CHAPTER 3

POSITIONING OF THE RESEARCH: PLANTING AND FERTILISING THE FIELD

I am keeping the metaphors of ripening, pregnancy and birthing in mind when doing this research on infertility. I have the expectation that some kind of union, some kind of integration, is taking place between the researcher and the research process, as well as between the researcher and the co-researchers. 'For us, the aim of research is not to bring about change, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into those stories' (Müller et al 2001:2). I foresee that we will be touched by each other's stories, and that we will perhaps be, in some way, different after these encounters.

At the same time, I believe that a separating or a bringing forth (a type of birthing) will continue, partly because of the spiraling, circular movement that takes place when research is done, when the notion of reflexivity has been implemented. According to Steier (1991:2), reflexivity makes multiple perspectives possible, including the perceiving of the self. Reflexivity is described as a 'turning back of one's experience upon oneself', by Mead (in Steier 1991:2). These processes of bending back, as well as the experiences of coming to different understandings, must be understood as socially constructed. It can be referred to as a circular process, with reflexivity as the motioning relationship, allowing for the circularity (Steier 1991:2). In the same vein, Berg (1998:17) proposes a research process that is spiraling rather than linear. Starting with an idea, the researcher is spiraling forward through all the subsequent stages of research. However, no stage (from idea, theory, design, data collection, to analysis and findings) is ever completely left behind, since there is a continuous harking back to previous processes. The 'emergent design' is described, as the fourth and final element in the hermeneutic circle in the context of research inquiry (Guba & Lincoln 1989:179). It refers to the research process of cycling and recycling the hermeneutic circle, of going back and forth as a way to get a more focused research design. The researcher is positioned from a place of 'not knowing' (or not knowing what he or she doesn't know) about various design issues, and evaluation takes place as 'an emergent

process' (1989:254). As new information emerges, and new constructions are unfolding, the design takes shape in a serial manner.

In arguing for a 'reflexive methodology' in research, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:248) highlight the importance of breath and variation in interpretation. The principle of reflection and interpretation represents a movement of 'quadri-hermeneutics'. They identify four levels of interpretation, consisting of the empirical material or construction of data, interpretation, critical interpretation and self-critical and linguistic reflection. Various directions and reversals in the process of reflection are posited, thereby emphasising a 'broader, multilevel area of reflection' (2000:248). The term, reflexive, are preferred, instead of 'reflecting', indicating that the abovementioned levels, are' reflected in each other', and not merely, reflected upon.

Lawson (in Michael 1990:179) describes reflexivity as a critical review of one's premises and says that, taken to its extreme, it can lead to non-belief in epistemological, moral or aesthetic fundamentals. In taking reflexivity to its furthest point, all premises are enduringly questioned. Although it can be argued that reflexivity is latent in all behaviour Harr, (in Michael 1990:180), taking a stance in favour of reflexivity will enhance the conscious questioning of one's perspectives and the options of substitute points of understanding. I am confident that new meaning, new possibilities, will be born out of the telling and interpreting, the re-telling and re-interpreting that go hand in hand with narrative research.

In undertaking this research, I am paying respect to ethics and acknowledging my own values when it comes to how I think about the world, about people and about myself. I believe that, in choosing to do research in this way, on this theme, it says a great deal about me. But it also points to the kind of world I would like to live in. Steier (1991:3) suggests that we see research 'as constituted by processes of social reflexivity, and then, of self-reflexivity as social process'.

I will explain the epistemological contexts from both the theological and the methodological perspectives. In accordance with the metaphors of pregnancy and birth, that intention implies a coming together of two worlds, a complementary

relationship, I am making use of certain methodologies as a fitting response to and effusion of the theological grounding on which I have decided. Epistemologically, I position myself within the postfoundationalist point of departure and narrative practical theology. I associate myself with some of the viewpoints and values of feminist theology, specifically those of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Denise Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm. As far as my methodological preferences are concerned, I am comfortable with the assumptions of the social constructionist paradigm, and my approach will embrace some of the basic ideas of participatory action research.

3.1 Epistemology: points of departure

Epistemology points to a philosophical reflection on knowledge, including its origin, foundations, language, limitations, nature and the means of acquiring it (Deist 1984:84). Epistemology can also be seen as the 'nature of knowledge and justification' (Schwandt 1997:39), as it goes a long way to justifying the use of one particular methodology in preference to any other for a particular research project. The aim, practice and assumptions of epistemological theory and the methodology for exploring it must be in harmony.

Tracy's viewpoint deserves broad attention. Tracy (1981:5) states that, if one would like to know what theology is, one should first ask questions about the theologian's self-understanding. He explains that each theologian addresses three specific, related social realities (or publics), namely, the wider society, the academy and the church. The reality of each 'particular social locus' affects the theology and the kind of emphasis the theologian places on it. It also affects the self-understanding of the theologian' (Tracy 1981:5).

However, it is not only social realities that influence the theologian (person or group), but also the theologian, who in turn affects social realities, says Tracy (1981:69):

> Any proper understanding of praxis demands some form of authentic personal
> involvement and/or commitment. Any individual becomes who he or she is as an
> authentic or inauthentic subject by actions in an inter-subjective world with other

subjects and in relationship to concrete social and historical structures and movements'.

Tracy thus emphasises the interrelatedness of people, institutions and ideas in society and their influence on society.

He also makes a distinction between the three different disciplines of theologies as he sees them, namely, the fundamental, the systematic and the practical. Regarding the field of practical theologies, Tracy (1981:58) explains their character and focus in relation to the following five areas.

With regard to the area of primary reference group, practical theology addresses society in terms of the social, political, cultural or pastoral movement in respect of the religious focus.

Concerning modes of argument, he states that practical theologies regard praxis as the best way to understand and measure the meaning and truth of theology. In this sense, praxis is to be understood as practice that is informed by and capable of informing, as well as transforming existing theory.

Tracy regards the ethical stances of practical theologies as 'giving responsible commitment to and sometimes even involvement in a situation of praxis' (Tracy 1981:57).

Concerning religious stances, he believes practical theologians usually become personally drawn in and committed to a 'particular religious tradition or a particular praxis movement bearing religious significance'.

Lastly, with reference to expressing claims about meaning and truth, he describes practical theologies as becoming involved in praxis that leads to transformation, in addition to being able to clearly articulate this in a theological and 'philosophical, social-scientific, culturally analytic or religiously prophetic manner'.

According to Poling and Miller (in Burger 1991:17), David Tracy understands doing theology in the context of the social community as practical theology. For Tracy, the core question is how the world can be transformed in the context of theological ethics. The focus is firmly on the world, and not on the academy (which he calls fundamental theology) or on the church (which he calls systematic theology).

Does this imply, then, that theology can be practical only if it concerns the world outside the church and academe?

Demasure (2004:222) explains Tracy's definition of practical theology as follows:

> Practical Theology is the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian fact and the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation.

She understands Tracy's 'mutually critical correlation' to refer to the diverse ways in which the correlation can take place: questioning and answering in a reciprocal manner between human beings, as well as a Christian message. This differs from the approach of Paul Tillich, who places the idea of questioning solely on the shoulders of the human agent, and answering only on the account of the Christian message. The term 'interpreted' points to the fact that language and symbols are needed to mediate between tradition and the here and now. Demasure explains Tracy's understanding of praxis and theory as interconnected, in such a way that praxis is seen as an expression of theory, although not as a deduction of a particular theory (when the theory would not be influenced by praxis). Tracy uses the phrase 'Christian fact', says Demasure, instead of terms like *kerugma* and message, to illustrate that Christianity is embedded, not in the imagination, but in reality. It also illustrates that Tracy, in using the term 'fact', believes that more than merely the text is embraced. Life itself is involved: events, practices, rituals and imaginings are involved. The wording of 'the contemporary situation' points to the way in which it is instrumental in the interpretation of tradition, and it also addresses the complexity of the context. It is clearly the context that shapes those questions that could or even should be asked about a certain situation (Demasure 2004:224).

The ideas of postmodernism and social constructionism have challenged all disciplines, including theology. My preference in the understanding of practical theological research (which fits in with the worldview of social constructionism) is to listen to the stories of the perspectives and convictions of people sharing how they think about God, how they believe He is communicating to them and others, how they know He is present or absent in their lives, and in the lives of the communities in which they are living. Amirtham (1989: vii) urges:

> For the sake of vitality and faithfulness, for the sake of relevance and wholeness, theology needs the experience and faith reflections of all believers. It is they who live amidst the conflicts and challenges of everyday life, it is they who strive to relate their struggles and aspirations to the faith.

Of course, the practical theologian does not come to an understanding merely by way of attaining knowledge in the act or art of listening, but by adhering to a certain process that is indeed practical in character.

