59) describes practical theology as practical narrative theology and refers to such an approach as narrative hermeneutical. Narrative practical theology is, therefore, an ongoing hermeneutical process within the immediate storied context of ministry. The intention of this process is to transform the human story,

both individual and corporate, in ways that open the future of that story to creative possibilities.

I agree with Crites (1971:291) that the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative. Every new stimulus and sensation, or interpersonal action, consciously or unconsciously are being shaped in a story form through thought processes. Stories are events linked in sequence across time according to a plot. Narrative emphasizes order and sequence. Storying is both linear and instantaneous and incorporates the temporal dimension. Stories exist by virtue of the plotting of the unfolding of events through time (see White & Epston 1990:3-9; cf Morgan 2000:5). The life stories of people are created by linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a period and finding a way of explaining them or making sense of them. People including those met on the research journey give constantly meaning to their experiences while living their lives that shape the plot of the story. They create the stories of their lives by linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a time. People, interpretive in nature, experience events daily, and seek to make it meaningful in story form. Narrative is like a thread that weaves events together, forming a story. Stories can provide a network that may enhance meaning to life or function as epistemological lenses on your personal life or the lives of others. It gives a description of or an explanation for things as they are and as a narrative report, it binds actions, events, and people in a comprehensible pattern or experience (Müller 1996:21). There are many stories occurring simultaneously and different stories may be told about the same event for example retreat. Other events or the interpretations of others as well as my own as researcher, could lead to an alternative story.

“Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a

condition of temporal existence” (Ricoeur 1984:52). The purpose or future of the acts of storytelling and reflection on the story can only be found within the timeframe of the life stories of people. Both the past and the future are connected with the present. Therefore, the outcome or the new life-story as well as the research story cannot be predetermined. It is only through involvement with the story that a new or future story may be born. The plot and context of the story of a faith community or tradition will be investigated in order to listen what is behind that which they say, when they tell the story (ies) or to hear what they are actually saying. Not only the sense of the narrative (immanent meaning) but also the referent of the narrative, the past and future, appropriation as well as semantic analysis is important (Ricoeur 1981:171-176, 280-287; cf Müller 1996:25; Dreyer 2003a:327).

The aim of postmodern narrative hermeneutic is the construction of alternative stories in order to replace unacceptable old ones. The ideological-critical process functions within a deconstructionist perspective that seeks alternative perspectives, stories, practices, and behaviour and relationship patterns (cf Dreyer 2003b:344). Narrative can also be helpful in the understanding of the complex system of codes, signs, and metaphors in cultural institutions or faith communities. It comprises of plot, context or setting and characterisation (ethos, values), reveals their history in story form, and provides an indication of the meanings that the group attaches to events (see Hopewell 1987:103-107). In the narrative, questions and answers of existence come to the fore. The way to self-understanding is through the story.

1.4.1.4 Constructionist, Postmodern Narrative Theory

In *constructionist, postmodern narrative theory* the observer or researcher of a system or communication action becomes part of it. The researcher is actually becoming involved in a process of constructing a new system.

All descriptions of the research problem are primarily viewed as information of the researcher or observer. What the researcher tells or writes about what was observed or experienced; tell more or just as much about him/her as about the situation or system that was observed. This according to Keeney (1985:120) is then a movement away of observed systems to observing systems. Narrative hermeneutics make use of constructionist and social constructionist models (see Neimeyer 2000:207-242).

Constructionist theory tends to focus on experiential exploration of the tacit processes of self-construction, especially within the context of intimate attached relationships. It emphasizes how each person creates personal representations of self and the world, and acquiring the ability to transcend problematic constructions in order to construct things in very different ways. It seeks to gain insight in the way people view the world by means of metaphors through which they give meaning to their lives and is therefore interested in individual self-understanding and self-development (see Meier 2001:394).

Social constructionist theory on the other hand emphasizes the social origins of meaning and concentrate on discursive practices as the objects of study, as well as on transformation and critique. What it means to be a person is determined by cultural ways of conversing about personhood. Therefore, this theory focuses on self-understanding and self-development within the social context or the interaction of stories of people with one another. It is a systemic and collaborative approach that encourages equal status between researcher and subjects under study. Gerkin (1991:61) uses the term “participant observer.” Knowledge is not viewed as a psychological construction within the observer/researcher but as a shared construction within an interpreting community. During this process, all participants can take part to construct a new reality or story (Müller

1996:33). The relationship between researcher and all involved in the research journey could also influence the essence and nature of this new story.

Narrative theory attempts to bridge constructivist and social constructivist theory positing that people are storytellers by nature. People attempt to organize their experiences into coherent accounts. The life stories may at times become incoherent, oppressive, or circular. The aim in postmodern narrative theory is to assist people in a deconstructive reading of limiting assumptions, resisting oppressive narratives by dominant forms of discourse. In the process, they may become authors of more liberating hopeful stories (Neimeyer & Raskin 2000:6-7). During the research journey, I aim to listen to the stories of individuals and faith communities, to deconstruct master narratives and to construct authentic narratives. Postmodernist theory makes one aware of the linguistic cultural and social structuring of human experience. However, when overemphasizing it, the self may be engulfed or annihilated in the process. Therefore, the reflexive ability of the people participating in the research, their potential as purposive agents as well as what is happening within them during discourse will also be maintained.

Postmodernistic theory challenges hierarchy and the dominance of value-assessments of people as a form of deconstructive criticism. It displaces terminology and concepts from the context in which they are normally used and is ideological-critical, inclusive of the contributions of other viewpoints and acknowledges pluralism as a reality of life. The focus is on the symmetrical interaction between people as important persons and co-subjects in research. Thus there is no one and only or “final truth” (modernistic) to be discovered by a “rational” subject (researcher) but rather various, sometimes suppressed discourses and different perspectives on the whole. Communication becomes not so much a

subject-object process but rather an interaction- process between co-subjects (see Pare 1995:3-7). On the research journey, they are participants together with the researcher who is not the only expert with all the knowledge or truth about a phenomenon anymore. This social constructive approach of inter subjectivity with a consensual type of knowledge where the dialogical participation of all is valued has the potential to construct a new reality together. The researcher is not only in a critical stance regarding the “object” but becomes also suspicious in a self-critical way. Both the researcher and the characters are involved in the active process of story development and interpretation. The reflection on the stories of all involved, may eventually become a new writing or own story of the research process with new possibilities not ending with a conclusion but with an open ending as a text which may become the preface to another text for others that wish to do further research. Reflexive practice or hermeneutical-communicative actions of the researcher (see Van der Ven 1998:9) are relevant to the research of the problem statement stated. The description of the facts or situation during research is but only one aspect of a much more complex approach to reality where experiential, experimental, transformational, conceptual, and moral aspects will play a major part too.

I have certain expectations of the research journey as well as different experiences of my own and those of others that will be analysed, formulating findings and making choices during the whole process. Reflection (cf Van der Ven 1989:11) typical of self in the form of self-dialogue or internal dialogue with different selves is not action independent of the practice of research but part of the whole process where the researcher becomes interpretive subject and interpreted object. The topic of monastic retreat will not be approached merely as an object to be experimented on but implicitly as an experiment in itself, the researcher reflecting in the form of strategies, analysis, guidelines, and

evaluation. The epistemological reflection of the researcher on the investigation will be part of the process of knowledge production. Dreyer (1998:24) therefore emphasizes the role of the researcher as interpretive subject and object. The challenge will be to remain reflexive regarding his/her theological presuppositions because different ecclesiological perspectives may lead to different interpretations of empirical data and to different proposals of action.

1.4.1.5 Myth Theory

Myths as exemplary stories express peoples' beliefs and ways of thinking. The usual context of myth is ritual and myth provides the ideological content of sacred behaviour. Nijk (1968:272) views myth formation as secondary and as a continuation in language of the original ritual.

Ritual is described in detail under heading 1.5.3 and Rite of Passage ritual in chapter five as necessary background for the understanding of myth theory. Myth theory in turn forms the basis for observing, explaining, and understanding of the mystic aspects of monastic traditions.

The distinctive feature of a religious sign system is the combination of myths, rites, and ethics (Theissen 1999:2; cf Stoltz 1988:79-147). Myths function on an unconscious level and manifest in narrative form. It expresses people's beliefs and way of thinking. Social behaviour and interaction can be explained by identifying their mythical roots (cf Malinowski 1971:11-35; Bolle 1987:261). Rosemary Radford Ruether (1993:8) says the following:

Myths in the sense of exemplary stories are not illegitimate, and history is never completely objective, but is always a selection and interpretation of the past to make meaning for the present. But this does not mean that there can be no historical knowledge apart from subjective

wishes, nor that myth does not need to be examined for its spiritual and ethical values.

Rites are cultural forms and recurrent patterns of behaviour and social activities that interrupt daily life. In this way, the sacred becomes present in the mundane. This sacral reality represents another reality, an alter state of consciousness or mythical narrative of someone's life. Rites consist of ritual formulae that interpret the mythical narrative (cf Lang 1988:442; Theissen 1999:3). Rites like all forms of religious sign language represent a specific ethical consciousness (cf Theissen 1999:4).

In the middle Ages in the Catholic tradition, ritual became the focal point (ritualism) at the expense of the bible (myth). This in turn led to a reaction during the Reformation to accentuate the bible (intellectualism) at the expense of ritual. Lukken (1999:57) accentuates the integral corporeality as source of ritual to counteract the danger of dogmatism. Ritual carries a spiritual act or a creative act of the past (*Urzeit*) into the reality of the present, and the ritual drama supersedes the everyday reality with the potential of influencing this reality and those part of it (Dreyer 2003:320). As symbolic action, another function of ritual is to bring people in contact with a deeper (spiritual) reality and to create an opportunity to have an intense experience of the Mystery and transcendental or ultimate reality. Ritual transforms, mediates, orders space and time, marks transition periods. It has ethical, therapeutic, expressive, and “exorcising” dimensions. As social or religious drama, it embodies the memories, vision and ethos of a community or group.

In order to describe, explain and understand the systems of signs, codes and metaphors of for example mystic traditions (or other cultural or church groups), narrative provides an important way of understanding (Hopewell 1987:103-107). Narrative refers to the group's history as well as the

meanings they attach to the events. Myths show how godly powers and figures from the past for example St. Benedict, St. Francis, or Br. Roger became role models for their followers. Their actions become the model for the thinking and behaviour of others. The value patterns of a group or the characterisation in the narrative develop from the implicit myth of the group (Hopewell 1987:107-111). The latent myth is the sacred stories of people (the group) and the deep-seated myths behind the stories for example the sacred myth (foundational myth) of the monastic and Dutch Reformed traditions is the Jesus-narrative. These shape the experiences of people about themselves and their life world. What people share with others about their experiences of the world are the stories of their lives (see Crites 1971:296). Crites (1971: 295) describes the function of myth in this regard as follows: “they orient the life of people through time, their lifetime, their individual and corporate experiences and their sense of style, to the great powers that establish the reality of their world.” Myths tell a story or stories about people and their inner, psychological, and associative spiritual experiences in picture language and represent the life and wisdom of a group of people or tradition over millenniums (cf Campbell 1972:13). Therefore, myth theory could provide a cognitive basis for practical models of for example monastic behaviour. Scientific findings, which relate more to the outside world, cannot displace these myths.

(Honko 1984:49-51) describes myth theory via the criteria of form, content, function, and context:

➤ The *form* of myth

The form of Myth is a narrative about the origins of that which are holy where mythical prototypes or ancient figures function as role models, and creation- and foundational events are expressed in narrative form. Myth as narrative is different from myth as history because of the role of memory in

narratives. Memory is life carried by living people and in permanent evolution between dialectics of remembrance and amnesia and may remain latent for a long time to suddenly revive again and is part of the own era as a living link with the eternal present. Myths may be expressed in literary or narrated form, in dance, prayer, icons and symbols or thoughts, behaviour and dreams.

➤ The *content* of myth

The content of myth varies, for example: theogony, cosmological, cosmogony, anthropological, ancestral, cultic, saving, or revelation, *jenseits* and end time myths. Cosmological or creation myth gives authority in religions or faith communities to narratives about how the tradition or religious practices originated.

➤ The *function* of myth

Myth functions as a model for human activity and show how godly figures or powers from the past become role models for following generations. For example, the activities and teachings of St. Francis provided a cognitive basis for a practical behavioural model for the Franciscans.

➤ The *context* of myth

The context is usually ritualistic as patterns of behaviour sanctioned by usage thereof for example the rituals in Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize spirituality during liturgy and prayer times during the day. The ancient rule of St Benedict becomes ritual drama in the present influencing the lives of its followers. The role of the latent foundational myths in narrative form and story content of a new beginning provide a practical model for everyday behaviour for instance in monasteries. When the researcher describes or explains the faith communities it will be rational-analytical as well as against the background of the narrative and mythical character of the faith communities and spiritualities. Myths tell in picture

language of powers and wisdom that have remained through thousands of years. Behind myths as symbolic manifestations are universal archetypes that also make its ultimate core of meaning relative in interpretation. The meaning that myth conveys is the meanings of the followers whose myths they are and must be translated into their language. Myths are an important part of an *associative spirituality* for example monasticism in which mystical elements or the mystery of God and experiencing the transcendental through silence and meditation, are practiced. However, not in a *disassociate spirituality* for example Dutch Reformed tradition where dogma, logic and rational aspects are more important than in an *associate monastic context*. Both are relevant and inclusive because it is about the presence and experience of God although in different ways.

The history of Jesus of Nazareth is the foundational narrative or implicit myth of Christian spirituality that arose in communities in response to that history. The goal is then to test and evaluate the past, present and future of the tradition/community/spirituality according to its implicit myth by going back to the plot and context of their story and asking: “what lies behind what people say when they convey the own story of the group and what do they really or actually say” (Dreyer 2003a:324-325)?

1.4.2 Truth, Perspective on the Bible and Epistemology

Two relevant questions regarding the nature of truth and reality are: how do we know what we know and how do we justify what we believe to others? Cartledge (2003:41-45) describe three relevant theoretical frameworks for the understanding of the nature of truth in relation to claims of human knowledge:

- *Correspondence* theory claims that what is said about the world as true depends on how the world is. The concern here is whether a belief or proposition is either in correspondence with reality or

facts. Truth is viewed as mind-independent and relates to propositions that are asserted in relation to external reality.

- *Coherence* theory is more concerned whether a belief or proposition is in coherence with other beliefs, propositions, or statements of truth as well as truth as a contingent creation of language expressed in a culturally mediated way.
- *Pragmatist* theory's concern is whether a belief or proposition is useful to people as a necessary and/or sufficient condition for being true. Truth must be understood in terms of practice or as in postmodern discourse in terms of its function as a tool for achieving certain ends where true assumptions provoke actions that lead to desirable results.

According to Kirkham (1992:22) Charles Sanders Peirce (1957) understood truth as settled habits of action by the community. The community is constantly enquiring and could eventually converge on truth but until then all truth claims and beliefs are viewed as criticisable and fallible. The only propositions everyone would be expected to agree upon are those that reflect object reality. Peirce's pragmatist theory is based upon a correspondence theory (see Kirkham 1992:83-84).

Wright (1993:32-41) suggests a critical-realist epistemology that combines elements of all three theories. In critical realism, knowledge is viewed as partial, limited and may need to be revised in the light of external reality and acknowledged incoherence. It is not a detached but a relational epistemology functioning within a narrative-laden world. Knowledge then could progress via revision and "true" knowledge could make a difference on practical levels. 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 provide data upon which to make informed judgements. Consciousness and reason may provide sources for frameworks and concepts tested via empirical data collected.

Gods' truth is revealed in praxis, through the structures of reality by which Gods' actions and presence are disclosed through people's actions to reveal the truth. Revelation is not an isolated individual experience but a participation in tradition from a particular perspective or a tradition dependent, cultural, and linguistic phenomenon of a religious community. Within such a context, ecclesial praxis functions as a dynamic human process of critical reflection. Religion becomes the interpretive scheme that embodies myths, narratives, and rituals and which gives structure to human experience and understanding of the world. These practices and rituals provide information for interpretive frameworks and are regulated by those that form a Christian community with common beliefs and values (Anderson 2003:50-52). The community defines acceptable practice; experience and doctrine based upon its coherence with their linguistic cultural usage of the bible to resource and legitimise contemporary religious practice (cf Lindbeck 1984:112). Truth as experience and experience of God, although important, are embedded in the narratives, in the symbols and practices of these communities. Knowledge therefore is concrete and real within the framework of practices within the faith community (see Shuman 1997:215-217).

The bible as the "property" or faith documents of these communities offers interpretations based upon practice and provides a basis and interpretive framework or symbolic universe from which reality may be understood. It also provides an opportunity for people of the community to make it their own story (Cartledge 2003:49). Therefore, the truth of the bible or the truth of Gods' word is not something to be extracted by the human mind, to be

possessed as a formula or doctrine without regard to its purpose of bringing people into the truth. Gods' truth does not end with the community's concept of truth, neither does reason become the criterion for what is true, God is the authority for what is true of God. God and not the bible is the primary authority of faith communities of which the bible serve as witness.

To try to formulate a word of God as sheer objectification of truth detached from His being is according to Anderson (2003:53) idolatry that may come under human control as subjectivism of the worst kind. Rather, the bible is not merely a product made by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but continues to be a form of Christ-praxis (continued work of God in the risen Christ through the Spirit) that provides a basis for the life of the church. The fact that God reveals Godself in the texts of the bible cannot be proven but can only be believed. The church as community engages in the hermeneutical task of interpreting the Word of Christ in the context of the Work of Christ. A concept like "the truth" written out into permanent formulas does not exist. The bible contains the testimony of people about their meetings with God and about the truth that they heard from God which is temporary in character (cf Loader 1996:575-576, 579-586). These testimonies proclaim propositions about the truth and by listening to/reading these propositions the reader may be led to an encounter with God. God reveals truth in this encounter with people. In the process, the bible becomes word of God anew (Malan 2001:638). Immanuel Kant (1984:180-191) emphasised that the only way to speak or reflect about God during such an encounter, is in an analogical way, and using metaphorical language. Reason and senses know and experience the *phenomenon* (or "*Erscheinung*") and not the *noumenon* (the "*Ding an sich*"). God becomes in this sense only accessible as potential *noumenon* of which reason may have some idea of, but whom nor reason nor sense

can confirm (Malan 2001:636). The *noumenon* in monastic mystic traditions refers to the Mystery of God.

Du Toit (see 2000:92) discusses three factors to be taken into account with regard to the bible message and in the discussion about what the faith community believes about the bible. These are the bible as a pre-scientific or premodern document, the tradition as way in which the church or Christian community previously thought about it for example in dogma and an acceptance of and sensitivity for the current context (inter-scientific) as life- world of people. Since Kant, a different approach to the mythological texts of the New Testament developed for example Bultmann's demythologizing proposal (see Malan 1998:4-5) as well as the deconstructive reading of the text (cf Van Aarde 1996:460-461).

The revelation positivism of for example Bavinck (1956:95) in the Protestant tradition, where knowledge of revelation is viewed as the deeds of God in history available through the bible and in which revelation preceded the recording of the text, has been relativised by relational reasoning. During the history of the epistemology, relativation began with the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. Lauster (2004:264-265) as postmodern thinker, describes the essence of Barth's perspective on the bible as "Gottes wort ist Gott selbst in der heiligen Schrift" (Lauster 2004:264). The bible is both human word (fallible) and word of God. The bible as human word or text is a sincere testimony about God and of revelation. The bible as word of God is God in the bible. The testimony points in essence beyond it to an excelling, more superior Authority (point of reference) or God. The bible is a testimony of the revelation; it has no self-verification or authentication within itself but does have a revelatory character. The bible is not the revelation as such but a witness/testimony of or narratives about people within a historical-cultural context regarding the presence and mystery of God and therefore not a compilation of

rounded off truths about faith. It contains analogical metaphoric faith-language and is a dynamic action of revelation history (Van Aarde 1995:42). Instead of a choice for relativisation in which anything becomes acceptable, Van Aarde (1999:457) uses the term *deconstruction* that refers more to analytical construction than negative destruction. The bible tells the story of Gods' involvement with the reality of human existence and does not deliver clinical always accepted, objective truth that are not part of the context. It is not so much the words as such that are inspired by the Holy Spirit but the message, big lines, stages or the essence of Gods' self revelation. The authority of the bible is located in the Christ of Scripture as the word of God and not in the bible as a product of holy inspiration that could be detached from Christ. Truth is relational within the relation and interaction between insight, knowledge and experience where interpretation plays a major role (see Van Huyssteen & Du Toit 1989:4-10; 24-26; cf Britz 2002: 359; König 2002:145; Anderson 2003:56).

Truth then is regarded as a relational process and a listening process to the bible and its message within its context and the context of the reader in relation with Jesus Christ, and not an objectivistic or a subjectivist action. Truth is not something outside of the listener but dialogical in the sense that the truth of scripture comes to the reader and the reader(s) come towards scripture (Heyns 1976:34). Stroup (1981:91) puts it as follows: "The narrative of Christian confession or autobiography emerges from the collision between individuals and their personal identity narratives and the Christian community and its narratives." Historical truth is foremost faith-related where the facts of history are experienced in faith and revealed as confessions or faith-truths. New insights are always possible and understanding calls for interpretation that is to discover, translate, apply, and live the relational truth in a relational sense. It does not mean that truth should be abstracted from personal knowledge and faith nor that personal faith can be detached from Gods' own being and

word. Furthermore, it is not the theological reflection as such that leads to new revelation but because God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scripture is the normative truth of that revelation. However, theological reflection should take note of the presence of the One who is revealed in his continuing ministry to the world through the Holy Spirit. Scripture continues to be a specific form of Christ-praxis providing a normative basis for the church. The authority of the bible and faith in Jesus Christ as saviour cannot be separated; faith comes first, and then follows “authority” of the bible (see Anderson 2003:55-56; cf Britz 2002:259).

1.5 Praxis Theory

1.5.1 Practical Theology: A Praxis Orientation

Theology is practical in nature, Catholics with the legacy of Aquinas (focus on speculative, philosophical nature of theology), and Protestants with the legacy of Augustine (focus on theology as *scientia practica*) reached consensus on this issue during the second half of the previous century (Polman 1957:520; see Van der Ven 1990:39). The older model of practical theology as merely the application of biblical and systematic theology has been challenged significantly. Pannenberg (1973:439) viewed theology as completely practical but then with church practice as its specific object. Praxis according to Pieterse (1993:41) relates to the experience and knowledge of *Gods' presence* in the *world*. The (“exclusive”) orientations regarding the praxis (or “object”) of practical theology, for example either the pastor/priest or the congregation/parish or both had broadened since the sixties to *include* the context of society (Van der Ven 1990:40; see Pieterse 1993:42).

The move in practical theology to a praxis orientation can further be explained by the postmodern shift in culture from modernity especially in

the West but also from the perspective of liberation theology that have stressed that truth is not something abstract or remote but something that is done, it is truth in action or orthopraxy (see Phan 2000:4-63). This shift to praxis or value laden action arises out of the concrete realities of poverty and oppression in third world countries. Contemporary political theology sees itself as practical fundamental theology and Latin American liberation theology applies the three steps of praxis: seeing, judging, and acting (cf Van der Ven 1993:34). In postmodernity, the focus is on experience as prime mediator of truth and reality and on the local narrative rather than universality or meta narratives (Cartledge 2001:17).

The object of practical theology is the communicative praxis of the faith-community at the service of the gospel in the context of the contemporary society. These faith communities are part of society and influence one another. Theory in practical theology means theological theory derived from the understanding of the gospel in tradition as well as from insights from current social science theories and from scientific insights of practical theology (Pieterse 1996:171-172; cf Van der Ven 1993:9). Praxis according to Cartledge (2003:249) is value laden activity, conscious or unconscious, explicit, or implicit in which a mixture of beliefs and practices intertwine. Praxis therefore is not the same as mere practice but refers to a particular action, saturated with meaning, value directed, and theory laden, reflective on the means and ends thereof and in which truth is not merely applied or practiced but also *discovered*. The praxis-concept includes the actions of the pastor/priest, congregation/parish, as well as actions of individual Christians and Christians in groups in society and spirituality in church, religion, and society. Van der Ven (1990:44) describes praxis as “koordinatensystem der Gesellschaft, des Christentums und der kirche.” Pieterse (1993:43) refers to Mette (1978) and Zeffass (1988) stressing that praxis is not about action alone but includes existential aspects for example meditation, prayer, relationships, and

mystical encounters etc. Praxis is action generated by practical knowledge through which the church community lives out its beliefs (see Anderson 2001:47-49). It is reflective practice aiming at the transformation of the current situation. Theory and practice are linked; both can only develop when current practice is changeable or historically determined as well as both being reciprocally critical of the other (cf Pieterse 1996:172-173). There is a bipolar tension relationship between theory and practice with creative critical interaction during the research journey. An integrated circular model of working back and forth between theory and practice is followed. The research dissertation avoids a dualistic approach of theory-formulation applied to empirical work, striving for a bipolar tension relationship between theory and practice (Zerfass 1988:40). Praxis one has its theoretical origin in theological tradition or theological understanding of the research praxis, which is analysed in its concepts. Then through empirical investigation follows an analysis of the situation (social scientific insights). The results of the situation analysis interact with the reflective thought processes of the researcher. This process in turn will be enriched by theological and epistemological reflection in the current context. In certain scenarios, the whole process can lead to a development of practice theory leading to a new modified praxis two.

1.5.2 Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach

For practical theology with its orientation of engaging with real people in real social contexts, the need to use empirical approaches is fundamental to the discipline. Although theoretical and abstract discussions are also essential, they are primarily used in relation to concrete and empirical studies of people (Cartledge 2003:11). Next to historical, hermeneutical, ideology-critical, linguistic, and metaphor-analytical methodologies, the empirical approach is also very relevant for practical theology. Theology is an empirical discipline that aims to explore, describe, and test theological ideas within a specific context with the direct object thereof; the faith and

practices of people concerned. Practical theology needs a sound and clear methodology to fulfil its task of reflecting on the people's praxis from the viewpoint of Gods' revelatory practice in a way that is as scientific as possible. The social sciences are helpful to enhance this enterprise and theology is dependent upon these disciplines within practical theology. Theology gathers in itself the appropriate methods and techniques to facilitate this development, the overall framework of thought then is theology, and the hypotheses to be tested theologically (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:323-326). Empirical investigation is done through dissociation, objectification, description, exploration, and explanation.

The term *empiric* signifies the daily process of peoples' experience in interaction with their environment. It progresses within a cycle of observation and impact of the environment on a person, experiencing the environment by testing or trying it out and evaluating if the environment changed because of the action of the person. In empirical science, this process develops in a systematic and controlled way. The experience of the environment for example monastic retreat, especially the trying-out part of the process is examined, described, tested, and explained. It may include according to Pieterse (1993:31-33) the following: presumptions regarding knowledge of the relations and processes in the environment, expectations or the derivations from the presumption that certain actions will have certain effects, as well as testing or evaluation as investigation of the correctness of the expectation.

A relevant question asked and discussed by Van der Ven (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:326-330; cf Van der Ven 1993:101) is whether practical theology should be considered mono, multi, inter or intradisciplinary in an empirical approach:

- *Mono-disciplinary* refers to the application of theology, for example ideas drawn from systematic or historical theology to a concrete situation in a normative-deductive way.
- *Multi-disciplinary* refers to a two-phase approach in a series of monologues where an empirical description by a social scientist is followed by theological reflection. For example, a theologian works with a social scientist in order to get enough valid and reliable empirical information. In the process, theological enterprise could become very dependent upon the social science analysis of the present situation as well as the theories of social science.
- *Inter-disciplinary* refers to the interaction between the social sciences and theology and stresses reciprocity and a number of co-operative parallel dialogues. This approach could put pressure on the researcher because it requires legitimating by both theology and the social sciences. In establishing a dialogue with the present-day social sciences, theology then could enter into an unequal balance of power because the social sciences do not need theology in order to practice their discipline, whereas for practical theology, at least within the inter-disciplinary version, this cooperation with social sciences is essential.
- *Intra-disciplinary* refers to the requirement that theology in itself becomes empirical, that is, that it expands its traditional range of instruments, consisting of literary-historical and systematic methods and techniques, in the direction of an empirical theology. The term intra-disciplinary in the general epistemological sense refers to the borrowing of concepts, methods and techniques of one science by another and the integration of these elements into the other science.

In this research journey, an intra disciplinary approach will be followed. The history of theology is an example of intra disciplinary borrowing; adaptation and integration (see Van der Ven 1990:101). There is no standard approach as to how theological insights should be applied in practice and the research problem will determine if other social sciences will be used or to work together with other disciplines on the same problem. Because this study is approached in an intra-disciplinary way, it implies that a more empirical stance is taken accompanied by empirical methodology.

Hermeneutics establishes a framework within which this research journey is conducted and my empirical approach takes into account the following main hermeneutical principles (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:331-332):

- The research problem will be studied from the researcher's own prejudices and being conscious of it during the meeting with the otherness of the text, human actions or the data under investigation.
- The researcher participates in the life of the fellow human beings and their world whose praxis is under study and may be influenced by it or also influences this world.
- The researcher relates to the time perspective that guides hermeneutic investigation. The history of the texts or of the persons under study is investigated because it influences the life of the researcher and of others. It can function as tradition, which bridges the gap between past and present and from there, anticipates again the future.
- The researcher stays aware of the fact that people's lives cannot be studied in a vacuum or island but in the religious, ecological, economic, political, social, and cultural multi-dimensional context.

- The researcher maintains a hermeneutic of suspicion in which the thoughts, praxis, and feelings of the subjects under investigation as well as his/her own are explored and also explained from an ideological-critical stance.

1.6 A Social Constructionist Model

The social constructionist model provides questions, pointers and directions for enquiry that might if pursued, lead to a better understanding of the domain under investigation. It suggests new focal points for the research by strongly emphasizing certain relations and dimensions (Mouton 1990:144). It simplifies and systematizes the research domain by positing certain assumptions. It also provides a universe of discourse or way of talking about certain structural and behavioural aspects of the phenomena under investigation (defining it).

1.6.1 Researcher and Co-Researchers: A Narrative Journey

A narrative approach to the research question will be implemented where people are viewed as subjects and co-researchers with their stories part of the research process. The framework of thinking is shaped by experiences with a narrative form characterised by contextualising, locality, and pluralism. The researcher moves from the known to the unknown by means of analogy or by the projection of a narrative about what is known (Brueggeman 1993:8-9; Gerkin 1986:53). Conscious or unconscious thought frameworks or paradigms through which the surrounding world is scientifically reviewed, determine this process. Such an approach is much more inclusive and refers to the whole eco system in which communication-processes progress where narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative. A research model of narrative involvement will evolve from an eco hermeneutical (holistic) perspective where the focus is on the understanding of the whole of the context within different contexts and the researcher is drawn into the meaningful whole as a virtual reality

experience. The aim of the holistic non-exclusive approach is to minimize the dangers of excessive selectivity in the collection of data and allow for more clarity in the contextual contributions to its analysis. As researcher, I will position myself within the social constructionist (postmodern) paradigm where the focus is on epistemology and concepts as meaning, interpretation, and intersubjectivity of knowledge. Not so much then the ontological world is the focal point but rather the world of experience, the world we can know (cf Bruner 1987:15; Müller 1996:14, 80). Therefore the people involved in the research within the framework of monastic retreat are approached as interpretive communities of storytelling cultures and research participants or in a sense also co-researchers. It relates to what Gerkin (1986:54) describes as practical narrative theology, “an ongoing hermeneutical process within the immediate storied context of ministry.” The intention of this process is the transformation of the human story, both individual and corporate, in ways that open the future of that story to creative possibilities.

The researcher and other subjects in the research process may become co-constructors of a shared reality (retreat). Understanding then can become a narrative process, which gathers momentum within the occurrence of involvement. To understand, the researcher needs the story because it shows relationships and put it within a wider understandable context. The relationships between author, storyteller, and implicit reader/listener, meant reader/listener, characters, time and place will be examined. The whole idea is to experience the context via involvement and to listen intently and respectfully to the stories of all involved as well as the un-story, that which is not being told (see Laird 1989:427-450; Müller 1996:25). The communication between storyteller via characters addressed to readers/listeners in the text can be described in Ricoeurs’ (1995:190) words as: “someone speaks, someone speaks to me in the text, someone addresses himself or herself to me, a voice, which is of

course an instance of the text...the speaking in the writing is the new voice, the narration of the narrative". By analysing the narrative point of view of the storyteller and how the characters are portrayed in the literature review as well as listening to the stories of retreatants, the ideological perspective of the narrator (how the world is viewed and evaluated) could be revealed. The process of understanding and interpretation (hermeneutics) will not occur or start after the completion of the empirical investigation. It is a process, taking place continually by reflecting on and interpreting the social context of monastic retreat and formative spirituality and its conventions, ethos and identity. The focus is on the reconstruction of the relevant constructs of what it means to be a human being and not on a researcher who as a specialist may gain normative knowledge in order to find the one and only truth or answer.

Both theoretical knowledge and experiential knowledge are relevant within a networking structure where the researcher assists with the birth of the new story that is being discovered together. In this process, the researcher should be open and receptive to recontextualising thought processes. The researcher's own self-understanding is important too; who he/she is, whom he/she belongs to, where he/she is now and where he/she comes from. The own context of the researcher, which is part of identity, will influence the listening process during research. As participant observer of different retreats within different traditions, a social constructionist view of knowledge means that knowledge is a shared construct within an interpretive society or a communal textual interpretation. Language and semantics become the way in which meaning is shared and applied which in turn leads again to the act of story creating (cf Müller 1996:81). Narration emphasises the inter-subjective knowledge of interpretive societies or storytelling cultures where cultural and individual experiences are put within an understandable framework through the process of narration. It involves, says Gerkin (1984:45), "the

opening up of our understanding to admit the intrusion of the world of the other in the hope and expectation that something truly new may be shared in the encounter.” It is an involvement with a co-subject(s), into the life world and mind of others. Gadamer (1976:57) says, “We engage him/her, and he/she engages us.” The approach is inclusive and refers to the whole eco-system in which the communication process of retreat progresses or the understanding of the whole within different contexts. Auerswald (1968:204) talks about “a co evolutionary ecosystem located in evolutionary time and space.”

Gerkin (1984:137, 153-154) applied Gadamer's hermeneutical theory within a social constructionist model where pastoral interaction between people can take place in a non threatening, warm and accepting relationship for the different stories to flow together. Pastoral care is viewed as dialogue between the story of the person and themes from the Christian story. The relationship between pastor and person is within a non-threatening environment, characterised by warmth and acceptance. The importance of the inter-subjective influence of language and the hermeneutical tradition of text interpretation where knowledge is perceived as a function of communal textual interpretation, are emphasized (Pare 1995:5). The challenge is to listen to the stories of people and identifying collective recollections, deconstructing master narratives and reconstructing authentic stories. Within the framework of the social constructionist model the aim will be to gain insight into how people represent themselves and the world by means of metaphors that give meaning to their lives as well as individual self-understanding and development of self especially the development and insight that take place within the social context (Meier 2001:393-394; cf Neimeyer & Raskin 2000:5). These stories of people in interaction with each other for example within their respective monastic, Dutch Reformed and other traditions will be recognised as a way of giving meaning to their experiences. Narrative

in this sense becomes a way of knowing. The question to ask is not so much “what has really happened” but more “how do you experience and interpret what has happened?” The history of the traditions of the St Benedict, St Francis and Taize traditions is not history as objective facts from the past but the product of collective recollections within specific social contexts. These shared memories also legitimise and maintain the social or religious order. The constructionist and social constructionist models acknowledge the stories of people by which they give meaning to their experiences (see Müller 1996:16).

Research within the narrative mode will take a form that (White & Epston 1990:79-83):

- privileges the lived experiences of each person/group,
- encourages a perception of a changing world through the plotting or linking of lived experience through the temporal dimension,
- invokes the subjunctive mood (liminal or betwixt, the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire and focus is on human possibilities rather than certainties) by triggering presuppositions, establishing implicit meaning and generating multiple perspective,
- encourages 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 new stories,
- invites a reflexive posture and an appreciation of one’s participation in interpretive actions,
- encourages a sense of authorship and re authorship of the lives and relationships of people in the telling and retelling of the research story and

- acknowledges that stories are co-produced and endeavours to establish conditions where researcher and co-researchers (subjects) becomes privileged authors.

In narrative hermeneutic, history is only important because memories in story-form reveal the practical horizon or current existence of people (cf Pambrun 2001:287-288). By interpreting the historical experiences, the experiences and needs of people may be exposed in the process by asking what they want; do they see themselves as victims or agents, what new possibilities are opened? Ricoeur (1981:274-296) views discourse as narrative in nature that strives to shape scattered events into a meaningful plot. In the narrative discourse the narrator fades away to let the events speak for themselves that becomes a confession, which tells what happened. The word-events refer back to the action in history of the experience of and interpretation of what occurred.

1.6.2 The Researcher and The Researched: Participatory and Reflective Understanding

Hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts and constitutes the objective layer of understanding because of the essential structures of the text. There is no opposition between explanation (natural sciences) and understanding (humanities or social sciences) and the pretension of neutrality is an illusion (Ricoeur 1991:53). Therefore, the researcher will integrate the two and give priority to a holistic understanding. The goal is to overcome the nineteenth century's discord between understanding and explanation where explanation was viewed as belonging to the physical sciences and interpretation to the human sciences. Interpretation becomes an event between the researcher and the text or action itself where while interpreting, the researcher is not initially in control but is first seized by meaning rather than doing the seizing, not dominating the action.

Understanding is more than a simple mode of knowing but more a way of being and a way to relate to beings and to being as such). It is an understanding of *being in the world* and the mode of being of the being that questions (interpreter). In the narrative, existential questions and answers come in a narrative way to the fore where the way to self-understanding is through the narrative (see Ricoeur 1981:52; cf Ricoeur 1991:60). It is not so much then the researcher as knowing subject that sets him/her up as measure of “objectivity” but rather striving to inhabit the world, to orientate oneself in a situation of retreat, to apprehend a possibility of being, indicated by the action. According to Ricoeur (1983:66) the ontological moment takes place when situation-understanding-interpretation occurs.

In the hermeneutical circle, subject and object are mutually implicated when the subject (reader) enters into the knowledge of the “object” (co-subjects/text) and in turn, the subject is determined by the hold that the object has upon it, even before the subject comes to know the object. It is participation as an apprehension of a belonging to the whole of what is. The subject is not the source of the unity of meaning but something that precedes the subject. The reader as interpreter and co-subject does not dominate meaning but is shaped by meaning at the same time that it is made by the subject (ontological condition). Nevertheless, dissociation is also necessary to make understanding possible. Ricoeur (1981:145-181) differentiates three phases in the process of understanding:

- First there is the participating understanding of a text or narrative within the context of the reader where the reader/researcher is part of the faith community,

- second follows the phase of explanation of the own context and a distancing and critical stance to look at the faith community from outside and how they understand the text and
- thirdly there is again participatory understanding where the interpretation of the first phase is brought in a critical-hermeneutical way in relation with the results of the second phase.

In this way, *interpretation* and *explanation* can be complimentary within a hermeneutical framework

Ricoeur (1984:5) does have place for a more critical analytical mode of thought and says, “to explain more is to understand better.” The move is from a first understanding through critical explanation, to a second post-critical understanding. The emphasis on the legitimate character of interpretation is postmodernistic in the sense that objectivity no longer has the meaning of verification but takes holistic nature of understanding turn that involves evidence, arguments, and conclusions that are probable but not proofs (Stiver 2003:61).

Research in this study will be done from an inside perspective (participatory understanding) and an outside perspective (explanation). In the *insider* approach critical theological reflection on the faith of the faith community and how they experience God is done as a participator while trying to understand it and making it meaningful for the own context. In the *outsider-perspective* research is done from a distance where through conceptualisation and empirical investigation the faith experience, communicative actions are analysed in a scientific way and evaluated critically (Dingemans 1990:93-100). The dialectics of the *fusion of horizons* anticipates conquering the remote distance in time between the reader’s historical experience and the historical experience of the text. The

key hermeneutical issue is how mediation takes place between the worlds of the text for example the horizon of possible experience in which the work displaces its readers and the world of action of the reader (Ricoeur 1995:240; see Ricoeur 1991:53-74). It concerns the relationship between the text as a configuration of a world and a horizon of meaning and the reader's own act of interpretation of existence. The narrative assists the reader's present existence and the relationship with the horizon of meaning opened by the text. The researcher or reader attune himself/herself to the narrative qualities of the text; that is to the operation of meaning, its creative interpretation of its own historical experience and the corresponding reference of the world of the text (or retreat-action) . The reader interprets his/her own present experience or contemporary historical context. The text is read in the light of a quest for meaning and this act in itself is an attempt to configure what is happening in the reader's historical experience. In this way, in an act of interpretation, which encounters an act of interpretation, the meaning of the world of the text lends itself to further readings. A fusion of horizons takes place, which anticipates conquering the remote distance in time between the reader's historical experience and the historical experience of the text. Wherever there is a situation, a horizon can be contracted or enlarged. Communication at a distance between two differently situated consciousnesses occurs by means of this fusion for example at the intersection of their views on the distant and the open. An element of dissociation within the near far and open is presupposed. People live neither within closed horizons nor within one unique horizon and a dialectical tension between what are one's own and what is alien or far exists. What enables the communication at a distance is the matter of the text, which belongs neither to the author nor to, its reader. This hermeneutical process could bring people and stories together, bring forth up to now unknown horizons, and create new realities (cf Pambrun

2001:288). Understanding then becomes a narrative process that also needs an event of belonging and involvement of the reader in the story.

The outsider approach (distance between self and praxis) as well as the insider approach (getting into the subject's position and personal impressions) will both aim for inter-subjectivity and interpretation. The researcher's role is not to create a dualism of either belonging to (insider approach) or dissociation (outsider approach) but to maintain the dialectic between belonging and dissociation. Both the objectivity stance and the insider approach are considered important and could compliment each other (Ricoeur 1991:75; see Van der Ven 1993:80-106). Therefore, the researcher will not aim to choose between the researcher as insider and the researcher as outsider, detachment or involvement but rather to be placed at an equal distance from the two extreme approaches and to embody the dialectics between belonging and dissociation in every research endeavour, whether quantitative or qualitative. My assumption is that to forget the insider approach is to result in an alienating dissociation and to forget the outsider approach is to result in a sanctioning of ideology or relativation (see Ricoeur 1991:265-272; cf Dreyer 1998:20-22).

As the aim of the research journey is to listen to stories and to be drawn into it, then objectivity at all costs by trying to be an observer and to bring about change, is not the issue. The aim is to strive for subjective integrity and participatory interaction. Based on Ricoeur's view on the dialectic between belonging and dissociation, the researcher will try to embody the dialectics between belonging (*Verstehen* or insider perspective, engaged participant) and dissociation (outsider perspective). Both aim to reduce or eliminate ideology, by becoming immersed in the researched participants and their interpretations, the researcher's own ideological and subjective interpretations can be reduced and by distancing himself, not taking the interpretations of the researched at face value (critical objectifying);

ideological interpretations of the researcher and the researched may be reduced or eliminated (Dreyer 1998:22).