In my work environment at a large state hospital, where I engage in pastoral counselling (sometimes called facilitating) with patients, family and hospital staff, the above certainly holds true. The nursing staff experience God in various ways and to different degrees in their understaffed, underpaid, conflict-ridden working conditions. Patients experience God in their emotional or physical pain: a stillbirth, HIV positive, an amputated leg, a brain tumour or a kidney transplant. They wonder what God thinks about them, or what He is trying to tell them. They sometimes want to know what I (as counsellor) think is happening to them, because often the God they meet in their hospital experience is not the one they thought they knew. The cleaners, porters and doctors would certainly arrive at uniquely different descriptions and reflections of God's presence or absence in the passages of the hospital. All these perspectives are equally valid and true, and their stories of need, of God, life, hope and death infuse my own experiences and ideas about practical theology. It also influences other areas of my existence, for example, the people, processes and particular context of this study. To say that one is doing practical theology in the hospital environment, or any other environment for that matter, means starting and staying in the context, reminding

yourself to come back to the context if you have strayed and continuously reflecting on the context. In this research, I followed similar patterns of listening and reflecting with the co-researchers concerning their stories of infertility.

3.1.1 Practical Theology

What is the task of Practical Theology, Childs (1998) asks. He distinguishes clearly between systematic and pastoral theologians, describing the latter as those 'involved in the practice of and reflection upon pastoral care' (1998:202). He emphasises that pastoral theology has two characteristics. First is its particular empiricism of being specific: the detail of the case, the situation. This is and should be the focus point. Secondly, Childs describes pastoral theology as 'a form of practical wisdom' (1998:196) notably incapable of prescribing how to do things in general because it cannot predict how things, people or situations are going to develop or turn out. The knowledge derived through practical wisdom can thus only be learned in the practical moments of caring. Childs maintains that it is a knowledge that grows out of experience and is not cognitive or intellectual. Because it involves diverse, unpredictable human beings, the strength of practical wisdom lies in its being aware and able to respond to the 'action' and the 'particular' (Childs 1998:197). This viewpoint echoes van Huyssteen's (1997:4) focus on and acknowledgment of the contextuality of theology as seen from a postfoundationalist viewpoint.

Childs gives another important insight. Practical wisdom is not acquired or 'done' in an individual manner. Instead, it involves working closely with others who share the same tradition of what practical wisdom means. It entails relationship with others and with God. It involves emotion and reflectivity, and contains the possibility of self-enrichment.

Müller (2005:3) maintains that Practical Theology should stand out clearly from its theological cousins by virtue of its focus on a specific context. Arguably, all theology should be practical, but the discipline of Practical Theology should be even more so. Its focus should furthermore include a kind of methodology that honours the abovementioned practical, contextual stance. Müller proposes a methodology that maps the movement from context to theory and yet again to

context, with purpose and intent. He describes this as the circle of practical wisdom (Müller 2005:3).

The discipline of Practical Theology has at times seemed to struggle to find its identity and calling regarding the notion of praxis, but Browning's clarification helped in some ways to find the road back to the roots of practice. Müller (2005:1) refers to the concept of postfoundationalist practical theology as 'in itself a re-discovery of the basic forms of practical theology'.

Browning (1987:7) offered a new formulation for the historical way in which theological disciplines were described. Instead of regarding practical theology as only one of the subdivisions of a long line of theological disciplines, he sees theology in its entirety as 'fundamental practical theology' (1987:8). He links his different formulation, one that he regards as 'a revolution long overdue' (1987:8), to the logical effects of the practical philosophies of Ricoeur, Gadamer, Habermas and Rorty on the discipline of theology. He was influenced in his formulation by the fact that the basic assumptions of these practical philosophies point to practical thinking as the pivotal axis of human thinking. He sees theoretical and technical thinking as mere abstractions following practical thinking.

Let me digress for a moment to consider Gadamer's conception of the hermeneutic circle, otherwise called the 'circle of understanding', as he comments on Dasein's being in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Grondin (2003:104) says that both Heidegger and Gadamer stress the phenomenological meaning of the notion of a circle as the idea 'that all understanding necessarily (ontologically) proceeds from an anticipation of meaning'. For Gadamer, it is important to insist on the phenomenological aspect of a circle because it takes into consideration the interpreter's relatedness to both his/her object and tradition. Grondin (2003:107) explains Gadamer's thoughts on the ontological nature of the circle of understanding. The *terms of the circle* point to the circle as the whole as well as to its parts. As far as the *logical pertinence* is concerned, the circle indicates a rule of interpretation, a rhetorical issue. This phenomenological circle describes 'a constant process of revision in the anticipations of understanding, in the light of a greater knowledge of the parts and in the name of a greater coherence of

interpretation'. The *limit of the metaphor* of the 'circle of understanding' is that there is really no true circle (because it should not be defined from a linear, Cartesian perspective), but it symbolises the 'necessary coming-and-going of all understanding'. In fact, the circle invites 'constant revision (re-interpretation) of the hypotheses of meaning (in the name of 'the anticipation of perfection' recognised by the thing to be understood'. According to Gadamer's thinking, *to understand* is 'above all to listen to each other about the thing'. Furthermore, the future is not within our grasp, and can be anticipated solely because of our acquired past experiences. He believes, therefore, that the *source of anticipations* lies in the precedence of the past (a work of history), and not the future.

Grondin believes the circle points to the fact that 'all understanding emerges in favour of a universal context of which we are always and already a part' (2003:106). The idea of the circle can just as well be supplanted by the notion of a 'constellation of understanding', as the subject of understanding is in the grasp of specifics: 'at such a moment, it appears in time and space, in response to such a dialogical context, in such a "stellar" horizon'. He says, 'the subject of understanding always inscribes himself in a universe, in a horizon, of vision and sharing, where he allows himself to be challenged by a constellation of questions' (Grondin 2003:106).

Returning to Browning, it was stated previously that he was influenced by Gadamer's beliefs, and he adheres to the idea that people think practically. According to Browning, fundamental practical theology contains four sub-movements: descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic and strategic practical theology. In this last analysis, practical theology comes into its full practical bloom (Browning 1987:9). Transformation often becomes possible when a community is in crisis. In the midst of the discomfort of concrete situations, new questions emerge that attest to the practical situation, which leads to new theories about the praxis (Demasure 2004:27).

Browning (in Demasure 2004:225) advocates for a conversation between three parties in order for practical theology to be relevant as 'a revised correlational conversation' in which a critical approach is at stake. The three parties include the

voices of the Christian testimony in historical context, Christian experience and practice in the current context and the Christian experience in the personal context. Browning (in Demasure 2004:226) expresses himself as follows:

> [Practical theology] must find ways to include what is so often excluded, i.e. the personal experience and practices of the interpreter and, of course, the individuals in his or her audience, but always in dialogue with both wider cultural experience and normative Christian meanings and practices.

In defending his conviction that in theology there should be a movement from practice to theory to practice, he points out that theory always springs forth from practice, it never stands on its own; and that it points to the way human thinking is inclined. Furthermore, in comprehending and utilising the composition of practice-theory-practice, formal, academic theological thinking and writing on the one hand, and the more informal, practical efforts on the other hand, are brought closer together (Browning 1987:9).

There has also been, over the past few decades, some discrepancy between the academic standing of Practical Theology as a university subject as opposed to that of other theological subjects. One of the most frequent questions concerned whether practical theology was indeed theology rather than mere technique. Another point of view questioned whether practical theology was, in fact, simply theological application, a kind of after-thought, lacking context and methodology (Burger 1991:21). These stances also affected the ways in which both the task and the vision of practical theology were formulated. Theology students often understood practical theology to be the terrain where applied skills acquired from theoretical knowledge could be exercised. Müller (2005:2) states that one of the implications of practical theology's battle to be taken seriously as a scientific partner equal to the other theological disciplines was that it was (unfortunately) becoming more and more of an intellectual academic exercise. In its efforts to obtain scientific status, practical theology had lost its sense of the balance between theory and practice. As Müller (2005:2) explains, 'a disregard has developed for the many levels and forms of the practice of practical theology on the local as well as informal level'.

Heitink's (1993:18) definition of practical theology is as follows:

> Practical Theology as science of conduct (*handelingswetenschap*) is understood here in terms of empirically orientated theological theory of mediating the Christian faith within the praxis of modern society. (*My translation*).

He stresses the continuous tension between Christian tradition/faith and the modern community because the two influence each other. One without the other means that the true context of practical theology is not acknowledged.

Gerkin (1997) promotes a cultural-linguistic model for pastoral care, whereby the role of language and interpretation is acknowledged in an effort to understand human situations. He envisages the pastor as the interpretative guide who facilitates dialogue between the 'stories of life' and the 'grounding story of the Christian faith' (Gerkin 1997:111). Practical theology thus emphasises the connection between the two.

He advocates for the continuous implementation of certain images from the history and traditions of pastoral care, which are still applicable, although modified, to the changing future that lies ahead. The first image or function is that of the pastor in the roles of priest, prophet and wise guide, to be implemented with the necessary creative wisdom. The importance of balancing the functions of ritual practices, education and prophetic imagination, in which socio-cultural discourses shape and often suppress, is crucial (Gerkin 1997:80). The second image of the pastor is as a shepherd of the flock instead of judge and director of people. Gerkin emphasises that the shepherd should protect and strengthen those who are rendered powerless by their communities. The role of pastor as mediator and reconciler must be played out in such a way as to invite listening, consideration and explanations of all concerned, those in the faith community as well as the individual members of that community. In the last instance, Gerkin (1997:82) presents the image of the pastor as ritualistic leader, functioning not only with sacramental and symbolic acts but also as soul-carer of the flock. He acknowledges that individuals and communities are formed and shaped by perceptions, behaviours and meanings from socio-cultural dynamics.

Lartey's description (2000:74) of practical theology in terms of what he calls the 'way of being and doing' approach also reflects an awareness of the influence of socio-cultural forces on individuals, groups and the Christian faith itself. This approach invites theologians to be concerned about doing theology in such a way as to be reflective, thoughtful and inclusive. It also focuses on context, aware that faith exists in practice, and that faith and experience could be transformative. He mentions that this approach of hands-on practical theology (including some feminist and black theologies) was itself marginalised, and underutilised, because it stemmed from the greater value placed on theorising and the abstractions of practical theology, in addition to the drive for scientific status (see Müller 2005).

A distrust and dislike of interpreting scripture and the sources of the Christian tradition in the abstract is one of the characteristics of the theology of liberation. Gibellini (1987:10) is careful to point out that the theology of liberation is not the whole of theology, but rather a secondary theology that presupposes:

> Christian revelation and salvation, where a multiple and varied mediation continues to be at work: philology, history and philosophy. But in the specific quality of its discourse the theology of liberation gives priority to socio-analytical mediation.

Mediation, in this instance, means the instrument to achieve its goal.

Gibellini (1987:8) describes liberation theology according to Leonard Boff's definition in terms of four elements: first the preferred option, and thereafter, three mediations. Quoted by Gibbelini, Boff says:

> The theology of liberation tries to articulate a reading of reality beginning from the poor and with a concern for the liberation of the poor; to do this it uses the humane sciences and the social sciences, engages in theological meditation and calls for pastoral actions which help the way of the oppressed.

First, liberation theology prefers and presupposes a foregoing political and ethical option *vis à vis* the gospel. It chooses to evaluate the social world from the viewpoint of the poor, reflecting on the causes or reasons for poverty, and

subsequently acting for the liberation of the poor, alongside those who are oppressed. The fact that liberation theology is guided by the force of this ethical and political option makes it 'a theology of *desde* and *sobre,* from and about praxis, theology understood strictly as a second act' (1987:9).

The three mediations in which liberation theology engages are socio-analytics, hermeneutics and praxis. Liberation theology does not use philosophical methods or mediation in order to reflect and act, but rather uses the *social sciences,* favouring *socio-analytical* mediation, in its determination to both begin and aim at praxis.

Secondly, liberation theology uses hermeneutical mediation in the light of a specific political and social state of affairs, and does not interpret scripture or Christian tradition in the abstract. In fact, an understanding of social reality is articulated into a theological understanding, with the help of the theological concept of *salvation*, and the sociological concept of *liberation* in such a way that the theological proposition of *liberation is salvation* results. The hermeneutical circle consists of a specific situation that gives rise to present questions that are then positioned to the revelation. In Gibellini's words (1987:11), liberation theology claims that, in adhering to the cycle of the hermeneutical circle, it unshackles theology from false universalism, and indeed liberates theology.

In the third instance, liberation theology is focused on praxis. It makes use of practical and pastoral mediation following the acceptance of the previous two mediations. Together, the mutual articulation of three mediations leads to 'praxis of liberation', a balanced trilogy of scrutinising the experienced reality, theological reflection and pastoral reflections and actions (Gibellini 1987:11).

Pattison and Woodward (2000:36) pose the question of how pastoral theology is done, and present a critical, creative, conversational model using three viewpoints. The conversation is firstly from the viewpoint of one's own perceptions and assumptions, feelings, ideas, beliefs. Secondly, it uses those from the Christian community and tradition. In the third place, the conversation is with the situation or practice at hand. They regard pastoral theologies as transformational knowledge

that embraces wisdom and intuition. In other words, it involves more than just cognitive knowledge, but instead engages a 'complex view of reality which incorporates meanings, images, metaphors, stories and feelings as well as thoughts and actions' (Pattison & Woodward 2000:38). Pastoral theologies must also be truthful about (one's own) reality or the realities (of other people), even if this proves difficult. Furthermore, it should be apophatic, meaning that it has credibility and relevance only if it can fearlessly face the hiddenness and uncertainties associated with a God who is often known more by His apparent absence than His presence. Pastoral theologies should also be able to reflect on experience and situations in relation to theory and faith. This refers to an ordered and self-conscious reflection that focuses on human discourse (not only on God), a reflection in which insight is expected and which engages in reflection on the reflective process itself. This critical process of reflection is, amongst others, present in feminist practical theology that is, due to the nature of this study, of epistemological relevance.

3.1.2 Feminist Practical Theology

Schumacher (2004:ix) says a *new feminism,* was first launched by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* when he said:

> In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a 'new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of male domination, in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.

This new feminism, unlike traditional feminism, supports the full development of human life for the common good of all (Schumacher 2004:x).

Nicholas regards feminist practical theology as a division of practical theology, with a particular focus on women. It includes women's lives, the diversity of their experiences, 'and the particular features of their lives that are structured or constrained by a sexist society and theology' (Nicholas 1998:158). She explains that the methods of liberation theology drew her because of its focus on the

description of people's lived experiences; it also challenged the status quo of marginalised people. The method of liberation theology allowed for an interactive process between lived experience and discourses in both society and Church. Nicholas (1998) echoes other feminist theologians like Bons-Storm (1998:6) and Ackermann (1998:94) by underlining the importance of practical theology in liberating, healing and transforming. If practical theology were about listening and reflection alone, it would be helpless to unsettle the power structures of those more privileged. Practical theology, according to Nicholas, should therefore also be about questioning the various 'interpretive frameworks' people use to make sense of their lives. These frameworks function like filters that add or subtract value to people and things. Good practical theology cannot function within 'traditional frameworks of understanding and meaning', but must activate transformation and liberation (Nicholas 1998:158) by questioning and imagining new possibilities.

Riet Bons-Storm (1998:15) sees practical theology as 'faith lived in context' which combines the following: the context of the Christian tradition in terms of different theologies and its impact in the form of sermons and Christian education, the context in which people live their lives, as well as the quickening work of the Holy Spirit. She believes this communication of the Holy Spirit speaks to the hearts of women who long for a life of abundance as envisioned by God. This communication from God to women empowers them as 'theological agents' (1998:14) and gives them the right to be heard and taken seriously. She chooses the image of a child, the most vulnerable person in society, as a suitable metaphoric instrument to measure and test the inclusiveness of the practice of practical theology. But this image is more than merely a measuring rod. Her dream for theology is that it would undergo a practical change if marginalised small voices (like those of children, women and other unheard groups) could speak out with hope and imagination, trusting those with dominant voices to be included in the 'dialogue of faith' (1998:21).

Riet Bons-Storm (1998:16) uses the metaphor of a ladder to describe the hierarchical power-rendering factors an individual has at any given time in a social–cultural climate that determines their position on a particular rung of the

ladder. Those with a considerable number of 'power-rendering factors' in their favour are at the top of the ladder. Bons-Storm points out that the lower positions are synonymous with being sidelined and silenced. Feminist practical theology makes a point of bringing the voiceless, those in a weak position on the lowest rungs of the ladder, into the conversation. However, feminist theology does not intend to listen only to the marginalised; it is inclusive and inviting to all who want to take part in a dialogue of faith.

Bons-Storm describes a type of conversation that aims at mutual understanding, and at the same time acknowledges that God cannot be known. She points out that no one can claim to have the last word about God. What is possible, however, is that, without trying to 'convince or defeat' each other, the conversation about people's inspirational vision of hope can be shared in an equal, meaningful way, to include everyone's voice, but especially the voices of those who are powerless (Bons-Storm 1998:17).

The themes of women learning to listen to themselves, the effects of patriarchal power and the possibilities of healing have been addressed by Mary Daly in her groundbreaking book *Beyond God the Father*. Insight into sexism gives hope for change, because it exposes the evil of oppression and the damage it causes to members of both sexes. In her writings, Daly describes the 'worldwide phenomenon of sexual caste' (1973:2), stretching from Saudi Arabia to Sweden, and points out how this depressing system is kept in place by both the dominant and the so-called weaker sexes. She believes female consent is obtained through *sex role socialisation*, starting at birth. Most role players (parents, teachers, media, clothes manufacturers and professionals like doctors and psychologists) contribute to the unconscious and largely uncalculated dynamics of this socialisation process. However, the effect is that the attitudes, assumptions and arrangements of a sexually hierarchical society are kept in place.

Daly (1973:2) argues that women's low caste status has been and is, to this day, masked by *sex role segregation*. It boils down to a subtle but potent message about women who should (could?) be equal but different, where 'different' actually implies 'unequal', in an understated way. It feeds an unending cycle. Low caste

status is also masked by the fact that women have various forms of *unoriginal (derivative) status* relative to their ties with men, who possess the pivotal position in society. For instance, being both a daughter and wife supports identification with patriarchal institutions and often has the effect of pitting women against each other within their families. Lastly, *ideologies* have the power to confer certain identities upon men and women, with patriarchal religion as a particularly guilty party.