The goal is to understand and interpret qualitatively the subjective dimension of the reality of retreat (a situation where people are in relation with God, self and with others), the human experience of it, the deeds and the intentions and values behind the actions. It is also a reflection within the action (experiential), reflection on the action (experimental) and teleological reflection within/on the action (transformational) (see Van der Ven 1998:106-114). The researcher will be a participant in this social reality of retreat where own assumptions should be under critical scrutiny (belonging) and dissociation (critical of tradition or the way of retreat) for which quantitative methods are more appropriate. In this way a fusion of horizons could be reached; a new broader horizon that excludes the idea of a total or unique knowledge and emphasizes that understanding is never final but an ongoing process. There is no need to be enclosed in one point of view, because wherever there is a situation, there is a horizon that can be contracted or enlarged (see Gadamer 1975:245-253; cf Ricoeur 1991:73). The researcher and researched do not live within enclosed horizons or within one unique horizon and this fusion of horizons also excludes the idea of total or unique knowledge. Absolute knowledge is impossible, remain incomplete and partial and although a critique of ideology is necessary “ideology always remain the grid, the code of interpretation” (Ricoeur 1991:269). Explanation as part of empirical research seeks knowledge and understanding as to how and why things are related looking for causes and results (Van der Ven 1993:80). Within a hermeneutical frame of understanding, critical explanation analysis (dissociation) and interpretation (participating understanding) are both necessary in the research process. Therefore, interpretation, and explanation of retreat as human communication action will both be used in a complimentary way (cf Ricoeur 1981:150).

1.6.3 Self-Understanding and Narrative Reflexivity

▪ Temporality and Self-understanding

Temporality is the deep unity of time past (having been), present (making present), and future (coming forth) before its extension and repetition of historically dispersal into within time ness. Symbol, myth and narrative as mimesis of human action and interlacing meaning and time shape, embellish and express what is deeply significant for human existence. The process of mimesis leads to a discovery of self and of the human community as historical and temporal. Stories about past, present and future as a unit develop from one temporal source, for example the present and are about the unity of a person's whole life. Ricoeurs' thesis, according to Van den Hengel (1983:139-142), is that narratives and temporality are reciprocally related because narratives as form of language's ultimate referent, is temporality that expresses a form of life for example the ontological dimension human experience of time is bound up with narratives (mostly unconsciously). Temporality and narrative intersect in the plot and growing into consciousness on the emplotment level. Consciousness, viewed according to a temporal parameter, orders experience according to past, present, and future and within a functional parameter it remembers, anticipates and attends to experience. The argument is that only the present exists, which includes the whole experience for example, the present of things past, a present of things present and a present of things future. Within such function of consciousness, the present of things past becomes memory, the present of things present becomes direct awareness and the present of things future becomes anticipation. These three modalities 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 determine the content of the experience of the present (cf Meier 2001:396-397). The past cannot exist in isolation, past and present

and future flow from one temporal parameter for example the present. The tensed unity of these modalities requires narrative forms both for its expression (mundane stories) and for its own sense of meaning of internal coherence. A narrative is about life in its totality (Dreyer 2003:342). The most direct way to construct memory is by telling a story and a story is much more as clinical production of facts that are remembered. To remember is the present of the past and expectation or anticipation is the present of the future (Crites 1971:302). The stories of peoples or monastic communities reflect their inner being and motivation for actions in two ways:

- First there is the story itself as action that tells what has happened. It is told not always chronologically or linear and past, present and future may be intertwined. The reader/listener or researcher then arranges this story to understand the impact of the past on the present and the desire for the future. To ask questions regarding this aspect of the story is to bring aspects of distant history to the fore, link them with and place them next to aspects of recent history which are about current unique outcomes, immediate future possibilities and distant future possibilities (cf Tomm 1993:10).
- Then there are the desires and needs of the characters, their characteristics and features, convictions and meanings. The aim of questions about this aspect is to identify possible correlations.

White and Epston (1990) refined the whole process of storytelling within a postmodern perspective. When people see their lives from the perspective of the dominant narrative it may lead to a personal story that may become oppressive, incoherent or not developing any more. The aim of postmodern narrative hermeneutics is to construct alternative stories as alternative perspectives, narratives, actions, and practices to replace

these unacceptable ones. A person within the Dutch Reformed tradition may be helped to deconstruct restrictive premises for example a rigid discossiative context within a tradition and to oppose oppressive discourses of for example modernistic paradigm to become author of a more hopeful life-story by creating a new one that brings change. Readers/researchers have the capacity to interpret existence itself and to come to self-understanding. To relate this openness to action the reader needs narrative texts as models of agents being within time (see White and Epston 1990:2-5; cf Meier 2001:398; Pambrun 2001:291). Therefore, because of the expectation of the reader of being in the time, he or she uses stories of how others fulfilled this mission. The interpretation of the reader's present experience of history includes a diagnosis of the desire as reader – what word do you wish to add to the movement of history, how do you see yourself amongst others as a victim or agent in this time?

- **Narrative Reflexivity**

Narrative promotes a reflexive habit (self-awareness regarding presuppositions, interests and concerns) in the researcher/reader. Different narratives play out different scenarios of how people respond to and act in different situations and to the extent in which the reader identify someone to be responsible he/she also imagines what it means to be responsible. The action of storytelling and reflection on the story's goal (future) can only be found within the time framework of people's life stories. The past and future are connected in the present. Therefore the new outcome (new life-story) cannot be determined beforehand. By participating in the story, a new future story may be created (Dreyer 2003a:327). Narrative furthermore through first and third person interplay – first person reflections or third person accounts, leads to imputation as tactic for exploring responses, reactions, evaluations, intention. Narrative holds together all these distinct features together in a unity identity while allowing the reader to draw upon the narrative as a laboratory in which to

explore all kinds of possibilities involving his/her own act of existing for example to test feelings and the capacity as readers and agents. In the operation of configuration, the fusion between the fictions and historical in the readers own life and action becomes the focus of attention. For this reason the narrative identity of the reader, in his own act of existence will become a moment of *refiguration*. Then a new fusion is called for and intensified in the manner in which the reader brings the fictional quality (the explorations opened by the world of the text) to bear on the interpretation of the historical present, that is his/her own possibilities, given the contingent events of the readers own life. Thus, interpretation joins existence and new light is shed on the events in the present.

To read then refers not only to the capacity to read, but also to a person's capacity to tell his/her own story as well as to follow mediation, which in time, allows the reader to interpret his/her life. In this sense, the configuration of the narrative becomes the cognitive and existential operation in the refiguring of existence. The present that is the life of the reader becomes the place where the reader's relationship to the future as hope and the relationship to the past as possibilities intersect. The present includes the whole experience because the present is all that exists. In the present the past is remembered as a fixed affair while the future is still open (see Crites 1971:302-303). The past, the present and the future flow from one temporal parameter, the present (Dreyer 2003b:342). The reader/ listener does not only read or listen but has the capacity to tell his or her own story. In this process of a relationship with the text, the reader can come to self-understanding and interpretation of self. Self-understanding is therefore always a mediated experience (there is no immediate relationship of self to self). To reach deeper self-understanding, a turn to the strategies and operations of meaning made productive by classical narrative texts may be necessary. This in turn invites people to imagine new possibilities in the midst of their concrete historical events. It

happens because narrative promotes an image of the self in the form of characters or figures in the story and the reader recognize him/herself as someone who acts while recognizing another who acts, suffers and who lives the experience of a history. These figures also acquire in the course of history an identity and in the concordances and discordances of life, a unity of life is recounted and held together through the operation of the plot. The plot generates a story and allows a history, a life to take shape. Narratives hold together both the storyline and the narrative identity of the characters. In the process, different narratives and stories are presented to the reader through the presentation of different characters and their roles in order to explore the sense of who does or say what (for example the mimetic ability of the reader). The way, in which narrative designs a unity of the subjects' life, helps the reader to begin recognizing his/her own life as one which has to configure a unity in the concordances and discordances that make up their own history. While the narrative develops characters with a self, actors who are responsible for what happens, the reader may begin exploring own senses of agency and an ethical identity emerges from the narrative identity (Pambrun 2001:292 - 295). Therefore, because the plot has fused a fictional and historical reference, the narrative identity fuses the possibilities gained from the reading of the text with the concrete historical opportunities of the present.

The narrative process model of Angus, Levitt and Hardtke (see 1999:1255-1270; cf Meier 2001:291) provides an explanation of how strategies and processes are used to transform events for example a weeklong retreat at the monastery of Taize into meaningful stories. These meaningful stories organize and represent the sense of self and others in the world. The reader/listener and the story (storyteller) engage in a threefold mode of enquiry namely external narrative mode, internal narrative mode and reflexive narrative mode:

- External narrative mode entails the description and elaboration of life events (social etc) in which the questions “what happened,” “who and why” are addressed. It refers to inter narratives (Meier 2001:291), how one story is replaced by another, and a new story created.
- Internal narrative mode comprises the description and elaboration of subjective feelings, reactions, and emotions connected with the event that addresses both the question: “what was felt at the moment of the event occurring” as well as “what is experienced now that it is told” (Meier 2001:395)?
- Reflexive narrative mode entails the reflexive analyses of issues attendant to what happened in the 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. The listener/reader links meaning to experience in interaction with the storyteller and characters in the story. This is done based on needs, motivation, expectations regarding self and others who play a significant role in the listener, storyteller and the characters (Dreyer 2003b:341).

1.6.4 A Pastoral Therapeutic Context

Ricoeur (1995: 309, 313-314) views the narrative of a persons’ life as construct with a beginning or several beginnings, middle part with high’s and low’s and an end that shows that closure or wholeness has been reached. This narrative is open and may be reviewed constantly and thus a variety of narratives about the own life can be told from different viewpoints. It is essential also; to be open to the stories and histories of others which themselves are open/closed stories/histories.

Donald Capps (1998:34) took Ricoeur’s model into the pastoral therapeutic context, where there is, a need is to give systematic,

constructive attention to the ways that individuals *story* their lives in order to develop new more fulfilling life stories. Three different aspects of people's situations can be distinguished:

- The facts (the what) or the aspects of the situation agreed upon by most observers through consensus,
- stories (the why) as the meanings and interpretations that people give to the facts, the constructs, theories and made up hypotheses and
- experience (the how); the label to describe internal feelings, fantasies, sensations and the sense of self.

Roberts (1994:xiv-xv) states that stories are central to therapy where it has the potential power to link people together as well as to pull the events of their lives together. It may also become a versatile tool to help them to reflect on where they have been, where they want to go, as well as creating a collaborative therapeutic relationship. Capps (1998:30) puts it as follows: "Stories are relatively simple formats that illuminate complex interaction patterns." Stories can locate people in their lives and reveal where they come from and articulate central values and themes. The stories from the past can also provide a foundation for new stories, new beliefs, and ideas to be shared. The understanding through the stories that people tell, as well as an ongoing dialogue about the new stories being created, can help people to both hold the past and move on with the present and future (Roberts 1994:7). Stories have become a widely used construct and the renewed interest may be the relevance within a postmodern context as well as the influence of social constructionist theories. In the therapeutic context people come with views that have been influenced by their social/family interaction and language based construction of their situations. Pastors and therapists are trying to enter these constructed views and to influence them in certain directions or

helping them to rewrite some of these stories (Capps 1998:24). Therapists provide a space for the deconstruction of a clients' story in order for it to be viewed as only one interpretation among many possible ones, past and present. The process of deconstruction of old stories and the revisioning of a new story is to listen for dominant themes in the different stories and to reinterpret them on the basis of own personal experiences. The stories and experience of each person should be acknowledged, and might be challenged in a gentle respectful way on the way to developing new ones. This approach is relevant for the way in which the researcher listens to the various stories during the research journey and the potential therapeutic/regenerative context of retreat.

Capps (1998:53-172) describes three different, but mutually supportive, approaches to the storying and re-storying process. This provides a relevant narrative model namely:

- *Inspirational* stories (the art of the power of suggestion and persuasion with the possibilities for change),
- *paradoxical* stories (the subversive untying of pragmatic paradoxical knots in stories with plots that thicken) and
- *miracle* stories (the identifying and discerning of the exceptions that are already there and asking the day after the miracle question or the unexpected sudden absence of the problem).

Capps (1998:14) believes that regarding the three ways of *storying* lives, each person will have his/her favourite type, largely because it is the way people will see their own lives evolving. These are helpful ways to reflect on how people story their lives (that of the researcher and research participants). These approaches provide useful tools that pastors (and a researcher) may use in the listening to the personal stories of others and for the process of revision/rewrite into new stories as well as for

constructive interpretation to occur. It could also enable pastor and researcher to be more text and action focused than reader focused and thus allowing those whom are met on the research journey to determine the broad outlines of the conversation and to develop together new and meaningful stories. It further allows for the own individuality, innovation and style of the researcher to be expressed in the research process. Each preferred story type provides a different lens through which to listen, to look, and to interpret.

1.6.5 An Empirical Approach

The research journey proceeds and develops from the current practice of monastic retreat as a *hermeneutic-communicative praxis* with the focus on the acts as such, on the stories told about the action, the theological understanding of it and the analysis of relevant concepts. It is an epistemological reflection on the stories of the different traditions of Benedictine, Franciscan, Taize and Dutch Reformed 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 and empirical analysis of the situation, critical and creative interaction takes place within the mind processes of the researcher. The epistemological reflection within a dialogical narrative context and hermeneutic process means that theological theory as synthesis of experience and insight as well as empirical analysis of the current practice is cybernetically involved in the process of scientific understanding. During the research journey, empirical analysis plays a major role and the process will develop in a critical hermeneutical and dialogical way. The basis of the hermeneutics is a dialogue of relationships (Van der Ven 1993:78) between the relationship of the ancient texts to their contexts and the relationship of present day texts to their contexts. The older texts (stories) and their contexts are studied more by means of historical and literary methods and the present day texts (stories) via an empirical

approach. Both objective criteria (more quantitative) and subjective perceptions and evaluations (more qualitative) are relevant.

The approach to practical theology during the research journey will incorporate critically, the postmodern turn and the liberationist emphasis on *orthopraxis*. The model of Browning (1991:5-15, 34) puts practical theology within the framework of postmodern thought. In this model practical theology is approached as practical wisdom and moves away from the distinction between basic theory (*theoria*) and practical theory (*techno*) to integrate theory and practice as an ongoing process of action and reflection (cf Müller 1996:1). Practical concerns are part of practical theology and theory is not distinct from practice. All practices have theories behind them and within them (see Browning 1991:6). The movement is from practice to theory and back to practice because theory is always embedded in practice and practical activities both precede and follow it. Praxis may denote theological, meaningful (theoryladen), value-laden actions, habits, and practices (see Cartledge 2001:17). It is a way of being in the world that is part of the worldview, beliefs, and values of a person, community or tradition. Practical wisdom, *phronesis* is more than mere application of abstract principles to concrete situations. It is a value oriented dialogical discussion between experiences in practice and knowledge of existing theories. The questions asked in this process is not so much: “what is the case,” “what is the nature of things” or “what are the most effective means to a given end”? Rather “what should we do” and “how should we live”? In this sense religious communities (for example Taize, Benedictine, Franciscan, Dutch Reformed) could be carriers of practical wisdom or be powerful embodiments of practical rationality. Browning (1991:10) puts it as follows: “they exercise practical wisdom *because* of their religious symbols and convictions.” Religious narratives then can enliven, liberate, energize, or make more effective the workings of practical reason or the scientific practical theological process.

James Fowler (1983:60) describes the concept practical wisdom (theory and practice drawn together) as a kind of *knowing* that guides being and doing. It is a knowing in which skill and understanding cooperate, experience and critical reflection work together and disciplined improvisation takes place against a backdrop of reflective wisdom. Browning's model is an attempt to integrate theory and practice in an ongoing process of action and reflection (cf Anderson 2001:26). Practical reason consists of an overall dynamic; an outer envelope and an inner core (Browning 1991:10-12). The overall dynamic of practical reason (*phronesis*) is a broadscale interpretive and reinterpret process (hermeneutical process). The *outer envelope* is the legacy of inherited narratives and practices delivered by tradition, which always surround people's practical thinking, and therefore practical reason is always saturated with traditions. It constitutes the vision that animates, informs, and provides the ontological context for practical reason. The *inner core* is the human experience, action and theological reflection part of practical reason that may ask questions in the light of the gospel as "what then should we do?" and "how then should we live?" This core functions within a narrative about Gods' creation, governance, and redemption of the world and within a narrative of how the life and death of Jesus Christ further Gods' kingdom in the world.

Practical theology within a hermeneutical model like this and the description and understanding of situations like monastic spirituality and the different communities of the research question, proceeds in the form of a dialogue or conversation. The researcher brings questions and commitments to the relevant communities or traditions and in turn is confronted and questioned by their commitment and practices (Browning 1991:15). The epistemological reflection proceeds as a hermeneutical dialogue where the researcher interprets and assesses the action of reeat

and in turn is interpreted and assessed too. Heitink (1999:6-7, 102-103) describes an integrative model of interpretation, which links the hermeneutical perspective of the human sciences with the empirical perspectives of the social sciences. Practical theological research of the relation between text and context is hermeneutical by nature, but empirical by design. It is *hermeneutical* by nature because the research is directed to a process of understanding for example the understanding of the significance of the Christian tradition in the context of modern society. It also requires an *empirical* design because practical theological research chooses its starting point in the actual situation of retreat and tradition. It is approached as a situation of action to be explained by means of empirical research and to be interpreted by means of theological theories. In this way, practical theology as a theory of action, as empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of Christian faith in the praxis of modern society, can bridge the gap between understanding and explaining. Human science and physical science differ in the sense that in nature it is about *explanation* and with people about *understanding*. Physical science is characterised by reason and elucidation while human science is led by imagination and understanding. The physical scientist, for example would explain a rainbow from the elements of wavelength and density while the hermeneutical “scientist” would also focus on the landscape within which the rainbow is perceived (cf Heitink 1993:182). That which the researcher seeks to understand is not so much the psychological constitution of another subject, but a meaningful content immersed in a tradition of its own (Gadamer 1976:273-274). People or communities and their stories are brought together and unknown horizons of understanding may come to the fore creating new realities in the process.

1.6.6 Action-Reflection Dialectics

The model of Larty (2000:72-76) suggests a being and doing approach by asking questions about the content of faith and praxis stressing that tradition, context and experience are shaping factors. It is a praxis-orientated approach asking questions about those engaged in the practical theology research task. Therefore, the context of the theologian/researcher is also examined and in a postmodern way, a hermeneutic of suspicion question arises as to who benefits from the research:

- The process starts with concrete experience, moves to
- a situational analysis of experience in a multi perspective way by means of sociological and psychological analysis followed by
- theological analysis allowing faith perspectives to question this encounter. These faith perspectives in turn are themselves the subject of questioning of the encounter in the situational analysis of theology and
- in the end the researcher and the group in which this process is set, offer a response.

The empirical theological model of Van der Ven (Schweitzer and Van der Ven 1999:331-335; see Pieterse 1996:179,181) have five phases in the empirical cycle where *empiricism* refers to the entirety of these five phases:

- Firstly the development of the theological research problem and goal to investigate.
- Secondly the theological induction phase where empirical research by means of either quantitative or qualitative methods are used whilst reflecting on and comparing the impressions, experiences and information that is gained and the processes the researcher is going

through. It is a continuous back and forth movement between perception and reflection whilst coming across a rich variety of convictions, attitudes and emotions among a rich variety of people.

- The third phase is empirical theological testing where the theoretical and empirical concepts previously gathered are conceptualised and operationalised. The operationalisation implies the transformation of the concepts concerned in terms of observable, measurable, and testable behaviour.
- Empirical theological testing is the fourth phase where the researcher collects data required systematically and analyses it.
- The final phase is theological evaluation, summarizing and interpreting the testing results and determining whether the theological theory fits into the empirical reality. In van der Vens' approach, in contrast with my own approach, there is a preference for quantitative methodology and the objective dominates the normative (social reality) and subjective aspects. When he does make use of qualitative methods, it forms part of the induction phase of the research.

The models of Van der Ven (1999) and Larty (2000) are *action reflection models*, relevant for the research journey starting with the concrete reality of a specific setting where the empiric reality under investigation and the involvement of the researcher intertwine. It provides a conceptual tool to be used with discernment and in which only the researcher can guarantee any quality of theological reflection or engagement. Practical theology as process focuses on experience of the situation or concrete reality that moves subsequently to theological reflection as engagement with the theological structures in a meaningful way. This process is in concordance with the practice of liberationist theologians.

Cartledge (2003:22-24) articulates a *dialectical model* of practical theology that he borrows from Jürgen Habermas (1985) via the pastoral hermeneutic of Anthony Thiselton (1992), conceptualising it in terms of a *life world* and *trans-contextual* system. In practice the practical theologian/researcher engages with the lifeworld of for example the monastic traditions with his/her own internal dialectics and own story, within his or her spirituality and tradition. *Lifeworld* or the concrete reality (concrete circumstances or setting under study and experience of retreat) signifies the hermeneutical level of inter-personal understanding and cooperative behaviour system in which contextual-behavioural features are transcended. From the life world arise questions, engagement and re engagement with ecclesial belief and practice and recommendations for renewed ecclesial belief and practice. This praxis-orientated approach will start at the life world end of the dialectic. The concern is the beliefs and practices of the subjects under study as beings in real life human experiential reality, which should take seriously their concerns, expressions of belief, and practice and perceptions. The focus remains on the actions as such and the stories about it as well as the symbols, traditions and their praxis. This information in turn is 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 base theories. The data from the empirical encounter is then investigated and mapped with major themes and interests highlighted in the process. The working back and forth between praxis and theory (creative analysis of data and theological reflection) may generate new insights. Beliefs and practices in the life world will encounter beliefs and practices in the meta narrative, tradition or spirituality. The dialectic then proceeds via the research model of Van der Ven (1999) and finally could result in findings or a recommendation for renewed theological praxis.

From the *trans contextual system* or theological identity (theological structures of individuals or group, constellation of beliefs, historically and culturally mediated traditions) arise questions such as articulation of issues and the project, analysis of data, literature review, engagement of theological science with social science and finally the analysis of data, recommendations for new understanding and critical and constructive theology (Cartledge 2003:28). The system includes a meta narrative that refers to an overarching theological narrative that stands outside the concrete reality. This bigger, wider and all embracing narrative (story) or grand narrative may help others in the life world to understand meaningfully their own narrative (stories) as the two narratives are brought in relation to each other (Middleton and Walsh 1993:39). The goal of hermeneutics is that the reader/listener may come to his or her own new story in interaction with the stories of others. The actions of the different characters told to the readers/listeners by an author/narrator in such a way that they are able to change their own stories (Dreyer 2003a:326). During this process, they might look at their story and discover the three-dimensionality of it or experiencing it as triologue; that is discovering God as part of the story (Müller 1996:86). Narrative as the history of a group in story form signifies what meanings the group give to their actions. It consists of plot (storyline), setting (context and worldview), and characterization (values or ethos of the group). The story of Jesus (the gospel) as ideal foundational narrative functions as an alternative or contra narrative against for instance dominant cultural narratives for example the dogmatic Christian narrative from a Eurocentric perspective. Contra-narratives are helpful in giving meaning to the world, people and their experiences in the midst of continuous change (Dreyer 2003b:344). In postmodern narrative hermeneutics, critical of meta narratives, the aim is to construct alternative stories, perspectives, and behaviour and relationship patterns to replace not acceptable stories by deconstruction as ideological-critical process (cf Ricoeur 1991:285-294).

1.6.7 Ritual and Rite of Passage

Marcel Barnard (2004:129-133), reminds readers that within church walls, ritual and the involvement of church members in liturgical ritual are declining. However, outside church walls, old and new rituals are being revived and implemented. There are at home, in schools, television, public domains for example Taize services, liturgy of Iona, Thomas services, pilgrimages and celebrations that experiment on the intersecting plane of spirituality, liturgy and ritual (cf Post, Pieper & van Uden 1999).

1.6.7.1 Ritual

Ritual is part of monastic spirituality, Christianity, and life. It is a phenomenon in societies, religions, cultures, and retreat. According to Harris (1992:3), the word ritual could be an unfortunate term as it denotes to some a boring routine or a form without soul or substance. For others ritual may become or be experienced as participation in a happening, a celebration, or meaningful event. It may be appropriate to use different words for example *celebration* or *rite* or *symbolic event* to counteract the perception of boring routine, lifelessness and having no passion, associated with the term ritual.

▪ Definition

Research conducted by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1909), Victor Turner (1969), and Mary Douglas (1966) stimulated a renewed interest in ritual. The term ritual functions as a container concept with many related elements. Ritual is a complex term to define. It is like a form of collage with different layers and the different constituents of ritual do not equal the organic whole. To preserve the richness, unity and impact of it, it is not be treated or analysed as a series of discrete elements but as a whole.

Turner, Westerhoff and Arbuckle in defining ritual emphasised the *social context* and community dimension of ritual. Ritual is described as a social drama that embodies the memories and visions of a community (Neville & Westerhoff 1978:130), and part of a society's communication code for transmitting messages to one another about matters of ultimate concern and about those entities believed to have enunciated, clarified and mediated a culture's bonding axioms to its present members (Turner 1976:504-505), with the stylised or repetitive, symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture within a social context, to express and articulate meaning (Arbuckle 1991:26). However, the patterned, structured, predictable, purposeful, repetitive, ceremonial, dramatic and symbolic aspects of ritual are also central to ritual (see Willemon 1983:4-6; Müller 1996:185). The broad definition of Menken-Bekius (2001:36) is a helpful tool in understanding and applying secular and religious ritual in practice. She defines ritual as “vanzelfsprekende, eenmalige of herhaalde, veelal symbolische handelingen, veelal vergezeld van bijbehorende formules en teksten, waarin de mens lichamelik en interactief betrokken is op een werkelijkheid die in het ritueel zelf present wordt gesteld.” Lukken (1999:47) accentuates the pregiven and symbolic character of ritual: “in het ritueel komen symbol, symboolhandeling en symboltaal samen, maar dan zo dat de nadruk ligt op de voorgegevenheid ervan, op de ontlening, op de herhaling.” I agree with Lukken (1999:103) that the Cross is central to Christian ritual as presentative symbol, for example referring to history as now present and actual in the life world of current history of that which Jesus of Nazareth embodied and completed. Within the context of variety religious and cultural ritual, Christian ritual has its unique irreplaceable identity for example the paradox of the *Paschal mystery* (cf Lukken 1999:325-327).

Ritual consists of symbolic actions in which words, deeds and gestures play a role and is accompanied by verbal and symbolic actions for

example music, kneeling, laying on of hands (see Blom & Lindijer:1986:17). The combination of gesture and word in a rite enhance its power to convince or to create a moment of revelation or disclosure. Ritual has a definite symbolic functionality and meaning within a community familiar with the ritual and able to decode its meaning. The type of communication that ritual entails consists of a response to a specific event, a specific person, society, previous and future generations and in religion essentially also to God. It signifies formal and structured actions that people agree on and occurs repeatedly for example when people greet and introduce one another. Ritual has a social function within the meaning the group or community attached to it. It may also have a teaching or reflective function when stimulating the senses within a specific context for example a cathedral. There is very often a religious dimension in ritual where the repeated, normative, symbolic, and functional behaviour of rituals are associated with religious expression. As symbolic action, the function of ritual, for example the Divine Office in monasteries, is to bring people in contact with a deeper reality and to create an opportunity to have an intense experience of the Mystery and transcendental or ultimate reality. Ritual transforms, mediates, orders space and time, marks transition periods. It has ethical, therapeutic, expressive, exorcising dimensions (see Lukken 1999: 25-35; cf Müller 1996:184-185)

▪ **Characteristics**

Some of the features that ritual have in common making them recognizable as ritual, are the following (see Schmidt 1988:395-420; Vos 1996:53-60; Menken-Bekius 2001:36-43; cf Smith & Tausig 1990:98; Driver 1991:159-160; Harris 1992:33-35):

- Ritual in a symbolic way represents the holy, transcendental and sacred and the ritual elements are not separable from their

signification. For example during a ceremony, the sacred will be an attentive or remembered presence rather than a materially embodied one or one that is made present in the components of the ceremony as such.

- Ritual is usually accompanied by bodily movement or gesture or performed in a dramatic way. The nature of ritual is repetitive and structured in nature and comes via tradition in a specific form. It may also be re enacted and re created when specific actions from the tradition are relived and commemorated in dramatic ways, repeatedly by looking back in remembrance or looking forward to the future.
- Ritual is social in character and embedded in society and function as a vehicle to carry and shape values in a society and to influence human behaviour in that society. Ritual has layers of meaning that is determined by context. These layers of meaning make it possible to communicate a variety of meanings with one action or ritual event but makes it also susceptible to misunderstanding and confusion of meaning. Ritual displays a playful and imaginative character that enhances the communication value and impact of it. As social drama that is removed in a sense from the immediate reality, meaningful comment on reality may be presented as well as providing a way for community cohesion to become manifest.
- Ritual represents within the Christian community something known to the community, transfers what it represents to the participants, mediates regarding the past and the future, has status and power because of repetition, confirms the status and identity and cohesion of the group, provides a meaningful and

cathartic way to respond to far reaching occasions in life, and provides a view on God and his presence.

- Ritual is behaviour in which the mind, emotions, experience, and those involved in it can integrate actions in a meaningful way.
- Symbol, symbolic language, symbolic actions are the smallest unit of ritual and functions as basic building blocks of ritual. Each symbol may have individually a variety of meaning but within a specific ritual for example bread and wine in the Eucharist; a unique, new or deeper meaning is possible.
- Both myths as sacred stories and ritual make use of symbol to convey meaning, the one will use words or metaphor and the other actions, objects and words.
- In the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize traditions, a variety of ritual play a significant role. For many years in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the sermon in liturgy with rational, dogmatic and moral words with elaborative language became the most central ritual. Ritual communicates via restricted language and metaphorically, via the symbolic elements it consists of. It is embedded in a liturgical context for example of the Divine Office of monasteries. The Eucharist reminds of and gives shape to salvation and during this process; the ritual image can grow into a symbolic imagination and become meeting places with God.
- A religious element is usually characteristic of ritual and as symbolic action; it leads people into a deeper reality or experience of the transcendental. Couture (1990:1088),

describes ritual as “repeated, normative, symbolic, and functional behaviours often associated with religious expression.”

- **Types of Ritual**

- **Structural Ritual**

Confirmatory and transformation rituals act by centring a persons' will in transcendental sources for example anchoring the immediate order in a realm that transcends it. The purpose of structural rituals is to maintain distinctions in the maintenance of structure within a divine order (see Driver 1991:137, 150). It includes taboos (cf Theissen 1999:134; Soskice 1985:15), positive injunctions, as well as greetings of a religious nature, prayers of affirmation and rituals of meditation, which stress the sustained perception of transcendental meanings present in ordinary experience. It provides group cohesiveness and set group members apart from those not sharing in their customs (Schmidt 1988:412). It can be an efficient vehicle for expressing a society's values and passing it on (Harris 1992:21; cf Kuitert 1992:216). Examples are the recital of blessings and viewing life as an opportunity to constantly dwell in Gods presence (monastic mindfulness), seeing a beautiful tree or flower, meeting Christ in the poor or an encounter with persons of wisdom as the Desert Fathers. Practices like these ritualise consciousness and are especially important for mystical groups of almost all world religions (see Smirnov 1994:11). Such practices act as frames for a God consciousness preventing a person from becoming engulfed by mundane activities, and promoting the modified consciousness as an enduring entity (Depoortere 1995:32). In *confirmatory* ritual, the transcendental and ordinary realms are connected while preserving each, the distinctions, and boundaries that structure the cosmos are sanctified and will therefore cluster especially around liminal points to preserve and define differences (see Zuesse 1975:517-530).

Confirmatory ritual acts as a frame of awareness, tend to be more abbreviated than transformation ritual and may include religious greetings, blessings, and prayers of affirmation and rituals of meditation that stress and define the sustained perception of transcendental meanings present in ordinary experience (Heitink 1990:129).

The purpose of *transformation* rites is to bridge the divisions within divine order and to effect transformations by recentring and renewing that order when threatened by internal or external change (Wallace 1996:413-420; cf Finn 1989: 69-89). These rituals arise in response to anomaly, decay, imbalance and fault and aim to restore harmony and ideal patterns for example a retreat for stressed out and tired “rat race” Christians. The essential dynamic is a re centring process established in the following way:

- First, the disturbing element becomes disconnected from its surroundings, by literal spatial dislocation if possible for example the pilgrim is going away from his/her usual daily environment to a specific place.
- Then he or she (disturbing element) comes directly into contact with the transcendental source or master in the sacred, which dissolves it and reforms it for example a time of flux and of liminality, outside of ordinary structures where positive potentially integrative factors that may be constructively reshaped are identified.
- Finally, the reshaped person or element of the person relocates into the divine order. Transformation ritual places the disturbing element in a new location in the divine order for example via initiation the child enters the adult phase, funerals where the person is fully acknowledged dead, rites of passage for example birth, initiation, marriage, calendar rites,

consecration rites and conversionary rites. Restorative rituals include purifications, healing rites, divination and crisis rites. The condition of liminality is a fertile source of rituals and symbols, myths and works of art. Lukken (see 1999:245-275) describes radical changes regarding Christian rituals of transition and a new growing pluriformity stature of these rituals for example initiation rites (baptism and confirmation), marriage, forgiveness and reconciliation, sickness and death.

➤ **Stability Ritual**

The past and present are connected to each other in ritual and provides security and hope for the community (Hanekom 1995:86). Examples are fertile and harvest rituals, the New Year's Eve worship service in some Christian communities. To maintain and strengthen their identity as growing Christian-communities, exclamations, songs, confessions of faith and prayers became rituals and part of rituals. The believers participated in these to express and structure the identity of their community within a variety of other religious communities (Dudley & Hilgert 1987:139). Ritual within the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize traditions also provided structure and stability for monks and pilgrims over the years in an ever-changing world.

➤ **Ritual of Mystery**

Within Christian faith communities, sacramental ritual, for example the Eucharist and Baptism communicate and stimulate the mysterious or mystical aspects of religion. Ritual played an important part in the early Christian communities as they did not try to rationalize their profoundest experiences but rather made the unknown and unexplained character of life, part of the more intimate relationship of the community and between the believers and the transcendent God (Dudley & Hilgert 1987:146). The regular enactment of ritual is able to renew the experiential focus on the sacred and the mythical via a re-centring process. Ritual may be helpful to

those participating to start reflecting on for example the Mystery of Passion of Christ. Usually while participating in a monastic retreat, a specific space, or place for example the chapel, with symbols, icons and an “atmosphere” of mystery and silence is available. The perceptible for example symbols, rituals, and music communicate the non-perceptible to the mind, heart, and senses of the pilgrim.

➤ **Therapeutic Ritual**

Ritual can have an integrating and healing function especially during crises for example when somebody dies. Initially those close to the deceased can move into the chaos of deep depression, disbelief, or shock. They may know that action is essential during the chaotic, fragmented phase not necessarily knowing how to respond further during the mourning process. Rituals of mourning then can provide an anchor or some order within the chaos of pain and a helpful means to overcome the pre-occupation with disintegration (see Heitink 1990:129-130). In the process, the trauma may lead to a positive and meaningful participation in the ritual, shaping it into a profound religious experience. Modern Western society has lost over the years many of the healing and stabilizing impact of ritual. However, for quite some time now people have been pleading for and rediscovering the therapeutic effect of meaningful rituals. Menken-Bekius (2001:61-105) emphasizes the potential worth and healing impact of good ritual in the pastoral context and reminds people how daily and other rituals are part of being human. Ritual as a way of expressing oneself can become a vehicle by which to come to know oneself better or to rediscover life and meaning in life or how to depart from life in a meaningful and dignified way. Through ritual people, invite the supernatural, the mystery into their lives. Seeking the origins, secrets of life and the regenerating power of the mystery (see Lukken 1999:61). Ritual also structures people’s lives within time and space. It provides a bridge between the inner-world of emotions, passions, and desires and

the surrounding outer-world of actions, people, and environment. The more intense the emotions, the more the need for a channel to assist in bringing it in a more controlled form into the open. The “dying moments” (for example dealing with bitterness, guilt, forgiveness) type of ritual as one element of the monastic retreats I have directed, as well as the “kneeling with the head on the cross” ritual at Taize, had a *psycho-hygienic* (term used by Menken-Bekius for the healing/therapeutic function of ritual) function in the lives of pilgrims who participated in these. The fact that silence and longer periods for meditation and reflection on stories are provided for whilst taking part in the ritual of retreat and other sub-rites, is a confirmation of the powerful creative potential of pilgrims by way of their imagination. Menken-Bekius (2001:66) stresses the importance of the imagination in secular and religious ritual and says “wat betreft de religieuze rituelen acht ik het een van die belangrijkste verworvenhede van de moderne theologie dat ze de betekenis van de verbeelding heft (her) ontdekt.”

➤ **Faith Enriching Ritual**

The function of ritual in stimulating spiritual growth is multi faceted: it may ethically accentuates the crucial values in life, neutralising via incantation the alarming power of mystery of evil, expressive as a means of venting feelings, social in inviting others to become part of it, canalising very strong feelings in a positive way as a transformer does with electricity, and mediating the past as remembrance and providing a basis for the future and intensifying the experience of the now in the sense that it connects past and future making it more accessible and controllable (Lukken 1984:24-40). Religious rites could be helpful to individuals to become aware of both the profane and the sacred integrating it as an entity for and within the community of believers (cf Müller 1996:188).

➤ **Functional Ritual**

Wallace (1966:420-430) identifies the following functional rituals: divination rites to control non-human nature or the supernatural, intensification rites to increase food supply, protective rites to avert misfortune, therapy rites affecting humans for example curing rites and anti-therapy rites with injurious ends like witchcraft or sorcery, ideology rituals directed at the control of social groups and values for example passage rites of the life cycle and territorial movement, social intensification rites to renew group solidarity as in Sunday worship services, arbitrary ceremonial obligations as in taboos and rebellion rites that allow catharsis, salvation rituals that enable individuals to cope with personal difficulties for example possession, shamanic, mystic and expiation rites, and revitalization rites designed to cure societal and identity crises such as millenarian movements.

Retreat and pilgrimage follow a rite of passage structure. Turners' conceptualization of separation, marginality, reincorporation, and structure and anti-structure is a helpful tool in the planning of retreat as well as understanding the process of monastic retreat as a relevant ritual. In anthropological theory, Victor Turner's approach to ritual provides a helpful analysing mechanism and a framework for planning of a ritual.

1.6.7.2 Rite de Passage Structure: Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner

Victor Turner (1987) builds on the *rite of passage* structure, a term first used by and identified by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) which accompany and nurture persons through stages of life and development. It describes two types of rites: rites that mark recognized points in the passage of time for example new moon and New Year as well as rites that accompany the passage of a person from one social status to another in the course of life

(Turner 1987:386). Van Gennep (cf 1960: 1-25) shows how life could be mapped in a series of states for example foetus, child, adult, authority for example spouse, parent, chief, priest, elders, and ancestors. Within each state, a person's life is defined in relatively clear terms but the passage between states, is marked by unusual rituals – the *rites of passage* or ritual process of status transformation accompany transitions from non being to being in birth, from childhood to adulthood in puberty, from being single to being married, and from life to death in funerals. In many instances, a biological event may precede or accompany the rite, but it is the rite as such that communicates via symbols, that provides people with a meaningful identity within the community. Rites like these represent a legitimate crossing of a boundary, which bring along a new identity with new responsibilities and rights. These rites assign people a location in cultural space and designate them a status that the other members of the society recognize as proper (Van Staden 2001:583). After observing many types of rites of passage, Turner identified three stages common to all namely:

➤ Separation

It forms a discontinuity with the old social identity. People experience it as separation from other people, places, and time. The participants are separated from the ordinary group rhythm and move into an off limits area for others not involved with the ritual. The initiands are removed from their ordinary life world to experience an out of the ordinary situation. They also leave secular time in order to enter timelessness. Furthermore, a different timetable for sleeping, eating, learning, and working is followed (Turner 1967:223-226).

➤ Marginality (*Liminality-Communitas*)

It generates new understanding for the new status of the initiands by virtue of their separation from their familiar world. They are cut off

from the points of reference, activities, and people they are accustomed to during daily life and can become disoriented. They are in a process of abandoning previous habits and understanding of their personal identity and social relations. Because they have not yet acquired new statuses and roles and their previous identities no longer function, they are in between, in liminality. During the ritual they recognize their relation with the institution into which they are being initiated and unity and equality are emphasized, they are in *communitas* (see Turner 1967:99-101; cf Turner 1969:95).

➤ Reincorporation (Aggregation)

The reincorporation phase initiates social continuity within the new status as well as new understanding. The ritual process is now completed, and the initiands return to society with their new statuses, roles, obligations, and rights. They are accepted into society as being capable for their new roles and redefined status in the community (Turner 1967:251-260).

Although the rite of passage raises initiates from one status to another, they are not progressively elevated through each stage. On the contrary, the margin phase (or liminal phase) is marked by humility and status decline before moving via rites of incorporation to a new more elevated status than the old status before the rites of separation (see Scandrett-Leathermann 1999:312-313; cf Harris 1992:42).

Turner (1967:23-30) was familiar with rites like these for example practiced by the Ndembu of central Africa. His research showed that ceremonies as the Nkang'a, a girl's puberty ritual moving from one state that of being a girl to another state that of a woman, fitted perfectly into the Van Gennep framework. During the separation phase, the girls are taken from "normal" society, taken to a place in the forest outside her village,

and positioned at the foot of a muddy tree, which produces white latex when cut (symbol of mother's milk and breasts). A war of sexes is played out on the first morning when the women of the village return to the tree where the girl slept for the night. The women of the village dance around her lying perfectly still while the men of the village look on and being insulted until noon. Now the girl lays on her other side and the men are allowed to join the circle of women dancers. At the end of the day, she is carried to a secluded hut at the edge of the village where she remains for weeks or months being instructed in the knowledge an Ndembu woman is required to have. On the first day in the forest, she is clearly betwixt and between states; she has not arrived anywhere and in the following weeks and months, she continues her abnormal life. She has been set apart; whenever she can, she adopts a foetal position clasping her arms or hands over her ears. Men avoid her; she is dangerous, set apart in the marginal or liminal phase of the rite of passage. The Aggregation phase sees her returning to normal society, which finishes with a triumphant dance demonstration of womanhood as her dress drops down exposing her now developed breasts. She is given the chiefs' wand of office for the day. Her husband is there and often the day will conclude with the couple's marriage. The rite of passage is over. She, who has entered it a girl, leaves it as a woman.

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 neither here nor there but are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom conventions and the ceremonial. Turner (1969:96) describes this stepping over the threshold as though there are two main models for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating namely:

- The first is of society as a *structured*, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico legal economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating people in terms of more or less,
- The second who emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of 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 also referred to as *anti-structure* or inter structural situation. It is a state of transition and may even become a process of transformation where the neophyte as transitional being or *limina persona* is defined by a name and a set of symbols (Turner 1979:234, 235). On the one hand, they are reduced or ground down, their status levelled or 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 (cf Scandrett-Leatherman 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 and not 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. Scandrett-Leathermann (1999:314-315) uses the term *communal connectivity* to describe this social bonding. *Communitas* is not

only created via a 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, simplicity/complexity.

The neophytes or 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 1979:238, 240-241). 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 may 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 1979:243).

After this period, the normal, structural order of the Swazi kingdom will be regenerated into lightness.