Daly maintains that the Christian tradition's interpretation of the story of the fall of Adam and Eve has held far-reaching implications for both the Church and society. 'As long as the myth of feminine evil is allowed to dominate human consciousness and social arrangements, it provides the setting for women's victimisation by both women and men' (1973:48). Women are blamed for bringing 'original sin' into the world because Eve offered the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to Adam, and women henceforth internalise the blame and guilt that go with it. Their complicity in believing this false naming is largely enforced by conditioning. The real culprit is not women (who are condemned to playing the part of the original sinner/temptress), but the 'demonic power structures which induce individuals to internalize false identities' (1973:49). She points out that the revelations offered by the myth of the Fall (which many people joke about and say that they don't take seriously) has, despite the light-hearted protestations, projected a negative image of the relationship between males and females, as well as the 'nature' of women, although this is often expressed in a veiled and residual manner.

Daly's viewpoint is that the myth of women's sin in Paradise has negatively prejudiced Church doctrines and civil laws, while male-centred ethical theories, social customs and destructive cultural patterns have no doubt influenced the thinking and formulations of feminist theology. The effect has been to cast light on the way in which the Judeo-Christian tradition lies embedded in patriarchy and in the self-righteous manner in which patriarchal religion has named, interpreted and spoken for women and about women, without ever acknowledging them in their fullness as human beings. The male viewpoint was basically metamorphosed into God's viewpoint, in which process the false naming relating to women and sin was legitimised. Daly (1973:4) is unapologetic about believing that the entire conceptual systems of theology and ethics have been developed under the

conditions of patriarchy. In making use of exclusively masculine symbolism for God, using masculine symbolism for the idea of divine 'incarnation' in human nature and applying masculine symbolism in terms of the creaturely relationship to God, sexual hierarchy is promoted and even glorified. Where does healing lie? Daly proposes that 'the liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves' (1973:8).

Rosemary Radford Ruether (2000:70) maintains that the 'experience of Christ in our lives reveals the nature of God as the power of co-humanity'. The Logos-Sophia of God is beyond male and female, and Christ's human maleness represents merely one expression of his many identities. A feminist view of ministry understands the Church as both a nurturing and a prophetic community of liberation from evil, including the evil that lives in the Church itself. Feminist theology moves through a 'continually deepening spiral of critique and reconstruction' in an attempt to bring healing to the Church as a whole, and in particular to men and women, who both 'possess the fullness of human nature in its complexity' (Ruether 2000:70). She mentions that several important feminist theologians, such as Mary Daly, had left Christianity because they've lost hope that Christianity can truly reform to display an inclusive character.

3.1.3 Postfoundational Practical Theology

A more recent development in practical theology, which is also relevant to feminist practical theology, is that of postfoundational practical theology. Van Huyssteen (1997:278) understands postmodernism as a continuation of the critical aspect of modernism turned against the questions it raised, and not directly opposed to modernism. Postmodern thought is in that sense part of the modern, and at once separated, since it critically reviews modernity's foundational assumptions. Furthermore, Van Huyssteen reintroduces modernity's two distinguishing ideas in a new light. Modernity's notion of the human being as basically rational and autonomous, and the differentiation of culture into autonomous spheres, such as science, art, morality and religion, linked in a universal notion of rationality, is reconfigured in the following way: The human subject is seen as shaped, but not determined by its context; as embedded in its traditions, while at the same time capable of criticizing it (Stone 2000:416).

Both science and theology are challenged in the light of postmodernism's discard of meta-narratives, and its acceptance of pluralism as a whole (Van Huyssteen 1997:268). Van Huyssteen's (1997:1) concern about Christian theology's interdisciplinary status facing up to the diversity and pluralism of contemporary postmodern thought, resulted in him exploring if and how Christian theology can join the postmodern conversation with especially the discipline of natural, scientific knowledge. The latter, usually accepted as the ultimate paradigm of human rationality, in relation to theology's character of ever so often, private and esoteric knowledge claims. The epistemological reason for the arguments in his essays (1997) is that contemporary philosophy of science, with its enduring focus on the problem of rationality, is probably the most important connection in the debate about the nature and standing of theological knowledge. He proposes a postfoundationalist theology as a 'positive appropriation of some constructive forms of postmodern criticism', and as an alternative to the claims of foundationalism's alleged objectivity on the one hand, and the extreme forms of most non-foundationalism, on the other. He describes foundationalism as the thesis that beliefs can be justified by some self-evident item of knowledge, resulting in an inflexible and infallible position, supported by evidential systems of various convictional beliefs. Within the world of postmodernism, non-foundationalism (or anti-foundationalism) has replaced foundationalism, in both theology and philosophy of science, as the preferred form of rationality. Non-foundationalists reject the idea of strong foundations underlying our beliefs, and rather describe belief-systems as together forming 'a groundless web of interrelated beliefs' (Van Huyssteen 1997:3). In addition, it argues that every community and context has its own rationality. Van Huyssteen cautions that the interdisciplinary status of theology could be fatally undermined if non-foundationalism is applied in its extreme form, where a total relativism of rationalities is implied. He proposes instead a postfoundationalist theology as a viable third epistemological option that makes the following two moves. 'First, it fully acknowledges contextuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic values that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be God's presence in this world. At the same time, however, a postfoundationalist

notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to point creatively beyond the confines of the local community, group or culture towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation' (Van Huyssteen 1997:4).

Stone (2000:417) comments on Van Huyssteen's refigured notion of rationality, as 'not a superimposed meta-narrative, but rather an emerging pattern that is evident in the ways of trying to make sense in every day life, whether it involves a quest for understanding, intelligibility or judgment'. Van Huyssteen rejects the idea that the domains of religious faith and scientific thought are exemplified by opposing notions of rationality. In the first instance, the a-contextual, generic, abstract (and simple) terms of 'theology and science' should be rejected in favour of specific and definite descriptions in terms of interdisciplinary dialogue between parties. Secondly, what Van Huyssteen calls 'the resources of human rationality' aid in overcoming different and seemingly incompatible reasoning strategies within different disciplines by leaving abstractions behind, and focussing on specific, interdisciplinary problems in a contextual and transversal way.

Flowing from the strengths of this 'more holistic, embodied way' to think about human rationality is the possibility of all theological and scientific disciplines to cross disciplinary lines in multidisciplinary research. While arguing for the integrity of their specific disciplines, overlapping concerns and shared problems can be identified. It opens up the opportunity for intellectual support or new insight from other disciplines.

Van Huyssteen (2006:41) describes interdisciplinary dialogue as a form of transversal reasoning, emerging as a 'performative praxis where our multiple beliefs and practices, our habits of thought and attitudes, our prejudices and judgments converge'. It is possible to maintain personal convictions, while at the same time stepping beyond the limitations and boundaries of specific contexts and disciplines. With this in mind, he proposes that theology should be able to claim a public, democratic voice on a par with other disciplines.

When referring specifically to a postfoundationalist theology, Van Huyssteen once again stresses the movement of being both contextual and interdisciplinary. Not only are we to acknowledge and articulate the way our belief is embedded in God,

and shaped by our personal and ecclesial commitments, but we should be critical of them. A rethinking and reconstructing is possible in as much as we acknowledge how its flexible and fluid nature have been shaped by the ongoing process of history (2006:114). The contextual and interdisciplinary movements as described by Van Huyssteen, form vital elements of the reconstruction of pastoral narrative theology and its related methodological epistemology.

3.1.4 Pastoral narrative theology

Demasure (2004:176) posits that the disciplines of theology, psychology and hermeneutics are all interested in the reality of the 'self'. The perspective differs in each case. What psychology names the self (or ego), theology calls the soul, according to Gerkin (in Demasure 2004:176). Furthermore, the hermeneutical self gives meaning to experiences and events. The life of the soul refers to the dynamics between three angles of a triangle consisting of the self/ego, the social situation and the interpretations of faith and culture. Constant interactions take place between so-called forces (things that are a given in a person's life) and the meaning that the individual ascribes to them. Gerkin (1984:93) maintains:

> The life of the self forms an interpretation, a narrative story, whose central task is
> to hold in coherence and continuity the relationships of the self within itself and
> with the object world beyond. I shall call this work of the self's life the
> hermeneutics of the self or, in more theological language, the life of the soul….

In addition to the complicated reciprocal workings of the elements of the life of the soul, Gerkin (1984:105) also accentuates the perspective of time. The self stands in relation to time and interprets events according to three different concepts of time. Time, as it relates to the experience of one's life cycle places an individual in a position relative to the past, present and future. In trying to find 'coherence' and 'continuity', the person reviews and relives experiences in ways that not only make a new future possible, but can also change their perceptions on the past. The self hovers between anticipation of what is to come, and the memories of what has been. The second concept of time underscores the context of the socio-cultural and historical in the life of an individual. While cultural influences certainly affect people, the opposite is also true. Tradition and innovation are both calling out to the individual and the group. Thirdly, the eschatological time frame overrides the

here and now, as well as the past. God's actions and communication place the person in a space and time between the already and the not yet. Gerkin (1984:146) uses the metaphor of a pilgrimage of the life of a soul, to describe the intention and hermeneutical process of trying to integrate the self in terms of all the different angles and planes described. 'The arena of potential fragmentation is enlarged to include all aspects of the self's interpretive life, including the ultimate aspect of its life in God' (1984:146). Complete integration is, however, not possible in this life. In other words, the self is not heading for the actualisation of itself in the sense that Carl Rogers proposed (Meyer et al 1988:401). That would demand a high level of congruency in which it is possible to know oneself completely (by knowing one's experiences as well as one's psychological and physical abilities) and to actualise one's self by integrating all the factors mentioned. Demasure (2004:180) points out that in Gerkin's critique on Hiltner's description of self-realisation he makes a distinction between the psychological and theological perspectives. In the theological understanding, as he sees it, humans can merely approach wholeness and integration in a fragmentary way, but never attain it.

Gerkin (1986:48) considers narrative theology to be grounded in the belief that the story of God as creator, sustainer and redeemer (as portrayed in the Bible) is also the story of the world. It is the main narrative against which all other narratives are resting. This Story is open-ended and refers to God's activity and stake in all the affairs of the world, and on behalf of the world as a whole, in all its pluralism and inconsistencies.

Furthermore, for Gerkin, the term 'narrative theology' means 'that the interpretation of the affairs of the world by Christian theology is fundamentally metaphorical' (1986:52). The biblical narrative of God conveys a rich variety of stories and themes that simultaneously reveal and hide the story of God. Part of this paradox is brought about by the use of metaphorical language in the Bible, but also because God is so utterly different from His creatures. Gerkin (1986:53) advocates that the story of Christian theology must be continuously set against the stories of all aspects of life, as well as all other religions.

Ganzevoort (1989:9) concurs with Gerkin on the viewpoints of the hermeneutical pastoral approach (1984, 1986) when he describes it as a personal meeting at which the narrative of the patient/client takes centre stage. The atmosphere and intentions in the meeting(s) make possible the action of searching in togetherness for meaning, comprehension, life story, interpretation and patterns of interpretation.

He believes the hermeneutical, interpretive approach is especially helpful for people who have experienced some kind of loss in their lives, for instance people affected by infertility. When people tell their life stories they weave fact and interpretation into authentic experiences. They try to understand what has happened or is happening and how it is affecting their today and tomorrows. In trying to understand, they interpret, and organise what they grasp into a picture, pattern or whole. Boisen (in Ganzevoort 1989:88) explains that spiritual suffering occurs at the point where it becomes difficult or impossible to find a link between an idea, experience or happening and a language of meaning relating to that. It is precisely at those points when the Life story breaks up, when expectations and future dreams collide with daily experiences. Then the Life story can be found again in a new way with new interpretations.
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Gerkin (1984:26) sees the primary function of pastoral counsellors to be that of listening and interpreting. Listening demonstrates caring, and makes healing possible. It is a powerful, but very elementary way of forging a link with another person. To listen to somebody is to give the utmost, namely, your attention, says Rachel Remen (1996:143). She believes that, if one listens without interrupting, a strong connection forms. Respect is shown. Listening means: not interrupting someone's story. In other words, listeners should not be tempted to start pouring out their own stories, even when the motive is to show solidarity with the one they are listening to. The listener should not subtly silence that person. The good intention of immediately giving a tissue in response to a counselee who becomes tearful is an example of an action that could potentially stop the flow of what is being communicated. It could be interpreted as: 'Your tears make me uncomfortable, so please, get a grip on yourself'. Or: 'Please stop crying, so that we can get on with the real communication, which is the verbal conversation

between us'. To encourage the person to keep on crying is equally unacceptable. 'Cry as much as you want to, just let it all out', makes the person self-conscious because it elevates the crying.

It is not a question of refusing the box of tissues when the counselee asks for it, but the counsellor has to be aware of what their words and actions might convey to the other person in terms of directing the process. To cry is to communicate a number of emotions. To be left in peace to cry gives one the chance to experience those emotions and learn from them. Remen (1996:143) confesses that the art of 'just listening' was one of the most difficult things she ever had to learn, because the process meant that she had to unlearn a number of things. She had always thought that just listening reflected timidity and, worse, stupidity. However, silent listening has tremendous healing power.

During a presentation at the University of Pretoria in July 2006, Professor Ganzevoort said that a methodology for pastoral theology that moves beyond mere intuition is needed, and that meaningful narratives help to harmonise a life story. The presence of suffering in an individual's story could be an indication that an inadequate interpretation has been made. In the realm of narrative theology, suffering can be described as fragments that do not fit into a life story. Stories can change someone's life, and a narrative can be seen as one of many possible perspectives on that person's reality. Ganzevoort believes that the most fundamental stories of our lives are conflicting.

He sees religion as narrative at its core, and humans as symbolic in nature. We therefore play the narrative game in our religious rituals and tell stories in our sermons. The question is: How does our religion function in our life stories? Religion itself should be acknowledged as a life story, capable of changing with the larger life story as such. As people can reach out only with symbols and metaphors, a full realisation of God is not possible. Revelation, that is, the way God comes closer and speaks to us, is also embodied by narrative. It is only in the course of our life stories that we can find God.

Truter (2002:2) alludes to this notion, preferring a contextual theology as a safe place for patients to meet God. The meaning that God gives to their lives can be explored within the 'experienced life context of her or his own illness', in other words, in their position of 'illness-as-lived' (2002:2). A relationship with God does not lie within unshakeable dogma and understandings, but rather in finding meaning in conversations with God (and not so much about God) within the unique, daily realities of people's lives.

Whether or not the narrative of the client embodies illness or crisis, Ganzevoort (2006) describes narrative theology as an act of creating a reality by moving from the propositional stance to the performative stance. The propositional narrative question expresses interest in the meaning of something, while the performative narrative question looks into how what someone believes is affecting (helping) them in the life they are living. It is not particularly concerned with whether it is true or not. As language is embedded in relationships, the question to be asked is: How does it shape our relationships? However, it must be accepted as a given that there is always a language barrier of some sort, as it is an aspect of human fallacy. Three different dimensions of text and action are at play. The syntactic dimension asks the question about what is happening in the text, while the semantic is interested in its meaning. In the last instance, the pragmatic or performative dimension is concerned about what text and action do to the interviewer and interviewee.

Ganzevoort (2006) describes three different ways in which practical theology can be applied: as liberating action (pointing to the reason for doing research that will possibly bring about change); as empirical research (to get as close as possible to understanding what is going on); as ministry formation (the training of pastors and ministers). In doing practical theology as liberating action, the interviewer is, in a sense, imposing his or her story on the interviewee. However, in agreeing to participate, the interviewee is playing the game of narrating/ telling stories with the interviewer and both of them anticipate change. In this context, stories are taken as self-construction and narratives are used to promote, for example, empowerment of the marginalised.

Narrative research is characteristically driven towards a culture of action. Its methodology invites action in terms of participation and interpretation, but it reaches beyond the local context to social and cultural patterns. It questions, dares and challenges ideas and practices to change (to act upon themselves).

3.2 Epistemology: methodological perspectives

3.2.1 Social constructionism

In view of the preceding epistemological discussion on practical theological, feminist practical theological, postfoundational practical theological and pastoral narrative theological points of departure, the methodological approach presented below will of consequence reflect an own character. This methodological approach facilitated the whole process of doing research as well as writing this thesis.

Anderson and Goolishan (in McNamee & Gergen 1992) describe the development of systemic (family) therapies during the past decades from second-order cybernetics and then constructivism to a position where interpretation and hermeneutics take centre stage. This narrative social constructionist viewpoint makes room for acknowledgement of the individual's experiences. The cybernetic metaphor of mechanical feedback loops understood and defined humans as 'information processing machines' while third-order cybernetics sets people free to be 'meaning-generating beings' (1992:26).

Van Meygaarden (2005:17) states that social constructionists place an emphasis on social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family and culture, with meanings thus emerging from 'a flow of constantly changing narratives. However, social constructionism is unlike constructivism in that it sees the creation of knowledge not as an internal process, but as an inter-subjective social process where perceptions co-evolve within a network of communication (Van Meygaarden 2005:17). Constructivism does not take into account the role of language in the process of creating meaning, nor the possibility that broader social networks contribute to this process (Van Meygaarden 2005:18).

Van Meygaarden (2005:18) further writes that social constructionism understands reality as a construction that functions in relation to the belief system we bring into

a particular situation and according to which we operate. The context in which we create meaning thus becomes a crucial component.

Van Meygaarden (2005:20) therefore quotes Dell (1982:57) who describes that 'speaking about experience or reporting experience can only be a reflection upon, or a representation of experience'. Dell notes that there are differences between our experience, our description of that experience and our explanation of the description and the experience…Meanings are thus formed in interactions through the medium of language. Social constructionism asserts that knowledge is generated interactively through the vehicle of language within a context that has certain characteristics (Van Meygaarden 2005:19). Social constructionism, thus shares two premises with postmodernism namely, language is important in the process of meaning making and that the central focus is on relationships.

When we use social constructionist frameworks in developing metaphors when doing research, we see how the stories that circulate in society constitute our lives and those of the people with whom we work. Kathy Weingarten (1991:289) writes:

> In social constructionism, the experience of self exists in the ongoing interchange with others… the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into those narratives.