Liminality cannot replace social structure as such because society is a dialectical process of successive phases of structure and anti-structure (liminality). 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, will. In and through these, new models might be generated 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 (communal connectivity) that underlies the status-sensitive interactions of daily life (Scarlett-Leatherman 1999:315).

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Introduction

In empirical fieldwork research qualitative and quantitative research are relevant. Quantitative research collects and processes physical data that is measurable, comparable, and countable. Qualitative research is more interested in deductions, points of view, insights, and the data less subject to control although comparable. The research will follow a predominately qualitative approach to study from a reflective stance people (co-researchers) in terms of their own definitions of the world (the insider perspective), focusing on the subjective experiences of the individuals or groups remaining sensitive to the contexts in which they interact with each other. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are important. The researcher uses quantitative surveys that are statistically quantifiable not

so much for the statistics of the data but to identify focal points and tendencies in the relevant stories.

1.7.2 Quantitative Research Methods

The quantitative empirical analytical method is similar to research in the natural sciences and uses terms as variables, measurement, experiment, and control applying them to social reality. It is conceived as a rational and linear process of research (Cartledge 2003:77).

1.7.2.1 Surveys

Survey questionnaires (cf Appendix) are used to acquire research data collected from a cross section of people at a single point in time in order to understand the ways in which certain variables relate to one another. Each question contains at least one variable or more and collects information from the same variables from a number of respondents. There is a variety of sample strategies for gathering the data from particular groups of people. It includes both random and non-random sampling techniques (see Cartledge 2003:74-75; cf Mouton 2001:75,107). The sequence of the questions must be determined as well as the try out of it in the field. The transition between the various parts should be well prepared and not too abrupt and should contain sufficient variety. During the try out phase respondents will be asked about the difficulties and problems encountered while answering the questions.

1.7.2.2 Data Collection

Once the questionnaire is finalized the question arises which group of people will be studied in the sense of what is the population under study (universe) and what sample (research population) will be drawn from the population as a whole (Van der Ven 1993:140). In this research journey, the population is the pilgrims or retreatants and their spiritualities or people representative of the traditions under study and then a selection of

cases of each of these traditions will be drawn focusing on those on retreat. Once the sample has been determined, the actual collection of data will begin in direct contact with the people who must be willing and able to participate. The fact that people may decide not to participate because of practical circumstances or lack of interest ought to be kept in mind and may influence the response rate. The data produced by the survey questionnaires, can be coded, and subsequently entered into a computer statistical package, for example the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The data from the questionnaires are reduced to individual variables of which the answer options are coded within the database (see Cartledge 2003:75-76).

1.7.2.3 Experiments

In social psychology, experiments are often used in which at least, two groups, comprising people who have been randomly allocated, are tested in relation to a particular theory where one group is the experimental and the other the control group. The experimental group will then be exposed to an experimental stimulus of some kind or independent variable and the control group not and any difference between the two understood to be due to the independent variable since all other factors are deemed to be equal (Cartledge 2003:75; cf Mouton & Marais 1990:49,80,96).

1.7.2.4 Data Mining

Quantitative research will also seek to use other previously gathered data that is publicly available and if possible, a comparison can be made with earlier studies (Cartledge 2003:75).

1.7.2.5 Structured Observation and Interviews

The quantitative approach to the collection of data may also be applied to qualitative methods for example a structured design with a clear and predetermined list of items may be used in order to structure the process

of observation. In structural interviews usually no attention is given to the interaction between interviewer and interviewee and a predetermined set of questions is used (Cartledge 2003:75).

1.7.3 Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research is a multi perspective approach to social interaction, with different qualitative techniques and data collection methods. The aim is describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing such interaction in terms of the meanings that the subjects attach to it (De Vos 2000:240). The focus in this research project will mainly be on qualitative methods where events, values, actions, norms etc. will be viewed from the perspective of the people who are being studied. It asks for sustained involvement by the researcher with these groups, providing detailed description of the social and spiritual contexts under investigation as well as analysis and explanations of the phenomena being described reflecting also the meanings ascribed by the people under study, taking account of their social and historical situation in which they communicate. This method of research allows the researcher to get closer to the data and engage with the subjects as an insider and is more flexible and more responsive to their perspectives (see Mouton & Marais 1990:164-168, cf Cartledge 2003:70). In the social context the research develops as a procession of interconnected events over a period providing a video clip or Poloroid picture development process sequence of events. The researcher will also operate with an open and flexible research strategy rather than a fully prescriptive one. In practice then the questions are not so much tightly designed or theory-driven questions but more general an open in nature and in the process theories and concepts will be tested as they arise from within the data under collection

1.7.3.1 Participant observation

In participatory action research a group of people plan together what to research and how to go about it, involving the group in the whole process of research and together aim at discovering new knowledge, developing consciousness and mobilizing for action (Collins 1998:2-3). Although this research study is not participatory research in its strict sense, some of its principles will be honoured for example breaking down the distinctions between researcher and researched and subjects and objects of knowledge, linking theory and practice, and a more participative, person-centred enquiry as doing research with people and not merely on them or about them.

The researcher will describe and analyse experiences, beliefs and behaviour of a group of people within a particular time, place, and culture, spirituality by means of observation with varying degrees of participation or non-participation and does so from the perspectives of those under investigation as well as own perspectives. Methods will include interviewing people in an *ad hoc* manner as opportunity arises, examining documents relating to these groups and life histories and biographies of key individuals. Thus, ideas generated from one source of material compared to other sources (triangulation) enhance the reliability of the results. It usually will mean that the researcher is immersed in and among those whom he or she seeks to study for example during a retreat or staying at a monastery, in order to generate an in depth understanding of the group and its context. Time will be spent with retreatants representative of the different traditions as well as with monks in the monasteries. Comprehensive field notes documented constantly and broad questions asked, phrasing initially in an open way consulting what the various conversational partners' thoughts are, before inadvertently narrowing down the options for further questions.

Participant observation is a field strategy that combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents, direct participation and observation and introspection. The researcher observes the research field from a member's perspective and influences it because of his or her participation (see Cartledge 2003:70-71; cf Flick 1998:141). The observational procedures applied in this qualitative research will develop within the following dimensions (Flick 1998:137):

- Covert versus overt observation: the observation will be revealed to those who are being observed.
- Non-participant versus participant observation: the observer will become an active part of the observed field.
- Systematic versus unsystematic observation: the observation will remain rather flexible and responsive to the processes itself.
- Observation in natural versus artificial situations: observations will be done in the field of interest.
- Self observation versus observing others: although observing other people much attention will be given to the researchers' reflexive self-observation, for further grounding of the interpretation of what is observed.

Therefore, as participant observer on the research journey gaining access to the research groups, a decision will be made as to what role to fulfill. That of more distant research, for example (a *covert* process) present but not speaking or being part of the process being observed, researcher participant (an *overt* process), for example taking part in the social setting engaging in positive interaction in a monastery and retreat and "interrupting" when relevant for the research. The aim will be in the study to be participant who is already involved in the situation under study but also to take time to step back and analyse what is happening from a research perspective. I agree with Flick (1998:144-145) that although it is

crucial in the qualitative research methodology and within my post modern approach to gain an insider perspective in the study field, it is also necessary to take on the status of a stranger or outsider at times in adopting a critical external perspective. The researcher will strive to dialectically embody or fuse the two functions of outsider and insider in order to methodologically authenticated theoretical premises and making the research subjects not into objects but dialogical partners.

1.7.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are important within field research and compliment participation observation (Cartledge 2003:71). The researcher uses qualitative interviews with the emphasis on the relativation of culture, the active participation of the interviewer and giving the interviewee choice. The idea is to learn how people see, understand, and interpret retreat and their lifeworld. Listening will play a mayor part and not only the posing of focused and detailed questions, thinking about what to follow up only after the interview. However, topical interviews with more focus on subjects chosen by myself as researcher and interviewer and more active questioning and more rapid exchanges following up within the interviews. At times, a combination of focuses and styles are implemented in one single interview listening and asking (see Rubin 1995:31, 195). All the interviews are audio taped and transcribed verbatim and analysed.

▪ Unstructured Interviews

The researcher provides a minimal amount of guidance to the interviewee and allows the conversation to develop naturally but a group of themes or ideas regarding the research question may be used to guide such an interview (Cartledge 2003:72).

▪ Structured Interviews

The questions in this form of interview contain questions as part of an

interview protocol that guide the interview and the procedure is followed strictly in every situation. It produces similar transcripts of the interview every time (Cartledge 2003:72).

- **Semi structured Interviews**

Although it would have a set of questions, it allows new questions to emerge during the conversation. There is the expectation that the interviewed subject's viewpoints will more likely come to the fore in a relatively openly designed interview than in a standardized interview. The goal is to reveal existing knowledge in the form of answers in order to become accessible to interpretation (cf Flick 1998:76, 87).

- **The Focused Interview**

The specific feature of this type of interview is to use a stimulus like for example a specific retreat an aspect thereof that is content analysed beforehand for example silence, meditation and asking questions on it before the retreat. This enables a distinction made between the objective facts of the situation and the subjective definitions of the interviewee in order to compare them. In this way, one studies subjective viewpoints in different social groups. The four criteria (see Flick 1998:77, 81) to be met in the design of the interview and the conducting of the interview itself are: non-direction, specificity, range and the depth and personal context shown by the interviewer

- **The Semi Standardized Interview**

This type of interview takes place when the interviewee has a complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study that includes explicit or immediate assumptions that may be expressed spontaneously in answering an open question. But these are complemented also by implicit assumptions that could be reconstructed by asking different types of questions to for example pastors of the Dutch Reformed church: "Could

you briefly tell what you relate to the term retreat if you think of your church tradition”?, “What are the essential and decisive features thereof ?”

- **The Problem Centred Interview**

This type of interview provides biographical data and the interviewee’s view with regard to a certain problem. It is important that the interviewer makes clear his or her substantial interest, is able to maintain a good atmosphere in the conversation and deciding when to bring in his or her problem centred interest in the form of questions (Flick 1998:88-90). An example of a question regarding monastic retreat is:” what comes first to your mind when you hear the key words monastic retreat in monasteries or would you think that going on a retreat for a few days is running away from the challenges of real life?”

- **The Expert Interview**

In this type of interview the focus is on the capacity of the interviewee of being an expert in the field of monasticism or retreat or spirituality and the interview will have a more directive function to exclude unproductive topics. The researcher conducting the interview could also make clear that he or she is also familiar with the topic.

- **The Ethnographic Interview**

Participation observation mainly takes place in the context of field research but in applying it, interviews also play their part. The challenge is how to shape conversations arising in the field for example while visiting the Taizé community into interviews in which the unfolding of the other’s specific experiences are aligned with the issues of research in a systematic way (Flick 1998:93). Here opportunities for an interview often arise spontaneously and surprisingly from the regular field contacts. Spradley (1979:58-59) suggests the following for conducting such an interview: “it is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of

friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist the assist informants to respond as informants. Exclusive use of these new ethnographic elements or introducing them too quickly will make interviews become like formal interrogation.” Elements to be included are a request to hold the interview resulting from the research question, explaining the project and notes taken and need for involvement by interviewee and ethnographic questions for example descriptive, structural and contrast questions. This is conducted in a spontaneous way over lunch or between prayer offices.

- **Focus Groups or Group Interviews**

This method will use group dynamics to uncover information about a particular group or sub-group of people and while building on the unstructured interview technique, extends it beyond one person to a group. For example, a young adult group from a particular school or university attending a retreat. The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group. Focus groups may also be used with other methods for example surveys, observations, single interviews etc. These interviews are useful in orienting oneself to a new field, generating hypotheses based on informants’ insights and developing interview schedules and questionnaires. It is advisable to work with strangers than well-known people, to begin with more heterogeneous groups and then more homogeneous ones and to start the interview with warm-up introductory comments and questions (see Cartledge 2003:72; cf Morgan 1988:12; Flick 1998:123). A number of themes and topics guide the discussion and enable different perspectives that are highlighted and contradictions to be noted. The researcher to obtain greater depth of information may pursue these different perspectives.

- **Life Histories**

This method entails the construction of the lives of key individuals under investigation for example diaries, autobiographies and conversations with acquaintances and colleges of the person (Cartledge 2003:72).

- **Oral History**

Oral history is similar to life history although from the perspective of a social group rather than an individual and this information from members of a group about the past enables the telling of their history (Cartledge 2003:73).

- **Narratives as Data**

The starting point in the narrative interview is to approach the interviewees' experiential world in a more comprehensive way. It is characterized as the outline of an initial situation (how everything started), then follow the events relevant to the narrative as selected from a whole host of experience and the presented as a coherent progression of events and finally the situation at the end of the development is presented (Flick 1998:98). It starts with a generative question that refers to the topic of the study with the intention to stimulate the main narrative of the person interviewed. The interviewer strives not to interrupt or obstruct this narrative in any way but empathises with the narrated story trying to understand it (Flick 1998:100).

- **Documentary Analysis**

The literature that the different groups or traditions under study produce themselves for example books, magazines, newsletters etc will provide information to be used in research (Cartledge 2003:73).

- **Grounded Theory Process**

This approach gives preference to the data and the field under study as against theoretical assumptions, which, are not applied, to the subject under study but discovered and formulated in dealing with the field and the empirical data to be found in it (Flick 1998:41). It thus develops theory from data in the field and uses twenty to thirty interviews in order to saturate descriptive and explanatory categories (Cartledge 2003:73).

- **Theological Reflection**

The framework of empirical theological research implies according to Van der Ven (1993:121) dialectic, within which perceptions of hermeneutic-communicative praxis are continually occurring or collected. The researcher registers observations in different ways: random or systematic, participatory or non-participatory, indirect or direct and overt or covert. Charged with this stream of perceptions, the researcher approaches the internal dialectic as continuing theological reflection for example a process of ordering and interpretation, which in turn may modify the perspective within which the “facts” are perceived.

Whenever some perceptions have been acquired, the results are subjected to a closer review, for example to reflection to arrive at preliminary conclusions which may put subsequent perceptions into a more specific or accurate perspective. This phase will consist of the interaction of perception and reflection. Theory and an overview of relevant empirical research literature guide the reflection. The extrapolation and application to the research findings of theological insights obtained from and through the guidance of the theological and empirical literature (see Van der Ven 1993:124). Reflection may stimulate a more discriminating analysis of both the literature-based insights and of the results of the researcher’s own perception.

Reflection is part of action (reflection during action) regarding the experience of self, others, groups, situations, processes etc. in that it occurs during the action through abduction, deduction and induction. It is also an analysis of the experiences of the researcher during the research process. However, reflection is also experimental in nature in that it is reflection as explication and analysis of the processes in the action itself (Van der Ven 1998:110-112). Theological reflection as a critical, creative and hermeneutical process on the findings of the research journey can proceed in three ways:

- Firstly a working back from the findings to the original theological theory from which the research was done,
- secondly, a theological interpretation about the research subject based on the concrete context found during the empirical investigation and thirdly theological reflection on the methodology because of the completed study, and
- thirdly, theological reflection on the research problem after the investigation within a new horizon of understanding in which the researcher may theologise about the problem. This hermeneutical process may produce new insights. It is also commendable to meditate after the investigation on the method and strategy used in the research. Relevant questions are, did the used methods fit the field of research producing adequate results, what mistakes were made and how can it be improved (Pieterse 1993:188-189)?

There is dialectic between theology and spiritual experience in that theology can evaluate experience and experience can stretch theology. Theology not only challenges, supports, critiques, evaluates expressions of spirituality but is in itself shaped and changed as new experiences in the spiritual life evaluate, support, challenge and critique it (Downey 1998:125). The researcher ought to take care not to allow theological

presuppositions to unduly or unconsciously dictate or restrict spiritual experience or the understanding of spirituality and to be constantly open, aware of and acknowledging such presuppositions in the reflective process

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods take the researchers' communication with the field as an explicit part of knowledge production. The subjectivities of the researcher and of those studied are part of the research process (Flick 1998:6). The researchers' reflections on his or her actions and observations in the field, the impressions, etc. become data in their own right, and are documented.

Dreyer (1998:14-27) argues that in both quantitative and qualitative research the practical theological empirical researcher has to embody the dialectics between belonging (insider perspective) and dissociation (distance or outsider perspective). Qualitative research with the high level of interaction between researcher and researched, will usually involve higher levels of belonging than quantitative research. To be engaged participant the researcher has to enter and interact (dialogical communicative actions) with and respect the life world (social, cultural, economic, political) of the researched. The role of detached observer means not merely accepting the content with the descriptions and interpretations or common sense of the research participants but also taking a critical reflexive stance. This means in practice to be critical of methodological choices, research methods, and interpretations during research. Furthermore, this critical stance pertains also to the researcher's own life world, theological presuppositions, the cultural, social, and political positions, as well as his/her scientific "habitus" including the meta-theoretical and theoretical frameworks that feature implicitly and explicitly in the research.

▪ **The Appropriative Method**

The aim in this method is to understand the Christian spiritual life (spirituality) as experience through interpretation and application (Downey 1998:129-131). The purpose of interpretation and application will be appropriation, for example, real understanding that is not only notional or theoretical but also with value-adding and transformational potential. The core conviction driving the method is that all genuine understanding for example purposes, meanings, values are subjectively understood from the inside out (appropriative). Interpretation of a spiritual experience or action, tradition past or present means that the researcher and the co-researchers allow preconceptions and tightly held convictions to be questioned in the process.

The appropriative method involves three steps (Downey 1998:129):

- The first being the description of the phenomenon as experienced or expressed in all its complexity,
- the second step is critical analysis on manifestations of spiritual experience in the past and present and
- the third is constructive interpretation that goes further than mere description or critique to provide insights for spirituality today with the potential to enrich the spirituality of all participants in the researcher process.

▪ **Social-Constructionist and Narrative Method**

Anne Lamott (1995:62) refers to Alice Adams's formula of writing as an exciting way of story development with the formula ABDCE for Action, Background, Development, Climax and Ending. This provides a framework to approach the research question also in a narrative way. This method provides guidelines to write one consistent, yet non-linear story

during the research process in view of the ABDCE formula (see Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:76-96; cf Müller 1996:96).

□ **Action**

Action refers to the action of the story and the story of the action especially the stories heard about retreat. Especially the now of the story and its dynamics, asking as researcher *what is happening here?* The now is dynamic in nature and to have it told opens up a possibility to create a new now for the future. It entails an empirical look at the people on retreat and an honest and serious effort listening to and describing it. Where it become necessary to go back or forward, when moving away from the *now* during the research an effort will be made to go back from the past or future and focus again on the now (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001: 79). Instead of working with hypotheses of what should be, the aim will be to understand the environment of practical knowledge where in human social action enacts and constructs culture. The aim is to allow the *co-researchers* to tell their own stories in their own ways uninterrupted. The action of the research will also consist of interaction between the researcher and the people and their actions, becoming part of the action of retreat, being aware of the interests of the researcher, and being transparent about it.

The researcher will strive to be part of the action that is researched and to hear the story through reading of applicable literature, observing and talking to the people, observing the art forms of the community and writing the stories down. Structured, half-structured and unstructured conversations and other qualitative methods are relevant. Awareness is necessary of the different discourses in the community that have impact on the action and people involved. The researcher's own story will become part of the research and feedback from the participants on the description of the action will also be obtained. The relationship or feelings

between researcher and the different role players who are part of the action field will be described (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:80).

□ **Background**

Lamott (1995:62) describe it as follows: “Background is where you let us see and know who these people are, how they have come to be together, what was going on before the story.” During this phase of the research process, the *now* of the story is set against the current socio political, economic, spiritual background of the researcher and co-researchers (setting design). Associations and connotations of the *past* are relevant, for example, the role of the monasteries and desert fathers and mystic spirituality’s role in the development of retreat are experienced to understand the action better.

Don Brownings’ (1991:47) first, second and third movement: descriptive, historical and systematic are related to the movement of action and background together. He describes the first movement as horizon analysis that attempts to analyse the horizon of religious and cultural meanings that surround people’s religious and secular practices. He uses the term thick description to emphasize the necessity to interpret the action that is being researched against the background of different perspectives for example economy, psychology, sociology, spirituality etc. After this description and as part of it, the background extends to the historical perspective and the systematic concepts already developed, concerning the specific or related relations.

□ **Development**

Lamott (1991:62) states: “Then you develop these people, so that we learn what they care most about. The plot – drama, the actions, the tensions – will grow out of that.” She uses the metaphor of the Polaroid picture development in which one cannot know beforehand exactly what

the picture is going to look like until it has finished developing, a gradual process providing more detail sometimes with surprising detail. The narrative researcher remains *patient*, interested, and curious not knowing beforehand what the outcome or solutions are or should be but waiting for the research plot to develop. This approach of patient waiting does not mean passivity, lack of realism or a withdrawal from interpretation but a social-constructionist approach where the researcher and characters are involved in an active process of story-development (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:82).

The researcher therefore will try to facilitate, wait, and reflect until the plot emerges and to be more than just a scribe but to listen to, get to know them better and have compassion with the characters. The emancipating role of the researcher means for example that the data may bring about provocative ideas, not foreseen or hypothesised, and to stimulate further dialogue and debate.

The challenge will be to bring about the different stories (background, own story, literature) in conversation 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 and to let them reflect critically on preliminary interpretations.

□ **Climax**

Lamott (1995:62) describes this phase as follows: “You move them along until everything comes together in the climax, after which things are different for the main characters, different in some real way.”

The researcher still does not know the answers or outcome at this stage of the process or the way the plot will eventually develop but do envision a temporary destination. The characters should be allowed to develop from

here in their own time and way towards the end. The expectation is that retreat may be an effective way deeper into God but the challenge will be to wait for the climax to happen instead of manipulating it. The research document should therefore be a honest development of character and plot and not a propagandist or controlling stance taken (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:83). This can only happen after the different stories have been heard in the different traditions and the emerging of a possible new story has developed.

□ **Ending**

Lamott (1995:62) says: “And then there is the ending: what is our sense of who these people are now, what are they left with, what happened and what did it mean?” The methodology of research equals the writing of a story, the creating of a book and involves many of the stories of those involved in the research. It is more than mere reflection on these stories but also a new writing, an own research story with new possibilities. Therefore, the narrative approach to research does not end with a conclusion but with an open ending, a preface to the next text, which could stimulate a new story and new research (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:85).

▪ **Literature Review and Literature Study: Historical Descriptive**

Although the focus in this research project is empirical in nature, the literature review and subsequent literature study is also essential and part of the listening process of the research journey. It will take place as an identification, review and studying 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.

In the historical descriptive method, the focus will be on individuals, particular movements (traditions), specific topics, and issues pertaining to the research question. The reading and interpretation of the historical texts on the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize traditions, which recount the spiritual experience and way of retreat, takes place in context. The guiding conviction is that these texts provide reliable access to authentic spiritual experience, which the texts themselves verify as such (Downey 1998:126). In the viewpoint of this researcher, this method, with an awareness and appreciation of the historical narratives, serves as a reminder that the story of contemporary Christian spirituality and retreat do not occur in isolation but is part of a narrative that many before today experienced. Their experience may enlighten, instruct, guide, challenge, or validate the present story. The researcher will also keep in mind that a historical text or document does not give access to the actual spiritual experience of persons and groups from earlier eras but it provides an account of their spiritual experience.

- **Data Analysis**

Ultimately all fieldwork culminates in the analysis and interpretation of data, be it quantitative survey data, experimental recordings, historical and literary texts, qualitative transcripts or discursive data. Analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships. The aim of the analysis will be to understand the various constitutive elements of the data via inspection of the relationships between the concepts, constructs, or variables and to establish or isolate patterns, trends, or themes trends in the data. The data will be analysed by using the approach of Rubin and Rubin (1995:226-227). Data analysis will begin while the interview is still underway. This preliminary analysis can show how to redesign the questions to focus in on central themes as interviewing continues. After the interviewing is complete, a more detailed and fine-grained analysis follow of what the conversational revealed. In

this formal analysis, additional themes and concepts are identified building toward an overall explanation. To begin the final data analysis, all the material from all interviews that speaks to one theme or concept is put into one category. Material within the categories will be compared to look for variations and nuances in meaning. Comparison across the categories is also important to discover connections between themes. The goal will be to integrate the themes and concepts into a theory that offers an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of the research arena. The completion of the analysis takes place when the researcher feels that interpretations made are ready to be shared with others and what it means for theory and for understanding of the lifeworld.

Interpretation involves the synthesis of the data into larger coherent wholes and the interpretation (explaining) of observations or data by formulating hypotheses or theories that account for observed patterns and trends in the data. It also means describing the relation between the results and findings to existing theoretical frameworks or models.

1.6.2 The Complementarities of Qualitative *and* Quantitative Research

Both the exactness of *quantitative* analyses and the depth of *qualitative* investigation are necessary for comprehensive research (Pieterse 1996:186, 187). Van der Ven states that the focus in the Nijmegen department of practical theology, of which he was part of, is on the relation of complementarity's between the two approaches. The hypothesis is that they are not opposites but that they complement each other (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:336). Within an interpretative wider hermeneutic paradigm, there is room for both where for interpretation the qualitative method is appropriate and the quantitative method for explanation. Ricoeur's (Ricoeur 1981:150) hermeneutical framework uses both interpretation and explanation because all science is models of

interpretation and all knowledge is interpretation where the researcher tries to make sense of observations within a framework of understanding. The aim is to evaluate and test the interpretation constantly critically whether it fits into reality.

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have advantages and disadvantages. Quantitative surveys allow for developing a hard core of knowledge, inter-subjective testing of results reliability and validity, replication and generalization. Qualitative surveys provide the opportunity to take the subjects uniqueness into account, the dynamics and the drama or their interactions and communications, the depth of their emotional engagement and the specificity of the images, symbols and rituals implied (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:337). Qualitative methods will involve participants on the research journey and help to survey the subjective learning processes as well as the intentions and motives behind actions (Pieterse 1996:184).

Quantitative research is embedded in a positivist theory. The methods and processes of natural sciences are appropriated to the social sciences. It excludes the metaphysical and scientific knowledge proceeds then by means of verified facts and aims to be value free and objective. It operates from the outside looking in with detached scientific objectivity, has a static view of reality and individuals as external to it, and constrained by it (Cartledge 2003:76-77, 81). Science is viewed as deductive in the sense that theories generate hypotheses or conjectures regarding causal relationships that are then tested empirically. Quantitative research is a rational and linear process where researchers conceptualise research in terms of a logical structure. However, research is often more complex and not as orderly and linear in practice and involves imagination.

Qualitative research belongs to a non-positivistic approach to research where people are not objects but conscious, purposive actors with definite ideas about their world, attaching meaning to what is happening around them and construct a social world of meaning that they inhabit. Qualitative research then does not present its findings as final and true but as an invitation to view reality from a different angle and aims to enable the search for meaning in a complex social world. It seeks sustained engagement with the people under study and follows an insider approach is more flexible in its approach and more responsive to the subjects' perspectives (Cartledge 2003:78, 81). Typical of qualitative research according to Flick (1998:27) is:

- Its orientation towards analysing concrete aspects in their temporal and local particularity starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts.
- It provides an insider perspective that studies people in terms of their own definitions of reality, the subjective experiences of individuals and their stories, the contexts in which people interact with each other and the perspectives of the participants and their diversity are taken seriously
- It gives room for reflexivity of the researcher and the researched where the subjectivities of the researcher and the researched are part of the research process.
- A variety of approaches and methods are available, it takes into account that viewpoints and practices in the research field are different because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them.

- It views the researchers' communication with the research field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge production.

The approach followed by the researcher is 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. My research journey follows a predominantly qualitative approach.

CHAPTER TWO

Retreat and Spirituality

2.1 The Empirical Research Development Process

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 Empirical Fieldwork

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

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

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

- The focus in South Africa was primarily on people within my own church tradition going on a one-day or weekend retreat because the main aim of the research was to establish the relevance of monastic retreat for the Dutch Reformed tradition. Most of the retreats took place at Good Shepherd retreat centre (because of its location and the more monastic setting) at Hartbeespoortdam but I also made use of other venues with the same character for example nature, quietness, chapel. I chose these venues for their *monastic* atmosphere, accessibility, and geographical convenience. I conducted seven of the twelve retreats myself and participated as retreatant or pilgrim with others on the other occasions. The total figure of retreatants (co-researchers) during the retreats was two hundred and thirty four, of which 95% were Dutch Reformed.
- The decision for visiting the three monasteries in France and in Italy was based on the three orders within monasticism for example Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize, which were relevant for the research journey (motivation for choosing these orders was outlined in The Church of Reconciliation and Monastery of Taize situated in France is the only monastery within this monastic order. The Benedictine monastery of La Pierre Quie Vire also situated in France is an old and very secluded monastery and retreat establishment and one of the more famous in Europe. The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi was included because it contains the tomb of St. Francis, founder of Franciscan spirituality and a monastery built to commemorate his life.

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

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

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

2.2.1 Participant Observation

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

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

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

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

2.2.2 Documents

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

2.2.3 Interviews

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

2.2.4 Narratives

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

2.2.5 Surveys

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

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

2.3 Discussion of aspects of the Fieldwork Data

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

2.3.1 Motivation or Purpose for Going on Retreat

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

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

2.3.2 The Retreat Venue

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

2.3.3 Preference regarding the Type of Retreat

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

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

2.3.4 Definition or Idea of Retreat

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

2.3.5 The Experience of Monastic Retreat

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

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

2.3.6 Elements of Retreat

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

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

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

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

2.3.7 Preferred Spirituality and Faith Stories

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.8 After Retreat

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

2.4 Spirituality

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

2.4.1 Trends in Spirituality

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

Some notable trends of contemporary spirituality are:

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

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

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

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

2.4.2 Defining Spirituality

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

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

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

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

2.4.3 Christian Spirituality

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

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

The following factors could influence and shape spirituality:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4.4 Spirituality Types

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

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

2.4.4.1 Head Spirituality

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

2.4.4.2 Mystic Spirituality

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

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

2.4.4.3 Heart Spirituality

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

2.4.4.4 Kingdom Spirituality

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

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

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

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

2.4.5 Protestant Spirituality

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4.6 Studying Spirituality

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

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

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

CHAPTER THREE

Monasticism

3.1 Monastic Christian Spirituality

The origins of Christian monasticism go back as far as the first century church where men and women, even entire families decided to live a life of perfect continence. An example is the Consecrated Virgins as brides of Christ, mentioned by Tertullianus who led a life of prayer, fasting, retirement, and good works, individually at home or in small groups generally living on the outskirts of towns. The first doctors of the church praised this ascetic way of life: Clement of Alexandria (215), Origenes (253) in the East, Tertullianus (220), and St. Cyprian (258) in the West. They described the control of a person's thoughts and passions as a necessary condition for one's purification and dedication to God. When the Desert Fathers went into the desert they went there to lose in a sense their identity, to eradicate the personality, to become anonymous, to make of one self the void, becoming in the process an embodiment of silence (Cowan 2002:26). They believed that this in turn could potentially facilitate receiving light of the word of God and the empowering to love him even more. Virginity (or celibacy) consecrated to God realises in the soul the union of Christ with the church and replaces martyrdom as the way to give oneself to God (De Dreuille 1999:75).

The example of St. Anthony (251-356) one of the first and most famous hermits in Egypt and one of the most famous of the hermits persuaded many to take up solitary life. He was a pious boy who lost his parents when he was still very young. When he was twenty, he was moved by the New Testament's call to leave all and follow Christ. He divested himself of all property and material things and put himself under tutelage of an experienced monk. He went into solitude in the year two eighty five

entering a deserted fortress, where he stayed for twenty years living an austere life of self-denial. The sayings of Anthony included in the collections of sayings by the desert monks and nuns, show a wise ascetic who learned wisdom experientially in struggling against the obstacles of the world and the flesh. He willingly supported the lawful appointed bishops of his time but left doctrinal arguments to them and to the theologians. Prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, charity, love of the poor, faith in Christ, meekness and hospitality were the virtues he emphasised and which later became part of early monasticism (Feiss 2000:192-193). Many followed this path of ascetics and solitude in the desert and soon monasteries were born in the mountains of Egypt where the desert became a city of monks who left their own people and registered themselves for citizenship in the heavens.

A new society was born that owed its allegiance to no man save he who was prepared to dedicate himself to cultivate the blue flower of *ascesis* (Cowan 2002:28). The Desert Fathers (330) lived semi-eremitic life in solitary cells scattered in the desert around a central church where they gathered on Sundays, under Pachomius followed the development of highly organized types of cenobitic life (293-346). St. Benedict (550) dismayed by the low moral standards in Rome where he studied, fled the city to a deserted spot called Subiaco with the desire to please God alone, the spreading of monastic life in Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Europe brought with it abundant literature. The monastic ideal of unification excluding any diversion, leading monks or nuns to the divine and to the perfection of the love of God began to flourish (De Dreuille 1999:85). Many centuries later St. Francis (1182) would strip himself naked as a mark of complete renunciation of his family, the world and material things to serve God, literally following Christ in poverty and thus began in twelve hundred and nine the Order of Friars Minor. As late as nineteen forty Brother Roger would arrive at Taize where to since nineteen fifty people

from all over the world flocked to experience some of the flavour and aspects of monastic life together with the brothers living there (Ramon 1994:7; cf Spink 1999:9). Although monasticism experienced decay and reform, degeneration and renewal through the centuries the monastic ideal to be united with God and linking heaven and earth in monastic community-life stayed alive and well (Mills 1982:127). Characteristic of the present spiritual trend in monasticism is a return to monastic tradition with a balanced synthesis of the values brought forth by the previous centuries. Bible, liturgy, and the Fathers meditated on during *Lectio Divina* are considered anew as main sources of monastic spirituality. Time for silent prayer is given pride of place in the monastic timetable and guests are invited by abbot and monks to share in the quest for God by the monastic community (De Dreuille 1999:108).

The historian Hans Lietzmann's (1951:153) assessment of the monastic approach to the bible was representative of many Protestant Reformers suspicion of the way monks supposedly engaged with the bible. He states, "The mechanical reading and memorization of texts did not penetrate the heart and gave only the faintest biblical tinge to the world of ideas in which the monks lived." The perception that the bible had a negligible influence upon early monastic life, playing a minor role in their spirituality, was one of the reasons according to Burton-Christie (1997:70) why Luther, Melancton and others found the Christian monastic ideal problematic. After studying the way the monks approach and read the bible since the Desert Fathers in monasteries, he concluded this to be an unfair assessment. He argues just the opposite (see Burton-Christie 1997:70-81). My research journey also showed that the monastic passion for the bible has been from the start deep, intense, and pervasive. The early monks cultivated a profoundly biblical spirituality, as an entire way of living, in order to be informed, and transformed by the word of God. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (trans. Ward 1981), one of the earliest and

very important Christian monastic texts and my own exposure during the visits to monasteries, reveal an interesting hermeneutic of the bible. A word or text would come to the fore during a Divine Office or liturgical gathering of the monks or read or proclaimed by the abbot or a fellow monk. Followed by a careful discernment or scrutiny of these word(s) asking what possibilities did they offer, what challenges? During this process of discernment, they strived not only to understand the meaning of the words but also to root out any passions that could prevent them from interiorising the word of God deeply into their lives. The goal is to become transparent and open to new worlds of meaning opened up by the word of God, transformed by its power, and to become as monk a new sacred text or mediator of Gods' presence in the world. Their hermeneutical focus is the following:

- Careful attention to the power of language or power of words in all its expressions be it during the Divine Office, the meditation on it in the solitude of the room or cell, the dynamic word uttered by an elder or even words of slander or gossip spoken in carelessness or anger.
- Emphasis is put on language and praxis, in the sense that the word in whatever form, meant mutual engagement becoming part of every fibre of a person's life.
- As in the spirituality of the desert fathers, the handling of the bible reflects a lived, embodied character. The interpretation of sacred texts and the processes of radical personal transformation and conversion are viewed inseparable.

Central themes of monastic spirituality identified during the reseaech journey are the following:

➤ *A search for God and a renunciation of the world.*

Renunciation means to turn away from the mundane world by entering into the solitude of nature: the wilderness, a cave, a desert, or entering a monastery. The key is not so much the outer journey as the inner journey into the wasteland of the own heart or a climbing of an inner mountain (Skudlarek 1982:250). The quest for God or burning desire for God remains the heart of monastic life and not so much secondary aims (teaching, preaching, nursing, or other kinds of outreach) that are sometimes characteristic of some of the modern orders (De Dreuille 1999:110). Monastic life does however allow the search for God to take on a great variety of form (an inclusive approach) for example in Franciscan spirituality. Some monastic traditions focus more on a life of silent contemplative prayer (ascetics), others finding God more easily in liturgical music or worship, others in charitable services in society, and others combining these elements. My own experience at different monasteries is that various accents can be found in the monasteries; their proportions vary and give each house or abbey its particular unique character. For Mills (1982:152) the primary goal of monastic spirituality has been to offer monks on earth an image of heaven and to praise the virtues of transcendental life and avoiding the vices of sinful nature. The way to win this victory is an arduous denial of the body and will. He is convinced that throughout history this ideal was reserved for an elite group, spiritual elite that largely corresponded with the social elite. Although it could be true in certain instances, the praxis of the Desert fathers, Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize spiritualities that I studied and experienced convey an openness and invitation to everyone to partake in the monastic journey of searching for God.

- *A striving for peace, via discernment of and detachment from desires that may inhibit union with the divine within oneself.*

There is vigilant attention payed to the mastering of passions and the development of virtues that may lead step to step to peace of heart. Although a potential danger this need not imply a dualism or a despising of the body or material world but more a striving for a state of perfect balance and harmony in life. It refers to a state of detachment, a dispensing of diversion or a letting go by re-establishing the soul's control over the body and material world in order to enter the highest/deepest spiritual state possible. It is a journey into the light of God and the holy quiet, a state of stillness, freedom from care, and freedom from the need to own things, tranquillity, peace, and silence of the heart (Cowan 2002:36-38; see Burton-Christie 1997:76-77; cf De Dreuille 1999:111).

- *An emphasis on silence and solitude in the forest, desert, or the monastery.*

The monastery is perceived as first and above all a gate of heaven, a place where God comes down in his infinite charity to be seen and known. I experienced the monasteries as a Tabernacle or an upper room. The research journey revealed that monastic retreats become such gateways for many pilgrims. Silence facilitates a meeting moment between God and pilgrim. It was in the silence of the forest, in the atmosphere of peace in the early morning with the breeze moving the branches of the trees, the solitude and silence of the chapel that I became intensely aware of Gods' presence. Many of the pilgrims/retreatants at the monasteries that I interviewed felt that it was in the silence and not in commotion, in solitude and not in crowds that God as revealed most intimately to them. Silence is highly valued in monasticism as longterm workable social behaviour in order not to disturb the peace of others and to remind them of the desert. The monastery according to one of the monks I spoke to, is a creation of an artificial desert, a quietness and loneliness amid the crowd whilst

striving together to be one with God. The community of monks in the monastery, together in the common regular places where they work or in studying and praying together, enhances the whole atmosphere of silence and prayer. It was to me as if the common effort to be one with God as well as the common silence made it possible for the fruit of each one's prayers, merits and virtues to become the spiritual possession of all (Mills 1982:138; see De Dreuille 1999:112-113).

➤ *Hospitality is valued highly in monastic spirituality*

Spirituality is viewed not as a private, individualistic blissful trip but as an authentic journey of holiness overflowing in the welcoming and blessing of others (Skudlarek 1982:251). As retreatants and pilgrims, we experienced warm hospitality in the monasteries and amidst the stability and rhythm of the monastic life; we were invited and welcomed into the rhythm and community of monastic life. I experienced the idea of stability (monks) and change (the passing guests) at the monasteries in a symbolic way as representative of two complimentary faces of Christ: Christ staying and Christ welcoming, Christ knocking at the door and welcomed. These experiences made the monasteries to me not so much the house of monks but also symbol of the presence of God. Hospitality involves the creation of a free and friendly space where one can discover the possibilities of reciprocal mutuality. Pohl (1999:13) comments as follows:

In hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations...[Yet] Strangers rarely bring only their needs;

within the hospitality relationship, hosts often experience profound blessing.

People flocked since the earliest times to the Desert Fathers to receive spiritual guidance and encouragement; sometimes they built monasteries purposefully along pilgrim's roads for easier accessibility. Even when placed at the outskirts of civilization and the high value put on solitude, the idea prevailed in many instances still to keep contact with members of the parish or society in different ways. Both the communion with men and search for God are valued in monasticism. Could the search for God or the hunger for an experience with the infinite or mystery be made more accessible at such places? Could the atmosphere of peace, silence, stability, charity and prayer be helpful to people going there on retreat or for a short visit to appreciate not only the horizontal dimension of equal hospitality and charity to all but also the vertical dimension as a focusing of all human activity on God in living and personal prayer, individual or common? The answers to these questions by pilgrims interviewed on the research journey are that it could indeed.

➤ *Work and tasks are considered holy and a means to spiritual perfection.*

During long hours of solitude and silent meditation, a simple repetitious task like making ropes or plaiting baskets functioned for the desert fathers as an anchor to thoughts avoiding distractions. Later on in the history of monasticism, the times between work and vocal prayer were divided to facilitate even more concentration on God. Work is perceived as a means to develop special virtues like humility, generosity, obedience, detachment, and purity of heart, and to alleviate temptations like sadness and despondency. Monks work in order to be able to be self-efficient and to give in charity to help others. Material things demands respect not for itself but for the sake of God to whom it belong. Pilgrims experienced the

life in the monasteries visited as an order of events and tasks to maintain an atmosphere that is enhancing to a life of prayer and being consciously in Gods' presence. The isolation of the places itself, the various forms of work the monks do in order to be self-supporting, the study and reading done in their rooms (cells), the daily prayer offices, the meals all contributed to a monastic rhythm. A rhythm focused on keeping the monastery a holy place, a sanctuary, a haven where God is met, adorned, and experienced.

➤ *The cenobitic or community life is viewed in monasticism as a way to union with God.*

The Desert Fathers stressed the importance of this virtue integrated into monastic spirituality. The main lesson that St. Anthony learned from his first visit to the solitary Egyptian monk was devotion to God and mutual love (De Dreuille 1999:121; see Skudlarek 1982:89). Monks interviewed, witnessed about the importance of being one another's servant in the monastery, living together in peace as symbol serving God, and experiencing of his peace. The community life is furthermore to them symbol of the harmony of the angelic community. Monastic life is not mere secret dialogue between the soul and God but also a turning together towards the infinite Mystery. The sharing in Christ's life and giving it to each other make monks mutually responsible for each other's spiritual growth. In the Life Commitment made on the day a new brother makes his life commitment in the Taize community he is asked the following: "If you have to rebuke a brother, keep it between you and him, be concerned to establish communion with your neighbour, be open about yourself, remembering that you have a brother whose charge it is to watch over you..." (Schutz 2000:71). The presence of Christ in the individual members and community affects also the role of the abbot or prior where one of his main functions is to create harmony and consensus in the community. Nowhere perhaps does the monastic community find a better

expression than in the daily common prayers or Divine Office. De Dreuille (1999:123) describes it in the following way: “United with the heavenly choirs, monks praise God in the name of the Universe; participating in Christ’s life-giving sacrifice they are welded in a common love and with Him they embrace the whole world and offer it to God”.