Freedman and Combs (1996:22) expanded on the social constructionist approach, positioning it within what was referred to earlier on in this section as 'third- order cybernetics'. They emphasise the following four ideas:

(i)   Realities are socially constructed:
The social construction of reality describes how ideas, practices, beliefs and the like come to have reality status in a given social group. Hoffman (1990:3) favours ideas relating to social constructionism since, instead of seeing individuals as stuck in 'biological isolation booths', which she conceives as having an evolving set of meanings that emerge from interactions between people. These meanings may not exist in an individual mind as such – they are part of a general flow of constantly changing narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996:26).

(ii)   Realities are constituted through language:

In agreeing on the meaning of a particular word or gesture, we agree on a description which shapes subsequent descriptions, and also directs our perceptions towards making new descriptions. 'Our language tells us how to see our world as well as what to see within it…Language does not mirror nature; language creates the natures we know (Freedman & Combs 1996:28).

(iii)   Realities are organised and maintained through stories:

Our stories, brought forth in the language we use, are kept alive and passed along in our living and telling thereof (Freedman & Combs 1996:29). Therefore, 'within a social constructionist worldview, it is important to attend to cultural and contextual stories as well as to individual's people's stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:31).

(iv)   There are no essential truths:

In the narrative worldview we cannot objectively know reality, but we can only interpret experience. There are many possibilities for how any given experience may be interpreted, but no one interpretation is 'really' true (Freedman & Combs 1996:33).

These four social constructionist ideas fuse to form the framework within which narrative research is understood and practised.

3.2.2 Narrative research

One way of applying social constructionism is by means of the narrative approach of listening to, developing and writing stories. The way Stephen King (2000) describes the writer's craft in his book *On Writing* has interesting parallels to the way in which the research process is documented from the viewpoint of the narrative paradigm. He is the writer of, *inter alia*, *The shining*, *Carrie* and *Fire Starter* which were all made into films.

According to King, writing is a meeting of minds and a type of telepathy, where the writer sends out signals and the reader receives them. Of course, there is a lot of room for interpretation and imagination because people do not look at and

measure the world with 'similar eyes'. The important thing is an understanding between reader and writer of what is described 'in terms of rough comparison' (2000:105). It is the descriptive tool in the writer's box that draws the reader into the sensory world of the writer and forms a participants' bond between them. King cautions against 'thin description which leaves the reader feeling bewildered and nearsighted' (2000:174). On the other hand, overdoing description brings in too many details and images, to the extent that the story that wants to be shared is sidetracked.

King (2000:163) says stories consist of three parts. Narration moves the story from one point to another. Description gives sensory reality to the reader, and dialogue is the characters' speech. As writer, King does not plan plots for his stories, because he believes stories should be found or dug up from the ground like fossils and relics. Stories make themselves. They already exist, 'part of an undiscovered pre-existing world' (2000:163). According to King, to produce a plot means to be untruthful to the real lives of people, because, despite their efforts to plan and take care, the plot for the most part just unfolds as it wishes. Furthermore, deliberately constructing the plot minimises the spontaneity of the creative process.

In using the metaphor of excavation to uncover story fossils, large or small, there will always be a few 'breaks and losses' in the process of liberating the fossils from the ground (King 2000:164). That metaphor holds also true for narrative research. Despite anyone's best efforts to explain and re-explain in order to aid understanding, the researcher always hears the story of the co-researcher coloured by his/her own background, perceptions and life story. It is never possible to understand the other's story exactly as it has been lived from that person's point of view, which is not necessarily a bad thing.

He advises the prospective writer to let his/her completed book rest for about six weeks, resisting the temptation to read 'snippets' from it here and there. Establishing distance from the piece of writing is important, he says, not only from the point of view of a time frame but also in terms of being mentally unoccupied with it. Re-reading it after an interval of some weeks feels as if it could be someone else's work, although it sounds very familiar. King (2000:213) sees this

time of rest as a recuperation period that so refreshes the writer that it becomes easier to re-read the work critically, and re-discover it. When a writer has actually completed a novel, the next stage would be to change aspects of the writing that need to be worked on. In conducting narrative research, 'going back' to the research document after a resting period would not involve those kinds of changes, but could help the writer to reflect anew on what has been seen, heard and experienced as well as the way in which it was done.

During the years of developing their narrative approach to therapy, White and Epston (1992:8) were reluctant to name or give 'simple, conclusive descriptions' for what they were engaging in. The act of giving a name to something is in itself an attempt to pin it down and give it certain characteristics. The down side is that what has been 'created' and boxed in through baptising will, in turn, have the power to capture and restrict the creator. Neither do these writers associate themselves with any particular 'school' of family therapy. What they do say by assuming this preferred positioning is that they want to remain as free and adventurous as possible in their minds about exploring and practising narrative approaches. This leads to a continuous evolution of their ideas and practices, although the values and commitments to which they adhere in their work remain solid and stable.

The narrative approach makes possible a mutual enriching of lives between therapist/researcher and families/co-researchers. It happens not only on the level of sharing information, but also in the realm of human beings sharing their selves, as they interpret their worlds.

Kathy Weingarten (1994:73) describes how she used to view 'self' as "as simply a form of the letter 'I' itself". Until her diagnosis with breast cancer, she concurred with the idea that self is 'singular, compact, clear, and defined', and that included her experience of herself. She agrees with other writers that people's ideas of the Western self has undergone many changes during the last twenty five hundred years, and that the way we understand 'self' is entwined with our concept of the individual. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (in Weingarten 1994:64) depicts the

Western understanding of the 'self' of the past two hundred years as 'a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe'.

Although the concept of the individual took flight during and after the 18th century revolutions, when hierarchical features were done away with, the privilege of attaining individuality was not extended to everybody. In particular, women, children, slaves and poor males were excluded from the rights of individuals, in the sense that they were not seen individually as 'a solitary, autonomous, self-sufficient entity' (1994:64). Furthermore, a new concept of motherhood developed, in which a woman's highest calling was not to enjoy or develop her own individuality but to nurture it in her children and to care for her husband in the context of her home surroundings. What motherhood should or should not entail depends to a great extent on what culture determines at any particular time.

Various child-rearing ideologies, from Rousseau in the 18th century to Benjamin Spock in the 20th century, proposed that the mother's needs and desires had to be crucified until she became a 'selfless vessel' for the development of her children into socially and emotionally well-adjusted adults (Weingarten 1994:65). This paved the way for the polarised, dichotomised idea of the good versus the bad mother. It played itself out in various areas, such as the cold, uncaring mother versus the sacrificing, nurturing one. In the long run it is still mainly the choice between home and work, and the particulars of the choice that defines a woman according to the good mother/ bad mother dichotomy (1994:88). Coupled with the idea of the self as 'one stable, coherent entity', making even minor decisions about child rearing can have major ramifications for a mother's understanding of the type of self she is, that is, good or bad. For instance, if the mother allows her children to make a loud, continual noise with their friends, she can see herself as a good mother but a bad individualist. When she tells them to be quiet and sends the friends home, she can see herself as a bad mother, but a good individualist (1994:74). This makes possible only two choices, and they are both crippling, because they leave too little leeway for describing the real self and inhibit the true voice of the mother.

If a mother can be seen as good or bad in relation to her children, a wife/ girlfriend can be seen as good or bad when it comes to her ability or otherwise to produce children. Women who want to fall pregnant but fail to do so normally evoke a certain amount of sympathy. However, women who choose not to become mothers often provoke a kind of unease in society. They tend to get neither sympathy nor understanding. Weingarten (1994:74) proposes that redefining the self, not as an entity that develops stability over time, but as someone with the capacity to render a coherent account of oneself over time, frees one from entrapment in cheap and easy dichotomies. With this alternative view of the self, a person is liberated from descriptions of merely who one is. Rather, the focus is on what one decides to do in a particular context, and 'with this view of the self, the self is no longer an entity but an account, a narrative or a story' (1994:74).

3.2.3 Narrative or story

Certain characteristics of qualitative research conform favourably to the assumptions of the narrative approach in research, which in turn is based on the social constructionist paradigm. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:147) state that, despite differences in qualitative approaches, there are two commonalities: first, the focus is on phenomena occurring in natural settings, and, second, the intricacies and full complexities of those phenomena are taken into account. The narrative approach places a high premium on people's 'telling' of their own lives (Freedman & Comb 1996:29). This has implications for at least three areas: whatever is being researched, the researcher and the kind of information that is focused on, as well as the way in which the information is understood and applied.

The qualitative researcher is interested in the perspectives of those being researched on the subjective level. Phenomenological studies in particular probe 'a person's perception of the meaning of an event' (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:153). The nature of a lengthy, open-ended interview/conversation/narration also enhances the chances of a person's telling something from a position of greater personal strength and control. Parry (1993:457) says it is 'this sense of finding one's own voice, describing one's own experiences in one's own words, that is challenging us to a new kind of strength. We then realize that it is not only our own stories that are valid and true, equally those of others'.

Qualitative research in the realm of the narrative approach has implications for the understanding of the role of researcher. 'Qualitative researchers believe that the researcher's ability to interpret and make sense of what he or she sees is critical for an understanding of any social phenomenon. The researcher is thus an instrument in much the same way that a sociogram rating scale, or intelligence test is an instrument' (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:147). The researcher is, of course, more than that: the mere presence of the researcher as a subjective human being, intervening in people's lives (Müller & Schoeman 2004:3), is an acknowledgement that the research dynamics between role players are relational, and thus influential in all directions.

The kind of information on which the focus lies in a narrative approach looks at the context of an individual in relation to wider society, and also at the phenomenon of how knowledge is formed and upheld, the role that power plays in this and its effects on people's experiences and expectations.

McTaggart (1997:2) …understands the issues of community, solidarity and commitment, as channels that are necessary for doing authentic research in social life. It also refers to the questions of ethics, morality and values. McTaggart prefers the description of movement because it points to the implicitly political character of all methods of research, specifically the power play between researcher and researched. It also puts on the table the politics of being heard, which potentially and hopefully could lead to being understood and accommodated in liberating ways.

'Qualitative inquiry' is normally used as a comprehensive term for all kinds of inquiry such as, *inter alia*, ethnography, case study research, life history methodology, ethnomethodology and narrative inquiry. In explanation, qualitative research is normally compared to quantitative research, in other words, non-numeric data in the form of words in contrast to numeric data. Swandt (1997:130) further mentions that the word 'qualitative' refers to a quality that points to an inherent or essential characteristic of something, an object or an experience. He mentions that, interestingly, Elliot Eisner's understanding of qualitative, as

explained in his book *The enlightened eye,* (1991) appears to be the only definition that takes quality as its starting point, in that he views inquiry as a matter of perception of qualities and an assessment of their value.

Berg (1989:6) points out that the aim of qualitative research is to appropriately search for answers using systematic procedures. It is not only a matter of amassing nominal (in contrast to numerical) data. Research methods influence the researcher, those being researched and ultimately the conclusions drawn. Social researchers apply techniques that range from near totally uncontrolled methods (observations in natural settings) to extremely controlled methods of observation.

Jennifer Mason (1996:3) maintains that qualitative research is generally associated with the interpretivist sociological tradition, specifically phenomenology, ethnomethodology (1967) and symbolic interactionism. Here, the focus is continuously on the experiences of a person or group within the context of their own perceptions, and positivistic and behaviouristic frameworks, where methods of experimenting and measuring are used, or rejected (Plug et al 1987:100). According to Berg, various related theoretical orientations developed from a symbolic interactionist perspective, Dewy (1930), Mead (1938) and Blumer (1969) being regarded as its main proponents. According to Blumer (in Berg 1989:7) 'symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products formed through activities of people interacting'. It is not a question of things having any intrinsic meaning *per se*, nor is it the psychological elements between people that lead to meaning. It is implied, then, that people are capable of generating numerous realities by way of interpreting their situations. This implies that there are no 'correct' or 'wrong' interpretations. Experiencing a situation as real makes it indeed real for someone.

Berg (1989:8) posits that the techniques of qualitative research in the theoretical school of symbolic interaction focus on examining social settings as well as how the occupants of these settings live and make sense of their lived experiences. People, as occupants of their social settings, make use of symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles to create their surroundings and try to understand them. Researchers in this genre are interested in people's subjective understandings

and perceptions of their environments. Despite the diversities within symbolic interactionist views, there are three binding elements. First, there is the possibility of negotiating about definitions. Thomas and Swaine (in Berg 1989:8) explain that the nature and meaning of people's actions, as well as the setting itself, are determined by the manner in which they (the inhabitants of a setting) define their situations. The second binding element is the perspectives and ability of people (participants) to act with empathy, in other words, to put themselves in another's shoes. The third binding element is the fact that social interactions and the meanings they convey are the source of research data, and are of key importance in the formulation of theory.

Jennifer Mason (1996:3) argues that, although qualitative research encompasses a wide variety of philosophical ideas and different methodologies (anthropology, linguistics and semiotics, discourse and content analysis and feminism), a loose definition would entail the following: Qualitative research lies within an interpretivist philosophical position. The aim is to try to interpret, understand and experience the social world (seen as complex and multi-layered), while focusing on meaning, practices, discourses and constructions. Mason further proposes that qualitative research should involve critical self-scrutiny, or active reflexivity. Researchers should continually try to understand their role in the research process, seeing that they are not detached from their 'data', but are, in fact, integral to it. Another important point she makes is that qualitative researchers should aim at giving a wider resonance to the contextual, social explanations they find. However, this does not mean that broad generalisations can be made.

It is more correct to talk about 'qualitative methodologies' in the plural, because researchers with quite different epistemological positions conduct qualitative research (Willig 2001:8). Qualitative research should be conducted ethically, taking into account both the preferred methodology and its political milieu. The epistemological position adopted by a researcher prescribes to a great extent the methods that should be used. These should be more than just descriptive or exploratory in response to interesting and perplexing questions. Research should be conducted with a social conscience and with durable, long-lasting social change in mind. Mason (1996:6) argues that researchers have a responsibility to

ground their questions in the essence of the epistemological and methodological relevance of what they are enquiring into, and that they should look for analytical links both in the discipline in which they are engaging and in other disciplines (1996:16). Therefore, this research and thesis is grounded in a clearly chosen epistemology of practical theology, feminist practical theology, postfoundational practical theology, pastoral narrative theology and its related social constructionist methodology.

Willig (2001:5) points out how feminist scholars of the 1960s and 1970s critiqued conventional epistemologies that tended to consistently prove the inferiority of females to males in areas like moral development and intelligence. Feminists argued that these so-called findings were used to excuse and perpetuate sexist ideas and unequal practice towards women in many social quarters. Feminist scholars questioned the foundations and assumptions of the epistemologies and methodologies of the so-called 'male science' on at least two levels. In the first instance, the male was used as the norm (because of easy accessibility and because men were regarded as the supreme human subject) in the majority of social studies. Women as research subjects were merely measured against the male example without the relevant differences being taken into account. Some studies were also designed in such a way that they favoured male subjects. Willig points out thet Kohlberg's scale (1976), for example, was used to prove that women's moral development was less advanced than that of men. Feminist scholars also challenged the claim by 'male science' that it conducted objective research, and pointed out the impossibility of the researcher's not influencing and being influenced by the research process. Donna Haraway (in Willig 2001:7) referred to this impossible claim to objectivity as the 'God's eye view'. The notion of reflexivity accommodates the dynamics of the researcher's involvement in the process and findings of doing research.

Willig (2001:10) points out that 'qualitative methodologies', to a greater or lesser extent, place importance on the role of language and the use of reflexivity. There is a distinction between personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity. The first points to the way in which researchers themselves reflect on how their own positioning *inter alia,* values, social identity, political commitments, experiences,

shape the research they conduct. In addition, personal reflexivity also involves thinking about how their research has influenced them personally.

Second, epistemological reflexivity is part of the approach inherent in qualitative methodologies. It takes into account how the design, questions and world-view standpoints of the researchers have led to certain understandings about the research context itself, as well as what the implications are for the research findings and the wider societal contexts alike.

Rubin and Rubin (1995:38) explain that the feminist model and the interpretive approach have influenced the model they propose for qualitative interviewing. They underwrite some of the ideas of the feminist approach, especially handling the interviewees with gentleness and protecting them from any harm arising from the research. The issues of supremacy and compliance as they affect women in a male-dominated society were a cause for concern in feminist methodology. This concern was extended to rooting out any insensitivity to power games inherent in research. Giving interviewees a voice in research is tantamount to giving back their humanity, and is making a political statement, according to the feminist approach.

Rubin and Rubin (1995:38) acknowledge that the world is a continuously changing place. Their model of the qualitative interview focuses on specific contextual circumstances in the multifaceted world of research. Part of this challenging complexity is that every aspect of the research process, including the participants, has a reciprocal influence on a number of other aspects. They cite three characteristics of qualitative interviews (1995:8):

- The listener must 'hear the meaning of what is being said'. Like an ordinary conversation, interviews are unpredictable, unfolding as they take place, so they should not be pre-planned. At the same time, the researcher is extremely interested in the detail of the interviewees' experiences and thinking in order to get to a deeper understanding of the issues.

- The aim of the qualitative interviewer is to discover how the interviewee sees the situation and his/her world in relation to the context. It is understood that different people reflect different perspectives, and a dissimilar viewpoint is not indicative of whether someone is intrinsically right or wrong.

- Interviewees take an active part in the research process in their role of the interviewers' conversational partners. They are encouraged to direct the conversation with their individual interests and responses, which mean that the interviewer must be highly tolerant and flexible. S/he must be willing to be challenged and questioned, and must thus be entirely at ease with an interesting but unpredictable situation in which improvising on the spot is par for the course. The interviewer thus has to take part in the research process in a personal sense, not just directing it from a planned script (Rubin & Rubin 1995:41). A good balance would be to show some empathy with the interviewees, but not too much involvement; if the interviewees requested it, something of the interviewer's personal life could be shared, if relevant, but the role of the interviewer should be retained.

In view of the above discussion, postfoundationalist, social constructionist, narrative research is therefore not merely a matter of collecting stories and analysing them narratologically. Rather, postfoundational, social constructionist, narrative research is about a particular epistemological point of departure as described under paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2, and implies processes which can in some instances make use of certain qualitative methods. However, postfoundational, social constructionist, narrative research is not concerned with models and techniques, but with movements that bring forth multiple dimensions of understanding.