3.2 The Taize, Benedictine and Franciscan Communities

The history and spirituality of the following communities or monastic traditions are relevant. The motivation for deciding on the three orders is the following: The order of St. Benedict is the oldest order within Christian monasticism and Benedict wrote the first official written Rule of Life for a monastic order. My first experience of retreat was a meaningful Benedictine private retreat. It was the beginning of the more monastic and mystical chapter of my story. The story of the Franciscan order began a few centuries after St. Benedict with the frail figure and simple lifestyle of St. Francis of Assisi. His literally living out of the Gospel story about Jesus amongst the poorest of the poor, came like a fresh breeze and prism of new colours in a stuffy dark era of the Catholic tradition caught up in the deadlock of rigid religion, rational ritualism, monotonous monasticism, hedonistic hierarchy and indecent ideologies. The focus of the Franciscan way of life is on life in simplicity, solitude and silence balanced with a reaching out to the needy, love for Gods’ creation and nature (eco-friendliness) and was later captured in the Rule of St. Francis followed by Christians worldwide outside monasteries as the Third or Tertiary order of St Francis. The Taize story started much later in the late nineteen fifties and has over the years become a buzzword worldwide and also in South Africa amongst Dutch Reformed pastors and parishioners. It is the only monastery and order where an equal number of monks from the Protestant and Catholic tradition live in community by the rule or source of Taize in one monastery. Hundreds of thousands of young people under

the age of twenty two from all denominations visit the Taize monastery each year for a ecumenical monastic type weekend or a weeklong retreat. The Taize community at Taize in France, The Benedictine community of La Pierre Qui Vire in France and the Franciscan community of Sacro Conventio Di San Francesko in Italy were visited as part of the research journey.

3.2.1 The History of the Community of Taize

A tiny village called Taize with only about a dozen stone buildings in Upper Burgundy Southern France; ten kilometres from Cluny, so small it is not even on most maps of France has come to be well known amongst pilgrims around the world. At any given time of the year, especially in summer, mostly University aged people and younger from any continent of the world get off at Taize. They come with their packs on their backs trudging up the hill through a small village to what somewhat looks like a big summer campground and 'n big "strange looking" church building (the church of reconciliation with the round Orthodox shaped towers protruding from the roof. The church has expanding halls and can accommodate up to five thousand people. There is also a monastery, home to an ecumenical community of brothers from around the world (celibacy and communal life). During Easter weekends up to twelve thousand people of whom ninety percent are under the age of twenty gather at Taize, living in dormitories and in tents.

Roger-Schutz-Marsauche was born on 12 May nineteen fifteen as a Protestant but surrounded by a living Catholic faith around him (Brico 1978:11). After a difficult adolescence, tried by doubt and severe illness (tuberculosis) and an attraction to writing that will never totally disappear, he had a monastic vocation and a dream of the foundation of a community. The greatest influence that shaped his life was his grandmother who lived as widow in the North of France during world war

one. Her three sons were fighting on the front lines. She remained home in order to welcome refugees even when bombs were falling nearby. She looked after old people, little children, and pregnant women. She left only the last minute when everybody had to flee. Her one desire was that no one else would ever have to through what she and others had experienced. Christians she believed so divided amongst themselves and killing one another in Europe should be reconciled to prevent another war. She came from a family who had been Protestant for generations. However, to make reconciliation a reality, she went to the Catholic Church, not being perceived as a repudiation of her own people (see Schutz 1990:83). It was probably especially these two aspirations of his grandmother, taking risks for those in need at the time, and becoming reconciled with the Catholic faith as a Protestant in order to symbolise and contribute to peace, that influenced Br Roger for life. From the days of his education, he expressed an interest in monasticism. A student of theology in Lausanne Switzerland, he wrote his licentiate dissertation on St. Benedict and the beginnings of Western monasticism, with the aim of showing it to be consistent with biblical ideas and themes. While a student, he also chose to live with some twenty friends in a so-called “Grand Community” or third order group (Hicks 1992:203). He also became president of the Protestant Student Federation. From the beginning, he stood for and lived an authentic and intense spirituality, convinced that island situations or desert experiences like retreats were necessary for much converse with God and little converse with His creatures. He believed in meditation, the examination of conscience and confession as important aspects of retreat (Brico 1978:13). He had a vision of an ecumenical retreat and monastic community as well as a constant reaching out to the poorest of the poor.

In nineteen forty at the outbreak of the Second World War, he at the age of twenty-five, left his native Switzerland for France, the country of his

mother. On his bicycle, he soon came across a road sign: “Cluny.” He found the ruins of the famous monastery and a small town with shops and a notice in the window of the local barrister:” houses for sale in Taize.” Taize is ten kilometres from Cluny and was only a little further from the dividing line that separated free and occupied France until November nineteen forty two. He settled there and began welcoming political refugees, mostly Jews whom the war has compelled into exile. On his own, he prayed three times a day in a tiny oratory, just as the community whose creation he was contemplating would do later. He wrote at this stage of his life an eighteen page pamphlet on the monastic ideal that started with the following: “everyday let your wake and your rest be quickened by the word of God, keep inner silence in all things and you will dwell in Christ and be filled with the beatitudes of Joy, Simplicity and Mercy” (Brico 1978:15). During nineteen forty to nineteen forty two, Roger found friendship and a sense of community in Max Thurian and Pierre Souvairan and the beginnings of a society was established. However, the citizens of the village of Taize did not trust what they were doing for example in helping Jews and refugees and out of fear for possible bad consequences for the village, reported him to Nazi interrogators (see Hicks 1992:204). He was then betrayed to the Vichy police after living two years on meagre resources and was only in nineteen forty four able to return to the village of Taize after being ordained as Protestant pastor in nineteen forty three. Nevertheless, during his exile in Geneva, a few young men have already joined him, attracted by his first booklet on monastic community life. A sentence from this booklet will be at the heart of their life “keep inner silence in all things, in order to remain in Christ...be filled with the spirit of the beatitudes: joy, simplicity and mercy”.

At the end of the liberation, in a crippled France, when they returned, the first brothers struck by the suffering of the German prisoners, who were held in camps nearby decided to reach out to them. They soon received

permission to receive these prisoners for a meal once a week. In the simple and deeply human hospitality that was extended, a Gospel reality is sown, a word and a calling that hundreds of thousands will in years to come take back from this village to all the continents. They also kept and fed twenty orphans and shared food with German soldiers as well as Jewish refugees not taking side in the war. The post-World war II period was for the brothers a slow process of finding their way toward the goal of community. Community life and a great simplicity of life started in nineteen forty nine when the first brothers made life commitments to celibacy. They were actively involved in farming, caring for orphans and helping the sick. As a community, they were also involved in service and compassion motivated by a desire to live for Christ. The brothers had a passion for reconciliation, to live as a people reconciled. The first members of the community were from Protestant backgrounds; but soon Catholic brothers also entered the community. The first group of seven brothers made lifetime monastic commitments: celibacy, common life, and a great simplicity of lifestyle, acceptance of the ministry of the prior, community of material and spiritual goods. For the first time the century old monastic ideal became a reality in the Reformed tradition. In the nineteen fifties the brothers perceived new needs that need addressing and started to form small fraternities of brothers around the village and France and later in countries of poverty and turmoil where they became priest-workers (Hicks 1992: 204, 205; see Schutz 2000:79; cf Brico 1978:19; Schutz 1990:84).

The church of reconciliation was dedicated in nineteen sixty-seven, and since nineteen sixty nine, the community became more ecumenical with Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic brothers joining the community. A parable of community and of reconciliation began to take shape. To the diversity of the various Christian denominations was added the diversity of nations. The hundred brothers are form approximately thirty countries and from all continents. The objective according to the

brothers I have spoken to is also broader in the sense that the entire human family is their concern and striving to live as people who are reconciled in order to be a leaven of peace where people are suffering or experiencing conflict (for example war, ethnic violence). Since nineteen fifty, the Taize brothers would go to live for long periods at a time to live amongst the poorest of the poor and earn their own living there. The community also refuses donations and inheritances because of the conviction that simplicity sustains creativity and stimulates communal life. To them it is an act of faith (risk of faith) and a symbol of a community to give themselves for Christ and for others. They do this because of Christ and of the Gospel and to live each new day for God without expecting anything in return and without demanding to see any results of their self-offering.

The overall atmosphere at Taize is saturated with the experience of God and no emphasis is put on propositions of faith, dogma, or holding of correct opinions. Absolute creeds, membership rituals, regulations, laws, and bureaucracy are perceived as peripheral. The emphasis is on God and the experience of God, on communion with the Divine through prayer and action but action then dependent on and forthcoming from this experience and communion with the Divine. The focus, the heart of Taize is prayer. Prayer in the church of reconciliation three times a day, prayer as communal prayer; meditative, repetitive with simple words through music, silence, silent prayer, listening, resting in God, kneeling at the cross, celebrating communion and reflection on the bible. I experienced together with co-researchers this “form of prayer” in a very profound way and as part of a process during the week staying there that took me deep inside myself and into inner silence and deeper into the presence of God.

3.2.2 The History of St. Benedict, Founder of Benedictine Spirituality

Not much is known about the life and personality of St. Benedict (480-547 AD.) himself. He was born in the Umbrian province of Nursia in 480. Two names are associated with his youth with the one Scholastica whom was according to tradition his twin and later becoming a nun. She might have had something to do with Benedict's resolve to become a monk. The other is Cyrilla who accompanied him to Rome to complete his education with her function to keep a motherly eye on him as a housekeeper. Rome has fallen in 410 and the Barbarian hordes were dismembering the empire, the Huns were ravaging Northern Italy. The church too has been torn apart also theologically, particularly on the question of grace. Then according to Ester de Waal (1984:15) a man appeared on the scene who later built an ark (the Rule of St Benedict) to survive the rising storm and in which human and eternal values may enter to be kept until the water drained away again. This "ark" lasted for fifteen centuries and still has the capacity to bring many safe to land. Benedict went later to Rome to study liberal arts and maybe Law but abandoned his studies, left the city and went to Subiaco where he lived a solitary life for three years in a cave on a hillside. What he saw of the prevalence of vice among the students made him retreat and what he experienced in decadent Rome shocked him so that he decided to become a monk (see Maynard 1954:7).

He left the world, gave up his inheritance, and despairing of society as hopelessly evil he wanted only to contemplate God as a hermit. His aim was to spend himself laboriously for God and not be honoured by the applause of men especially after people heard of a miracle that took place at Cyrilla's place. As he was journeying northwest, he met a monk named Romanus who helped him find a cave nearby for seclusion without any danger of anybody pointing him out as a miracle worker. He gave Benedict a suitable habit, a *melota* or sheepskin garment of utmost

simplicity with the promise to supply his simple needs as well as he could. All this were very far removed from the monastic practice Benedict introduced later when he abandoned the eremitical for the cenobitic life, but for three years, he lived in his cave. Beautiful mountain scenery surrounded the place with a view also of the ruins of Nero's palace and broken arches, which were symbols of the crumbling imperial greatness. Benedict never once left the cave not even for Mass or confession. This was quite an extreme form of individual retreat into solitude. It exceeded even some of the Desert Fathers practices who occasionally or at least on Sundays would go to the nearest church for Mass. Hidden as the cave was it was not utterly concealed, so with time people came for guidance, many recognizing his holiness and wisdom and bringing him food (Chapman 1929:27-34).

An interesting (mythical) incident happened there while he was alone and a powerful temptation assaulted him, first in the form of a little blackbird that fluttered around his face. He managed to catch it, and after making the sign of the cross, let it fly away. Immediately afterwards he so overcome by the memory of a woman he had once seen in Rome, that he nearly left his religious project immediately. He adopted a drastic cure to overcome the sumptuous desires of the mind and flesh: At the entrance of the cave, a thick patch of briars and nettles grew. He took of his clothes and flung himself among the thorns, rolling in them until his whole body was covered in blood. Afterwards he apparently said that the excruciating pain quelled the desire so completely, he never again was tempted in the same way. There is also in the tradition a story (Chitty 1966:115-117) that St Francis of Assisi many centuries later visited St. Benedict's sacred cave, finding the thorn bush still there, blessed it, upon which it immediately burst into full bloom. Cardinal Schuster, Benedictine adds that upon a visit by him there, he saw the thorn bush was still growing but that upon each of the leaves may be discerned what looks like the outline

of a small serpent. Even if it is probably because of a mark left by a parasite, it filled him somewhat dreading evil.

Benedict's fame was growing and he was attracting more and more disciples and even important personalities from Rome visited him. At one stage during his hermitage, a group of monks from a monastery at Vicovaro whose abbot died persuaded him after long conversations to go with them as their Abbot. The monastery was nothing more than a series of cells cut into rock with a refectory and oratory. It did not work out well because of changes for example regarding hard working and moderation in all things that Benedict made. They tried to serve him poisoned wine and when he blessed it as was customary, the glass vessel was shattered. He left with the words: "My brethren, may Almighty God have mercy upon you! Why did you treat me thus? Did I not tell you before that my ways and yours would never agree? Go then and seek an Abbot according to your way of life, for me you can have no longer" (Cabrol 1934: 78). People flocked to his cave now in still growing numbers. He then made the decision to leave the eremitical life and to proceed to the cenobitical having learned after Vicovaro what a community of monks living together should not be like. The second stage of his career had started. Since then many others would join him there and with time, he built and began twelve small monasteries scattered on the hillside of Subiaco with twelve monks in each on probably donated land. It may be a plausible conjecture that Benedict wrote a rule for Subiaco that has since disappeared, except for parts becoming part of his later Rule. Without regulations, there could have been no orderly life. Perhaps even they followed an adopted version of the Basilian rule (Maynard 1954:22-23, 29). In the year five hundred and twenty eight (or 529) Benedict at age forty left with a few fellow monks for Monte Cassino where he built, after destroying pagan shrines of Apollo and Jupiter his new monastery. It was an ideal place for a large monastery on an extensive plateau rising dramatically from the plain. It was secluded

but a landmark on the main road between Rome and Naples. During the building process, another miracle happened when one of the monks died after a heavy masonry stone fell on him. The other monks were told to bring him to St. Benedict's cell where they put him a reed mat and after an hour of prayer, the monk returned to work again. Many more miracles and prophecies and rationally unexplainable events (myths) are ascribed to him but what stands out to me is the man in his cell in the tower of Monte Cassino meditating and praying about the monastery and on what kind of monasticism God wished him to establish. He read and studied available literature in this regard and would eventually provide a rule upon which nearly all-monastic traditions after him would build their models to a greater or lesser extent (see de Waal 1984:16). He would remain at Monte Cassino for the rest of his life. His reputation as a holy person grew, and after he died in five hundred forty-seven, his remains ultimately found its way to the abbey of St. Benoit-Sur-Loire, where they remain today.

St. Benedict's life (as portrayed in the second book of St. Gregory the Great written in Rome in 593-594) can be viewed as a quest, a *pilgrimage* that started in the narrow mountain passes of Subiaco and progressed through the broad sweep of plains that eventually led to the mountain top at Monte Cassino. Yet as person, he much remains hidden and the Rule remains the ultimate source to reveal the personality of the man. It seems that Benedict never thought of himself as founding an Order but that his idea was more that each abbey or monastery should be completely autonomous although following the principles of the Rule of St. Benedict. It is indeed possible to look upon each separate Benedictine abbey today as constituting a religious order in itself. There is no Benedictine general or any provincials or councils that govern but only an abbot for each community (de Waal 1984:18; cf Maynard 1954:81). It is into the individual abbey that the monk enters to stay there usually for his whole life, except if transference is granted for compelling reasons.

I stayed for a week during the research journey at the *The Abbaye Ste Marie De La Pierre Qui Vire* Benedictine Catholic monastery situated just outside Reavraux in France near the village of St.Leger Vauban in beautiful countryside within a forest and a small river flowing nearby. It dates back to eighteen fifty when Father Muard, I was told while staying there, a Catholic parish priest received a vocation to live a more monastic life. He left France for Italy to find an appropriate order to join and live the prayerful life. In Subiaco in Italy where St. Benedict also started his calling, he found “by chance” a little booklet on the Benedictine order. He returned to France looking for a place to start a fraternity of brothers. A friend showed him the beautiful woods of St Leger Vauban and by providence, a rich man gave him the grounds on which the current monastery is built. In the beginning, only the priest and a few companions lived there but in time, more brothers arrived and joined. They lived in simple quarters, in five to six cabins. Father Muard died in eighteen fifty four and his successor attached the Benedictine rule formally to this community of monks. Thus, a Benedictine congregation of Subiaco was formed in France. The beautiful church (Cathedral) was built in eighteen seventy. The front part of the cathedral was only added in recent years. Many pilgrims visit the monastery for a day, weekend, or weeklong retreat. Others come only on Sundays to participate together with the community of monks in the liturgy of Holy Mass

3.2.3 The History of St. Francis, Founder of Franciscan Spirituality

Francesco was born in eleven hundred eighty one or two into a rich family in Assisi in Umbrian Italy. Nothing is known about his boyhood other that he could read and write and learned some Latin but not scholarly inclined. The rivalry between Assisi and its neighbour town Perugia was fierce and in the twelfth century, struggles between popes and emperors led to

clashes between them in petty warfare. Italian cities were developing into communes, each striving to bring neighbouring towns under its rule. Within the cities, there were rival groups of noble families and a growing influence of merchants and bankers. The end of the century also saw the third and fourth abortive crusades. It is against this background of rivalry and strife that the story of the life of Francis Bernadone must be seen (see Reynolds 1983:9-11). He was likeable, fun loving, gregarious and sensitive with a love for poetry and love songs. His dreams of knighthood led him to a battle with Perugia and he was taken prisoner in twelve hundred and two and spent a year in prison suffering a prolonged fever. Returning home he lied sick in bed reflecting on what to do with his life (Ramon 1994:6). In twelve hundred and four, he set out to fight in a papal army in Apulia but twenty-five miles out of Assisi, he had a mystical experience that told him to turn back to Assisi. He saw a vision of a hall filled with military weapons and heard a voice asking him: "is it better to serve the lord or the servant?" Francis responded "the lord of course", and the voice replied, "Then why do you serve the servant?" (Short 1989:7). This was the beginning of a conversion process and after receiving a startling vision of the crucified Jesus, he began to seek God in solitude and prayer (Ramon 1994:6). He travelled to Rome as a pilgrim, started to mingle with the beggars at the door of the church of St. Peter, and exchanged his clothes for theirs. On returning to Assisi, he found himself embracing a leper and sought a new home, with the priest of a run down little church, San Damiano outside town. Here he was praying with fervour and longing in the church when he heard the Christ of the crucifix saying: "Francis, go and repair my church which, as you see, is falling into ruins." Interpreting the message in a literal sense, he made a clear and painful break with his family and the world of business. Taking cloth from his father's store, he rode to Spoleto where he sold the cloth and the horse in order to raise money to restore the San Damiano church. His father denounced him a thief and summoned to court, Francis denounced his

father giving back to him even the clothes he was wearing. The bishop of Assisi Guido took of his own cloak and put it around Francis with the words: “have faith in the Lord, my son for God will give you what is necessary for the work of the church” (see Reynolds 1983:18). The cloak hanging action took place metaphorically and for Francis the approbation or at the least acquiescence of the church was a primary need. He worked within the church and not against it and always gave due respect to the presiding priests.

After this calling and new commitment he decided he would call no one father except God and embraced a new life. So began twenty years of loving service to God, and the literal following of Christ in poverty. During the next two years, in hermit dress he repaired three small churches near Assisi – San Damiano, San Pietro, and St Mary of the Angels – the Portiuncula. It was there, on the feast of St Matthias in twelve hundred and nine that God spoke to him in the reading of the Gospel from St Matthew 10:7-10, outlining the life, which Francis yearned for. His literal obedience to Scripture caused him to throw away his staff, take of his sandals, and exchange his leather belt for a rope. The Order of Friars Minor or lesser brothers had just begun, emphasizing that humility was a virtue they should cultivate and that they should not take on the duties of the higher clergy (Ramon 1994:7; cf Reynolds 1983:32). The early years of the new penitent life of Francis, are not described in detail by his later followers. The Penitents were members of a widely diffused movement striving for the renewal of Christian life that spread throughout Europe. In Francis’s time, many of them lived in and around the fast-growing towns while others lived in remote areas in the hills and forests. They did not belong to mainline religious orders and were lay people from different levels of society who shared a desire to live according to the Gospel, as they understood it: giving up property, dedicating them to prayer and fasting, working for their sustenance, begging for alms and sometimes preaching.

Some lived in communities and others were solitaries. It is within this broad movement that Francis chose a way of living: praying, fasting, and working on the repair of small chapels.

In twelve hundred and eight, his life changed dramatically when the Lord gave him three brothers and Francis' personal conversion since then became integrated with a common project of life; and the Franciscan family was borne. One-year later twelve brothers formed the family who set out for Rome seeking approval from the Pope for their way of life. Francis (in Short 1989: 10) wrote many years later: "and after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it to me." Others joined the group and they continued praying, working on church repair and other kinds of manual labour, serving among the lepers, begging for their bread when they received no compensation for their work. Francis also received permission to preach and in twelve hundred and twelve spoke at the cathedral of San Rufino in Assisi. He also received in the Order the eighteen-year-old Clare who eventually became the Abbess of the Second Order of poor Clares (see Ramon 1994:7). She decided to follow the life of the Gospel practiced and preached by Francis and the brothers. She cut her hair and dressed in a plain tunic and went to stay with a women's Benedictine community at Bastia and shortly afterwards with a community of women penitents. Then she and a few sisters stayed at the chapel of San Damiano. They were called Poor Ladies, Lesser Sisters or the poor recluses of San Damiano (see Short 1989:12). These nuns were contemplative women who lived an enclosed life with a deep experience of sisterhood, without fixed income and living a life of prayer, manual labour, and poverty

The order of St. Francis needed a church where their priests could say Mass and where prayer and meditation could be fostered. The Benedictine monastery of Subiaco gave permission for them to use the Porziuncula church called Santa Maria Della Porziuncola as well as the little church of San Damiano. They also made use of the caverns in the rocky side of the deep mountain gorge in the foothills of Mount Subiaco about a half hours climb from Assisi. It became their retreat or hermitage where the brothers could retire secure from interruption and renew their spiritual fervour (Reynolds 1983:35). When the friars gathered at Porziuncula in twelve hundred and seven there were some five thousand of them there, many from foreign countries. The phenomenal spread of the Friars Minor could probably be ascribed to a mounting discontentment with the church at that stage because of immorality, corruption, and power struggles of many priests, bishops, and cardinals. In addition, the ideal of the Franciscan movement of reaching back to the early church and also back to the Gospel message as well as striving for a simpler form of religion, their preaching and example attracted lay people to share in their ideals and labours. Pope Innocent III and his successors apparently sensed that this fraternity as group of “loyal to the church” men could bring new life into the church, so they were absorbed, encouraged, and not rejected by the papal authorities.

The early Franciscans lived according to the contemplative and active mode of life sometimes accentuating one above the other. It seems from the history of Francis' life that he himself spent roughly half of his life in retreat alone or in community with the brothers at the church or monastery. The other half was spent on missions and reaching out to the poor. He had an intense desire to go into solitude or alone with three of the brothers to a secluded place where they could pray and meditate but had also a strong vocation to evangelize and bringing the Gospel message of peace, repentance, and reconciliation. He had in mind

according to Reynolds (1983:51) two kinds of friars: those who were more active in the world and those who chose to live as hermits or with a few brethren to keep the chain of prayer unbroken. The indications are that he was inclined to the second course. But there was also a third course that some of the brothers could take in practice; when they were tired of all the wandering and preaching they could withdraw for a while to some secluded retreat to refresh their spiritual lives in prayer and meditation far from the noise and business of the world. Most of the friars seem to blend or combine then the contemplative and active life. Many of the friars that I met at the Basilica in Assisi tend more to a contemplative mode, although not so much in the radical individual ascetic sense, but managed a balance between solitude and community. They were very active in the Upper Basilica Church during the day doing service there for example mass for the pilgrims and tourists. Others also travelled a lot to other parts of the country and world on outreach to other Franciscan communities.

Francis' rule or way of life received verbal approval from the Pope in twelve hundred and sixteen and official recognition in twelve hundred and twenty three. In twelve hundred twenty four during his time of retreat at the mountain of La Verna in Tuscany, he underwent a mystical experience of the crucified Christ and returned from the retreat with the stigmata, the marks of Christ's wounds in his hands, feet, and side (Short 1989:15-17). He was already approaching death now worn out by physical pain and illness and suffered from a serious eye disease. During this time, he wrote and composed his spiritual masterpiece, The Canticle of Brother Sun, a hymn that spoke of Gods' goodness and the goodness of all creation and impending death. On the evening of October 3 in twelve hundred and twenty six he died at the Porziuncula and his body was carried up to the city for burial first in the church of San Giorgio and four years later in the magnificent Basilica built in his honour. On the way to the town gates, the procession carrying the dead "little poor man" stopped at the monastery of

San Damiano where Clare and her sisters saw for the last time their brother and friend, now marked with the stigmata (signs of Christ's wounds) (Reynolds 1983: 102).

The Minor Brothers brought about a renewal of religion during the twelfth and thirteen centuries and according to Reynolds (1983:109); "no one has equalled Saint Francis in the freshness and power of his impact on religious life." Vast multitudes of people who have never met a friar owe much to the spirit and message of Saint Francis. A Benedictine historian, David Knowles (1948:126) has written in this regard the following:

The new life that Francis himself had lived and shown to others remained and remains in the Church, and has in all centuries inspired individuals and groups within the Order as the model for a type of sanctity which all recognize as Franciscan. It has besides, enriched the spirit of all Europe, not only, or even principally, as a new manifestation of the brotherhood of all men and of the share of all creatures in the beauty and beneficence of God, but as a showing forth of the Gospel lived in its fullness with a detail and clarity rare to equal in any age, and as a revelation of the imitation of Christ crucified, in love and suffering, which though present in all Christian sanctity, appeared in Francis in a new form to which the growing mind of Europe responded at once, and which was to prove the prototype of much which was to come in the religious life of the West.

The Franciscan Third Order or Brothers and Sisters of Penance (first order is the Friars Minor, second order is the Poor Sisters of Clare) is the Franciscan family or lay movement and embraced today by millions worldwide. The Poor Clares also called the Second Order live in hundreds

of autonomous communities scattered around the world. There are tens of thousands of lay and ordained men of the First Order divided into three branches: Friars Minor Conventual's (more adaptive approach, Friars Minor Capuchin (renewal and a purer Franciscan observance) and the Friars Minor. There are Franciscan communities in the Anglican and Catholic Church traditions.

3.3 Monastic Way of Retreat

3.3.1 A Benedictine Way of Retreat

Research data show that the Benedictine monastic tradition leans more to the contemplative than an active mode of life. The importance of and emphasis in the Rule on the Divine Office (see rule 8-20; cf de Vogüé 1977:127-169) as well as my own experience at the monastery of La Pierre Qui Vire confirms that Benedictine spirituality promotes silence and contemplation. It makes ample provision for it in the Divine Office for chapel, private prayer, study, silence, and work. The goal is to seek God and union with God and to be constantly conscious of the perfect love of God, for example to be in continual prayer between the seven prayers of the hours (Divine Office) in the chapel. The Benedictine, though he/she may engage in various forms of active work, is not committed by the Rule to any kind of work at all, except what is essential to perform in the monastery. I noticed gardens, a workshop, library and also books and works of art created by the monks and on sale in the shop on the premises, with monks behind the counter at La Pierre Qui Vire.

Benedictine spirituality also emphasizes relationships between members of the community. The monastic ideal preceding Benedict was that of a novice finding a holy man and asking to learn from him and the monastery had been a group of individuals gathered around the feet of a sage. One of the earlier monastic rules, the Rule of the Master had given enormous

powers to the Abbot. St. Benedict came and changed this exclusively vertical authority structure by focusing on the interpersonal relationships of the community of monks. They are there to focus on learning about and seeking God but they are brothers bound in love to each other. He devotes three chapters (RB 69-71) to this topic. In Chapter 72 of the rule five to eight he states the following: “the monks are to bear with patience the weakness of others, whether of body or behaviour. Let them strive with each other in obedience to each other. Let them not follow their own good, but the good of others. Let them be charitable towards their brothers with pure affection” (de Waal 1984:19).

As retreatants we ate together as a group, sometimes in silence and afterwards would clean up the tables and wash dishes. At times one or two retreatants would be invited to eat in silence with the monks in their refectory or dining hall. One group bible study per day, usually in the morning after breakfast for retreatants led by a monk can also be attended. The story the one morning was about the bath of Bethesda, and the question of Jesus “do you want to be healed?” The “new” or fresh interpretation of the well known story by one of the monks and deep theological insights was to me very stimulating. He expanded on two levels of healing, talked about desperate and distressed people, the “boiling water, the Sabbath, the fact that the same word is used here to get up that is used for the resurrection for example a new life or exodus or walk that begins here for the man. It all became an allegory for the group of retreatant’s pilgrimage and my own retreat journey as potential source of regeneration and renewal. The group bible studies at the monastery were much more formal and less spontaneous than those I have experienced at Taize. The retreatants are welcome to join the community of monks in the chapel during the seven prayer offices. A definite border between the abbot and the monks sitting in front around the altar (enclosed area) and the retreatants or other visitors are maintained at all

times in the cathedral. Nowhere perhaps does the Benedictine community find a better expression than in the common prayer or Divine Office where the monks believe they unite with the heavenly choirs to praise God, participating in Christ's life giving sacrifice, bonded in a common love to embrace the whole world and offering it to God in prayer.

The liturgy or seven daily prayer offices (The Divine Office) in the cathedral were:

- *Vigiles* (night office): at 2h05 in the morning, the rule of St. Benedict says it must be early in the morning thus the time for this office may differ from monastery to monastery.
- *Laudes* : 6h35 commencing with long bell ringing to announce a new morning (day).
- *Eucharistie*: 9h15.
- *Sexte*: 12h30 the Afternoon prayer.
- *None*: 14h45 on Sundays and other holy feast days.
- *Vespres*: 17h30 Evening prayer.
- *Complines*: 20h30 before going to bed.

Bell ringing: during night office at 2h05 it was rung nine times

During the day: three times in the morning, afternoon and evenings (from tradition the annunciation by angels as well as silence). Bell ringing three times daily I was told serve also as a reminder to pray three times a day.

The monks explained the aim of the Divine Office to me: It functions as a tool or means to arrive at unceasing prayer where the function of the specific prayer hours is then not to dispense from the calling to continual prayer, but recalling it to memory and outlining its fulfilment. De Vogüé (1977:129-138) describes it as going back to the early Egyptian (Desert Fathers) spirituality that focused on the continuity of prayer and prayer

vigils only at the beginning and end of the night with the rest of the day without offices. The movement from the prayer of the hours, two times daily to seven corporate prayer hours in Benedictine monasteries, is a move from solitude to public gathering and from liberty to obligation. He rightly warns against legalism and forgetting that the purpose of the seven supports (Divine Office) are to build or support the bridge to spontaneous unceasing communion with God. This warning is also applicable within the context of designing a way of retreat and all the elements build into it.

The following is an example of three liturgies at La Pierre Qui Vire:

Laudes

Organ music

Overture

Hymn

Ps 142 and 137

Canticle

Ps 150

Lecture Rom 12:1-2

Organ music

Canticle

Litany

Notre Pere

Benediction

Organ music

Vesperes

Organ choral music

Overture

Hymn

Ps 141

Ps 47

Ps 116

Canticle

Lecture Eph 2:4-6

Organ music

Canticle of Mary

Litany

Benediction

Organ music

Complines

Flute

Hymn

Ps 15

Lecture

Canticle of Simeon

Benediction

Chant

It was apparent that the Benedictine liturgies aim to create an atmosphere between simplicity and solemnity. The focus according to the the monks I interviewed, is the Divine Office and for them “perfection” lies right here. The monks stated that Benedict does not give exact prescription as to how the Divine Office ought to be conducted but stressed that Gods’ presence is everywhere and everything done for him must be done carefully and exactly. The Psalms play an important role and are recited every week, all of them. Mass or Eucharist is not conducted in the same way in every Abbey for example some will retain the choir to say most of the office and others will sing it. The value of private prayer is accentuated but the consensus seems to be that the more monks are penetrated and saturated by the spirit of liturgy, the better they will be able to reach

heights of interior prayer. They recommend the cultivation of personal and mental prayer in order for the recitation of the Divine Office to become more spiritual and contemplative. The praise of God is highly valued during the common prayers (the Divine Office). The canticles and rest of the Office in the words of one of the monks I spoke to is the official voice of the Bride of Christ who sings, united to Christ and under Gods' very gaze. The Rule does not deal with what chants should be used by the monks although the Gregorian mode seemed common and trained singers were used to good effect. Psalms are usually sung during the different offices. Each monastery develops its own liturgy within the framework of the Benedictine rule. There is a specific choir office for the chants and singing. The scripture readings are the decision of the abbot. The divine office was not only the main way of retreat whilst visiting the monastery but is intended to support and stimulate a monastic way of life. Private prayer supported by personal silence and the community atmosphere is closely connected with the common prayer of the community namely the Divine Office (cf Campbel 1983:40-43). Psalms and silent prayer succeed one another both occupying an equal place. The singing of psalms connect the monks to the prayer of the people of God which go back for centuries making the Divine Office writes (De Vogüe 1977:145): "an ecclesial memorial". The whole atmosphere of the liturgies in the Benedictine monastery where I stayed was more "high church" like, and the group of monks very solemn and serious.

One of the questions put to the monks was how Benedictine monastic spirituality views prayer and whether the Benedictine tradition offers a particular way of doing it that is also practiced in the monastery of La Pierre Quie Vire. The response was that one of the expressions of the search for God is the desire to follow the recommendation given by Jesus and recommended by St. Paul to "pray at all time, continually" (Luke 18:1, Eph 5:20). The monastic tradition offers a particular way of accomplishing

this. The first Egyptian monks fulfilled the twofold duty of work and prayer in the footsteps of St. Anthony (the father of Christian monks) and St. Pachomius by reciting psalms or other scripture texts when working. From time to time, they stood or knelt to express their own prayer. Later when work had to be done in the fields or in workshops, fixed times were dedicated to the communal recitation or reading of scripture texts. St. Benedict continued this tradition and used the following complementary means to pray constantly that is also used by the monks at this monastery namely the liturgy and choir office, private prayer, and *lectio divina* (sacred reading). *Lectio Divinia* (RB 48) or sacred reading as a way or process of reading a sacred text, meditating on it and responding to it in prayer in order to reach contemplation is valued highly in the monastery.

In the liturgical or divine office, monks celebrate Christ's mysteries and it unites the faithful to him. St. Benedict made use of the *lectio divina* tradition when monks began to separate work from prayer and prayed seven times a day (seven symbolizes the whole/fullness/completion). The aim was that these liturgical prayers would help the monk to pray the whole day. St. Benedict placed the liturgical offices at the points of the day where the activities change, in order to offer to God what had just been completed and to entrust him with the next duty. The divine office is not only a means to pray continually but has also a value of its own as a service of praise and supplication for the whole world in the name of humanity. Care, beauty and a prayerful atmosphere in the Eucharistic liturgy in the chapel is a cherished tradition where mass is celebrated daily and seen as a prolongation of the Sunday mass. The choir office is closely related with the liturgy. They view the Psalms as words of Christ and the monks are invited to sing them wisely by sharing the prayer experience of the psalmist and Christ himself. In this way, the psalm may become a personal prayer, a word of God touching the heart giving light and comfort and answer to personal questions. The monks are invited to build their

continuous contemplation on these and other texts read during the liturgy. Following the example of Christ, the first monks used to retire often in solitude to pray. St. Pachomius requested his disciples to recite verses of scripture when going from one place to another and St. Basil recommended meditation of scripture while doing manual work. Private prayer in Benedict spirituality is thus clearly flowing from the recitation of the word of God and in an atmosphere of humility and reverence for the presence of God. The monks do not find it necessary to say a great deal but to say or listen constantly in the heart the words, which have touched the soul, to keep it in memory and repeat and meditate it during the day. To a Benedictine monk then these texts are not just mantras or repetitive phrases to help concentration on Gods' presence but words of God pregnant with his creative and formative power and able to shape the heart of the monk that prays in the image of Christ. The aim or ideal is to stay in the presence of God to reach pure prayer where the soul pours itself out in God like a blazing fire.

I shared with the monks my experience of the monastery as an extremely quiet place, and that I noticed that they converse very sparingly. During the mealtimes in the refectory they would refrain from talking with the exception of one brother reading passages from a book. I asked them to reflect on this atmosphere of silence in the monastery. Some of their thoughts on silence were the following: Silence and control of thoughts go hand in hand and are monastic observances found also in the Hindu (some sannyasis make vows of silence lasting several years) and in Buddhist monasteries (to reach the interior solitude of meditation and to move beyond the senses). Following the example of Jesus (going to quiet places for silence and solitude), the first Christian monks left the world and went to the desert. However, the world and the neighbour were still in their minds so their first struggle was with their thoughts and the passions of the human heart. They fought it with prayer following the image given by

Ps 136 “to break the evil thoughts into pieces on Christ as soon as they arise.” St. Pachomius recommended the same vigilance to the monks of his communities to repeat in their hearts some Scripture texts in order to avoid temptations and to keep the mind in Gods’ presence. Silence was from the beginning the usual atmosphere of monasteries, also silence as result from a more controlled way of speech in the use of words. To use words sparingly or to use a few words as a reminder of Gods’ presence, promote virtuous silence that expresses the respect due to God and creating an atmosphere of recollection helpful to listening to God and to others.

St. Benedict heir of the monastic Christian tradition takes the teaching on silence (RB chapter 6 and numerous other allusions to silence in the rule) by his predecessors for granted. He defines specific times and places where a stricter silence ought to be kept for example in the chapel. Benedictine monks should strive at all times to keep silence. The monks do not interpret it as a strict rule but rather an effort towards self-mastery and mutual charity. For a Benedictine monk the first degree of humility is a constant control of the mind (inner silence) and the control of the tongue (outer silence). Their main thesis is that monks should refrain not only from bad or unnecessary speech, but also even from good speech in order to cultivate listening silence. When words are used, the rule insists on the practice of the good word. After the Divine Office, all leave the chapel in complete silence, so that a brother wishing to stay and pray alone will not be disturbed by the insensitivity of another. During the day when someone chooses to pray privately he will go into the chapel to be there in silence. When words are used they us it wisely and in an edifying manner for example the abbot’s teaching functions like a leaven of divine justice kneaded in the mind of his disciples. The cellarer or bursar sees to it that no one is upset or saddened in the monastery as household of God and speak in a way that promotes calm, courage and comfort. The needs

of the guests or retreatants are met with all charitable service and a brother will sit with us to listen and speak towards our edification. At mealtimes complete silence is maintained and the brothers are very attentive to one another's' needs as they eat and drink, so that no one needs to ask for anything. In the background, the reader's voice is all that is heard, reading from the bible or passages from other books. My observation was that the monks strive to find the right balance between silence and speech in order to help them to reach the silence of the heart where the words of Scripture, transform the soul and culminate in the ineffable experience of the encounter with Gods' love. Silence in a monastery is not only an important ingredient or element of a monastic retreat for them but a way of life.

On the question, why many people come to the monastery for a day, weekend, or weeklong retreat some of the responses from monks and retreatants were the following: "Because of spiritual needs, a spiritual hunger for God and His presence. There is not enough time in busy schedules and overfilled lives to find God and self. People are *scattered* in mind and lifestyle therefore, they come here for *recollection*, to refocus on and to find God in their hearts and in others whilst here at this silent, holy, and beautiful place. Visitors came to monasteries over the years as places where men are permanently living close to God and with the expectation to receive either spiritual or material help form the brothers. The monastery as the house of God is the meeting place for God and man and has the duty to welcome all those in search for God. Since the time of St. Benedict (and even before that the Desert Fathers) people visited monks to receive from their spiritual guidance and encouragement. People built many monasteries purposely along the pilgrims' helping them to get over difficult mountain passes or to cross the river fords and for spiritual support. More generally, they were situated at the outskirts of civilisation;

to keep contact with it but in solitude; they were in communion with men and in search for God.”

As to whether retreat, is commendable to all Christians and other seekers or not and on their personal view on retreat, monks replied as follows: “The needs and spirituality of people differ and therefore there would be different styles or ways of retreat to meet the different needs. For example in the Jesuit tradition, they will conduct a retreat specifically to help retreatants make important decisions. Retreat may also serve as a stimulus or reminder by participating in the *fixed rhythm* in order that when going back home something of the prayer and silence rhythm may become part of everyday life. The monks at La Pierre Quie Vire and in the Benedictine tradition only speak when it is really necessary and will eat together in silence in order to develop interior communication and listening to Gods’ voice. There is much time wasted that could rather be spent in prayer, wasted time as time that must be filled with stuff or noise or people. The repeated singing, chanting of Psalms in the cathedral becomes part of our everyday life and reminds us of the presence of God. As monks, they want to keep Gods’ Word close to their hearts and think about God all day while working and studying. Retreat may be necessary for some Christians to help them *practicing the presence of God* to become part of their lives when they return home. The atmosphere of prayer and peace and silence of the monastery invite pilgrims to discover the vertical dimension in living prayer and communion with God individually and in community. In the modern and materialistic times we live in, the monastery are to many seekers privileged places where the return to God and experience of his presence may become easier. The atmosphere in this house of God may be helpful in enriching life of the seeker bringing it in harmony with what God asks from them. The kind welcome given to retreatants and hospitality could help them also to appreciate the horizontal dimension of charity for all.”

3.3.2 A Franciscan Way of Retreat

I stayed with the community at The Church and Convent of San Francesco in Assisi (*Sacro Conventio di San Francesco*). The Fraternity of brothers residing in this monastery is part of the *Fratre Minori Conventual*, a fraternity with a more adaptive and relaxed approach to the Franciscan way of life.

The Monastery at the *Basilica di San Francesco* is the most beautiful and awesome place I have encountered. Millions of tourists and pilgrims flock here every year and the splendour of the place inside and outside is breathtaking. The Building style and art inside is a great tribute to a man who owned nothing and lived the simple poor life al his life. I have visited the Basilica once before as a tourist and has mingled with the crowds and looked at everything more through the eyes of a tourist than a pilgrim. To go there again as part of the research journey was quite different. To stay with the brothers in the deep chambers of this very special place and experience the grandeur, art, and symbols in complete quiet when all the tourists have left. For example, I knelt at the tomb with the remains of St. Francis during the day with my first visit with many other tourists but during the research pilgirmage also late at night during evening prayers with the fraternity of monks.

Rising on the lowest slope of Mount Subiaco, by the will of Pope Gregory IX and of Friar Elias, the double Basilica expresses in the concatenated articulation of its architectonic masses, the determination of making eternal through the centuries, the figure, and message of St. Francis. On the Romanesque framework of the lower basilica (1230-1232) where the tomb Church destined to guard the remains of the little poor man was constructed the upper basilica (1232-1239) which in the ascension motif of its arches presents itself as the exemplary type of Italian Gothic and to me

one of the most beautiful houses of prayer. My visit there was indeed a pilgrimage but I was not prepared, after getting to know Francis better through the eyes of the work of authors I have read, for the contrast between the poverty and humble and simple life of the saint and this magnificent basilica that entombs him. I experienced this incongruity throughout my stay at the monastery not only because of this vast structure of grandeur and opulence but also whilst living in the monastery itself. Although I do 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 man and his way of life and this magnificent shrine with all the grandeur built in his memory. Even the visitors or 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!

According to the brothers interviewed, the Basilica was built as a manifesto of Franciscan spirituality and a temple of glory. They showed me the various homilies depicted on the semi-darkened walls of the lower basilica that flow together into a thematic crescendo in the famous Giotto allegories above the central altar. These invite the pilgrim to follow the saint in his mystic labour, morally sustained by the Christ of Bethlehem and Golgotha and demonstrated by his life of obedience, poverty, and chastity, reaching final glory in heaven. The artists tried to participate in the passion and beatitude of the saint by going beyond the traditional Byzantine Roman art schemes. Their depiction is truer, more violent, sweeter, and more human. In the upper basilica, the pictorial cycles of the great schools of Italian art and the stupendous windows painted by Italian, French, and German artists narrate in choral format the life of the founder of the Friars Minor. The Old Chapter Hall houses the relics of St. Francis. Originally it served as the chapter hall of the first friars since twelve

hundred and twenty eight. The relics of St. Francis I saw displayed there were his ashen habit or tunic, Ivory horn, Chalice and Patten, Embroideries of Jacopa Settesoli, the white tunic, the blessing to brother Leo and the Franciscan rule.

The fraternity of eighty brothers gather each evening at nineteen hours fifteen in silence in what is considered by the Franciscans the most holy place of the Franciscan order; the Tomb of St. Francis. One of the brothers told me how Francis originally was buried in a sepulchre in San Giorgio where he had preached his first sermon until a more permanent shrine could be erected. Four years after his death the building of the Basilica was sufficiently advanced for his body to be transferred, and May 5 twelve hundred and twenty eight was the momentous day. With the specific orders of Pope Eugene IV (1442) and Sixtus IV (1476), the tomb containing the sarcophagus with the bodily remains of the saint was sealed in such a way that they could not be disturbed or interfered with. It was only in 1818 that Pope Pius allowed the tomb to be freed from the solid rock it was encased in. This also allowed the mortal remains of the saint to be uncovered and properly investigated by the Umbrian bishops, medical experts, and archaeologists from Rome and nearby towns. Then a crypt chapel was formed around the burial place, which was now guarded by a heavy iron grill. Today near his mortal remains, rest the bodies of four of his most faithful companions, who, shattering the taboo of their different social classes, offered a moving witness of Gospel fraternity: friar Leone, friar Maseo, friar Angelo and friar Ruffino. On the entrance stairway, facing the tomb of Francis rests the noble matron Jacoba of Settesoli, whom Francis called affectionately friar Jacoba.

The evening prayers in the tomb would start in complete silence, followed by scripture readings (the first evening of the visit Rom 5, Eph 1 and Luke 1 were read), then psalms were sung, followed by some intercessory

prayers and the last twenty five minutes spent in silent scripture meditation. I experience the silence in the enclosed final resting place of St. Francis as dense with the love and presence of Jesus whom Francis followed so literally and wholeheartedly.

Supper afterwards was a very big surprise to me as some of the brothers served wine, five different vegetables, salads, pasta, cheese, and pudding in absolute abundance to us with everybody talking and laughing heartily. Very different from the meals I had with the Benedictine brothers at La Pierre Qui Vire and especially very different from the diet that St. Francis himself followed. The novice friars sat in the middle of the big dining hall and they did all the dishing out of food and serving. There were also five young girls in the refectory that helped as volunteers in the monastery. I experienced a lot of warmth, joy, and spontaneity among the brothers during my stay and the atmosphere much more spontaneous and relaxed than for example the Benedictine monks at La Pierre Qui Vire. What do saints really look like and how do they behave I pondered at one stage during the visit, what is the image the community of saints reflect to others or should reflect? The surface behaviour of the community of monks I met in Asissi was *not so pious* (high-church) at all depending on what a person's perception of pious are. The life of St. Francis and his spirituality of humility, simplicity, and joy could be a reminder that the more people are of the saints, the more human they become. Bodo (1985:131) makes the statement: "The way of communion with other people *is* the way to union with God." Francis's love for his brothers as fellow human beings emphasized love with no conditions attached between the communities of saints. The only friar there from Africa confided in me that, he was not happy there and felt that he did not fit in at all and did not really feel accepted there especially by the other Italian friars. Listening to his narrative united me even more to this fellow pilgrim from my home

continent. The Franciscan friars do not stay at one monastery for a lifetime but may spend time in a variety of different monasteries worldwide.

Morning prayers start at six twenty five with a Mass conducted in the splendour of the Upper Basilica before the daily multitude of tourists and pilgrims would start to arrive. The music was beautiful; the sound of the friar's voices reverberating through the big cathedral had a goose bump effect on me. The ritual of the Eucharist and liturgy by the brothers in front with their white robes and purple stoles and *hostie* being given and humbly and gratefully received by myself spoke to my heart and I as Protestant experienced deep communion with Jesus and my Catholic brothers during the Eucharist.

In the convent of St. Francis, there is only the rhythm of morning and evening common prayers in comparison with the seven prayer offices of St. Benedict and three prayer offices of Taize. There are no group discussions or group bible studies. During the day the friars' study, work, conduct many Holy Mass liturgies in the Upper Basilica for pilgrims and tourists during the day, hearing confession, doing service at the doors, or merely standing outside and smiling the people in and out. They always had their black tunics on with a rope as belt and sandals but during their free time, they would wear plain clothes. To my experience, they were very down to earth, friendly brothers with the exception of a few more aloof, seemingly dogmatic, and more serious friars. Most of them were very open and receptive to me a Protestant stranger in there Catholic midst. The novices were most of the mornings busy with lectures. The Gospel and Psalms are the heart of their common prayers. The *Ave Maria* is also prayed aloud during evening prayers.

Other observations while experiencing life on the hill in Asissi on which the Basilica was built and the surroundings were that of a vast area, with just

too many people during the day. There are many other churches within walking distance of the convent, priests and nuns and monks can be seen almost everywhere. Also in abundance were the merchants selling icons and holy replicas and other haberdasheries, and many hotels and restaurants. To come here for retreat or pilgrimage would be difficult if not staying in the inner sanctuary of the convent where I have stayed, which is mainly open to Franciscan friars who come to the visit. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle there is the monastery enclosed with its wall and spectacular view from the nearly all-round balcony over the valley below filled with friars who live their more relaxed or liberal interpretation of the Life or Rule of St. Francis. The Basilica was for the pilgrims I have spoken to and many tourists who visit there for a day or morning an important symbol of holiness, uniqueness, celibacy, and commitment. Especially Catholic pilgrims I interviewed, view their visit there more as a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Francis, spending time in quiet reflection before returning home and not so much as a day or weekend retreat.

3.3.3 A Taizé way of Retreat

I arrived on the hill at Taizé for my first visit as part of the research journey but I viewed it also as part of a *pilgrimage of faith*. I realised when arriving there that I have arrived at a place where hundreds of thousands of young people (and a few thousand older people like me) have spent time there at the wellsprings of faith. Many came here in their search for a meaning for their life, a place I was told by one of the brothers that Pope John Paul once referred to after visit there as “Taizé, that little springtime of faith.” On my arrival at Taizé, a relaxed atmosphere prevailed, with many groups of young people sitting around chatting, some on their own reading the bible and others in deep discussion.

“Welcoming with simplicity is so important”, one of the brothers emphasised in an interview. He quoted what the leader of the community

Br. Roger (since my visit deceased) once had said: "something is simplified within us...Even with poor means and however destitute we are, we can do so much through faith in Christ...and the radiance of Christ will be light for many others across Europe and elsewhere." One of the marks of Gods' love is that pilgrims are always welcomed with forgiveness and compassion. This was my experience on arrival and during my stay at Taizé. All the volunteer workers and brothers made me feel welcome, loved, and tried their best to help me on my journey as pilgrim and retreating for a week on the Taizé hill. Hospitality and love for those arriving at a monastery were also characteristic of the monastic community of Taizé.

The programme for seventeen to nineteen year olds and the programme for those thirty years old and upward are not the same and the thirty-something's eat and have group meetings at a different venue. During the prayer Meetings or the Divine Office in the Chapel (church of reconciliation) everybody are together at eight hundred hours thirty, twelve hours twenty and twenty hours thirty. Pilgrims or retreatants are welcomed by a community of brothers who have made a lifelong commitment to follow Christ in common life and celibacy, in simplicity of life. The invitation to all is to take part with people from many different nations and the community of monks (brothers) in this way of life (the monastic rhythm of Taizé) by way of prayers, small groups, meetings, times of silence, tasks and meals. The community prayer or Divine Office (three times a day in the church of reconciliation) is at the centre of the life of Taizé and pilgrims and brothers confirmed that they view it as the centre of the retreat. The brothers of the community are available after the community prayers for spiritual direction in the church of reconciliation.

My first experience of community life at Taizé was having supper (I didn't realise I should eat at another venue for older people) in the youth dining

hall together with more than a thousand people all under twenty nine, which made we feel much older than my forty six years. Everybody was talking, laughing, and eating from plastic plates a simple meal of soup and bread and cheese afterwards appointed teams of pilgrims did the washing up. Work is part of monastic life also at Taizé with the young people doing a project or chore every day in groups.

The first prayer meeting in the church of reconciliation announced by persistent bells (five of them in different sizes) ringing for the first time about twenty minutes beforehand for five minutes and then growing silent to start ringing again five minute before the prayer meeting starts, was a real surprise and highpoint. Nearing the church, the “silent” posters outside is obvious and creates a zone of silence around the church. The liturgy for the evening is available at the doors as well as songbooks. The place inside astounded me. The hundreds of small candles in front with the deep orange draperies high and long from the floor to the roof, the more subdued or “darkish” illumination (semi-darkness pierced by tiny lights from the high ceiling helps to centre oneself), immediately started to enfold me and invited me to be immersed in the atmosphere, ritual and liturgy to follow. There was the faint smell of some sort of incense, everybody sitting on the floor or using little kneel bunks, others sitting on steps more to the side of the church, and few older people on chairs, bunks to the side of the one wall, the icons, cross, the green shrubbery that enclose the inner circle (rectangle) of sanctuary.... Near the icon of John, the Baptist a fountain of water evokes the life of baptism that seeks to water our day-to-day commitments. At the entrance to the choir, the reserved Eucharist is offered for adoration. Everyone is in complete silence, no words, and music. When the brothers (priests, monks) walk into the church (the bells stop ringing) in their white simple “garments/frocks” (70 of them taking about 6 minutes to fill the space and kneeling), the music starts. The brothers fill the space marked out by the

clumps of branches (shrubbery), kneeling in rows facing the cross and to the front of auditorium as if forming a kind of heart or backbone of the assembly, bearing the whole and leading it onwards. After several moments, the bells go quiet and another silence seems to permeate the church, more dense than before. The hill is now entirely still and the church is full. There is still a few more minutes of silence before the organ starts playing and after a while, the singing begins. A single voice begins; one of the brothers sings the first measure of an opening hymn to which the whole assembly immediately joins in. After the introduction, a psalm is sung, and then a bible passage is read in several languages.

A response are sung by a young child of the village of Taizé then a second response follows a repetitive melodic motive meditative in nature that tapers off into silence for about ten minutes. Several brother-cantors singing a litany of intercessory prayers in turn with the assembly, which answers after each petition with *Kyrie eleison*, Lord, have mercy follow this. There is a hymn and then Brother Roger (now deceased) the founder and prior of the Community read a simple benediction in several languages. The structure is familiar even if various elements, which contribute to the prayer's contemplative nature, may be new to some. In its essence, prayer at Taizé is no different from that which Christians of different traditions have practiced for ages in monasteries in the form of the liturgy of the hours. After the benediction prayer, another song follows and the brothers rise to leave the church, a signal – I assumed – that prayer has ended, until I noticed that few people (pilgrims) were leaving. A careful look at the front reveals that in fact a part of the Community has stayed on and continued to animate the singing, now with the help of several young pilgrims. The second part of the service unfolds, made up of simple melodies woven in succession into a kind of tapestry of continuous prayer. People trickle from the church, leaving when they wish. After evening prayer, many of the young people will stay on in prayer late

into the night. Several of the brothers remain available in the church for those who wish to confide a personal question or difficulty.

It is very difficult to bring under words what I experienced that first evening of the research journey at Taizé. An overwhelming experience of awe, peace, joy, gratefulness in an atmosphere drenched/soaked with the Spirit and Presence of God (not in a charismatic or reformed sense I have ever experienced before). Tears were flowing freely at one stage whilst singing the communal prayers/chants. The music is not so much loud, joyful, exuberant, or fast in tempo, but simpler, slow, meditative, repetitive prayer like, in up to fifteen languages. Nobody talks, announces anything, or preaches. The angelic like choir voices and those of the soloists and brothers, followed by the choruses sung by the pilgrims or retreatants were so beautiful, moving, and heartfelt that it stirred deep inside the spirit in a deep metaphysical sense. The number of the hymns that are sung can be seen on small electronic screen. The bible passage is read in six languages and available in print form when entering to the church. The brothers do the bible reading each in a different language and when this is done, everybody turns around facing the lectern more to the back from where the reading is done. After the readings, everybody faces to the front again and then follows a period of silence for ten to twenty minutes, which pilgrims use sometimes for reflection on the word or other forms of meditation, listening or just being still in Gods' presence. From the moment I could express with others (more than a thousand Christians from all over the world, from different denominations, languages and cultures) in a communal way via the words of the songs and the melody, the beauty of creation, of God and His people, His love, His presence, acts of compassion my way of looking at life, at myself, others and God, I felt transformed, deepened, enabled to discover the reality that is God around me and within me. Wonder took the place of despair or uncertainty, abandoning myself to the Light of Christ in the silence, whilst

singing prayerfully, waiting, listening, and pondering filled my whole being with hope and faith and love... God reminded me that He has living refreshing water (I was very thirsty the whole afternoon, drank a lot of water, thirsty again during the liturgy) – thirst after me and my light shines within you do not let your doubts and your darkness speak to you. Near the end of the service, the cross in front of church is brought to the middle of the sanctuary. It is in the space where the brothers usually kneel. Some of the pilgrims kneel at the cross, then all of the would brothers leave except six staying within the church, scattered around in the building and near the doors for those who may need spiritual direction or who wants to receive the sacrament of reconciliation prepared by a conversation or by simply listening. The message of the brothers is simple and profound: “God buries our past in the heart of Christ, and is going to take care of our future.” Pilgrims then move forward with some taking of their shoes towards the cross and kneel around it in silence; the choir of pilgrims leads the rest of the music. Many pilgrims then start to leave the church while others stay longer.

Impressions after the first day on the Taizé hill were that the church of reconciliation is a special and holy place. Signs with the words “silence” on it are put out near the church. The whole venue on the Taizé hill is different and special. Ninety percent of pilgrims are younger than twenty-five, the variety of cultures, clothes, languages, and denominations are immense. Outside of prayer meetings, there is a relaxed, seeker friendly atmosphere. Many people cannot understand a word of English and not everybody are Christians. It is a *monastic retreat* but also very “consumer-friendly” or *seeker friendly*. There is a shop on the premises and a kiosk just outside the grounds. The brothers wear ordinary clothes outside of prayer meetings and lead the group bible studies in the mornings. They are available for appointments with pilgrims and groups from same countries or cities meet them in groups.

Community prayers take place at sunrise, noon, and sunset. It is symbolic of people's lives marked by the rhythm of darkness and light, day and night, sleep and awake, dying, and eternal life or the celebration of the buried and resurrected Christ. Prayer according to the brothers is at the heart of the Taizé community and the response of one of the brothers on the question why prayer is important, is also representative of the community: "life itself scatters man's attention, even when it most obviously has meaning only in relation to God. Prayer is hence a means of re-situating all our actions in the context of loving God and neighbour. Without prayer then it is easy for brother and pilgrim to lose their way and prayer is the only refuge through which human hardness, rebellion, and bitterness may become soft again. Prayer at Taizé is viewed as a necessity that complements other aspects of a whole life. Various elements are used to make prayer meaningful and to fit into the context of life for example the icons, candles, chants, silence, and kneeling. The brothers clothe themselves in white robes during common prayers as symbol and reminder that Christ clothes their whole being. The vestment allows them also to express their commitment and praises to God in a way other than with words.

The Divine Office or Liturgy is:

- Singing of Psalms,
- a Bible reading: mornings the Old Testament and Gospels and evenings from Paul's letters and other New Testament passages,
- another Bible text sung by the brothers and repeated by the pilgrims or congregation (hymns or chants),
- silence,
- litany or intercessory prayer : after each litany congregation respond with *Kyrie Eleison*,

- hymn, a short prayer by the prior and blessing, and
- morning prayers including the Eucharist.

The daily Bible readings are published in the “letter from Taizé” that is published every two months. A young child of the village of Taizé sings a response then a second response follows a repetitive melodic motive meditative in nature that tapers off into silence for about ten minutes. Then several brother-cantors sing a litany of intercessory prayers in turn with the assembly which answers after each petition with *Kyrie eleison*, Lord have mercy. There is a hymn and then Brother Roger (since my study-pilgrimage, deceased) the founder and prior of the Community read a simple benediction in several languages. The structure is familiar even if various elements, which contribute to the prayer’s contemplative nature, may be new to some. In its essence, prayer in Taizé is no different from that which Christians of different traditions or the Divine office have practiced for ages in monasteries in the form of the liturgy of the hours. After the benediction prayer, another hymn follows and the brothers rise to leave the church, a signal – I assumed – that prayer has ended, until I noticed that few people (pilgrims) were leaving. A careful look at the front reveals that in fact a part of the Community has stayed on and continued to animate the singing, now with the help of several young pilgrims. The second part of the service unfolds, made up of simple melodies woven in succession into a kind of tapestry of continuous prayer. People trickle from the church, leaving when they wish. After evening prayer, many of the young people will stay on in prayer late into the night. Several of the brothers remain available in the church for those who wish to confide a personal question or difficulty. The hymns (chants) in the Church of reconciliation consist of just a few lines, simple and meditative, helping pilgrims to centre on God in worship, repeated by brothers and pilgrims together. Interviews with various pilgrims show the importance and

attraction of this type of music as well as the popularity of the songbooks and the compact discs sold and used worldwide.

The central moment of the common prayers is the silence, when entering and during a central moment of the service after the scripture reading for ten to twenty five minutes. God speaks in the silence for example to Elijah and often in order to hear God, the inner noises, and outer sounds must first reside that may block out the voice of God. Sometimes it even appears that God does not speak when people are silent, but then again Gods' apparent silence could be concealing a communion, a kind of communion where deep calls to deep (Hicks 1992:211-212). Silence in the church of Reconciliation for the pilgrims I interviewed, was the time to hear and feel God at the deepest part of their being together with worshippers or pilgrims from all over the world. Although there were different Christian traditions, languages and cultures during those minutes of silent prayer retreatants became one community, transcending all human obstacles, with no divisions as they communicated with God listening and sharing in their hearts. All perceived as equal before God, kneeling or sitting on the floor. What was being communicated during those times of silence to each individual remained hidden? Some of the thoughts, images, prayer, dreams, struggle, conflict, doubt, peace, gratitude, liberation, pain, joy were shared during conversations and interviews. Afterwards we would feel closer to God and one other as pilgrims because we heard and experienced God as a community in a special profoundly deep way.

The principal icon in the Taizé church is Christ on the cross. A Christ portrayed as thin, with the ribcage easily seen through the skin and a Christ of a darker skin colour. Besides and just beneath Christ are two disciples (Emmaus or easily us). In addition, an angel watches above. Everything about this cross represents the simple style of Taize and more importantly the simplicity of the Christ who died on the cross.

I agree with Brico (1978:95) that the ecumenical character of the liturgy of the Divine Office may be recognized in the Psalms set to music (Reformed), certainty of Chorale (Lutheran), Beatitudes, polyphonic Alleluia's and Icons (Eastern Orthodox) and the Eucharist and Chants (Catholic). At the end of the service, no abrupt break is made between prayer or worship and the rest of life. Hence, there is no clear termination of the service but those present come out of silence beginning to chant, singing slowly moving from the contemplation mode toward the day's activities and tasks. Brothers would exit the church and retreatants stay as long as they want to leave when they feel ready. This transition from prayer to daily life according to the brothers helps to dispel the false dichotomy between life inside and outside the church building. It facilitates and accentuates the monastic way of praying always, and practicing the presence of God continuously and striving to make prayer part of life and work. The pilgrims I interviewed also experienced the prayer inside the church as invitation to be carried out to the rooms, fields, town, library, and kitchen of Taizé when leaving the church of reconciliation.

The Taizé way of retreat was an intensively lived experience for nearly all the pilgrims I interviewed. For some who have lost contact with denominational worship, the way of prayer in the Chapel was a new discovery, which opened up a possible road for the future to venture on. The breaking away from material comforts, simple food and sleeping quarters as well as the meeting of others from outside, the sometimes so important barriers of language, culture, and life styles are realities that not only provided spiritual sustenance for the week but could also provide for the journey of life onwards. The peace, love, and simplicity, the compassion for the needy and poorest of the poor, the feeling of accompanied by God, that he is with his people during their venture through the world, lifted up their hearts looking forward to the future. One

of the pilgrims from India described the experience of community prayer and the Taize music during an interview in the following way: “I like the music; it helps me a lot in my life for example to pray and make contact with God. The singing out of the same truths or experiences in prayer like form repeatedly was very enriching to me. God becomes more real to me in the process, I am able to see my problems in perspective, and it really made a difference. It was internal food and it made part of my life whole. Like repetition, the three prayer times in the chapel help me reflect and refocus my thoughts, emotions, and experiences. The Gospel readings and singing repetitive prayers helped me to realise during my stay here that there are many issues in my life I must deal with for example when I arrived here I was far from God, I blamed Him for problems in my life. Then in the times of silence in the chapel, it was as if a rephrasing of everything took place and it dawned on me – that the darkness and problems are not in God- and when His light fell on it, the darkness disappeared. The problems vanished, it is difficult to explain it in words, but it worked like Magic!”

Taizé is filled with a variety of people (different cultures, languages, denominations, beliefs, spiritualities), community of brothers and the old Gospel message in all its simplicity. I experienced no hype, emotional hogwash or trying to be more spiritual but only an evangelical simplicity as experienced in the church, group bible meditations, dining hall, sleeping quarters and the unpretentious way in which pilgrims were welcomed. The diversity of languages and culture and many times the need for more than one translation during group discussions, discourage complicated conversations and dogmatic theologising. The small group meetings under leadership of one of the brothers exhibited a simplicity and profound depth of the Gospel in a practical and revealing way. The monks’ way of life challenged pilgrims to avoid remaining on the surface of persons, faith,

and things and to listen with the heart to the Gospel, meditate on it, saturated by it and living it out in the world.

The park or wood of St. Stephen's spring at Taizé is a beautiful place of nature. It provided an oasis for retreatants to walk through, or to sit and meditate. My walk one afternoon from St. Stephens' spring to my room, a quite steep climb with lots of steps to the top became a metaphor for my life. I arrived tired at the retreat but realised that the retreat came during a phase of my life where difficulties, discomfort, and disappointments in my ministry at that stage have left me drained and a bit disillusioned. I realised I was there because of the research but that I needed a *renewal/regeneration*, a new rest in God, a refocusing and going back to the essentials of the gospel and felt a need for healing whilst moving deeper into the presence of God. The many steps while walking the steep path became a metaphor for my life as disciple of Jesus Christ and of all the issues that confronted me during the retreat. The exertion, sweat, and discomfort during the steep climb reminded me of how we tend to focus on "feeling good" and "instant gratification" trying to sidestep the difficult things. I realised that during our Walk with God on life's journey everything also the trials and tribulations are part of life. To try to sidestep it or trying to be on a high all the time is not the answer but to meditate on the presence of God and constantly drinking from the source of my being it is the resurrected Christ.

The group bible discussions every morning led by one of the brothers, the group interaction all contributed to reveal the presence of God and facilitating an experience of God. However, none more so than the community prayer meetings three times a day in the Church of reconciliation. Pilgrims spoke about becoming engulfed during the Divine Office and immersed in a monastic spirituality that they find easy to relate to, and for many also a life changing and spiritual enriching process. The

pilgrims I interviewed experienced the prayer offices in the church as high points in their retreat especially the music and *mystic* atmosphere. They made ample use of nature at St. Stephens' and the young people enjoyed and found the group discussions and group projects stimulating and meaningful.

Every person (pilgrim) on arrival at Taize receives a brochure (with relevant info, program etc) that has an opening paragraph: "Though Christ is united to every human being without exception, He awaits a simple, free response from each one of us. To pilgrimage to Taizé then means being invited to the living springs of the Gospel through prayer, silence, and searching. There are many opportunities on retreat here to discover or rediscover a meaning for life, to find a new vitality, to prepare to take on responsibilities when returning home.

Every evening after the first part of the service has ended and most of the brothers have left, two brothers of the community bring the beautiful Taize Cross to the centre of the church in an upright position with one candle burning at the foot of the cross. Pilgrims can move forward to kneel in silence in front of the cross. During the Friday evening ritual (as part of the weekly celebration of the Easter mystery an icon of the cross (icon of Jesus crucified painted on a wooden cross) is laid down flat on the floor (20 cm above ground) in the centre of the church, surrounded by candles. A few of the brothers form a circle and bow down to venerate it. Those who wish can come forward to the cross. People lined up (as long as it takes) to wait their turn, myself too. The cross is approached individually or in small groups. Pilgrims kneel at the cross, foreheads resting lightly on the cross with the icon of the Crucified Jesus painted upon it (reddish and orange colours). For some it became an opportunity for a silent renewal of a commitment towards those who suffer in the world. For others (like me) it was a letting go of the burdens and situations weighing me down.

Pilgrims witnessed that they stood up after a while feeling the resurrection power in their spiritual veins, reassured by a meaningful ritual that Jesus is Light, Peace, Power. The mystery of the Christian faith, the mystery of God incarnate becomes visible as a flash of meaning (difficult to describe in words) dawns in the hearts of pilgrims. It is a holy moment to recognize the victory of love on the face of a crucified man in the meaningful sacramental ritual rich in symbol.

Every Saturday evening a celebration of light takes place (part of the weekly celebration of the Easter Mystery – Fridays focus on the Easter mystery, Sunday on the Eucharist). This service is called Vigil Prayer of the Resurrection. More than a thousand pilgrims sat and kneeled in the Church of Reconciliation. This was a personal “highpoint” for many of the pilgrims and for me. At a certain moment during the service, small candles are passed on to one another lighting it in the process, and in five minutes time the whole church was lit up by candles burning. This happened while pilgrims sang a more lively joyous Taize song called “let us sing to the Lord.” In that moment with everyone rejoicing and candles burning we celebrated our oneness in Christ in spite of language, culture, colour, denomination, spirituality, spiritual growth. The Light of Jesus and His Resurrection power and presence became one overpowering reality. I prayed, “Lord if only I could stay here with you on this *mountain of transfiguration*. This mountain of transfiguration served as symbol for the pilgrimage to the inner mountain of the heart.

At times when I would become more of a detached observer, I observed the brothers (monks) coming in very straight faced and solemn in their white robes, kneeling at their little prayer bunks for the duration of the service, only turning around when the scripture reading starts in order to face the lectern from which it is being read. Some are very young and others very old, walking with some difficulty. Why and when and under

which circumstances did each receive the calling to community and chastity, which is Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic; how do they manage to be in ecumenical harmony as a community, I thought by myself? I observe some of the pilgrims in the church, here and there I could see those who seemed to be local people from the nearby villages, as well as new pilgrims that have since arrived. There is also a family from Latvia (families stay in houses near the community) with three children four to fourteen years old and some of the children appeared to be very bored at one stage. The liturgy for each service or prayer office is available at the entrances to the church of reconciliation. The monastic liturgy is not explained in any way not in the little brochures pilgrims receive on arrival or verbally in any way. People especially new pilgrims just try to find their own way during the service. Some of the new retreatants (first pilgrimage and first evening) would just sit and observe what is happening, others again listening attentively, others humming the songs and some trying to sing. Looking at their clothes and appearance some of the pilgrims really did not look like pilgrims at all or seekers (some were to me very strange looking actually but still there is a hunger or thirst hanging in the air). There were the sometimes loud and overconfident Americans, the more shy Korean women, the old grey haired couple kneeling with difficulty next to four very young, oozing with energy young people. Then I realised Gods' arms are open to all and inviting each one of us, each unique and free to be yourself before God ("come just as you are to worship"). Before I knew it, I moved again from more detached observer to participant pilgrim, grabbed by the simplicity, authenticity and the enfolding presence of God in this holy place drenched by prayer – silence and singing... incense etc...all drawing me forward to the cross, kneeling their in silence and listening to and sharing with God...heart to heart, Spirit to spirit... next to me are kneeling a variety of fellow pilgrims.... I become one with them at the cross without knowing them but soaked in the loving presence of God, I feel a love and compassion so deep for all of them.

There are different ways for a pilgrim to spend their weekend or weeklong retreat. The first is to be part of the daily Divine Office (community prayers in the church), group Bible meditation introduced by one of the brothers, group discussions morning and/or afternoon on questions put during the morning introductions, various tasks or projects (work) either in the morning or the afternoon. It is also possible to spend a week of prayer in silence: Participating in the community prayers, the daily Bible introduction, and the rest of the day in silence with the opportunity to speak individually with one of brothers. Accommodation is then provided in a separate area set aside for those who want complete to be in silence.

3.4 Aspects of Monastic Retreat

3.4.1 Silence

Silence has become over time the lost art in a society and in many church traditions made of noise, surrounded by words, sound, and clatter. Silence in the modernistic positivistic era tended to become more and more unpopular and fifteen hundred years of silence since the Desert Fathers (300 BCE) fled to the desert, started to wane (Muller 1997:5). Inner and outer noise (*surrounded by sound*) is an integral part of life. Silence for many became a fearful phenomenon leading to an itchiness, anxiousness, or nervousness. For example in my own church tradition in the past when the liturgist would say “let us be silent” in a church service people tended to become restless with one thought in their minds: “when is this going to be over?” Many of the first time retreatants reading the retreat information beforehand regarding the importance of silence during the retreat, felt threatened by the emphasis on silence or very unsure about the whole idea. Part of the observation during the research journey is that there is a trend or movement towards this neglected and undervalued element in the Dutch Reform tradition. Some of the Dutch Reformed congregations the

past few years have started to conduct more silent-meditative worship services during the week or on Sunday evenings, there is more room for longer periods for silence in Sunday morning services and the renewed interest in more monastic type of retreats. This may be symptomatic of a shift taking place in order to experience the mystery of God or the divine silence. I have participated in such liturgies in South Africa (containing ritual and elements of Taizé and other monasteries Divine Office) for example *Adoramus* in Lynnwood and I designed and led *Magnificat* type liturgies in Florandia and Murray congregations.

Silence and the control of one's thoughts are monastic observances found in most religions. Hindu sannyasis make vows of silence lasting several years, the Buddhist monk seeks to control words and thoughts in order to go beyond the senses within the atmosphere of calmness, order and silence in the monastery (De Dreuille 2003: 21). When the sea is calm and clean, it is possible for the fisherman/woman to see clearly the different movements beneath the surface. However, when the sea is rough and murky because of the wind and debris, what is obvious on a clear day is hidden in dark restlessness. Silence is the usual atmosphere experienced in the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize monasteries visited as well as an emphasis on control of speech, insisting on the practice of the good or edifying word or speech. The research companions and I experienced it as 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 teaches people to speak words of wisdom, and serves as a reminder of the pilgrimage of life to the inner mountain (Nouwen 1990:50-53, cf Cowan 2002:55). Silence within monastic

spirituality is cherished as oxygen that keeps the inner fire of the Spirit of God within burning. The right balance of silence and speech can be helpful to monks and retreatants to reach inner silence or silence of the heart (see Cowan 2002:67). In this state of interior silence, the words of the Gospel can transform the soul and culminate in a deep experience of the presence of God (De Dreuille 2003:23). Keating (2003:90) emphasises the value of silence as follows: “Silence is Gods’ first language, everything else is poor translation.” In order to hear the language of silence also during a retreat within the Dutch Reformed tradition, people (pilgrims) had to learn and grow into becoming still and rest in God, although there is no immediate tangible satisfaction to it (interior and exterior silence).

Silence is usually the first impression visitors to a monastery or a monastic retreat get which is not necessarily empty silence or threatening silence or mere background to sound but more a full, alert static free medium of communication, especially the listening aspect of communication (Norris 2000:68). I did experience silence in the monasteries especially in the beginning at times dense, or even scary or uncomfortable in a sense. Retreatants mentioned a discomfort and uneasiness during some of the longer period of silence during retreat. In certain cases, it was because they were not used to or so familiar with silence. In other instances silence brought pilgrims face to face with themselves reminding of obsessions, addictions, revealing that as Christians they are not resolved within themselves as they have thought, and much more vulnerable. There is no escape in silence from an awareness of self, especially the dark side of self. There are not enough cosmetics available to hide the scars, money, titles, or having the power to heal. Alone in the cave of silence it can become a place of grace where eventually God could be experienced in the centre, being silent or to speak if He decides to. Silence is not merely an absence of outer and inner noise but a receptive posture of waiting with patience. Hinson (1993:34-35) describes 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 Benedictine spirituality, silence kindles the deep profound peace that characterizes the monastery. T. S. Elliot (1952:65) breathes the spirit of silence when he writes: “where shall the word be found, where will the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence. The right time and the right place are not here no place of grace for those who avoid the face. No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and clearing the voice”.

Monasteries and its inhabitants had developed through the centuries a strict discipline of silence and many also a doctrine of emptiness, which the early anchorites called a state of *hesychia* referring to the spirituality of the desert. This refers to a state of silence of the heart, a state of stillness and tranquillity, and a total rest in God (Ward 1975:71). Years of ascetical practice could lead to a perfect void, to emptiness with total silence of thoughts, words and desires in which no consciousness remains. Monks over the centuries strived to attain this sense of stillness or silence (Cowan 2002:37). According to St John Climacus (579-649 BCE), a seventh century recluse, to achieve the silent solitary life, one must choose places with fewer opportunities for comfort and ambition, but with more for humility (Climacus 1959:94). He lived the anchorite life in a cave for forty-five years near St Catherine’s monastery. By entering the Egyptian desert, the monks wanted to participate in the richness of the divine silence. To enter into the loving silence of God individually and also with a group of monks and other retreatants at monasteries or retreat centres, were for me and for many fellow-pilgrims/researchers a regenerative healing experience in the presence of the divine Counsellor and the holy quiet a quite illuminating experience. The research journey in this regard was a first step forward in understanding what the desert father Ammonias (in Merton 1971:42) and a disciple of St Anthony has written:” I

have shown you the power of silence, how thoroughly it heals and how fully pleasing it is to God...Know that it is by silence that the saints grew, that it was because of silence that the power of God dwelt in them, because of silence that the mysteries of God were known to them". The empiric data revealed silence to be a meaningful and essential element of monastic retreat in order to move deeper into the presence of God.

Pilgrims on a silent retreat may move into silence on the Friday evening after evening prayers, only breaking silence before going back home on Sunday. On the Sunday they can share and witness with one another concerning the dialogue experienced between God and them during the long silence. The study showed that this would be more appropriate when the retreatants have already made monastic retreat part of their lives over a longer period. They ought to be advised before they commit themselves to going on this type of silent retreat of the way it will progress regarding silence. During other types of monastic retreat consisting of different elements of which silence is but one, it could be stressed that nobody should feel compelled to enter silence, that not all people are accustomed or comfortable with silence. It should only be entered into with voluntary and loving obedience. It was also clear that especially the silence during meals whilst on retreat was for most a very strange and uncomfortable experience and I have decided to use this form of silence very sparingly in future. It is better to give the opportunity to those who wish to eat in silence whilst others may eat together as usual. In the instances when retreatants are all eating together in silence, the leader or spiritual director could read passages from a book or a volume of poetry. This is a ritual followed by the monks of La Pierre Qui Vire monastery during some of their meals. I have also found that 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 either visual or as feelings and clear defined thought patterns, could also guide and confirm the heart becoming restful in silence. Fowler (1987:7) describes this process in the following way: “images hold together our conscious and un-conscious knowing. They hold in fused forms both what we know and how we feel about what we know. *The non-verbal dimensions of liturgy and sacraments address the wombs of images within us.* They evoke and direct our 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) for the experience of God. Babin (1991:149-150) also values the symbolic and writes from a communication research point of view the following: “symbolic language then, is a language of temptation before it is a language of explanation. It leads not only the spirit, but also the heart; it moves the body. It is a language full of resonance and rhythms, stories and images, and suggestions and connections, which introduces us to a kind of mental and emotional behaviour.”

My observation during my journey on the path of the Dutch Reformed tradition is that it was common to be drawn into and become entangled in complex debates, modernistic discussions, and arguments about God and about God-issues. Simply being in his presence, less conversation with fewer words, becoming silent and listening in the presence of God, deep reflection and meditation, became in the process more and more the exception than the rule. My journey through the monasteries showed that silence can function as a womb giving birth to the wise words of the monks which in turn again may lead one into deeper silence. When Arsenius, the Roman educator who exchanged his status and wealth for the silence and solitude of the Egyptian desert, prayed, “Lord, lead me into the way of salvation,” he heard a voice saying, “Be silent” (Hannay 1904:206). This conviction is shared by the Desert Fathers and later also

Desert Mothers from whom monasticism grew. A story about Abbot Macarius (Hannay 1904:206) illustrates this conviction:

Once the abbot Macarius, after he had given the benediction to the brethren in the church of Scete, said to them, 'brethren fly'. One of the elders answered him 'how can we fly further than this, seeing we are here in the desert?' Then Macarius placed his finger on his mouth and said, 'fly from this'. So saying he entered his cell and shut the door."

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. In the church tradition I have grown up in and have been a pastor for twenty years, silence was most of the time the exception rather than the rule. The meetings, worship services, Bible studies, fellowship groups tended to be very busy, wordy; talking to God, singing, sharing with silence for many more embarrassing than meaningful. I have realised over the years and especially discovered again during the research journey that it is none other than Christ who wants to meet with us, who invites to enter the environment of silence in order for him to meet, touch, and speak to his people. Magee (1967:78) reminds pilgrims "It is none other than Christ himself who calls us into retreat. He wants to meet us far more than we want to meet him. We may only want to rest, meet one another, or meet with the retreat conductor. It is God alone and not the retreat leader who can lead us into silence and keep us in it."

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. It is here that I have found from own experience and feedback from retreatants, and not in isolation, that the insights, wisdom

and life received during retreat can be tested and may become a way of life. It is a way of life that is observed by colleagues, family, friends, seekers, and neighbours. The monastic way for example manifesting in unselfish self-giving, humility, courtesy, quiet speech, patience, serenity, hospitality and compassion for others reflects the Ultimate Mystery, in his creation.

3.4.2 Solitude

The Desert Fathers regarded society as a shipwreck from which to swim for your life because passively drifting along and accepting the values of the society would end in disaster (Merton 1960:8). Anthony and his fellow monks believed that to flee this potential spiritual disaster and the compulsions of society, one had to flee and reach the place of salvation for example the desert, the place of solitude. The *desert* provided a place to find the much-needed concentration to orient oneself towards God. Solitude may be a value worth considering which does not suggest that all Christians become hermits. Waaijman (2000:262-265) sees this as a counter movement and describes it as a complex process. Christians going out into the desert were part of a culture in which ascetics were highly respected. Fasting, austerity, self-control, and abstinence were part of the disciplines on the way to enlightenment or wisdom. The message prevalent in the monasteries I visited was that of *detachment*, not seeking attachment as pilgrims, but life in simplicity because Christians are pilgrims and solitaries who should not to be tied down by anything. The ascetic impulse and throwing of the yoke of the world (possessions, family, friends, own will and desires) to become empty 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 (see Nouwen 1990:6-30; cf Chittester 1998:23). The pilgrimage of solitude reflects the Mary alone with Jesus at his feet (with Martha busy in the kitchen) metaphor as best place to be. Avoiding noise and constant busyness, nothing contributes more in monastic spirituality to the love of God, than to be a solitary in this way (Casey 1994:153). Because it is difficult to see Christ in a crowd (for example Saggeus), certain solitude of gaze (*intentio*) is necessary. The contemplative and quiet life of the monk is the solitude that holy love longs for. At times pilgrims found this quite difficult but in the end very meaningful in the monasteries as well as on retreat alone with the Alone, to become empty of all thoughts and attachments. The advise of Nouwen (1989:39) to sometimes not try and exclude everything during silence and solitude but to voluntarily include thoughts, plans, ideas, worries, projects and concerns and make them into prayer proved helpful to myself and first time retreatants. The idea is not to direct attention exclusively to God, but to direct attention to all the attachments and lead them to and then place them in the all-embracing arms of God.

The term solitude could be misleading as some retreatants as being alone in an isolated place interpreted it beforehand. 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. Nouwen (1975:32-35) reminds us that to live the spiritual life you must first find the courage to enter the desert of loneliness and to change it gently and persistently into the lush garden of solitude. Understood this way, loneliness instead of a dead end, grave or abyss may become solitude as a threshold, a new creation, or meeting place deeper into the presence of God. 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 provision of prayers, poems, spiritual passages, scripture 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 retreatants do not hear or experience him at first, the discipline of solitude (Foster 1989:121) as a simple, though not easy way may free people from the slavery of occupations, preoccupations, and compulsions. Solitude then may help 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 is not so much a place to gather new strength (a private therapeutic atmosphere) or to continue more efficiently the rat race or ongoing competition of life after the time of solitude. Rather 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.

Thomas Merton (1956:261), a Trappist monk experienced the transforming power of solitude as the development of a new attitude towards others and describes it as follows: "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them as well as reverence for the solitude of others". The aim of solitude during a retreat should not be to separate people from others but instead 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 created for living in solitude, for communion with God and for rumination (Casey 1994:138). "Where do the little people of the world turn to when the big structures crumble or grow humanly intolerable"? (Von Balthasar 1982:23-27). It is a relevant question in light

of paradigm shifts in epistemology. The monastic paradigm (premodern-mystic) may show a way in that personal solitude and a supportive community may help sort out what is authentic among our needs and give us courage to pursue these, not only for our own benefit but ultimately, for the good of all. The reflection on the relevance of medieval solitude (and the other elements of silence and *lectio divina*) within the context of modern era retreat was a focal point of my research journey.

Solitude as it appears in monastic texts of the Middle Ages is not only for hermits who lived more or less permanently in solitude but was also a quality of community, corresponding to a “separation from the world” (Casey 1985:37-46). It could be a communal withdrawal (for example, I have taken groups of spiritual leaders of churches on retreat) from worldly involvement and distancing oneself from whatever could blunt the sharpness of the spiritual life in order to *listen*. Rievaux (1969:167) answers the question “what does it mean to go into solitude? That it means to consider the whole world as a desert, to desire the Fatherland, to have only as much of the world as is necessary to accomplish the journey and not as much as the flesh desires”.

The challenge after a monastic retreat or pilgrimage is that solitude will become more a state of mind and heart than merely being alone with God in specific places at for example a retreat centre. Reys (1961:30-31) recounts the following story of an encounter between a Zen master and a disciple: “Daiju visited the master Baso in China. Baso then asked: What do you seek? Enlightenment replied Daiju. You have your own treasure house. Why do you seek outside? Baso asked. Daiju inquired: Where is my treasure house? Baso answered: What you are asking *is* your treasure house. Daiju was enlightened! Ever after he urged his friends: Open your own treasure house within and use those treasures.” Cowan (2002:62) writes about his own journey or pilgrimage as a journey to the *inner*

mountain. Greek ascetical writers call it *xeniteia* or “to live as a stranger.” It refers to a journey away from the world, withdrawing from its contingencies, in pursuit of a deeper awareness of God and mystery of life. I had the opportunity on retreat in the monasteries to experience something (very insignificant in comparison) of the desert experience of the Desert Fathers and began to realise that the *solitude of the desert* is not only a dry place where people can die from 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. The aim is to experience solitude as a way of life after retreat not merely at specific hours or portions of daily life. To be at times alone in the monastery of the heart or chapel or sanctuary inside the heart with an inward attentiveness or monastic mindfulness of God waiting within you even with other people around and within very busy schedules. This is part of the challenge facing retreatants after such retreats.

3.4.3 *Lectio Divina*

This “method/model” or *lectio divina* approach has been associated with the Benedictine monastic orders and probably originated with the Eastern Desert Fathers, particularly John Casian. Considerable time is spent in monasteries on holy sacred reading (*lectio divina*). 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. It is intimately linked to St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality since it originated in the communities of monks that he founded (Michael & Norrisey 1991:31). It forms part of the process of continuous prayer or to put it into Brother Lawrence’s

(1982:68) well-known phrase it is to “practice the presence of God.” The discipline of *lectio divina* is based on human nature and described by the Hindu masters and practiced among the Tibetan Buddhists. Guigo the Cartesian formulated it anew in the Middle Ages. It can be compared (De Dreuille 2003:12-13) with the way a cow chews the cud. It starts with a careful reading, paying close attention to the passages that speaks to the heart, as a cow selects the tasty or sweet grass to eat. The selected text goes to the stomach of the memory and is later ruminated, reflected upon, for example by repeating it silently in order to apply and deeper understand it. The fruit of the rumination is to experience the spiritual taste of the text, beyond words and images. The taste of this experience is kept in the heart, contemplated and integrated in the soul, as a cow swallows and ruminating afterwards the grass.

The following principles of *lectio divina* came to the fore (Casey 1994:4-8; cf interviews with monks):

- 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.

Lectio Divina: *Lectio* (reading), *meditatio*, (reflecting) *oratio* (responding) and *contemplatio* (resting) for example sacred reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation have introduced me many years back (positive feedback regarding sacred reading from retreatants during the research journey) to a new way of experiencing God and way of relating to a Bible text. Within my own church tradition, I learned exceptionally well at seminary how to analyse a bible passage and to come to grips with it in a modernistic rational way (exegesis, depth analysis etc.). The effect of this cognitive-instrumental rationality (cf Habermas 1982) 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. It was for many pilgrims on retreat a way to move more and more into his loving presence beyond words and thoughts what the mystics refer to as *union with God*. *Lectio divina* was one of the fundamental elements that I incorporated in my own spiritual journey as well as on the retreats I led. I found Corene Wares' (see 1995:100-113) exercises that draws on the strengths of the four spirituality types and the Maier-Briggs temperament-personality preference profile a helpful "tool" applying it to *lectio divina* during retreat, to experience sacred reading in the different modes of sensing, thinking, feeling and intuition.

3.4.3.1 *Lectio*

The concept *lectio* refers to a thoughtful, reflective reading and an immersion in the lessons/stories of scripture 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 (Chittester n.d.:75).

Useful questions that may be asked are: “what do I know about the passage, what is the context, for whom was it written, how am I mirrored in it, where is God leading me, is it to reflect, to continue reading, or to pray for someone?” I realised doing the research and talking to the brothers in the monasteries that day after day, year after year they and other contemplatives go down into the scriptures, back through the holy wisdom of the ages, into the truth of the time, and in each moment learn and experience something new about the struggle within, about divinity, about life. Contemplatives like Abba Joseph stressed that they never really know what anything means, but only come to know better in every sentence they read every day of their lives that divinity is at the depth of them, calling them on (Feiss 2000:22-24; cf Chittester n.d.:77). Monastic reading (additional to studying of the bible) is more like a prayer than studying (rationalistic/analytical). 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 scripture 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. I introduced and used *lectio* on the retreats I conducted instead of the usual more analytical Bible *studies*, characteristic of many church camps of my church denomination. The feedback from the co-researchers during and after the retreats, point towards a need for more exposure to this way of reading/listening experience to the bible narrative.

3.4.3.2 *Meditatio*

Monastic mindfulness (living constantly consciously in the presence of God) and meditation stress the importance of *nepsis*, which means

sobriety, a watchfulness, and spiritual attentiveness directed to God (Nouwen 1990:31, 72-77; see Ware 1966:110). The concentration onto one point in order to control thought processes deeper into the spiritual dimension is a principle also in the Buddhist Theravada School. It refers in Christianity to a spiritual attentiveness as loving attention to the presence of God in pure faith that Keating (2003:147) describes as “characterized either by an undifferentiated sense of unity or by a more personal attention to one or other of the Divine Persons.” The tonality of consciousness for example brainwave changes during meditation is viewed as a fourth state of consciousness besides being awake, sleep and dreams. The silence of meditation is more than mere silence but a silence of heart and mind in order to become more open to Gods’ presence (Muller 1997:34-45). In *mysticism* (Keating 2003:90-97) the tendency is to focus on meditation as a way of going deeper into yourself 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 in *lectio divina* focuses on becoming silent, quiet, moving inwards with the goal to become open or receptive to Gods’ voice and touch while meditating on the bible or “sacred” texts. This type of meditation (not necessarily the same as *mystical union* with God) is also characteristic of Protestant theology, for example practiced by Luther, Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Voetius, a Brakel, Kuyper, and Geesink. After 1931 it seemed to vanish from the Dutch Reformed theology until only recently since 1990. Devotional masters have viewed the *meditatio scripturarum* as a central reference point to keep all other forms of meditation in proper perspective (Nicol 1991:17-20; see Foster 1992:153). 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. I have

suggested to retreatants for example during the Divine Office in the chapel 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, 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 it. We do not usually try to analyse each word of a lover, but accept it and treasure and ponder it in our hearts. As spiritual leader of a retreat, the thought pattern of Whyte (n.d.:250), proved helpful, saying for example the following: “you open your New Testament.....and, by your imagination, you become one of Christ’s disciples on the spot, and sitting at his feet...with your imagination anointed with holy oil...at one time you are the publican; at another time the you are the prodigal...at another time, Peter in the porch”. During meditation on bible passages or reflecting on different devotional writings throughout the ages, the mind descends into the heart drawn into the goodness and love of God. Merton (1960:98) reminds us: “anyone who imagines he/she can simply begin meditating, without praying for the desire and the grace to do so, will soon give up. But the desire to meditate, and the grace to start meditating, should be taken as an implicit promise of further graces.” Retreatants were reminded before *meditatio* began at certain times during retreat that nothing needs to be forced during meditation, or to actively seek new experiences. Pilgrims were invited to wait patiently on God, relax in his presence because it is he who reveals and touches, and take us deeper into his presence (Nicol 1991:22-24). Nouwen (1989:136) puts it as follows: “God should be sought, but we cannot find God. We can only be found by him.”

3.4.3.3 Oratio

Life, cherished in monastic spirituality, and viewed as being human in an atmosphere of Gods’ active presence and having constant communion

with him. Spiritual disciplines are mere instruments or vehicles to sensitize such monastic mindfulness of lifting up of the heart in the midst of life, opening it to Gods' presence and revelation for example during the daily Divine Offices, *lectio divina*, and silence (Casey 1994:71). 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. Prayer or *oratio* is the response of the heart during *lectio divina* to the cosmic God, cosmic Energy, Source of Life, and the personal and inner, enkindling God. "God is life, not a vending machine full of trifles to fit the whims of the human race. God is the end of life, the fulfilment of life, the essence of life, the coming of life" (Chittester n.d.:93). The emphasis in *oratio* then is not on personal satisfaction or problem-solving or to reshape the world to your own lesser ideas, but prayer as being open and responsive to the One that is everywhere and in everyone and is love. Foster (1992:141) says that *ontologically*, Jesus' relationship with God, may be perceived unique, but *experientially* pilgrims are invited into the same intimacy with God. *Oratio* is a response to Gods' presence crawling into the Father's (Mother's) lap to receive love, comfort, healing, and strength, to laugh or weep, freely and openly, to be hugged finding comfort in his (her) arms.

I became since a child hood accustomed to a modernistic and disassociate way of viewing and practicing prayer. The Dutch Reformed tradition for years and especially during my seminary years emphasised intellectual capacities and activities regarding prayer. *Let us pray* within such a paradigm, for many meant *let us start talking*. Many books and courses I studies on prayer accentuated the intercession and *wordiness* side of prayer. Many of the retreatants interviewed practiced prayer as mainly talking to God about what I deemed important or experienced as way to solve problems. Thinking about God as a mental dissecting process in order to understand him and his mysteries much better was the

focal point for many years of my prayer life. This type of attitude towards and action of prayer was part of a modernistic paradigm, which placed high value on mastering everything via intellect with the dominating conviction that everything could be analysed and understood and when understood could be controlled and even manipulated. The era of intellectualism, dominant in mainstream churches during the modernistic era was symbolised for many years in the academic gown that was the official garb of Dutch Reformed ministers. There came a realisation in pilgrims with the postmodern turn revealing the limits of intellectualism, doctrine, and formulas that could also be experiences in other ways. Prayer clothed in monologues of *disassociate* intellectual verbal self-indulgence or liturgy not much more than verbal actions and clinical sermons, turned into a need for *experiencing* the mystery and the source of life differently. This could explain the “popularity” of monasteries for pilgrims from Protestant traditions. The popularity of eastern religions prayer practices, yoga and Zen Buddhism practices of prayer and meditation may be indicative of the new desire expressed by co-researchers on retreat to relate to God the Ultimate mystery and probably a way of people that ask *teach us to pray* differently.

Oratio is prayer of the heart, a personal dialogue using the heart, feelings, and emotions, primarily listening to Gods’ voice and touch, then responding to him in an *associative* way. It is as if in the presence of a lover or intimate friend responding with love, honesty, and transparency. Feelings of love, desire, enthusiasm, repentance, sorrow, gratitude, anger, joy could flow forth during this type of prayer. The cycle of *lectio divina* develops in a spiral pattern from *lectio, meditatio, oratio, lectio*. During the process, prayer may become less busy or wordy, simpler, sincerely, responding to new or deeper insights, feelings. *Heart* within Jewish-Christian tradition refers to the source of all physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional, and moral energies. Macarius the Great a Desert

Father (in Hausherr 1978:314) said: “The chief task of the athlete [the monk] is to enter into his *heart* and pray.” No formulas, long sentences, or doctrine or complex concepts are necessary in such a prayer. In the beginning of my journey into monastic spirituality, this way of prayer to me was very different from the focus of prayer in my own tradition.

Retreatants from the Dutch Reformed tradition usually needed time to get out of a mode of prayer more characterised by wordiness, activity, petitions, and prescribed sub-divisions into *oratio* and then spiralling even further towards *contemplatio*. Pointers helpful on the way to *oratio* as part of *lectio divina* 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*. Gibbard (see 1976:39-42) reminds those who pray that 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*).

3.4.3.4 *Contemplatio*

Tomas Keating (1982:4) describes contemplation as way of communion with God “as a process of interior transformation, a conversion initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union. One’s way of seeing 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.” Later on Keating defines contemplative prayer (2003:145) as “the development of one’s relationship with Christ to the point of communing beyond words, thoughts, and feelings; a process moving from the simplified activity of waiting upon God to the ever-increasing predominance of the Spirit as the source of one’s prayer.” The

transformation or “transforming union” (Keating 2003:148) he refers to is more a stable sharing of all dimensions of a person’s life in the loving presence of God than a particular experience or set of experiences. The divine reality is present in oneself and in all that is. Contemplative prayer is not to meditate on a specific content or to focus on an object but is rather an experiential state not accessible to the faculties dominating everyday consciousness. Bourguignon (1979:236) defined *alter states of consciousness* as “conditions in which sensations, perceptions, cognition and emotions altered. They are characterised by changes in sensing, perceiving, thinking, and feeling. They modify the relation of the individual to self, body, sense of identity, and the environment of time, space, or other people.”

Contemplatio derived from the Latin verb *contemplari*, means *to gaze*. Jäger (1987:3) states that the

goal of contemplation is to gaze into one’s own self, to gaze upon the divine inside oneself and in creation by means of an awareness or experience that transcends the intellectual capabilities in order to reach enlightenment or union with God and an act of God, where eventually in such “pure” relationship nothing is seen, heard or felt anymore.

The active life as an authentic form of spirituality, faith, moral virtues, and charity is also taking place in the presence of God and being aware of it. However, the contemplative life according to Phillippe (1981:50-52) seeks the most direct interiorized contact with God or aims higher in that a more intimate and actual presence is sought. Contemplation is not a technique taught for example on retreat nor is it a running after mystical phenomena like ecstasies, prophecies, miraculous powers, and visions. It is rather the

way of pure receptive faith to union with God, which transcends every human experience and accesses God just as God is. Not God as joy or as charismatic manifestation but God also as fundamentally a *ray of darkness* knowing him also in the darkness of faith through the night of sense into the night of the Spirit (see Keating 2003:90, 116-117).

Contemplatives describe the stages of contemplative prayer in different ways, for example, Jäger (see 1987:19-66) sees it:

- Starting as a prayer by means of 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).

Foster (1992:170-175) calls:

- The first step recollection or centring prayer where all competing distractions are let go of until seating or kneeling in the present moment with God and God alone, with Gods' silence stilling the noisy heart,
- then follows a listening with one's whole being and because of divine grace; adoration and love wash over oneself with a growing inward attentiveness to divine motions at the centre of being with

- the final step into contemplative prayer is spiritual ecstasy where no words or thoughts are needed in the silent deep communion with God.

The model described by Teresa of Avila (see 1979: 20-55):

- Starts with a mysterious awakening at the culmination of the night of the sense, a entering of a breath of fresh air into the spirit like divine perfume that penetrates the inmost centre of being (infused recollection) as spiritual consolation for the former dryness,
- then follows the prayer of quiet in which the will is absorbed in God. Still the faculties of memory and imagination are free to roam around to which one need not pay any attention or cling to as the will is attending more and more to the presence of God,
- with the final stage the prayer of union in which the prayer of quiet moves to yet a deeper level, with the suspension of the memory and imagination as God calls these to himself. The mind and memory hears Gods' voice and respond by gathering around God in stillness and listening, quietly enjoying his presence.

During all the stages, God is present and one is 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 being. This sparkle, deep moment, or experience is realisation of an Arab proverb that says, "Come to me with your heart and I will give you my eyes" (Gibbard 1976:103). Keating (2003:92) refers to it as a "sense of deep quiet, with no self-reflection, no imagination, and memory and just resting in God." Nicol (2002:110-111) illustrates the process of moving down, deeper into God as a moving downwards to the sharp point of an upside triangle. A movement from *lectio, meditatio, oratio* into *contemplation*, is a movement from a broad spectrum of thoughts and

images to less or later to only one word or image and finally beyond words and thoughts and images, just adoring God as invisible and beyond comprehension. St. John of the Cross (in Slattery 1994:144) states:

When in this way the soul voids itself of all things and achieves emptiness and surrender of all, it is impossible; if the soul does as much as in it lies that God should fail to perform his part by communicating himself to the soul, at least secretly and in silence. It is more impossible than that the sun should fail to shine in a serene and unclouded sky; for as the sun, when it rises in the morning, will enter your house if you open the shutter, even so will God, who sleeps not in keeping Israel, still less slumbers, enter the soul that is empty and fill it with divine blessing.

In the contemplative state of wordless communication, beyond thoughts, in the sphere of serenity the soul is surrounded by the blue colour of the heavens and the mind itself hidden in a cloud of crystal light where any awareness of self is annihilated (Cowan 2002:120). Hinduism has Yoga as its pathway into deeper experience; Buddhism has Zen, or Vipassana. The corresponding path within the Christian tradition could be contemplative prayer as part of the whole concept of *lectio divina*.

One can try to find one's way between all the mystical "word-descriptions" of what the *contemplatio* experience in essence is. However, how does a person describe the wordless intimacy between two lovers? To contemplate is to be in love, intuition and instinct are prominent and with time human activity ceases and God takes over. Contemplation makes

ample use of the language of silence. It is a for many a new or different way of being in Gods' presence by entrusting oneself to him in order to let God be the centre of everything, not only during stage of contemplation. From my observation and experience, the goal of contemplation is 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 during the research journey with ample time provided to "practice" contemplative prayer and with specific guidelines to "get hold of it." Most Dutch Reformed retreatants I have interviewed afterwards about this aspect seem to find contemplation much too *mystical*, abstract, and complicated to grasp or implement. I have tried to put more emphasis during the retreats I conducted on the idea that prayer is also more than words and to let go and let God touch and speak as and when he wishes to during the times of contemplation in the chapel. I invited pilgrims just to rest and be in his presence in a sense of being with a loved one holding hands and saying nothing, not trying to hard or experimenting 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 the stages described above on the way to enlightenment. When *contemplatio* is a specific element of a conducted retreat, it is commendable that some form of teaching or orientation on it be provided as well as regarding its mystical roots. In the monasteries I visited, the monks did not make a great issue of *contemplatio* as part of the pilgrimage. They lived it. They reminded me constantly through their humility, using words sparingly but speaking wisely and their contemplative demeanour (*monastic mindfulness*) and awareness of God of the *mystery of God* and the adventure of being with him on the journey to the inner mountain ever deeper into his presence.

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 a variety of possibilities and a combination of different elements that may form part of such a retreat. This aspect is discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5 The Way of the Mystics

Early Christians took the word “mystic” from the Greek word *myo* meaning to close the eyes in reacting to religious experience. The root is the basis for the Greek word *mysterion*, mystery as encounter with the divine mystery. The term *mystikos* could also describe the encounter with God in the sacraments (Cunningham & Egan 1996:125). Christian mystical tradition can be a resource in the search for or experience of God in a postmodern context also within the Dutch Reformed tradition. Karl Rahner (1971:15) wrote the following: “the devout Christian of the future will either be a *mystic*, one who has experienced something, or he (she) will cease to be anything at all.” Common to most mystical writers is the notion that what they have to say is actually impossible to describe in words the ineffable mystical encounters with God. The Spanish Carmelite John of the Cross said (in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:469) regarding his own mystical poetry: “It would be foolish to think that expressions of love arising from mystical understanding, like these stanzas, are fully explainable”. The encounter with the Ultimate Mystery who is God, is a God who is revealed in the bible but definitely also hidden in the depths of unspeakable mystery. Therefore mystics resort to numerous symbols and analogies and poems in their effort to pierce if ever so slightly, the veil of mystery and the experience of God. The early experience of mysticism was embedded in the ecclesial context with sacramental roots and always as incarnation rather than some individualized mystical encounter. Scripture and sacraments kept the mystical life under the influence of the

Holy Spirit as architect of the mystical life (Cunningham & Egan 1996:126-131; see Nicol 2002:44-51). It is clear that mystics were viewed as persons whose single-minded love of God leads them to a deeper awareness and experience of the presence of God. Mystics realised that Christianity was more than the sum of dogma, its theology, or a dependence on virtues.

There is tendency to distinguish mystics as apophatic or kataphatic. Eastern Christian mysticism stresses (*apophatic*) the experience of darkness or incomprehensibility of the God-encounter that eludes all description. It is experienced as a personal encounter with the triune God in darkness. Western mysticism (*kataphatic*) focuses on the experience of God that can be known, said, or symbolised and on what has been revealed and manifested in creation, sacraments, and scripture. It could have been mystical experience that made the nearly blind St. Francis (in Habig 1973:130) see Gods' beauty in creation in the following way:

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that
you have made/And first my lord brother
Sun/Who brings the day; and light you give to
us through him/How beautiful he is, how
radiant in all his splendour!/Of you Most High,
he bears the likeness./All praise be yours, my
Lord, through Sister moon and Stars; in the
Heavens you have made them, bright/And
precious and fair".

The unknown mystic of the west, and author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (trans. Robert Backhouse 1985) who composed in the fourteenth century a handbook for contemplative prayer, described knowing as a *kind of*

unknowing. The totality of our experience of God contains in my view both the apophatic and kataphatic dialectic to be kept in a creative tension.

Waaijmans' (2000:467-468, 675-680) view on spiritual pilgrimage is that it is embedded in mysticism, for example, he quotes mostly mystics and emphasises contemplation as the way towards a higher mysticism. He combines veiling and revealing, covering and disclosure in a dialogical way in his description of the spiritual journey. The more one enters into God, the more you stay yourself with the ultimate union with God not dissolving into him. Mysticism speaks of two aspects of the God-life or the living in the presence of God for example ego consciousness (temporal) and enlightenment (eternal). The goal of the contemplative is to transcend ego-consciousness to enlightenment (alter states of consciousness), becoming one with eternal life. I agree with Jäger (1987:71) that the issue is not only to discover the life of God as indwelling but also to discover human beings as expressions of divine life. God manifests himself in human beings writes Jäger (1987:71): "living transcendence in immanence, God who lives us." For the mystical writer Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) everything is God as the totality of experience although God can be in dialectic way also personal. Nicol (2002:52) concludes that Eckhart went too far in letting the border between man and God fade and warns against mysticism with an impersonal non-relational view of God. However, the distinction between "natural" and "supernatural" is a Western culturally determined concept, not useful in understanding early monastic and mystic metaphysical concepts (Van Aarde 2001:1165; see Saler 1977:46, 51).

The Christian mysticism of the first eleven centuries was inseparable from the history of monasticism and according to McGinn (1991:131) monasticism had a decisive role in the history of the earliest layer of Western mysticism for example Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great.

When the Benedictine rule was composed in the middle of the sixth century until 1153, nuns and monks gave a distinctive monastic profile to Christian mysticism. Francis of Assisi wrote little on mysticism but lived a type of mysticism that so identified him with the naked and crucified Christ, that he bore the *stigmata* on his body. Bonaventure as minister general of the Franciscans developed mysticism as *The Journey of the Soul into God* (1978) that St. Francis lyrically lived. Franciscan mysticism, profoundly Christological and intensely affective, has touched all subsequent Christian mysticism in an extensive and profound way.

In my view, Martin Luther's rejection of the mystical tradition was unfortunate for Protestantism as it deprived this tradition of creative input from Protestant mystics. Luther probably reacted more against a late medieval piety and mysticism that was not "biblical" to him anymore. According to Jones & Wainwright (see 1986:342-356, 431-480) Luther had something of the *mystic* in him and received much wisdom from the mystical tradition. Stricter Reformed thinking tends to condemn mysticism and one of the reasons could be their emphasis on faith as primarily knowledge of the clarity of revelation through the bible. The idea of faith and the dark night of the soul or apophatic mystical encounters could make Protestant fellow-pilgrims on the journey within a theology focusing on kerugma, dogma, revelation, and rationality very uncomfortable and for others even very unacceptable. However, Christianity needs both the *rational (logos)* element (dogma, ritual, sacraments) and the element of *experience (mythos)* moving deeper into the presence of God. Without experience that focuses also on the mystery of God for example mysticism and contemplative prayer, religion could become stagnant, not much more than empty concepts or dead ritual. During a monastic retreat the Eucharist, Bible reading, listening prayer, meditation, silence, and other ritual elements of the liturgy of the Divine Office in the chapel became points of departure for the retreatants moving deeper into the presence of

God. Forms and rituals are there to contain the life, as a bowl is shaped to contain the liquid. “An authentic experience of enlightenment leads Christians beyond the scriptures to that which the scriptures attest. It is like a match that can be thrown away after it was used to light the fire” (Jäger 1987:73). Sacred texts, rites, recitations, ascetics, solitude and the practice of *lectio divina* prepared retreatants during a monastic retreat for an awakening to the reality of the Infinite. However not the spiritual director nor anyone else can brought it about, and no one knows when and where it will happen. That is Gods’ initiative and prerogative only.

3.6 Monastic Rule or Way of Life

A rule of life or guidelines for a specific way of life is common in the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taizé monastic traditions. Many Christians worldwide outside monasteries follow the basic principles or monastic rhythm for life of example either that of St. Benedict, St. Francis, or the Source of Taize by Brother Roger. Pilgrims that pilgrimage to Taize for retreat, receive a monthly prayer letter including bible readings as well as dates and venues where group meetings in cities all over the world will be taking place.

Carefully prescribed rituals, gestures, words, elaborate ceremonies and liturgy, surround life in monasteries. The monks dedicate themselves to a life of prayer and constant communion with God. There is strict discipline in such a way of life for example a monk in the La Pierre Qui Vire monastery lives his life, day and night, in obedience to St. Benedict’s rule, the holy rule, which is safe guarded and interpreted with utmost discretion and consideration by the spiritual father of the community, the abbot. 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 monk and the community who wish to make his whole life, whatever he does a continuing prayer or drenched with monastic mindfulness, can only do so in the context of a very concrete daily schedule that supports the realization of this goal. Therefore, for example at the La Pierre Qui Vire Benedictine monastery, the celebration of the Eucharist, the communal psalmody, individual meditation, study, manual work, eating in silence, sleeping and the seven communal prayer offices (Divine Office) every twenty four hours are all subject to careful regulation and conscientious observance.

While participating in the life of the monastic discipline, I sensed and experienced together with the other retreatants the great mystery of God prayerfully becoming more aware of his presence, hidden and veiled as well as at times more visible, in the deep daily rhythm of their contemplative day. I also realised there is no way that I could seriously live a life of prayer and more conscious of Gods' presence, growing and persevering in such a life of monastic mindfulness without a very concrete way or rhythm for my daily life in the ministry. Regarding the relevance of the monastic way of life for the Dutch Reformed tradition, changes in spiritual direction will be commendable based on the exploration of insights gained from the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taizé ways of life.

3.6.1 A Benedictine Way of Life

The Holy Rule, The Rule of St. Benedict as a Book of Wisdom is not so much a set of spiritual exercises, prescriptions, devotions or mere disciplines but a plan for 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 (Chittester 1990:3, 7). It functions as a guidepost or railing to hang onto in the dark. It leads pilgrims into a given direction and functions as 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* (Chittester 1990:10). Broadly speaking the divisions deal with: Persons, Officials of the monastery, Monastic Virtues, The Divine Office and Disciplinary Regulations (see Maynard 1954:74). The rule comments further 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. The spiritual principles and values in the Rule are inextricably intertwined with the concrete regulations of lifestyle (Kardong in Skudlarek (ed) 1982:268-275). Even though chapters one to seven are more of a spiritual and ascetical nature with the remaining sixty six chapters the practical implementation of principles, many of the finest spiritual insights of the Rule are embedded in very “mundane” chapters.

In aim and in language, the rule is set apart from other similar ancient monastic rules. Benedict was content to take what was good from the existing monastic heritage at that stage, to make it his own and colour it with his own experience. He drew the different strands together for example life of solitude and individual development as well as the value of corporate life in a settled community. As a practical person, he wrote the Rule in the dialect spoken in daily life and not in the classical Latin vein. He draws freely from Cassian, St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, Leo the Great, the Fathers and most of all the Scriptures. His frequent epigrams prove the Rule to be the composition of an artist, carrying the reader deep into the heart of the author (see Maynard 1954:72-73; cf de Waal 1984:18-20). He selected and blended elements from the sources as a person who lived out in practice what he was writing about on the cliffs of Subiaco and at Monte Cassino.

The long hours spent in solitude and contemplation especially the three years in the cave, the few years spent as leader of twelve smaller monasteries, the time spent at the monastery at Vicovaro and finally at Monte Cassino, all served as preparation for the final composing of the Rule. It was produced not over a few weeks but as a slow distillation, spread over several years after probably careful consideration and frequent revision. According to Maynard (1954:70), it was written in five hundred and thirty four. It was the first real monastic rule, previous ones being not much more than admonitions from which the individual abbot could obtain some guidance or useful hints. In addition, for almost six hundred years over the whole of civilized Europe outside the Balkans, to be religious and a monk was to be a Benedictine monk.

The importance of and emphasis in the Rule on the Divine Office as well as my own experience at the monastery of La Pierre Qui Vire, is that Benedictine spirituality promotes contemplation as way of life. It makes ample provision for it in the Divine Office, private prayer, study, silence, and work. The goal seems to be then, to seek God and union with God, and to be in the perfect love of God.

The Benedictine, though he may engage in various forms of active work, is not commanded by the Rule to any kind of work at all, except what he performs in the monastery. It was clear from interviews, enquiring how monks view work, what their attitude towards it entailed based on the rule of St. Benedict. Monks are truly monks when they live by the labour of their hands like the desert fathers and the apostles. The superiors in the distributing of the work will see to it that it is discreet and moderate so that the strong may have something to strive for and the weak may not be frighten away. The idea is that all should have enough freedom of heart to praise God while working and to fulfil their task in his presence with joy.

Since the beginning monks have worked, by charity to help the poor. However, monastic work has also a rich spiritual background where the desert fathers saw it as a means to help them pray. During their long hours of solitary meditation, a simple work like plaiting baskets or making ropes helped to avoid distraction and the work became an anchor for thoughts. With time, monks began to divide their time between reading, prayer and work and this alteration seems to make the concentration on God easier. The zeal to work hard, so important in Benedictine spirituality may also develop some special virtues like humility, generosity, obedience, detachment and purity of heart. Monks find work a useful means for fighting against some temptations like despondency and sadness. It may also be a penance, the most humble and simple way to master oneself (desires), and make atonement for our sins and others. It enables them to offer all human suffering to God in remission for the sins of the world. Furthermore, the monk finds in sharing with his fellow monks the hard burden of working to earn a daily living one of the best means of communion with each other. Monastic work can be manual as well as intellectual depending on the necessities of the monastery or the abilities of the brothers. Usually as part of the program for the retreats, I conducted in South Africa there was time for studying or reading and an element called “group sweat,” which entailed some form of labour or long brisk walk as a group.

However, all work implies respect and even love for the things used, from the simplest tools and kitchenware to the highest forms of art, theology, and philosophy. Everything used by a monk is not only treated well for its own sake only but for the sake of God to whom everything belongs. Through the careful way, in which everything is handled, and the concern for beauty, the glory of God is sung. Everything in the monastery is ordained to produce an atmosphere conducive for a life of prayer in the presence of God. Monks are engaged in a variety of works, striving to be

self-supporting and to help others. They have also to do their reading, their studies, choir office, and the Divine Office. The aim of all these activities are to make the monastery what it is meant to be: the house of God, a place where God is found and known, adored and in a certain way, seen and experienced in the bliss of contemplation. St. Thomas (in Maynard 1954:77) expressed the religious tradition of the sixth century onwards by stating that the religious life of monks is instituted primarily for the promotion of the contemplative life.

With regard to ascetics, Benedictine spirituality seeks a moderation that would prevent all extravagance (extremism) and singularity for example as were the case with the Desert Fathers and St. Francis.

The Rule of St. Benedict put emphasises the relationships between members of the community. The monastic ideal preceding Benedict was that of a novice finding a holy man and asking to learn from him and the monastery had been a group of individuals gathered around the feet of a sage. One of the earlier monastic rules, the Rule of the Master had given enormous powers to the Abbot. Benedict came and changed this exclusively vertical authority structure by focusing on the interpersonal relationships of the community of monks. They are there to learn and to seek God but they are also brothers bound in love to each other. He devotes three chapters (69-71) to this topic. In Chapter 72 of the rule 5-8, he states the following: “the monks are to bear with patience the weakness of others, whether of body or behaviour. Let them strive with each other in obedience to each other. Let them not follow their own good, but the good of others. Let them be charitable towards their brothers with pure affection” (de Waal 1984:19). The monks interviewed emphasized the importance of, value and experience of the fraternal life in Community (common life) in the La Pierre Quie Vire monastery. Common life is perceived as a means leading to union with God (Matt 25:40. Jn 15:12),

an idea developed especially in Christianity. (Buddhists attach value to the community as depository of the law and some Hindus recognise the presence of the Absolute in all human beings). Moreover, it was the very first Christian monastic community (that of Pachomius) that called this idea of communion leading to God *koinonia* as peaceful and supernatural mutual love. The main lesson the Desert Fathers for example St. Anthony learned from the visit to the Egyptian solitary monks, was devotion to Christ and mutual love. Although the neighbour was seldom met in the desert, he was often present in the mind and heart. The solitary monk had to keep charity in his heart, avoid judging others, and always ready to give the unexpected guest everything he needed. You also find *charity* one of the most frequent topics in the writings of the desert hermits. Pachomius applied the doctrine to community life and stressed the importance of charity, carrying each other's burdens, peace with one another as peace with God and love for others that make us friends of Christ. St Benedict's rule makes a synthesis of the vertical ascent of the soul to God and the horizontal recognition of Gods' presence in each individual where the monastery becomes the meeting point of these two currents. God is the common goal here in the monastery and it is His presence and the seeking of God that welds the individual members of the community together. Monks are linked together by this mutual seeking of union with God and by pure charity as the common search and practice of the love of God. The abbot's role is to preserve peace, to foster harmony and consensus in the community. The monk's individual transformation happens through the incorporation into a given Benedictine community. As monks, they strive not only to be obedient but also to one another as a road to God. The needs of the other are very important to them and to carry one another's infirmities with great patience in unselfish love is to see Christ in the brother. It is Christ's presence in others that brings an atmosphere of peace and love in their community. The monks reflected a respectful love towards Christ, which enfolds the abbot and brethren, as

together they focus on God. They share all day long in Christ's love and have to give it to one another. They also feel responsible for each other's spiritual improvement. The Benedictine community find expression in the common prayer (Divine Office) where they believe they unite with the heavenly choirs to praise God, participating in Christ's life giving sacrifice, bonded in a common love to embrace the whole world and offering it to God in prayer.

The monasteries of the sixth century were essentially small and simple with the daily activities characteristic of a large family at work. The monastery was a single storey building with offices, outhouses and farm sheds. Most were simple men and few were priests or scholars. The pattern of the day was to do the work of God with the monks gathering seven times a day in the oratory. The rest of the time was spent on domestic or agricultural work, study and reading, two meals and sleep. They were men living together to serve God and save their souls, glad to care for those who came there but content to remain essentially ignorant of the world outside their walls.

The Families of St. Benedict founded in Kentucky in the United States of America in nineteen seventy two by Carl Mitcham a social psychologist, is an example of a *contemporary adaptation of monastic community life* following the principles of the Rule of St. Benedict (see Mitcham in Skularek (ed):1982:257-267). It started as an attempt to use and adapt monastic principles for renewal of family life. They followed the liturgical or Divine Office of Benedict three times a day and strived to be contemplative living a quiet life of simplicity on a farm as small community. *Lectio divina* was practiced in quiet times, no television or newspapers were allowed and everyone visiting was asked to respect the monastic mindfulness and monastic rhythm of the community. Discretion and moderation so prominent in the Rule were cherished and they made

ample use of the spiritual mentoring and direction of monks from a nearby Benedictine monastery. The “experiment” to “reproduce” in a sense Benedictine monastic community life in a modern context was temporarily disbanded after ten years due to internal difficulties.

From the first moment of arrival at the monastery, the welcome at the door by one of the brothers was warm, special, and very hospitable. Moreover, although we could not understand each other because of language constraints, he tried his best to make me feel at home. The monks elaborated later on this aspect when asked whether this was the way everyone was welcomed: In the Hindu monastic tradition the guest is considered as God himself and the visit by guests as a religious experience in which God himself is received. Abraham received a visit from God in welcoming unknown strangers and Jesus considers the welcome done to the guest as done to him (Matt 25:30). The desert fathers shared the little they had with their visitors for example in the Pachomian monasteries had a guesthouse where people were received in an appropriate place according to their rank, lay people were going to St Basil monastery for spiritual counselling and St. John Chrysostom invited people of his diocese to go frequently to monasteries for retreats. Poor people and monks or clergy were all welcome. St. Benedict honoured these external forms of hospitality given by the monastic tradition but also gave it a new character for example in the variety of persons coming to Benedictine monasteries through the years for example relatives and friends, clergy and monks, poor and sick people and sometimes even hostile heretics! Another new aspect that the rule of St. Benedict introduced is that it leaves out the detailed prescriptions of earlier rules regarding the doorkeeper’s function. More important to St. Benedict was the attitude of the doorkeeper’s heart, which should guide his behaviour that it is Christ, which is received in the guest. For the monks the guests

are always welcome in the monastery and are welcomed as members of the community.

After his death within a century or two St. Benedict became the patriarch of western monasticism and his Rule the most influential in the Latin Church. From the seventh century onwards, the Benedictines brought both Christianity and civilization to much of Europe with cross, book, and plough. In the earliest days, monks went to the desert leaving behind a comparatively sophisticated life, now the pattern has been reversed. In a world in which barbaric invasions, political instability, wars, simple parishes of peasants the many monasteries came to stand out as centres of light and learning. Here pilgrims found a rich liturgical life, informed devotion, and love of learning and intelligent companionship. The communities became much larger with bigger complexes accommodating hundred or more monks. Pilgrims and visitors from every rank of society came in search of prayer, alms, protection, or hospitality. St. Benedict did not foresee this mingling of the enclosed life with the life outside the walls but it became part of the way of life. During the middle Ages in Europe, the black monks as they were called established themselves as landowners, administrators, bishops, writers, and artists. Half the cathedrals in England were under Benedictine rule (de Waal 1984:19-21). New foundations were appearing all the time especially under the monastic renewals during the tenth century. First, the Cluniacs put the emphasis on good order and administration and magnificent worship. Then the Cistercians recovered the role of austerity and hard manual work, which they felt, was neglected. At the beginning of the thirteenth century in England and Wales, the monasteries grew from fifty, in thousand and sixty six, to three hundred in the year twelve hundred. Today many thousands of Anglican and Roman Catholic people are following the monastic life according to the rule of St. Benedict in many different forms. Benedict though never thought of himself as the founder of a holy Order. His vision was that each monastery

or abbey ought to be completely autonomous although following the principles of the Rule (Maynard 1954:81). Therefore, it is possible to look upon each separate Benedictine abbey today as constituting a religious order in itself. Benedictine generals, provincials, or councils do not “govern,” only the abbot as the spiritual father of a monastery. It is into the individual monastery; the monk enters and usually stays there for his whole life except if transference is granted for compelling reasons.

The role of the Benedictine spirit on the Church of England since the Reformation is apparent in the traditional monastic offices condensed into the two Prayer Book offices of Matins and Evensong. According to de Waal (1984:22), the root of the Anglican way of prayer is the daily recitation of the psalms and regular scripture readings from the Benedictine tradition (see *An Anglican prayer book* 1989:37-70). The Book of Common Prayer was created because of a vision of Cranmer, after Henry the eighth dissolved the monasteries that the work of the monasteries should continue in the local churches. The key services to be prayed daily by the clergy and the people are the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer that builds on the Divine Office practiced in Benedictine monasteries:

Morning Prayer:

- Cantic (Ps 95-100),
- confession,
- the Psalms for the day,
- a reading from the Bible (OT),
- cantic (Song of Zechariah),
- another reading from the bible (NT),
- cantic (*Te Deum*),
- the Apostle’s Creed,

- the Lord's Prayer,
- and more prayers (including the Collect).

Evening Prayer

- Canticle (Ps 134),
- confession,
- the Psalms of the day,
- a reading from the bible(OT),
- canticle (*Magnificat*),
- another reading from the bible (NT),
- canticle (*Te Deum*),
- the Apostles Creed,
- the Lord's Prayer,
- and further prayers (including the Collect).

3.6.2 A Franciscan Way of Life

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* (Reynolds 1983:77). 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. He wrote in his Testament (in Moorman 1968:15): “after the Lord gave me some brethren no one showed me what I ought to do, but the Almighty himself revealed to me that we were to live according to the manner of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words, and the lord Pope confirmed it for me.” 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.

It was probably at cardinal Ugolini's request that Francis revised the first rule in order for it to receive canonical recognition by the Holy See in Rome. One of the purposes of the Fourth Lateran Council was to regularize the situation of so many different groups who wished to live a more radical form of Christian life in order to reform their own lives and those of the church. It forbade the approval of any new Rules for religious groups all were to accept one of the approved Rules, for example that of the Benedictines, Cistercians or Augustine canons. Francis and his brothers were allowed living their form of life because of the verbal approval by the Pope six years before the Council (see Short 1989:12-13). Pope Honorius solemnly approved the new rule on the twenty ninth of March twelve hundred and twenty three after the Cardinal and Pope modified some of the provisions for example the strict rule of travelling with neither purse nor staff was omitted (Reynolds 1983:78). Also anxious that the movement should cease to be a lay movement, the Pope arranged that the twelve brothers all receive the tonsure before leaving Rome (Moorman 1968:19).

The Franciscan rule is essentially Christ-centric, Christ at the centre of devotion, ministry, community life, authority, and charity. It portrays a radical Christ centricism where he is perceived and experienced in everything (see Short 1989:112-120). 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.

Francis also composed for Clare and the Poor Sisters a way of life but in twelve nineteen, Pope Honorius III gave Clare and her community the Rule of St. Benedict as the foundation of their sisterhood! For the next forty years, she would struggle to gain papal approval for her form of life and a Rule for her sisters, which would show them clearly as Franciscan and not Benedictine. The rule she wrote was approved shortly before her death.

The Rule or Way of Life of St. Francis sketches only in broad outlines the essence of the Franciscan vocation to be followed by his disciples for all time. He interpreted the Gospel in its most literal sense but he left in his Rule comparatively few concrete applications of the Gospel to the Friars life. For example under no circumstances should they receive coin or money. They ought to wear coarse garments and go unshod and not ride unless compelled by necessity. However, in the great issues of poverty, humility, obedience, preaching, and the foreign missions concrete applications are few (see MacVicar 1986:7). Therefore the letter of the rule is often open to more than one interpretation, lending itself to a degree of adaptation to circumstances unforeseen or not provided for by the St. Francis. This led according to one of the brothers and Abbot at the Basilica in Assisi to three traditions of Franciscan observance through history:

- The *Conventuals*, with a more adaptive, relaxed approach, focusing more on the spirit of the rule as the letter, believing that the Providence has ordained one thing for Francis and first brothers and ordained otherwise for the full grown fraternity through the years.

- The *Spirituals* or Capuchin tradition, opted for a more primitive observance and the revival of the primitive Franciscan life where observance of the entire Gospel under vow, lived in caves and huts and begging from door to door, high standard of poverty and humility, observance of the Rule to the letter, observance of the Testament of St. Francis and all it implies and as norm all words, intentions, deeds and writings of St. Francis (Moorman 1968:111-118; see MacVicar 1986:10-19).

- The *Observants*, whose desire it was to recreate the conditions in which the very early friars lived and to observe the Rule, both in letter and spirit, as dictated by St. Francis (see Moorman 1968:372-377). These traditions remain though one noble tree of which St. Francis is still the root.

I interviewed some of the brothers about Franciscan spirituality and the different ways of experiencing and walking with God. They compared the Gospel to music of God to which not all pilgrims listen to or experience in the same way. Not even all Franciscans hear it the same way for example the different traditions in Franciscan Spirituality. One of the friars describes it as an invitation to respond to and to start dancing. The challenge being to do it in much the same way as St. Francis did which essentially according to the friar means to live in peace with God, you and others. The challenge for him is to dance now, in the present because yesterday is history and tomorrow remains a mystery. St. Francis focus was to be in the moment, living with God and within His divine will. To him this is the heart of Franciscan spirituality and the freedom to interpret the music and dance of the saint creatively in the modern context of today. He also warned against too much of a focus on the Saint himself instead of what Francis danced on namely the heart of the Gospel.

Another friar shared with me the following on how the virtues of St. Francis as way of life may drive out vice today in the hearts of people and from society:

“Where there is Charity and Wisdom – there is neither fear nor ignorance

Where there is Patience and Humility – there is neither anger nor disturbance

Where there is Poverty with Joy – there is no covetousness or avarice

Where there is Inner Peace and Meditation – there is neither anxiousness nor dissipation

Where there is Reverence of the Lord to guard the house – there the enemy cannot enter

Where there is Mercy and Discernment – there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.”

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. In my view, their relationship brought a feminine, motherly, intuitive, or softer spirit into Franciscan Spirituality. G.K Chesterton (1923:126) said in this regard, “a heavenly love can be as real as an earthly love.” Francis helped Clare elope into Franciscan life, defying her parents as he had defied his father. It was much like a romantic elopement for she escaped through the coffin door of her house, fled through the woods, and a procession of torches led her to the place where she made her vows at midnight. Through the long years of her vocation and as Abbess later of the Poor Sisters, she revealed herself as a woman in love with God. However, she might also have been in love with Francis without consciously making a distinction between the two and surrendered her soul to the man who gave her God. (Brother Ramon 1994:79, 80). The *feminine* element in Franciscan spirituality is reflected in

tenderness when Francis (in Doyle 1980:22) 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.” Sister Teresa (in Ramon 1994:85) summed up their relationship as follows: “they were brother and sister to everything and everyone, and as they lived this out in daily life, Clare and Francis worshipped the God who is Father and Mother of all that is.” According to Short (1989:137-140) the community of St. Clare (The Poor Clares) have served the other members of the Franciscan Family as constant reminders of the primacy of the search for God in Franciscan life. Their lives have remained unchanged in the basic elements since the days of Clare. The Divine Office, the Eucharist, ample time together in community, silence, personal solitude, hard work, joy and seldom leaving the walls of their monasteries. Visitors to a poor Clare community are received with smiling courtesy that both Francis and Clare would have expected from their followers.

The fraternity that I observed and experienced at the Sacro Convento, has an Abbot and Vicar who together with the Abbots and Vicar of two other fraternities in the area form a council. Every four years a big Council meeting is held in Rome. In Assisi, the Abbot and Vicar make most of the decisions but in important matters, for example the budget the whole fraternity will vote on. There is a hermitage (where Francis also spent much of his time) five kilometres from the convent higher up in Mt. Subiaco where the friars retreat to on occasion for solitude and meditation. One of the friars explained the Franciscan habit he wore. It consists of a simple tunic, shoulder cape and a rope. Three knots are made around the waste as symbol of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The word habit comes from the Latin *habitus* and it means to put on a way of life. The

external garment represents an interior change; the armour of salvation, the mouth of justice and is a sign of unity and visible link between the brothers. He also referred to the five pillars of wisdom that give structure to the Rule of the Friars Minor in the monastery:

- Poverty: the Incarnation as poverty of God,
- obedience: the Passion as self-sacrificial love of God,
- chastity: the Eucharist as the chastity of Christ in the bread and wine,
- the Gospel: the Scriptures as the risen Lord made present through the sacred memory of scripture and
- discipleship: Mary at the feet of Jesus is a symbol of perfect discipleship and answering the vocation from God.

The Franciscan Cross (San Damiano Cross), a central icon in the monastery provides further insight into Franciscan Spirituality and the portrayal of Christ. A friar from India explained the colourful and rich symbolism of the Icon:

- Sea shells surrounding it: eternity, beauty, endurance, the already and the not yet.
- Black cross beams: evil and death.
- Red: dominating colour, the blood of Christ and outpouring of His love.
- Blood flowing from wounds: foul stains flowing from compassion.
- Loincloth with golden rope: vestment of a priest, the gold ephod, the High Priest and the Lamb being slaughtered.
- Face darker veiled in shadow: the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Jerusalem, but here depicted as God seen not through the veil/screen of incense and glory in the Holy of Holies but God cloaked in humanity.

- Oversized neck: word of God made flesh, which is the message that breathes new life into creation.
- Everything underneath his arms: the tree of life, the new Adam that shelters the fruit of new obedience under his arms.
- Five main characters, three on the left and three on the right, the same faces, eyes, mouths: they resemble the single family of God united in him.
- Two bigger figures at the left hand side of the icon:
Mary mother of Jesus with a white veil: as spotless bride of Holy Spirit, violet garment represents the colour of the Temple veil and she is the Ark of the new covenant.
- John standing next to her wearing a white garment: pure and red mantle for wisdom, both pointing to Christ as their source of life and unity.
- The right side of icon: closest is Mary Magdalene, a sinner who trusted in Jesus, and his mercy that transformed her life.
- Next to her is the wife of Cleopas, the “other Mary” and cousin of Virgin Mary.
- The Centurion who asked Jesus to cure his sick son:
His right hand is upwards as confirmation of his newfound faith and three fingers upward depicting the Trinity and the two fingers inwards resembling the two natures of Jesus, with the small face on his left shoulder as the face of his cured son.
- The upper part of icon with a smaller figure of Christ ascending into heaven, breaking out of a circle tomb, death with a cross in hand as a sceptre: he transformed the cross from instrument of torture and curse to a sign of hope and victory, the royal crest of the Kingdom of God.
- The hand in the middle top part of icon: the blessings of God the Father, his plan is unfolding in Salvation history within the great mystery of passion and death, good will triumph over evil.

It was before the Cross of San Damiano that I prayed with St. Francis at the beginning of his new vocation in life: “Most high and Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me Lord, a correct faith, a perfect charity, wisdom and knowledge so I may do your most holy and true will”.

The Franciscan form or way of life then is the evangelical life, the Gospel life in all of its radical consequences. The way of life that St. Francis inaugurated was not contemplative nor active but both. This characteristic explains how the Franciscan family include full-time contemplatives as well as full-time missionaries. It centres around the frail figure of their founder focusing on his spirit, character, and way of life. Three aspects are central in this regard namely the union with God as foundation of Franciscan life, the value of hard work and life with the poor and the importance of community.

3.6.3 A Taizé Way of Life

In nineteen fifty two until nineteen fifty three, Brother Roger wrote a short rule for the life of the brothers, the Rule of Taizé that later became known as the Sources of Taizé. The Little Source of Taizé expresses for the Taizé community the essentials, which make a common life possible. Central themes are: You are no longer alone, Prayer, Come follow me, Yes for an entire lifetime, the Prior, the Council, Meals, New brothers, brothers on Mission, Welcoming, the Mystery of faith, Peace of heart, Joy, Simplicity, Mercy and Trust (Schutz 2000:48-75). 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 Taizé or Rule suggests more a spirit, a way of life to inspire and to motivate the community to the essentials of common life

(cf Brico 1978:21). The focus is on a sober life in simplicity of heart; joy and love living daily the essentials of faith in community. New brothers are welcomed into the community during evening prayers and receive the white garment that the brothers wear during common prayers in the church of Reconciliation. The brothers in preparation time before commitment are called “younger brothers” and not novices. When a new brother wants to join the community, there are no strict rules or regulations for him. He is invited to experience and to learn for himself what life in community entails. He follows the same routine than the other brothers but will spend more time on study of the sources of faith, the bible, and the church fathers. Then when the younger brother is ready (time will depend on person in question) on a Sunday Morning usually during Easter in the church of Reconciliation in the presence of the brothers and all the pilgrims there, a few questions are asked and the vow made (see Spink 1986:15-20).

The role of the leader (not called “the Abbot”) is a shepherding function and the one responsible to build the community as a servant. He is not so much head of the community but the centre and heart of the responsibility is to verbalise what the community strives to experience and live out in practice. He is also the listener and the one to identify the gifts of every brother. Together as one, the brothers are on their way to the miracle of togetherness as an adventure with God; living a monastic parable of community in a postmodern world.

The brothers emphasised the principles of self-giving as suffering with others, which according to them bring the perfection of joy in Jesus Christ, mercy leads to forgiveness, reconciliation and the absence of petty disagreements or dislikes and simplicity allows to flee from the devious paths through which the tempter tempts the community of God. The brothers commit themselves to renounce all individual belongings and to

live in a community of goods. Everything is held in common and no capital is put away for future. They are not supposed to fear poverty and to trust in the generosity of God. The community live a life in simplicity in order to avoid greatness and depend totally on God. They do exceptionally well with the selling of art and books and music and give generously to the needy worldwide. The brothers see a life of celibacy as a means to worship and serve God and neighbour even more intense and focused. (Schutz 1953:25; cf Hicks 1992:209).

Central in the Rule is the unity of prayer and action. Everything starts and ends within community prayer during the Divine Office twice daily. However, it is combined with loving service to others and reaching out to the poorest of the poor worldwide. They conduct many youth conferences throughout the year in various cities of the world. It not only mobilizes those who have been on retreat to live the Gospel of Christ but also serves as a reminder and source for a way of life. During the nineteen sixties when the youth influx to Taizé started, some of the brothers said they felt that the masses of pilgrims and seekers were impeding on the life of the community. Surely, a monastery was no place to receive hundreds and sometimes thousands on a weekend or weeklong retreat! A suggestion was made to provide camping facilities two kilometres away from the church of Reconciliation and monastery. Eventually under commendation of Br. Roger Schutz the community decided to accept this flocking of young people to Taizé as the task and challenge of the community and to reach out to these seekers. In true monastic fashion, each guest is viewed as Christ himself who is to be received. The welcoming of seekers and pilgrims are therefore important and offered the free time of the community of brothers. Emphasis is put on hospitality to be generous and discerning. Br. Roger (Schutz 1972:3) asserted that *struggle (action)* and *contemplation* could not be separated just as contemplation could not overlook struggle as: “a 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 God's silence, senses an underlying truth: 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.

Pilgrims returning home after a weeklong or weekend retreat at the Taizé monastery may register to receive the Letter from Taizé as well as information on annual Pilgrimage of Trust international meetings and other conferences in different cities of the world. Families and parishes of the region around the city where these meetings take place welcome the participants who attend it. The aim of these meetings outside Taizé is part of the process to seek how to become bearers of trust and reconciliation in daily life (as a way of life). The Letter from Taizé can help pilgrims to continue their searching at home. Many of the retreatants interviewed make use of it as well as the newsletter. The Letter from Taizé is published every two months in thirteen languages. It contains news from different countries, topics for reflection, and Bible readings for each day. The website of Taizé is available in twenty-six languages. It provides information about meetings, articles, local contacts, material for preparing prayers, details of books, videos, compact discs and other publications etc. A newsletter twice a month available in eight languages is available twice monthly by email. These provide a link with Taizé after retreat and support the Taizé experience becoming a way of life.

Some of the comments of a group of College students during a group interview regarding going back home after the retreat were: "Back home

church and life on campus are very noisy and busy, cluttered most of the time, everything is so much more loud there than here at Taizé. Things change all the time, and society incredible consumer orientated in the United States with so much focus on a variety of programs also in church. Life on the Taizé hill is more simple, quiet, spiritually deep, and meaningful. The power and the presence of God here is more tangible and profound. We would like to have rhythm that is more spiritual in our lives on campus. We are taking some Taizé music, and the Sources of Taizé (book) with us back home to remind us of how we focused on God whilst being here. The Taizé type worship services in some of the churches could be helpful in living out the principles we have learned and experienced here. Still we do not know how to become more quiet and peaceful in our busy rat race type environments. Maybe the little book The Source of Taizé by Br. Roger could be helpful in directing our spiritual journey towards the more essential and meaningful aspects of the Gospel in everyday life. We would also appreciate similar types of retreat to go to in the States.”

On the question put to another group of pilgrims if the monastic tradition as it is lived out at Taizé has something to offer in modern day church environments at home, the response was: “Yes, for instance the rhythm or discipline of prayer, tasks, solitude, silence, Bible discussion. In addition, the simplicity of the Gospel lived out here. Churches are too cluttered with dogma, theology, and rational arguments. Maybe we should be more focused on God and his loving presence and his mystery and make more of symbols or icons and just being in his presence. Taizé type conducted worship services and retreats that are less loud and camp like providing more elements of reflection, silence, and music to help us going deeper into ourselves.”

Retreatants have the opportunity to spend reflection time in the quiet serene park of St. Stephens or elsewhere on the monastery grounds. One of the questions discussed during a group interview was the following: to take the *essence of the Gospel* revealed in a special way at Taizé back to everyday life, continuing the inner journey, and making some of the key principles of monastic life part of everyday life. Some of the themes mentioned were: the mystery of Christ, the simplicity of the Gospel narrative, the awesomeness of God, the mystery of life, the trust in and rest in God, the calling to become part of the plight of the poorest of the poor, the unity (catholicity) of the church, life in simplicity, the essence of the Jesus narrative, the Passover mystery, a deeper more meaningful experience of God, the immensity and power of Gods' love, the energy and sustenance of the Eucharist, and the healing power of silence experienced during the Taize retreat. The group felt challenged to respond to these aspects and to make the *monastic way* part of the leaven of the Gospel in modern day non-monastic communities. A decision was made to go back home and be symbols that show a way to Gods' love and the Gospel within their consumer-ridden and materialistic societies and church communities. A simple prayer by Br. Roger given out in thirteen languages during the retreat, invited retreatants pondering this challenge to pray: "Jesus our Hope, make of us the humble of the Gospel. Our deepest desire is to understand that in us the best is built up through a quite simple trusting, and even a child can achieve it."

3.7 A Monastic Way of Life after Retreat

The research journey identified a need amongst retreatants or pilgrims for further guidance after or between retreats especially to practice the presence of God and a life of prayer when returning back home to the *market place* or rat race syndrome. Retreatants who experienced the presence of God in a deep meaningful and profound way discovering and experiencing silence, solitude, contemplation and Divine Office, indicated

the need to grow further into monastic spirituality making it a way of life. There is a need for guidelines how to apply this way of retreat in everyday life. The research journey show that such a rule or practical framework would be an asset or tool to live the monastic way. I did manage to formulate many years ago whilst on a private retreat a code of conduct for my life containing for example certain values, a mission for life called “My utmost for the Most High.” This document (“Rule”) provided some sort of guidance for the walk with God since then. This is still very different from the monastic rules that were formed over the years that had great impact on the lives of people. Without a way the pilgrimage through life could become too 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 bring people safe to land on the stormy seas of modernity.

The Gospel lived out within a monastic context, spirituality or mindset was identified as a real need amongst the Dutch Reformed and other traditions retreatants interviewed and surveyed. What such a Rule could consist of or its detail-development and implementation within the Dutch Reformed tradition, is something that could merit further research. The research narrative shows the relevance of the monastic way of life in monastic traditions for Christians within the Dutch Reformed tradition:

- The Gospel challenges people to a disciplined commitment in many different ways. The way of retreat as setting aside, quality and quantity time and entering the island situation of the *desert* (quiet secluded place) whether in the form of a monastery, retreat centre, cathedral, and nature drew many retreatants closer to God becoming more open to his presence and voice. The research shows that many retreatants, including the researcher, became aware of their own depths and the touch of God and promptings of the Holy Spirit during retreat. Some

experienced healing, regeneration, for others it was a life-changing experience and for others a recommitment to God or the Gospel and a decision to live more consciously in the presence of God as experienced during retreat when returning home. The challenge and vocation and the moving deeper into God; experienced via silence, solitude, prayer of the heart etc. brought many to the point of a decision to respond by making this type of experience also a way of life. The challenge for retreatants is how to translate the *burning bush* experiences and new vision into sustainable courageous action.

- One of the basic responses of believers during a regeneration or recommitment phase for example after retreat is to embrace the Gospel or Gospel values as one's *rule of life*. St. Francis's did not want to follow the prevalent monastic patterns of that era, but simply to follow the Gospel. His first rule was the linking together of Gospel-texts which were to guide the lives of the friars in a disciplined and charismatic way. Later on because of the growing popularity of this way of life, the Third order or Tertiary order of Franciscans was formed and received canonical status in the year twelve hundred and twenty one in Florence. For the purpose a rule of life was provided which are followed today by many Christians all over the world consisting of men and women, married and single living out the Franciscan life outside monasteries. The society of St. Francis is a body of Christians within the Anglican tradition who seek to live out the Gospel of Christ in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. The rule provides a framework and disciplines enabling Christians to focus on humility, love, and joy as well as the disciplines of prayer, study, and work. Aspirants to this Tertiary Order, if accepted, would undergo a postulancy of at least six months, keeping an experimental rule before being admitted to the noviciate. The noviciate lasts two years and leads to profession at which Tertiaries commit themselves to Christ within the order with

lifelong intention (see Ramon 1987:175-178). The Spiritual Director or counsellor gives guidance in this process also assisting in drawing up a personal rule of life that gives expression within their own specific circumstances. Prominent in such a rule of life will be ways of service – prayer, study and work and the values of poverty (simplicity), chastity and obedience adapted for a life in the world outside a monastery and directing the follower towards the Franciscan principles of humility, love and joy. All postulants and novices meet quarterly under the care of a novice counsellor and to have spiritual fellowship and development reflected in the rule. Members of the Third Order will pledge to keep the rule for one year that can be renewed annually at a Tertiary gathering. Conversations with members of the third order, show enough flexibility and adaptability in the way the rule is lived out in practice and a dynamic sense of change and movement within the stability of rule and renewal.

- In the Benedictine tradition, although not on such a worldwide scale or organized way like the Franciscans, many Christians are also following the basic principles of The Rule of St. Benedict. Writers and scholars like Esther de Waal (1984) and Joan Chittester (1980) have written about, interpreting and applying the rule. It provides guidance on how to make the monastic rule or way of life practical in everyday life outside monasteries. The Anglican cloister, Order of the Holy Paraclete, welcomes retreatants at Rosettenville and give direction to those who want to be affiliated as associates or tertiaries living the Rule in everyday life when returning home after retreat or between retreats. Many refer to it as the *Benedictine Experience* or the attempt to follow the monastic pattern, which St. Benedict established for his community of monks in the sixth century. It continues today to speak to the needs of men and women who are trying to live out their Christian life in the modern world. Some of the retreatants I met at the

Benedictine monastery of La Pierre Quiévre echoed the words of de Waal (1989:13) who says:

The Rule is like a tapestry or to use another analogy, like some spring source to which it is possible to return time and again, that I come back to it, making fresh demands on it, asking new questions of it, and finding that at each stage of my life and with each new step forward St Benedict points me onward and illuminates the way to God.

Many retreatants during the research project view the Rule of Benedict as a guide, a mentor, and inspiration on their spiritual journey. I personally found inspiration and practical guidance from the rule over the years in the process of growing into wholeness and finding more balance in every aspect of my being; body, mind and spirit. The Rule of Benedict is ancient wisdom and yet it is new, as new as the Gospel, for it is towards Christ himself that St Benedict continually points. Families and individuals outside monasteries discovered wisdom and practical insights from the Rule. It deals with questions on personal relationships, authority and freedom; it recognizes the need for stability and the need for change; establishes a pattern for a balanced life; shows a huge sense of respect and reverence for people and material things; listening, hospitality, holy leisure, giftedness, work, community, *lectio divina*, prayer, obedience and the attitude towards material possessions are dealt with in a practical way. Esther de Waal's book *Seeking God, the Way of St Benedict* (1996) has provided many Christians over the years a practical interpretation and application of the Rule as a way of life.

- The Rule of Taizé or *The Sources of Taizé* instructs the brothers of the community and invites all others living outside the community or

monastery to live in the spirit of the beatitudes for example in joy, mercy and simplicity. Pilgrims who have visited Taizé for retreat can receive a monthly newsletter as well as the yearly scripture readings and prayer letter. The yearly letter translated in more than sixty languages is available to be meditated on throughout the year at the meetings at Taizé, other meetings in other parts of the world and individually by pilgrims at home. The sources of Taizé and the yearly letter provide a framework for a way of life that strives for joy by self-giving and suffering with others, for mercy or compassionate love that leads to forgiveness, for reconciliation and the absence of petty disagreements and dislikes and finally for a life of simplicity which allows one to flee from the devious paths of the world that can be very tempting (see Hicks 1992:209-212). Prayer is an essential part of this way of life as a re-centring of the person and of its action in respect to its image, a re-situating of all actions in the context of loving God and neighbour. Prayer at Taize is viewed as the only refuge through which human rebellion, bitterness, and hardness can become soft again and a necessity that compliments other aspects of a whole life. Although many of the thousands of young people who have visited Taize over the years have attempted to form a Taize movement, but the brothers of the community emphasizes that they feel pilgrims ought to become part of and involved in and improving local church communities. The rule of Taize emphasizes that its community is firmly rooted within the worldwide body of Christ (Schutz 1952:11). The Taizé experience as a way of life is stimulated and supported by the worldwide *Pilgrimage of Trust*, which was launched in nineteen seventy four at a worldwide council of youth meeting. The idea was to encourage retreatants after their pilgrimage to Taizé to become peacemakers, bearers of reconciliation in the Church and of trust on earth, by becoming involved in their own neighbourhoods, towns and villages, and in their parishes (see Schutz 2000:85). At the end of every year, Taizé prepares a five-

day *European Meeting* which brings together up to one hundred thousand young people (who has been to Taize once or more) in one of the mayor cities of Eastern or Western Europe. Similar meetings have been held in Madras, India. Manila, Phillipines and in Johannesburg. The liturgy of Taize has been applied (not copied) in many churches worldwide and in South Africa. The *Adoramus* Wednesday evening services at Lynnwood Dutch Reformed church and *Magnificat* once a month Sunday evening service at Florandia and Murray Dutch Reformed churches are examples of how the music, atmosphere and prayers experienced at Taize become a way of worship for many in the researcher's own church tradition. The ecumenical focus and emphasis on reconciliation in Taize and in the Rule of Taize are being lived out by pilgrims in their communities through prayer and action reaching out to others especially the poorest of the poor. The goal is to make personal life a parable of sharing and reconciliation through concrete acts of mercy and love. The Tsunami disaster in Asia prompted the spiritual leader or abbot of Taize to call upon all pilgrims who have been to Taize to become involved in the healing process through prayers and action.

The data from the research journey show that a way of living out the Gospel in a monastic sense after retreat or between retreats will be helpful as a guidance or framework for Christians in the Dutch Reformed church. When developing such a Rule it will be within the context of each pilgrim's own unique spirituality, needs, environment, and abilities. The following guidelines to assist in this direction could provide a starting point for an individual or a group of Christians wanting to practice Gods' presence more consciously after retreat:

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Psalms to provide the basis within the worshipping church, small group, and family (cell) community,
- a spiritual director (spiritual companion) or soul mate that can 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 such 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,
- some Christians 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 or even following the seven habit principles and practical guidelines (Steven Covey 1989), regarding the write of a personal mission statement for personal or family life,
- such plan, statement or rule may then be shared with a spiritual director for input, affirmation, and accountability,
- the commitment could be sealed within a cell group or during a retreat with communion and renewing it annually, and
- regular retreats may provide the atmosphere to expand the rule or to meditate on it.

The following elements could be part of such a Rule of Life:

- Weekly Holy Communion,

- prayer and meditation for example three times a day,
- penitence or self-examination and seeking spiritual direction (confession, guidance),
- lifestyle 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,
- *lectio divina*, 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 for reflection and self-evaluation, and
- a 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 the following:

- 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 monastic pilgrimage, and
- learning from the spiritual wisdom of other Christians for example the Desert Fathers, St. Benedict, St. Francis, Br. Roger, Francois Fenelon, Blaise Pascal, Madame Guyon, Thomas Merton, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Henri Nouwen and many others 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 Taizé, 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 way. A rule could facilitate a way of life where spontaneity, spiritual discipline, commitment, joy and simplicity are channelled to greater good, adding more value not only to one personally but especially to the lives of others.

CHAPTER FOUR

Retreat, Holy Places and Pilgrimage

After an extensive review of the existing literature to decide amongst other aims the research gap and subsequent literature study, a scarcity of literature on holy places, pilgrimage, and especially retreat became available. I made optimum use of the sources available however; I had to rely on the empiric journey itself to provide most of the data discussed in chapter four.

4.1 Retreat

4.1.1 An Overview

My observation and experience is that the pressure, challenges, and opportunities in full time professional ministry multiplied the last twenty years, but the demands and expectations placed on ministry have grown exponentially. Job (1993:11-12) came to the conclusion after research done on pastors and professional religious workers, that many had experienced disillusionment, depression and disappointment not only because of high workloads but also because of the contradiction between their value system, world view, expectations and those of the environment they work in. He also discovered that the care for the soul or *inner sanctuary* has often relegated in the process to second or last place. In my own ministry over the years my activist stance and a strong task-orientated unbalanced way of life, took its toll. At one stage, I realised an ongoing interior emptiness, compassion fatigue and a spiritual poverty. I went for spiritual direction to amongst others an Anglican priest. He and others recommended from their own experience and the practice in their tradition that regular retreats, personal 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. There developed in me with time and especially during the period of burnout and aridness, awareness, a desire to experience retreat, to withdraw at times for a day weekend or more and to be more open to the mystery of God and to rest passively in his love, to sit at the feet of Jesus. It has since become more and more part of my walk with God. The disciples of Jesus were engaged in a demanding and compassionate work, which was in the forefront of human need, and from which there was little respite. Jesus knew this and said to them "come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). Athletes withdraw from an easy routine into long hours of training before actually entering the contest. The archer withdraws the bowstring in order to thrust the arrow to its mark. Nature retreats into winter, and afterwards bursts out with the new leaves and blossoms of spring. The *rhythm of retreat and return* is woven into the fabric of life itself. The believer may take off from the market place into the *desert* or mountain to deepen his or her life of prayer, or to rest from struggles and stresses of daily life. This process became a period of physical, mental and spiritual renewal for many pilgrims as this research study has indeed shown.

To speak of retreat in a competitive world that emphasizes risk, strength, action, attack and getting in before one's opponent, may suggest for many weakness, passivity and running away. The religious world in the West is no less worldly in this respect, and the frenetic activity which accompanies much of evangelism, church administration and religious service had for many years neither time nor place for retreat (cf Magee 1978:7). There has been a turning of the tide, perhaps as a corrective to all this and as a reaction to the reductionism in Christian theology for example a disassociate tendency in Dutch Reformed spirituality and the devaluation of the life of prayer (cf Ramon 1987:7). Retreats provide an opportunity for

pilgrims to immerse themselves, twenty four hours, forty eight hours or a week or longer, 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 (Steere 1967:100). Retreat facilitates a way of going beyond mere knowledge about God and religious truths to the experience of God and truth. There seems to be a growing yearning amongst research participants 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* seems to be gaining momentum and taking place in not only the hearts of pilgrims but in more and more monasteries and retreat centres over the globe, visited by pilgrims.

Retreat provides an opportunity for the research participants for inward reflection. Being part of an adventure involves risk, the risk of giving up things for example defences, fears, and idols or dropping of pretences and unlocking doors that may lead to fullness of life. Many experienced it as a *pilgrimage*, a journey. They left the known environment of work and home arriving at a retreat centre (the *unknown*). The retreat facilitated a fresh view of God, self, others, and the world. For some it was as if years of their lives were lived or interpreted or recentred in only one weekend. The silence, the solitude, the times of community provided impetus for being available to God with heart and mind open to the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit.

It is difficult to define the process or experience of a retreat, the best definition may evolve by personally going on a retreat and by listening to the experience of other pilgrims. Two words commonly used to describe time out from ordinary routine could be helpful in defining the concept of retreat. The first; *vacation* indicates an open and empty space, an arena of

silence and stillness for God to work, a vacating of oneself from the ordinary and legitimate pursuits of work and other distraction in order to spend more focused or quality time in Gods' presence. The second; *holiday* indicates that such time spent does not happen in a negative vacuum but more within sanctifying or redeeming of time. The days spent may become "holy days" moving deeper inwards and into Gods' presence and loving embrace (Magee 1978:10-11; cf Ramon 1987:14-16). Retreat became a time apart (eight hours , twenty four hours, a week, two weeks or longer) from the usual business, circumstances or environment of retreatants/pilgrims, during which to engage in practices or disciplines that facilitated a deep interchange between and communion with God, oneself and fellow pilgrims on retreat.

An essential perspective, looking back on the retreats planned and conducted as part of the research narrative, is that which one cannot plan, organize, programme or control. It is difficult to put into words but I refer to the aspect of *Mystery*, the unpredictable, or the unseen. It serves as reminder that retreat and retreatants ought to be given the freedom during the retreat to just be there (being-with-God and not so much protocol, prescriptions, and boundaries). It is the expectation that the Spirit of God could work creatively during retreat and in unique unexpected ways. The when and how of it is not for a spiritual director or retreatant to prescribe or to be always aware of consciously. At times during retreats Gods' presence manifested as a deep awareness of the fullness of the present moment or as a new calling to add real value to people when returning home. Then the sight of flowers and a tree in the quiet of the morning or a smile from another retreatant that reaches deep within or a new appreciation for life, God or family as well as a new commitment to it. My first monastic retreat illustrates this aspect of retreat. It was a two-day personal retreat to St Benedict's House in Rosettenville Johannesburg in 1996. I became part of the monastic rhythm of the daily Prayer Office in

the chapel silence, work and eating with the Anglican community of sisters who permanently live there. There was ample time available to spend alone in the room, or in the garden, alone in the chapel or at times with the members of the community, and for reflection, reading, journaling. At one stage, the Holy Spirit and the presence of God took hold and began such deep and interior teaching that shook me very deeply and had profound implications afterwards for ministry, spirituality, and myself. I reflectively wrote down what I heard, felt, and experienced. Looking back on that first retreat experience, it opened a new dimension by God in my heart. It was a step towards a new kind of *pilgrimage* narrative and *inner journey* that would lead me more and more to the monastic way of retreat and eventually doing the research on the subject.

4.1.2 Types of Retreat

4.1.2.1 Conducted Retreat

A spiritual director gives address, lead meditations and may decide to be available for interviews, counselling or confessions. People on the retreat could be members of a church congregation or a group of people where the participants do not know one another at the outset of the retreat. A conducted retreat may have a central theme and more than one leader and may include periods of silence, sharing, solitude and of community.

4.1.2.2 Un-conducted Retreat

The retreatants could eat or worship together but there is also freedom for those who wish to spend more time alone. Help or guidance could be available via a brother or sister but usually the emphasis is more on prayerful silence and meditation for example the retreats I participated in at St. Benedict's house in Rosettenville. The sisters were available for spiritual direction, I shared with them my reason for coming and there was

no pressure on me to be part of their prayer offices in the chapel three times a day, I could eat in silence or with them at their table.

4.1.2.3 Individually Directed Retreat

It may last a day or week or even a month mostly in silence with a director available when needed for example at Sediba at Hartbeespoortdam. Sometimes it will take the form of a one-to-one relationship according to the needs of the retreatant on a daily basis with a spiritual director. In other instances, most of the time would be spend alone in silence, optional prayer times in the chapel and sharing with the spiritual director on the premises.

4.1.2.4 Vocational Retreat

A group of people with the same occupation for example pastors of the Dutch Reformed church will gather for the deepening of their interior life and meditating on their calling, life in a congregation and relationship with God, family and others. Business people or other occupations could retreat together for a day or weekend meditating, being in silence, and sharing with one another their experience of God, occupation and possible new horizons of personal, spiritual growth and power.

4.1.2.5 Dialogue Retreat

The aim or atmosphere of such a retreat will be to provide enough time and scope during the retreat for silent dialogue with God, especially listening to his presence and voice and in the process facilitating an opening up towards fellow retreatants in the form of group discussion and sharing. Magee (1967:64) says:

In retreat we are first forced into outward silence so that the habitual show of merely conventional togetherness may be broken. At first, we are embarrassed by the glances and gestures of

others. But gradually, we begin to realise that they and we are becoming more and more present to one another, that a new level of dialogue is emerging, a level of which we never dreamed in our talkative superficial sociability.

The empirical data show that during retreat, pilgrims may become more and more open to the *eternal Presence* and this in turn heightens all the other sensibilities. For example in the silent dialogue with God, the door to others opens up. We have experienced this as a team of pastors (my colleagues and I) on retreat in 2004 and in 1999 as a group of fourteen pastors of the same diocese as well as in 2005 as the leadership team of the congregation (church board). In the presence of God and in silence we discovered new dimensions of God, self and each other and the mystery and wonder of God, self and the other. The retreat place, the silence, meditations, and prayers provided a *healing*, transparent atmosphere of truth and honesty, awareness of God and self and 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 deepened and the light each received from God shone forth so much more brilliantly and in a healing way as we shared emotions and insights with one another.

4.1.2.6 The Creative or Arts Retreat

The focus of such a retreat would be on the creative artistic process and imagination whether poetry, dancing, theatre or drama, sculpture and painting. During the retreat, the unity of the spiritual, creative and material will be emphasized clearing the way or opening the doors for the miracle of Gods' creative artistic presence amidst the retreatants (Steere 1967:84). Other elements that could enhance the whole experience may be silence, contemplation, and personal soul searching, for example to

gather resources and to ponder on God and nature and creation. Informality, authenticity, exercising of the senses, music, space and touch, colour, sounds could further stimulate the artistic flow. However, most of the retreat's focus which will last preferably a weekend or longer would be on the "creating process" itself and therefore the venue and necessary materials are very important. The climax of the retreat process could be the presenting of the art works created during a special silent and contemplative worship service setting where the presence of God and his creative and artistic powers may be shared and celebrated.

Although I have implemented some aspects of creativity and art into retreat at times for example body awareness, posture, walk in a labyrinth, drawing, spiritual journaling, liturgical dance and poetry, I have not yet ventured into the conducting of an Arts retreat. There could well be a real need for such a venture, probably also among young adults. Elements of art and artistic creativity during a monastic retreat to celebrate the creative powers of God, the art of nature and creation, the gift of creativity in man/woman as co-creators could be experienced in a humble and deep way whilst being on holy ground in the presence of God. This could be an aspect relevant for future research.

4.1.2.7 Private Retreat

The retreatant plans his or her own pattern for the time. Usually one is most of the time in silence, solitude and in scripture. A place in nature, monastic house, or at a retreat centre could be appropriate. At Taizé, there are usually pilgrims that would arrive for a week, at times sharing in the Divine Office and Eucharist but who would maintain complete silence and solitude outside the Divine Office in the church of reconciliation and not sharing in any other group activities at all.

4.1.2.8 Quiet One Day Retreat

One day is set aside for prayer, study, meditation, and reflection. I have conducted a couple of these type retreats for example at Stigmatine house in Pretoria-North and at Leopard Lodge near Hartbeespoort Dam. I found this type of retreat to be practical for people who do not have the time because of very busy schedules to attend a weekend or longer retreat. First time retreatants were exposed to elements of monastic retreat in a slower gentler way and many times this provided the inspiration or preparation to be part of a longer retreat on another occasion.

4.1.2.9 Classical Retreat

Nearly all of the monastic retreats I have experienced as pilgrim as well as all of those I have directed the discipline of silence has been used rather extensively. The monasteries visited incorporated many long periods of silence with usually some time provided to share with others, to sing, or to pray together. In monasteries, silence is cherished and all pilgrims are invited to move into it. A combination of silence and talking were used in the retreats I have planned and led, always with more emphasis on silence. When the retreatants were mostly first-time pilgrims on a monastic type of retreat cherishing silence, solitude and listening and unceasing prayer, more time was spend during the first part of the weekend for orientation. Some teaching on monasticism or elements of monastic retreat was given and time for questions. More and longer periods of silence were introduced as the retreat progressed. The study showed that silence for many, especially in 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.

4.1.2.10 Ecumenical Retreat

It is possible to discuss and practice ecumenism in the ethereal realms of official dialogues, decisions of denominational synods or councils and of theological accords. However, I agree with Brother Roger (1988:12-14) of Taizé that the first manifestations of ecumenism were in the domain not of theology or doctrine but of spirituality and worship. The Taizé ecumenical community of priests (brothers) where thousands of pilgrims visit is ecumenical. They as well as the pilgrims from all over the world represent Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox Church traditions. The unity in diversity was a meaningful and enriching experience for the pilgrims interviewed. The name of the church or chapel/cathedral, “Church of Reconciliation” confirms not only the vertical relationship with God but also the horizontal ecumenical dimension. The basis and vital core of the ecumenical experience on the Taizé hill is not dogma, creed or theology, but prayer as communion with God the Source of Life who is the source of communion between human beings. The heartbeat of the ecumenical retreat experience is the common prayer (Divine Office) three times a day in the church of reconciliation that includes the ecumenical brothers of the community (Protestant and Catholic) with the thousands of young adults and the not so young. Together in at least ten different languages, prayer is practiced within a liturgy of Psalms that are sung, Scripture readings, litanies of intercession and a long period of silence. After the liturgical part of the service, worship continues by way of simple meditative chants consisting of a few words from Scripture repeated repeatedly. This type of common prayer, meditative and accessible to all, brings together people of a great variety of background, races, cultures, spiritualities, and age groups.

Retreatants I met and interviewed at Taizé and my own experience, show a diversity of people transfigured into a multicoloured unity by singing, listening to passages from the Gospel, praying and being silent together in

Gods' presence. I interviewed Unitarian Universalists, Reformed and Catholic theologians, non-religious and non-denominational people, very religious and committed to their church Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. I met people there more for a holiday or out of curiosity, God-seekers and "New-Age" spiritualities. The common prayer or Divine Office provided a source to drink from and the opportunity to be drawn out of isolation into celebration of unity despite diversity. Brother John of Taizé (1988:12-14) describes it as "the true miracle of prayer is more inward: little by little the person who prays is drawn into that other world, taken hold of by God...being transfigured by his transforming presence so that they begin to view others differently". Another example of ecumenical retreat is the Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox retreat committee in Los Angeles who developed over the years a joint retreat experience with two focal points namely communal prayer (silence, contemplation) and sessions of group sharing on the spiritual journey and formation. For example the spiritual director or retreat master (each year alternately from another denomination) would first share his experience with the whole group and afterwards gathering in small groups, integrating the four ecclesial communities, each would have the opportunity to share his/her own journey of faith. In the beginning, the yearly retreats were for ordained clergy only, but later lay people were also included (Br. John 1988:27-29).

The cross fertilization of insights and emphasis of the representatives of the different church traditions (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.

4.1.3 Pastoral Care and Retreat

Pastoral care, counselling, and spirituality are interwoven. *Pastoral counselling* is the experience of telling stories within a constructive framework for example in a congregational/parish setting or during a weekend retreat. Furthermore it is the systematic, constructive attention to the ways that individuals story their lives in order to develop new, more fulfilling stories (re-storying) by connecting the present story to an implicit story that may lie behind it (cf Capps 1998:viii, 10-11). *Spirituality* is a person's religious experience or to be in the presence of God, a life of faith in interior submission to God and pervading all motivation and behaviour, functioning according to Keating (2003:147) as a catalyst that may integrate, direct and unify all one's activity. Pastoral care or counselling is a process of listening and "searching with people for a way in which to experience (or story/re-story) their situation in the presence of God (Heitink 1993:35).

Henri Nouwen linked pastoral care and spirituality within the contexts of personal self-exploration of weakness/woundedness as well as remembrance in a experiential, subjective, intuitive and personal way (Gillepsie 2002:117, see Dreyer 2003:718). Nouwen's (1979:81) invitation as *wounded healer* to fellow pilgrims is into the story/ies of his personal pilgrimage, inviting them to learn from it. He (1979:81) puts it as follows:

Since it is the task of the minister (pastor) to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, he (she) must bind his (her) own wounds carefully in anticipation of the moment when he (she) will be needed. The pastoral caregiver is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his (her) own wounds but at the

same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.

Nouwen further explores the connection between pastoral counselling and spirituality within the context of remembrance where the caregiver with profound spirituality as way of living in the Spirit, becomes and is perceived as the living reminder (healing, guiding and sustaining) of Jesus. The story of personal human suffering and the story of the suffering of Jesus are connected and people's wounds may remind them of the need for healing or wholeness that will be met by grace (Dreyer 2003:721). Building on memories can unmask the illusion of present comfort and remind people of the story of God in order to have hope for the future (Nouwen 1977:73).

The illusion that there could be idealistic, escapist, quick fix methods to lead people into *easy wholesale wholeness* is rampant everywhere. De Waal (1989:23) is convinced there is no "perfect healing" and that each human being carries their own wounds, anguishes and own difficulties in relationships. It is more a question of learning to live day by day with this state of reality and not in a state of illusion of perfectionism. The monastic way, for example rule of St. Benedict provides a health ,generating way because it reminds people to look at pain honestly and invites them to open up their hearts to Gods' unconditional ever-embracing love. Gods' love can stimulate pilgrims forward on the path of healing, transformation, and new life. Monastic spirituality and the monastic narrative is a reminder that people are not alone with their stories of anguish and pain but part of a compassionate community of wounded healers reaching out to comfort them.

White (1993:35) stresses that in a postmodern context both minister (pastoral caregiver) and the one in need should dialogically seek

together for authentic stories, expressing own convictions not in a directive coercive way, but guidance with enough room for the other to come to an unique understanding of his/her life in Gods' presence. People's lives are shaped by the meaning that they ascribe to their experience and by the language practices and cultural practices of self that these lives are recruited into. The challenge then is that (during retreat and in post modern research also) these stories should be listened to, accepted and respected and together a new story or new reality could develop together in a process of re-contextualization). It is a listening process characterized by compassion without judgement, pride or resentment, a suffering with, sharing in and feeling the hardships of others by going where it hurts, sharing in the brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish of fellow pilgrims (Nouwen 1983:15-16, 41). Compassion represents the essence of Christian life and of a retreat.

For retreat to take place within an atmosphere of healing, guidance or remembering asks for an integration of spirituality and pastoral care in the lives of the spiritual director (pastoral caregiver) and the retreatants. Solitude may provide a way for caregiver (spiritual director) and retreatant to understand and articulate their inner world. Having an encounter being alone with the Alone, listening can bring pilgrims closer, deeper into the healing presence of God. Many retreatants experienced the prayer of tears in these times of solitude, the tonality of consciousness changes during meditation and thoughts, breathing, heartbeat, metabolism, brain waves, blood pressure change also. During the phases of solitude coupled with silence, meditation, and an encounter with God, some pilgrims (Nouwen 1981:13-14; cf Müller 1996:32-37) experienced deep insight into inner "demons" and pain. De Waal (1989:21) states, "We all stand in need of healing, we are all seeking wholeness." Inner conflicts and contradictions should be attended to lest they torn people apart and inflict wounds on others.

Solitude during a retreat is for Nouwen (1990:25) the “furnace of transformation.” It is a refinement of illusions of the false self and compulsions of the world. It is in the holy place of solitude that ministry (caring) and spirituality embrace and the new woman or the new man can emerge.

A retreat has the potential of a constructive framework for people to share their stories with God (in solitude), with the spiritual director and with the community. The research narrative shows that the atmosphere and environment of a monastic retreat, facilitated story interpretation and new understandings of the story. The person leading the retreat as spiritual director is also caregiver or counsellor who is available for the pilgrims on the retreat. The experience of retreatants has been that the periods of silence and solitude made them more receptive and open for listening, sharing, and direction. This made personal spiritual counselling more natural and possible. People are invited to share their stories and the caregiver provides more than assurance, compassion and listening but according to Capps (1998:10-11) interprets also, see things in the story the storyteller does not see, and may offer some suggestions or advice if necessary. The spiritual director or caregiver reflects on how we story our lives (their own as well as those who come for assistance). Capps (see 1998:53-170) describes three different ways of storying, or way of being evolving: *inspirationally* (challenges are overcome, growing stronger in the process), *paradoxically* (dilemmas of life, finding graceful ways out of or through it) and *miraculously* (occurring of miracles, expecting it and contributing to its realization). The caregiver could prove helpful within this context of story types and the preferred story world of those that seek help. He/she can use either the power of suggestion, or the untying of paradoxical knots or discernment of the exceptions (Capps 1998:14, 15).

Regarding the spiritual director's involvement with the stories and pastoral care of pilgrims during retreat, two paths are usually followed : Pastoral or personal interaction with retreatants are avoided as much as possible believing that the pilgrim can get further if left alone in the silence where the Divine Therapist does the only lasting work. Pastoral care and interaction with pilgrims are valued highly, having personal interviews inviting them to come for assistance or sharing their stories. Monasteries visited, tend to follow the first path although for example at Taize, the welcome letter at least communicated that a brother is available after common prayer if needed by a pilgrim. The retreatants response regarding this aspect differed. The fact that someone was available was enough for most of them. The decision of the spiritual director in discerning where the emphasis ought to be will depend on the needs of the pilgrims, the elements, structure, and character of the retreat.

Small group discussions during retreat provided a constructive context, a circle of love and acceptance in which to listen to and to share stories with one another. In such groups, the pilgrims experienced at times with others that the very feeling that has seemed to them most personal, private and hence incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there were resonance and resemblance in many of the others. In the words of Carl Rogers (1961:26): "what is most personal is most general", there comes the revelation that what is most unique and personal in each one during a retreat, when it were shared or expressed with the group or another individual, spoke most deeply to others. Thus when listening to another person telling his/her story, people are listening to their own stories.

4.2 Pilgrimage

4.2.1 An Overview

Between nineteen eighty three and nineteen ninety three the number of pilgrimages, for example to Santiago de Compostela in Spain increased by three thousand five hundred percent; from two thousand pilgrims to seventy thousand per year (Malloy 1998:2-25). 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, is an ascetic practice that 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 (Br. John 1984:382-393). There is a spirit of community that is integral part of pilgrimage. It is identifying with something bigger than the individual, 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 but the whole phenomenon tends to hold up a mirror to what is sacred for a specific time or age. The pilgrim is therefore no ordinary traveller and his/her map is in the heart (Time 2004:31). Pilgrimage is a communal rite of passage through space, home and away from home, a journey to a sacred place. It can serve as metaphor for the inner journey to the inner mountain. Some undertake it because of religious motives and others simply as a *moving out* that contrasts with the habitual staying at home (Skar 1985:89; cf Morinis 1981:282).

Turner (see 1972:234-245) explains the experience of a pilgrimage based on the classic three-stage form of rite of passage for example:

- The *separation* phase starts with the journey to a centre or place out there. The journey is not so much through a threshold that marks a change in the individual's social status as with initiation rites, but more a leaving behind of the usual routine and habits. A religious believer of any culture may at times look beyond the local church, shrine, or temple, feel the call of some distant holy place or sacred site renowned for miracles or the renewal of faith, and resolve to journey there.

- The *liminality-communitas* stage refers to the journey itself, the sojourn to the shrine or sacred spot and the encounter with the sacred there. It is characterised by an awareness of temporary release from social ties and order. Even secular tourists may be at heart pilgrims who want to switch worlds and may even experience transcendence in the situation of liminality whilst in a different country or environment that is special to them. The outward journey may thus become a way of *external mysticism*. Pilgrims with a mystical or monastic approach on the other hand, make an inward sacred journey or *interior spiritual pilgrimage*. Nevertheless, pilgrims, mystics and tourists alike are freed for a period from the nets of social structure. This middle stage of a pilgrimage is further marked by a strong sense of *communitas* or community channelled by the beliefs, values and norms of the religious tradition as well as a preference for simplicity in dress and behaviour, a sense of ordeal and by reflection on the basic meaning of one's religion. Once started the pilgrimage may become quite democratic, rich in its own symbolism and in *communitas* and as such potentially subversive from a social structural point of view.

- The *aggregation* phase is the return, the homecoming with the potential of new blessings to be shared or new perspectives gained, or regeneration experienced, as for example the homecoming after a study tour-pilgrimage to Taize, Assisi and La Pierre Quie Vire or the pilgrims going back to everyday life after a conducted weekend retreat.

Pilgrimage therefore is a dynamic process, a fluid and ever-changing phenomenon, sometimes spontaneous or initially unstructured or structured and may be outside the bounds of religious orthodoxy. It is primarily a popular rite of passage as a venture into religious, spiritual, or even secular experience and could be but not always a transition into a higher or *regenerative* status.

The hermits of the eleventh and twelfth centuries undertook numerous pilgrimages. The monasteries of that era seemingly failed to attract or keep the hermits, as they perceived monasteries as too lax in observance and discipline, too worldly, living too comfortable, and not doing enough to live according to the precepts of the gospel. The pilgrimages of the new hermits were much less limited in scope than conventional pilgrimage. The main objective was not so much the visit of shrines but emphasizing the principle of renunciation. The pilgrims would leave their families, friends, and homeland to become exiles in foreign regions. The intention of the self-imposed banishment was to mirror the fate of humanity in exile from the kingdom of heaven. The wandering pilgrim had the potential as means for atonement of past sins, an opportunity for officially beginning a new way of life and a chance for reorientation and reflection after visiting holy places and religious men. Their main aim was to revive the life of the apostles, to revive the model of the early church and to recreate a way of life they felt existing monasticism had obliterated and forgotten. They also emulated the desert monks of the third and fourth centuries and found inspiration in the patristic literature. At St Mary's in York, a group left the

abbey so that they could amend their lives according to the rule of St. Benedict. They wanted therefore to keep rules, which had preserved, or which would preserve the early Christian practices as faithfully as possible (Leyser 1983:21-28). They had at their disposal a vast body of literature as source of inspiration and a guide to actual observances. Their period of pilgrimage into the desert or to other sacred places provided a time of preparation and training in a way of life to serve the Lord thereafter for all time. This movement differs from that of St. Francis and his followers in the following century in that Francis never in the beginning intended to write a rule.

There have been critical studies of pilgrimage since the time they started. In the year 379 Gregory of Nyssa (in Schaff & Wace 1892:382-383) wrote a letter based on his experience of going to Jerusalem, a letter which has been ever since an embarrassment to supporters of pilgrimage. He stated that the gospels were silent on pilgrimage, and that immorality is encouraged by pilgrimages because of free mixing of sexes but his main criticism was theological. He and so would many after him, emphasized that the relationship with God and with others is what is central to Christianity. Pilgrimages; according to Lewis (1992:388-394) are undertaken to places held sacred and particular places should not be of any importance to Christians, therefore it is far better to stay home. He also states that a change of place does not affect any drawing nearer to God.

The experience of the pilgrims met on the research journey in France and Italy for retreat was just the opposite. Many felt that the venue or the specific monastery did enhance the spiritual search or to draw closer to God. There is a tendency in Scripture for God to choose places to reveal himself in a special or more dramatic way for example Jerusalem or Bethlehem or the desert. One of the reasons I visited Israel a few years

ago with a group of pilgrims was not so much to meet God in Bethlehem or in the garden tomb of Jesus. God is a God of all places, active in his children and in his world. However, I did experience God there and in later years during monastic retreats in a different, special, sometimes more profound way in the monasteries visited. My experience and that of some of the pilgrims I interviewed were that it was not only an edifying exercise in piety but also a reflection upon the essence of life and the relationship with God. For some pilgrims it was an experience of renewal of the desire to walk in the steps of the pilgrim-God, to follow Jesus on the pilgrimage of life and to be of greater service to others, especially those that suffer. Although there are critical voices on the pilgrimage to "sacred" places as special places where one may move deeper into the presence of God, it must be remembered that Christianity started in a particular place and do have a theological significant history which highlights a wide variety of places. The history of Christianity reveals places where events of Christian significance occurred. Examples are: The Egyptian desert (Mount Colzim where St. Anthony spent years in solitude) as the cradle of monasticism as well as the lives of many dedicated mystics and fathers, Canterbury as place of martyrdom, Rome as place of past persecution and present papal authority, Assisi as heartland of St. Francis where his call to simplicity and identification with the sufferings of Christ may be pondered and also perhaps the *inappropriateness* of the exquisite beautiful and great expensive church built to honour the little, poor simple follower of Christ.

The focus on specific places could also be viewed within the context of significant events or experiences for example an individual or group may have a significant experience of God or an encounter with God and his people in places which may collect many kinds of associations and be special or sacred to those involved for example on the Taizé hill. It could be a specific retreat centre, cathedral, garden, mountain, or monastery. The purpose of going to a specific place is to know and experience God

deeply or drawing closer to God. The challenge is (and recommendable) for the pilgrim to return home to implement this greater understanding or significant experience back home. The pilgrimage then to sacred places may have the paradoxical effect of enabling pilgrims after the pilgrimage to be more profoundly at home than before the pilgrimage, culminating in a new way of life.

4.2.2 Pilgrimage in Judaeo-Christian tradition

The story of Abraham as a corporate personality (De Fraine 1963:117), is the narrative of how a then unknown God entered Abraham's life (Gen 12:1-4) marking the beginning of a long pilgrimage. The pilgrim-existence-towards, affirms that to believe in God is to walk with God or to experience an existence-with-God (Gen 5:24; 6:9; 48:15). In this call and the road (pilgrimage) that was thus taken, Israel saw not only an event in her earliest history, but also a basic characteristic of her whole existence before God (Von Rad 1972:159). Taken from a community of nations and never really rooted in Canaan, being even a "stranger" or pilgrim underway there (Lev 25:23; Ps 39:12), Israel perceived the call as being led on a special road to a special place. The plan and goal of this pilgrimage lay completely in the hand of God. With this new relationship came the promise of blessings or a new life described in images of a country or land and an offspring. The pilgrim existence implies also faith in God manifested as a break with the known, to leave and to risk journeying with God as pilgrim-God not linked or confined to a particular place. Abraham becomes in this story a model of obedient venturing on pilgrimage with God. Von Rad (1972:161) stresses that to leave home and break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient people almost the impossible.

The story of the Exodus is another pilgrimage story where the pilgrim-God loyal to his people (Kaiser 1979:103) comes down to deliver his people

who were oppressed and wounded (Ex 3:7-8). To go on a pilgrimage even at first through a desert, signifies leaving both the hardships and the situation of slavery in order to find true freedom by walking with God. This freedom is not necessarily easy to achieve. It may lead into and through trials and wilderness; it has the potential to become a place of extreme intimacy between man and his/her God. It is accompanied with the promise of salvation and blessings (Westermann 1981:147). Deuteronomy exhorts the faithful to retain their pilgrim-hearts, even when settling in the land promised to their fathers and mothers (Deut 8:2-6; 11-16) and to remember the Source of Life's (Craigie 1981:185) miraculous provision and sustenance. Later in the darkest moment of the history of Israel, following the exile to Babylon, the prophets opened new perspectives of a new and even greater Exodus (Is 43:16) and Pilgrimage back to Jerusalem with Mount Zion becoming the classic image of Israel's restoration (Clements 1978:145). The referral to Jerusalem (Zion), the royal house, the Temple and the City underlines Gods' concrete presence in the midst of his people. The term *new-Exodus* applies not only to the nation (Is 60-62), but also to the rebuilding of the holy City where God will reside in his House and the son of David reign as a peace-loving king (Westermann 1969:353, 356-357).

The Torah and the Prophets lay the foundations of the pilgrim-faith. Jesus for his part became not only the pilgrim in an external sense as the one who has nowhere to lay his head (Luke 9:58). The essence of his pilgrim identity is revealed in his servant hood and suffering on the journey to Jerusalem. He knew what rejection and homelessness meant and his followers ought to be ready for the same experience (Marshall 1978:410). Jesus is the Pilgrim par excellence who travels constantly to and fro between Nazareth in Galilee, Judea with Bethlehem the city of David, and Jerusalem with its Temple. In Matthew's story the family follows the whole journey of its ancestors with the descent into Egypt (Matt 2:14) and the

return to the land of Israel (Matt 2:20). Moses lived as young man in Egypt, fled to Midian and then called back to lead the people of God out of Egypt (Ex 4:22, 23). Jesus, representative of the “true” Israel is kept safe in Egypt just as Moses was kept safe and is called to out of Egypt to return to Israel (Nielsen 1978:50, 51).

The pilgrimages that Jesus undertook to commemorate the Passover, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Booths, brought him into conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The *communal connectivity* (Liminality-*Communitas*) of Jesus’ pilgrimages was not with the autocratic regime and ideological church structures, but with those socially marginalized from Jerusalem in the outlying villages of Bethany and Bethphage. They were prostitutes, lepers, and handicapped as well as people representing the non-elitist masses. (see Frick 1977:28-45; cf Meeks 1983:80). The communal connection of these relations became a political power as the pilgrims moved to Jerusalem (Sandrett-Leathermann 1999:319). Jesus and his disciples dramatically reconfigured the power structures of church and politics in Jerusalem. In addition, according to Job and Schawchuck (1983:391), built on Walter Brueggeman Christology (1978), this reconfiguration was accomplished not as an expected revolution with swords but during a pilgrimage ritual and with the Cross.

As pilgrim with no fixed abode in this world, Jesus is more than a new Moses or a new Abraham. He is also the pilgrim-God who comes into the world to “fight” for marginalized people and invites them to come after him leaving, departing from the old way of life. He speaks and charts Gods’ path in the heart of people’s history and their hearts. He is the pilgrim or human being who heard the divine Word of God and shaped his whole existence to it. The pilgrimage ends and culminates when the risen and exalted Christ becomes the Way (Jn 14:6) to the Father and to humankind (Br. John 1984:380-393). The Gospels describe the Christian as a follower

of Christ, someone who listens to Christ's message and call and risks everything in order to follow him on the journey. Although Christians remain in the world they have been transformed with the homeland now in heaven and citizens of another Kingdom (Col 1:13) living as strangers and pilgrims in this world (one Pet 2:11). Christ brought his people out of the dark and dismal realm of false ideas and ideological ideals into a new land or Kingdom characterized by clearer vision and specific expectations (Hendriksen 1979:63; Greijdanus nd:46).

The question remains however if an authentic pilgrimage theology can be consonant/reconciled with the aspirations and experience of human beings in a modern materialistic world. Pilgrimage 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.

4.2.3 A Classification of Pilgrimages

Turner (1978:180-200) provides a typology for examining pilgrimage:

- *Archaic* pilgrimage originates in very ancient times and usually little or nothing is known of their foundation. The Huichol Indians of Mexico retain a complex symbolic code while others contain layer upon layer of the customs and symbols of later religion. Examples of syncretism occurred at Mecca and Jerusalem in the Middle East, at Izamal in Mexico and Canterbury in England.
- *Prototypical* pilgrimage is established by a founder of a religion, by his or her first disciples or by important evangelists of the faith. Visions, miracles, and the swarm of fervent pilgrims who pray and make acts of devotion mark the foundation. Then when the impulse for *communitas*

begins to grow, a strong feedback system develops which in turn increases the popularity of the system. A pilgrimage tradition develops with holy books about the founder, a shrine is built, and an ecclesiastical structure develops. Examples are Jerusalem and Rome as prototypical for Christianity, Jerusalem for Judaism, Mecca for Islam, Bodh Gaya and Sarnath for Buddhism, Banaras, and Mount Kailas for Hinduism.

- *High-period* pilgrimage is characterised by elaborate shrines, crowded by symbols and relics with ample place to stay and markets nearby. An example of such popular pilgrimages to the tombs of holy persons is that of Francis of Assisi and his shrine at Mount Subiaco and the double basilica complex built on his remains. Pilgrims have visited and are still visiting the tomb and the relics in a special hall as centre of their devotion in thousands every day. The eleventh to the fourteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of centres of pilgrimage and a boom in relics.

Modern pilgrimages seem to be 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.

4.2.4 Pilgrimage today

Pilgrimage takes the form of journeying to sacred places as an act of religious devotion, as part of a spiritual experience or as a secular pilgrimage. The term pilgrimage is increasingly used metaphorically to describe the *spiritual journeys* of Christian individuals and groups on their

way to God or the secular journeys of people to experience peace in nature or a *new age* type of spiritual encounter at places where the auras or magnetic fields of the earth are more concentrated. Davies (1988:176) explains that the popularity of actual journeys to many different places is partially due to increased leisure and better transport facilities and that almost any sequence of events, however random, can be spiritualised as a pilgrimage. Modern pilgrims travel by automobile and airplane and pilgrimage centres publish books, newsletters, pamphlets and have their own websites.

Neither faith nor pilgrimage seems dead in Europe or the Middle East. There are religious pilgrims going to Mecca as faithful Muslims, Christians who travelling to Assisi and Taize and Jerusalem and El Camino de Santiago (Santiago de Compostea) in Spain. However, in a postmodern age, the spiritual impulse could manifest itself also in a cycling, mountain climbing adventure, or the quiet contemplation in a beautiful garden. Mass worship could take place in a football- or rugby stadium. The world has changed and so has pilgrimage and the whole phenomenon of pilgrimage tends to hold up a mirror of what is sacred for the times. Today's secular or non-religious pilgrimages have a ritualistic quality that makes them part of the ancient religious traditions as search for blessing and enrichment where body, mind and spirit comes together in an individual quest. Part of the pilgrimage is the spirit of community that comes from identifying with something bigger than yourself (see Time 2004:34). 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 with fellow pilgrims, a hunger for freedom from religious and ideological power-structures and blind conformism and for radical authentic commitment for example symbolized in the full time authentic monastery way of life of the brothers.

4.3 Holy Places, Pilgrimage, and Retreat

Retreat in monastic-mystic tradition is primarily a journey deeper into God, into his presence. God is omnipresent and present in his followers through the Holy Spirit. He is wherever he calls you and wherever you call upon him. Pentecost accentuates that God does not dwell in holy places made with hands, but in the hearts of his people, the temple of God. However, in the bible whenever God gave new, epoch making revelation, it was usually in the context of wilderness, desert, mountain, and retreat. The geographical setting often reflected the interior solitude. In certain instances the revelation or touch of God came in the desert or under the stars with Abraham or the mystery of a struggle with a wrestling Jacob, sometimes a burning bush as with Moses and sometimes in the domestic environment with a women named Mary sitting quietly and attentive alone at Jesus' feet. Retreat experienced by pilgrims as a pilgrimage were not for them in the first place a long and arduous journey of merit to find the far away, transcendent God who separates himself form people, but rather a journey and celebration of love and faith to the glory of God who has revealed himself to us in Christ. This does not take away the fact that many pilgrims do value certain places as significant where God has especially manifested his presence or places which have been over centuries saturated by prayer and worship.

The monastic retreat experience is to feel and know in one's heart and mind, the reality of Gods' loving presence. To go on retreat should not mean to run away from a world where God is not present to a place where he is present. In the words of Brother Ramon (1987:125), "he is the God whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." Nevertheless, to go on retreat could become 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 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 visited over the years exuberated power, holiness, silence and the mysteries of God. To be able to add personal prayers, solitude and silence to those of the community or pilgrims who have visited over the years, can become 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 God and his people were for many powerful transforming contexts within which to pilgrimage for a retreat.

The *desert*, to which the early mystics (fourth and fifth century BCE) retreated to, became a metaphor in monastic spirituality for silence, solitude, and unceasing prayer and of the spiritual hunger and thirst for God and communion with him. To retreat to the desert were for them also an escape from a tempting conformity to the world to a way of life that can prevent the world from shaping man and woman in its image and enhance life in the Spirit (Merton 1960:3; cf Nouwen 1990:15; 91-94). 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* or elements of desert spirituality in a dehumanized, deluded and denatured world. The desert metaphor may provide 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 interrupting the ordinary sometimes conventional, routine piety pattern of life (cf Steere 1967:95). Retreat as desert experience proved helpful to retreatants to become quiet, alert, more perceptive, recollected, and reflective. In the process, certain issues of life became clearer and reality more recognizable and unambiguous. It opened windows to the mysterious, mighty, sovereign God and his very real presence.

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 be 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 form 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 to 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.

APPENDIX ONE

Questions to pilgrims at the beginning of a retreat for example at Taize

- Name, address, nationality, country or city, church affiliation or tradition
- Please share with me aspects of your spiritual story or journey up to now?
- Have you been on a retreat before?
- Is it your first retreat of this kind e.g. at Taize?
- Why did you come, why are you here?
- Are there specific needs to be fulfilled or expectations to be met whilst you are here? What are they?

Questions asked during or just after the experience

- How would you describe your experience of this retreat at this stage?
- What about more specifically the prayer meetings, music, silence, place, atmosphere, silence, solitude, group discussions etc
- Were your expectations met or not? Why?
- Would you say, "This was a meaningful and worthwhile experience for me" or "This was not a meaningful or worthwhile experience to me".

Explain or describe your answer

- If you have been to other retreats before, compare it with this one
- Are you taking back something with you after this or not? Any decisions made or goals because of it? If so, could you describe it please?

Interview questions put to Franciscan monks

At Sacro Convento di San Francesco - in Italy, Assisi

- Name and background
- Please tell me the story of your walk or journey with God
- How did it happen that you became a monk of the Franciscan order?
- How would you describe, what is monastic spirituality for you?
- What would you say is the heart of Franciscan spirituality?
- How does it compare to other monastic traditions for example Benedictine or Taize orders? Similarities and differences
- How would you describe the role of this community within the broader town of Assisi e.g. the poorest of the poor, and local churches/parishes?
- Would you describe this Basilica or Holy Place as a sort of retreat centre? Do people come here as pilgrims to spend a few days here and why?
- How do you see the role or function of retreat in our modern society?
- What is that attract people worldwide to Franciscan spirituality?
- How would you describe your way of life within this specific order, and in what way do pilgrims become part of it while here? What do you think are the impact or influence of the liturgy or prayer times on pilgrims?
- Has monastic life and holy places something to offer society today? Could you elaborate on it?

Interview questions put to Benedictine monks at La Pierre Qui Vire

- Could you please tell me more about the history of this monastery.
- From the moment I arrived here at the monastery I was welcomed in a very special and hospitable way by one of the brothers at the door and has experienced so much love and kindness despite language barriers. Is this the way everyone is welcomed and treated who knocks at the huge door of La Pierre Qui Vire?
- Is it very different from the other Benedictine orders and in what way /
- Tell me more about the presiding Abbot, how is he elected and what is his role and function within the community?
- Could you explain the liturgy or seven prayer offices everyday in the chapel?
- How does Benedictine monastic spirituality view prayer and does your tradition offer a particular way of praying that is also practiced here?
- What to your mind is the main characteristic of the life of a Benedictine monk?
- I noticed that the brothers here are involved in a variety of activities or work. How do monks view work within the context of a monastery and retreatants that come here?
- I also noticed that this monastery is a very quiet place, silence at mealtimes, brothers using words sparingly and an atmosphere of silent reflection. Could you elaborate on/respond to this observation?
- Why would you say are many people drawn to monasteries and retreats and why to this specific place?
- Would you recommend retreat to all people?
- What is your personal view on retreat?

Interview Questions put to Dutch Reformed pilgrims in South Africa

- Name:
- Address:
- Nationality:
- Country :
- City:
- Occupation:
- Church affiliation or tradition:

- Have you ever been on a retreat before? Where and when did it take place?

What did you experience there?

- Why did you come, why are you here?

- Are/were there specific needs that you want to be fulfilled or expectations to be met whilst you are here? What are they?

- What about the specific venue where retreats are held, is the place important to you or not at all?

- How would you describe your experience of this retreat?

- What about more specifically the Divine Office (prayer meetings) music, silence, place, atmosphere, music, solitude, group discussions, icons, colours, ritual, etc. Could you elaborate on it please

- Were your expectations met or not? (Why or why not?)

- Would you say, "This was a meaningful and worthwhile experience for me" or "This was not a meaningful or worthwhile experience to me".
Explain or describe your response
- If you have been to other retreats before, how do you compare it/them to this specific experience?
- Are you taking back something with you after this or not?
Any decisions made or goals because of it? If any describe it please
- Any other input, or response you would like to give?

A narrative interview

Could you please tell me the story of your spiritual journey and how it unfolded over the years up to now at this retreat, you may start as far back as you wish....?

Interview schedule with brothers at Taize

1. What would you say is at the heart of the pilgrimage of Taize?
2. Why has Taize become so popular over the years, especially amongst young adults from all over the world? What is the attraction?
3. Why do you think do young people even the not so religious ones become so easily immersed into the monastic atmosphere and feel at home here?
4. Why is it that pilgrims or retreatants at Taize become much more part of the prayers in the church of reconciliation (definitely not mere spectators as in some other monasteries). Was it like this since the beginning?
5. The popularity of the unique music of Taize, more than ninety different editions published and compact discs distributed worldwide is amazing, why do you think is the music so popular?
6. Could you explain to me the Divine Office or liturgy, and the icons and the colours in the church of reconciliation?
7. What would you say is the purpose and function of the periodic Letter from Taize that Br. Roger writes and published in 58 languages?
8. Could you explain how Catholic and Protestant priests live together in this monastery in spite of theological differences?

APPENDIX TWO

Retreat survey Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS please circle the appropriate answers

below

This part of the questionnaire asks for some information about yourself, your church, your faith, and spirituality

1.1 What is your sex?

Male

Female

1.2 What is your age?

Under 25

30-34

35-39

40-44

45-49

50-54

55-59

60-64

65-69

70-74

75 or over

1.3 What is your marital status?

Single

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Divorced and remarried

1.4 What qualifications do you have?

Still attending school

Diploma

Degree

Honors

Masters

Doctorate

Other

(Specify please)

1.5 What is your occupation?

(Please be as precise as possible)

1.6 What church denomination do you attend currently?

And in the past?

1.7 Have you been on a Retreat before?

1.8 If "yes", When? :

And number of times? :

1.9 Which one of the following describe your preferred spirituality/ your way of experiencing God and relating to Him, the best:

1.9.1 Intellectual/rational/left-brain/logic/reserved

1.9.2 Emotional/feelings/right-brain

1.9.3 Meditative/silent/listening/monastic

1.9.4 Charismatic/exhibitive/joyful noise/extravert/gifts of the Spirit

1.9.5 Good works/busy Kingdom worker/actions for God and others

Transformation	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
Renewal/regeneration	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
To be alone with God	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
Rest	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
Silence	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
To be with Christians	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
Experiencing God's presence	very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
Other (specify please):							

2.1 INSTRUCTIONS : please encircle the number of the one with which you agree the most:

My definition or idea of retreat is:

2.2.1 To go away from my normal circumstances and life world to a specific place to be with God

2.2.2 To leave the busy, noisy, hustle-bustle atmosphere and go to a place where I can be quiet, experience rest, listening to God and being in his presence in a more focused, concentrated and profound way

2.2.3 To leave my normal routine and circumstances for a different environment where I can spent time alone with God as well as with other Christians

2.2.4 To go away to a place where I can pray, worship, have bible studies play, relax and enjoy the presence of God together with other Christians

2.2.5 Not one of the above (please give another definition then):

2.2 INSTRUCTIONS: rank your preference regarding the following Types or Ways of retreat from 1 to 7, where 1 is the highest and 7 the lowest:

2.3.1 *'Church Camp' type of atmosphere:*

(big hall, dormitories, bible studies,
group interactions, small group
activities, games, lots of singing
and talking, worshipping songs, -----
laughter, playing)

2.3.2 *Retreat with others at a Retreat Centre*

(directed retreat by a Spiritual Director,
different aspects covered depending on -----
who the leader is)

2.3.3 *Silent Retreat*

(mainly silence, lots of solitude, focus is -----
on being alone with God, waiting, listening,
meditating, talking only when absolutely
necessary)

2.3.4 *Charismatic type retreat*

(more "noisy", joyful noise to the Lord,
gifts of the Spirit, praise and worship, bible -----
teaching on the Holy Spirit, prophecies, prayers)

2.3.5 *Personal Retreat alone at a Retreat Centre*

(a non-directed retreat, no spiritual director, not -----
within a group or with others)

2.3.6 *Monastery type Retreat at a Retreat centre or a
"Holy Place"*

(Chapel/Cathedral, specific divine offices or prayer times in
chapel, enough time for silent meditation, listening
prayer, alone and together with others before God, short
scripture meditations, more time to spent time alone -----
with God, longer periods of silence alternating with shorter
group discussions, more subdued worshipping and music)

2.3.7 *I do not feel drawn to Retreat at all*

(no interest in the subject or phenomenon
or to go on a retreat of any kind) -----

2.4 **INSTRUCTIONS:** Please choose one or more of the following listed below
(encircle appropriate ones):

Which of the following elements should be part of a Retreat. Choose the elements you feel could significantly contribute to making it a meaningful spiritual experience for you personally in the presence of God:

- 2.4.1 Lively music
- 2.4.2 Quieter/softer music
- 2.4.3 Preaching
- 2.4.4 Bible Teaching
- 2.4.5 Group discussions
- 2.4.6 Bible readings (short, meditative)
- 2.4.7 Silence (longer and shorter periods)
- 2.4.8 Meditation (different variations)
- 2.4.9 Solitude (time alone with God)
- 2.4.10 Prayer/music/silence/singing in Chapel
- 2.4.11 Fasting
- 2.4.12 Intercessory prayer
- 2.4.13 Manual work or physical exercises
- 2.4.14 Games/informal play
- 2.4.15 Relaxation and breathing exercises
- 2.4.16 Visual elements: icons, candles, cross, banners, paintings, pictures etc
- 2.4.17 Spiritual Director/leader
- 2.4.18 Material or notes available to help direct the time spent at retreat
- 2.4.19 Any other elements not listed above (please add)

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer each question by putting a circle

around **ONE** of the responses 'yes', 'no' or '?'

(where '?' = 'don't know')

- 2.4.20 Is it a good thing to once in a while get away from it all and go on a retreat? Yes No
- 2.4.21 Do you think there is a growing interest in the subject of Retreat ? Yes No
- 2.4.22 Would you say that retreat is for all Christians (is it everyone's cup of tea)? Yes No
- 2.4.23 Could retreat be an effective way to move deeper into the presence of God? Yes No
- 2.4.24 Should all leaders in the church be going on retreat? Yes No
- 2.4.25 Are you convinced that inner healing and renewal take place whilst on retreat ? Yes No
- 2.4.26 Do you feel that the place where a retreat takes place, plays a significant role ? Yes No
- 2.5.8 Does going on retreat draw people closer to God Yes No
- 2.5.9 Could young people (teenagers) benefit from taking part in a retreat where the focus is on silence, meditation, prayer and being alone with God Yes No
- 2.5.10 Could we learn from the way other denominations/church traditions e.g. Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox churches view and conduct retreat. (Could they contribute to the way retreat is conducted in your own church tradition) ? Yes No

2.6 INSTRUCTIONS : please encircle one or more of the following you agree with the most :

I would prefer to go on Retreat with :

- 2.6.1 Christians of my own congregation
- 2.6.2 Christians of my own church denomination
- 2.6.3 Christians of other church denominations
- 2.6.4 People I know
- 2.6.5 People I don't know
- 2.6.6 Members of other religions
- 2.6.7 Christians from a variety of churches and Denominations
- 2.6.8 Others not listed above (specify please)

2.7 INSTRUCTIONS : Please rank your order of preference by numbering 1 - 7 regarding the Place or Venue where a Retreat takes place. (*Where 1 is your first choice and 7 is your least preference*):

- 2.7.1 Tranquil quiet, and serene -----
- 2.7.2 'Holy Place': a quiet and deep prayer atmosphere -----
- 2.7.3 Chapel or Cathedral -----
- 2.7.4 Gardens, part of nature, water, trees -----
- 2.7.5 Luxurious accommodation and great food -----
- 2.7.6 Symbols e.g. icons, statues, cross etc portraying message of the Gospels and the presence of God -----
- 2.7.7 The place is not important at all -----

2.7.8 Other suggestions regarding the venue? (please describe)

2.8 INSTRUCTIONS : in this section please circle EITHER (a)

OR (b). Select only ONE option in every line

2.8.1 Which of the following do you prefer whilst on a Retreat?

EITHER

OR

(a) silence

(b) wordiness

(a) meditation

(b) teaching

(a) alone with God

(b) group interaction

(a) time in chapel

(b) time in room

(a) short bible meditation

(b) bible study

(a) eating in silence

(b) talking in dining room

(a) singing

(b) listening to music

(a) more spiritual direction by leader

(b) less direction given

2.9 Any comments regarding retreat?

2.10 Please provide also the following info (optional) :

Name

Surname

Address

(Thank you so much for your time and input!)

APPENDIX 3

WHY GO ON RETREAT: MOTIVATION

	TOTAL	YOUTH
1 PRESENCE OF GOD (seeking, being with, closer to, experiencing)	114	16
2 SILENCE	62	0
3 SOLITUDE	29	1
4 PRAYER (listening prayer, prayer of the heart)	37	0
5 TRANSFORMATION (renewal, inner healing)	74	12
6 REST (in God, relax in His presence)	24	0
7 BEING WITH OTHERS	19	5
8 GETTING AWAY (retrace, hustle & bustle)	25	2
9 SPIRITUAL GROWTH	40	18

THE VENUE WHERE RETREAT TAKES PLACE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

	YES	NO
1 IS IT IMPORTANT?	175	15
	TOTAL	YOUTH
2 TRANQUIL, QUIET, SERENE (away from noise)	65	2
3 HOLY PLACE (prayerlike atmosphere)	36	3
4 CHAPEL - CATHEDRAL	20	0
5 NATURE (gardens, water, mountains, etc.)	60	4
6 ACCOMMODATION - FOOD		
Luxurious, High standard	1	0
Simple, clean	9	0
7 SYMBOLS (icons, cross, paintings)	18	5

PREFERENCE REGARDING: TYPES OR WAYS OF RETREAT

	TOTAL	YOUTH
1 CHURCH CAMP (big hall,dormitories, biblestudies,group activities, games,singing,prayer,talking)	17	14
2 RETREAT AT RETREAT CENTRE (with others,spiritual director)	53	
3 SILENT RETREAT (mainly silence,lots solitude)	29	0
4 CHARISMATIC - PENTACOSTAL (joyfull noise ,lively praise & worship, biblestudy,prophecies,prayer)	2	
5 PERSONAL RETREAT (alone at retreat centre,no spiritual director)	14	
6 MONASTIC AT RETREAT CENTRE (chapel,cathedral,divine office-prayer meetings,silent meditation,listening prayer,alone & with others,short scripture meditations,more time alone with God,longer periods of silence, some group discussions,sudued worshipping)	101	28
7 NOT DRAWN TO RETREAT AT ALL	2	

DEFINITION OR IDEA OF RETREAT	TOTAL
1 To go away from normal environment and circumstances to a specific place, to be alone with God. (leaving the hustle & bustle life style to be in God's presence in a more focused and concentrated way)	39
2 To go away out of normal routine and circumstances to a different environment, to spend time with God and with other christians.	26
3 To go away to a place where I can pray, worship, have group bible studies, relax and enjoy the presence of God with other christians.	6
4 Not one of the above	0

EXPERIENCE OF THE MONASTIC WAY OF RETREAT

WAS THIS A MEANINGFUL RETREAT - WERE EXPECTATIONS MET?

	ADULTS	YOUTH	
NO	4		(Not ready for it, not what I expected)
YES	117	38	
1 Presence of God - Closer to God	79	19	
2 Regeneration - Healing	29	6	
3 Spiritual growth	15	8	
4 Away from it all - rest,peace,nature	30	4	
5 With other Christians	13	4	
6 Answers from God - Voice of God	28	6	

Other Responses:

- 1 Retreat too long - 1
- 2 Too short - 1
- 3 Too much lecturing - 2
- 4 Big hall too impersonal - 2
- 5 Other group at same venue - noisy - 9
- 6 Youth retreat: Other retreatants too noisy and shallow - 17
- 7 Difficulty with silence in beginning - 7
- 8 Floor, kneeling uncomfortable - 3

WAY OF RETREAT (Type of retreat ,elements of the retreat)

What could significantly contribute to make it a meaningful experience in the presence of God.

	TOTAL	
1 Lively Music - praise and worship	6	
2 Quieter,softer music (Taize,Gregorian,Classical,New Age)	61	
3 Preaching	0	
4 Bible study	3	
5 Group discussions	37	
6 Bible readings - Short meditative	20	
7 Silence - longer and shorter periods	84	
8 Meditation-Contemplation	20	
9 Solitude - time alone with God	44	
10 Liturgy,atmosphere in chapel - rituals,prayer,music etc.	93	
11 Fasting	2	
12 Intercessory prayer	2	
13 Manual work - exersice	0	
14 Games	1	
15 Relaxation,breathing exersices	14	
16 Visual elements-Icons,candles,cross,banners,paintings,etc.	58	Adults
	35	teenagers
17 Spiritual director - leadership role	48	
18 Notes - material,handouts	11	
19 Other elements - nature	16	

Ideas, recommendations from Retreatants regarding the Way of Retreat - Elements of a meaningful retreat with God:

- * A balance and unity between meditation, music, silence, solitude, visuals, group discussions etc
- * Time and opportunity for rest, sleep, prayer, healing
- * More explanation on the periods of silence and content of it
- * Silence, Lectio Divina, Eucharist, Group Sharing
- * Silence, Worship, Group discussion
- * Solitude, Silence, Lectio Divina, prayer
- * Scripture meditation, Prayer, Peace, Tranquillity
- * Lectio Divina, Prayer of the heart
- * Teaching on Meditation and Lectio Divina
- * Time spent in nature, Way of beauty, Silence, Music, Meditation, Eucharist
- * Soltude, Rest
- * Liturgy : Psalms, Silence, Meditation, Eucharist
- * Spiritual Director available for meeting one to one
- * Some retreatants more advanced than others regarding Retreat experience
- * Silence, Holy-consecrated-prayer saturated atmosphere
- * Most retreatants do not prefer silence during meals
- * Time alone with God,less time for group discussions, Silence with time for wordiness
- * More secluded and quiet venues for Retreat preferred
- * More time periods for Silence
- * Chapel atmosphere and times are very important
- * Nature - beauty of gardens, water, mountains, flowers
- * More time available for one-to-one discussions with Spiritual Director

SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH STORIES

Preferred spirituality:

	TOTAL
1 Intellectualistic, rational, logic, more conservative (left brain orientated)	10
2 Emotional, feelings, (right brain orientated)	23
3 Mystical, meditative, silence	63
4 Charismatic, exhibitivite, joyful	10
5 Action orientated, more busy kingdom worker	9

(Teenagers were mostly Dutch Reformed with a more charismatic emotional spirituality, but they grasped the more monastic and silent aspects of the retreat)
Their responses are not reflected in above totals.

6 Others:

6.1 Combined Spiritualities	4
6.2 Charismatic and Mystical	4
6.3 Intellectual, emotional, mystical	3
6.4 Profound need to experience God in a deep and profound way	20

SUMMARY OF FAITH STORIES:

Teenagers :

More rebellious, questioning but also hungry for God. Quite a few so called "drop outs or trouble makers who were only there for the so called jol.

Most of them wanted a touch from God, healing, hope, forgiveness and a deeper experience of God

Other Retreats :

Mostly Dutch Reformed, Christia Reformed upbringing, traditional value systems. Many experienced a "conversion" or regeneration when they were teenagers. Most of them lead very busy and complicated lives, tired, feelings of guilt because of way of life that "neglects God".

Most of them wanted more intimacy with God especially the group of 24/7 (real God-Chasers!)

Most retreatants wanted to learn and experience more of God via the more "classical disciplines" e.g the monastic way

ON RETREAT BEFORE ?

TEENAGERS	29
OTHERS	72

AFTER RETREAT: The way forward.

	Adults	Youth	TOTAL
1 Retreat as part of life in future (1day, 1/2 day or weekend)	41	9	50
2 Impact, positive influence of the retreat on :			
2.1 Relationship with God	31	9	40
2.2 Relationship with others	10	4	14
2.3 Self (Inner life)	10	14	24
3 Solitude, silence, contemplative, more monastic way of life in future			30
4 Future guidance on:			
4.1 How to apply this life enriching experience in every day busy, noisy life	33	18	51
4.2 Monastic way of life, prayer of the heart			20
5 Other responses:			
- Symbols e.g. cross or eagle etc. to help remind of retreat as a way of life			
- A place of retreat or spot at home			
- What about a retreat for women only?			
- Retreat every three months, shorter not necessary a a weekend			
- The need for spiritual direction on journey through life.			

COMPARISON WITH OTHER RETREATS THEY HAVE BEEN ON BEFORE

1. Most of the retreatants who have been on retreat before, distinguish clearly between the more camplike, biblestudy, group orientated, church camp types of retreat and this specific monastic type of retreat.
2. The atmosphere of the monastic retreat was perceived by the retreatants as more holy, subdued, and moving deeper into the presence of God.
3. The link between the different monastic retreats (different spiritual directors, venues, programmes) were made on the basis of e.g. chapel, times of silence, contemplation, meditation, music , nature and symbols - icons.

SUMMARY:

Retreats - { 9

One retreat no questionnaires only own experience

All retreats own experiences and observations

Questionnaires : total - 190 (included 42 teenagers)

159 received back : 83.7 % response rate !

teenagers retreat : 14-16 years

Rest : between 28 and 60

Venues : Good Shepherd, Leopard Lodge, Stigmatine Brothers, Heidelberg

WAY OF RETREAT (Type of retreat ,elements of the retreat)

What could significantly contribute to make it a meaningful experience in the presence of God.

	TOTAL	
1 Lively Music - praise and worship	6	
2 Quieter,softer music (Taize,Gregorian,Classical,New Age)	61	
3 Preaching	0	
4 Bible study	3	
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13 Manual work - exersice	0	
14 Games	1	
15 Relaxation,breathing exersices	14	
16 Visual elements-Icons,candles,cross,banners,paintings,etc.	58	Adults
	35	teenagers
17 Spiritual director - leadership role	48	
18 Notes - material,handouts	11	
19 Other elements - nature	16	

Ideas, recommendations from Retreatants regarding the Way of Retreat - Elements of a meaningful retreat with God:

- * A balance and unity between meditation, music, silence, solitude, visuals, group discussions etc
- * Time and opportunity for rest, sleep, prayer, healing
- * More explanation on the periods of silence and content of it
- * Silence, Lectio Divina, Eucharist, Group Sharing
- * Silence, Worship, Group discussion
- * Solitude, Silence, Lectio Divina, prayer
- * Scripture meditation, Prayer, Peace, Tranquillity
- * Lectio Divina, Prayer of the heart
- * Teaching on Meditation and Lectio Divina
- * Time spent in nature, Way of beauty, Silence, Music, Meditation, Eucharist
- * Soltude, Rest
- * Liturgy : Psalms, Silence, Meditation, Eucharist
- * Spiritual Director available for meeting one to one
- * Some retreatants more advanced than others regarding Retreat experience
- * Silence, Holy-consecrated-prayer saturated atmosphere
- * Most retreatants do not prefer silence during meals
- * Time alone with God,less time for group discussions, Silence with time for wordiness
- * More secluded and quiet venues for Retreat preferred
- * More time periods for Silence
- * Chapel atmosphere and times are very important
- * Nature - beauty of gardens, water, mountains, flowers
- * More time available for one-to-one discussions with Spiritual Director

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