3.2.4 Methodological design: 'The Seven Movements'
Müller designed a practical theological research process by making use of Wenzel van Huyssteen's core ideas on postfoundationalist theology (Müller 2002:8). This research process formulates Van Huyssteen's understanding of the grounding and

suppositions of practical theology into a research design of 'Seven Movements'. I intend using this design as a framework for the research on the narratives of couples affected by infertility.

Müller (2002:8) elaborates on this practical process by describing seven complementary research movements according to five major headings. At a glance, it comprises the following:

The context and interpreted experience
1. A specific context is described.
2. In-context experiences are listened to and described.
3. Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with 'co-researchers'.

Traditions of interpretation
4. A description of experiences as they are continually informed by traditions of interpretation.

God's presence
5. A reflection on God's presence as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation.

Thickened through interdisciplinary investigation
6. A description of experience through interdisciplinary investigation.

Point beyond the local community
7. The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community.

The first heading comprises the *context and interpreted experience*. The first movement under this heading points to a *specific context that is being described*. Müller insists that, even though practical theology can be utilised in diverse ways, ranging from formal to more informal applications, its contextuality is non-

negotiable, as that is what gives practical theology its particular, concrete character.

This refers to the specific research framework decided on by the researcher. It has also been described as the action field (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:4). These authors (2001) made use of Anne Lamott's model for writing fiction as metaphor for understanding and explaining the process of research from a narrative perspective. This approach, also known as the ABDCE approach, differs in some ways from the research process in 'Seven Movements' later developed by Müller. However, the in-context experiences, as well as the action field, refer to what is happening in the here and now, including difficulties that might be encountered. However, the in-context experiences are not stated as a problem that has to be solved (Müller et al 2001:2).

The second movement refers to *in-context experiences that are both listened to and described.* The in-context experiences are both the starting point and the focus of the research. The integrity of practical theology lies in acknowledging and developing the research from the context.

The third movement is concerned with *interpreting, describing and developing experiences in collaboration with co-researchers.*

The second heading refers to *traditions of interpretation.* Falling under this heading, the fourth movement is *a description of experiences as they are continually informed by traditions of interpretation.*

The third heading refers to *God's presence*. What is here taken into account *is a reflection of God's presence as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation.*

Ganzevoort in his before mentioned presentation (2006) I pointed out that God narratives are indeed narratives about human life, albeit told in a different language. Every language has its own possibilities and disadvantages. In the

language of God narratives, people share a very specific viewpoint informed by their specific experiences and interpretation of those experiences.

God means different things to different people. There are not only vast differences in how God is imagined and understood in diverse religious traditions and communities, but also among people who are part of the same religious traditions and communities. It is therefore essential to show respect for the different faiths by which people journey towards a preferred spirituality (Hudson & Kotze 2002:270). Placher (1998:155) refers to the many existing theories about the role and function of Christ. He points out that, far from ever being able to produce 'one definite account' on the central belief regarding the work of Christ, Christian doctrine is saturated with different theories. The work of Christ (including the presence of God) is understood in various ways because it speaks to unique and personal lives.

Placher (1998:156) describes the work of Christ with the help of the three long-standing historical images in the Christian tradition: solidarity, reconciliation and redemption. Each of these images or metaphors speaks a different language and tells only part of the story of Christ's work. It is therefore imperative to respect all these relevant metaphors and give them equal value. In order to find the fullest and richest notion of who Christ is and what his life and death portray, these scriptural images should all be pondered on and synthesised into a new whole.

In speaking the language of solidarity, Jesus communicates two things. The first is that God is with us in the whole range of life's pain: injustice, emotional anguish, betrayal, separation and death, to name a few. In fact, solidarity says that God goes before us and assures us that He has already been there. He knows the pain, and has conquered it. Secondly, Christ's expression of his fear, distress, and emotional and physical pain tells us that it is acceptable to admit that we, as humans, live in the realm of pain. It is acceptable and healthy for males and females alike to express the accompanying fear, doubts and anxiety.

A second image that should be added to the first is reconciliation. Placher (1998:160) puts it poignantly when he says:

> Talk of solidarity assures us that Christ is with us. The language of reconciliation reminds us of how deeply we are estranged from God. Put the two together and it seems that Christ, in solidarity with us, must be estranged from God, that indeed somehow his estrangement is our reconciliation.

Christ and the cross are doubly mysteries: the man who is also God and the pain of the cross's abandonment and death, which brings new life. When confronted with our own dreadful sufferings, we could be tempted to think that the cross of Christ was more bearable to him than our own cross is to us, seeing that he is, after all, the sovereign and powerful God himself. We may be tempted to think that, because Christ knew who he was and why he had to be crucified, his sufferings were more tolerable than ours because we have limited insight in both this life and the next.

Placher (1998:159) urges us always to keep the theology of the unity of the three persons of the trinity in mind. It is one-sided and damaging to the truthful image of the Father God to regard him as the spiteful judge who hard-heartedly sent his son to death because he wanted compensation for the wrongs done to him. This false image has created an aversion to bonding with the Father God. One of the arguments goes: 'I want nothing to do with a God who sends his own son to suffer and die'. Rather, Christian theology says the Father, Son and Spirit think, decide and act together. It is not only a question of the suffering Christ, but also of the suffering Father and Holy Spirit. Love must surely have been costly to all three of them individually, and in their mutual relationships as One God.

The third image to illuminate the work of Christ is redemption. It implies that we have fallen under the power of someone or something other than our Maker that wants to possess us. It also points to the fact that we cannot save ourselves from this enslavement, either because we do not realise that our captivity is dire, or because we are incapable of breaking the shackles of possession. One has, perhaps, a sense of being cornered, of being in a place where one would rather not be, of doing things that cause self-hatred because acting like this is against one's will. Paul expressed this by saying that his actions were often at

loggerheads with his will (Romans 7:19-24), and that he seemed like putty in the hands of his captor, who was directing him on a course that he did not want to take. The image of redemption refers to the victory of the Trinity in overcoming evil with the sacrifice of love. The human race is saved from the destructive forces opposing God's will by the power of the blood shed on the cross.

But how does everyone, male or female, make personal sense of the theodicy question? Where is God when I am suffering? Or in what way can the role of divine providence in the face of suffering and death be justified (Deist 1984:258)? The answers to these questions seem highly specific, tailored to fill the vicissitudes of everyone's unique life understandings. The narrative researcher has the privilege of exploring with the co-researchers their efforts at making sense of the paradoxical nature of love. Although love can move mountains, it seems, at face value, to be rather weak and impotent. The images of Christ the warrior and Christ the Prince of Peace, even the lamb willing to be slaughtered, are mentioned in the same breath. And although love is powerful, it calls for suffering and is expensive in terms of personal cost. However, suffering should never be easily and passively embraced without an effort to alleviate it. Without the effort, suffering is futile and without purpose, but when suffering is endured to gain some understanding, to love more or to make the world a better place, it could be worth the pain (Placher 1998:163).

The fourth heading of 'The Seven Movements' refers to *interdisciplinary investigation*. The focus is on *a description of experience thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.* Childs (1998:195) sees pastoral care as the care of people, including the rest of creation (plant and animal life) and points out that knowledge about the complexity of humanity is necessary. Although the different theological branches, for example the doctrinal or historical, should be explored in search of that knowledge, he urges theology to learn from other disciplines as well, especially the human sciences of sociology, neurobiology and psychology.

The fifth heading refers to the fact that it *points beyond the local community*, implying the development of alternative interpretations to reach beyond the local community.

These 'Seven Movements' discussed above were jointly as well as separately utilised throughout the research process as well as the writing of the thesis. Due to the fact that these movements are by no means linear applications of a model, but rather an approach, the different movements are reflected in various ways throughout the thesis, with some dominating in certain chapters e g 'method' in this chapter, 'context' in Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7, and 'tradition' in Chapter 8. This does however not mean that the other movements are not present where these three dominate, because 'The Seven Movements' as approach pervades throughout in a recursive and spiralling manner.

3.3 Ethical considerations within the narrative approach

Kotzé (2002:20) argues that the telling of narratives is an important channel for demonstrating and holding onto 'ethical ways of being'. Stories embody ethical wisdoms of people's lives, and are able to encourage the hearer or reader to look for ethical solutions in their own life experiences. It is not so much that a kind of moral lesson must be learned, but rather that these stories speak of real people in real-life situations grappling in their search and choosing a way to live through their difficulties and dilemmas. Stories have content and plot, beginnings and endings, but there is also a story within a story. A number of things are communicated, and because life is complicated, this points to diverse and complex potentialities and decisions. Stories also comment on the effects of people's choices on others. That immediately reminds people of the moral character of everything that is thought, said and acted out.

Kotzé maintains that the concept of ethics should be challenged to become a verb, not just a noun. Ethics should not be merely a part of everyday communication between persons, or a mere aspect of performing therapy or research. Instead it lies at the heart of 'participating in living' (Kotzé 2002:21) and should be acknowledged as such. Adhering to certain 'systems of norms' in order to make choices or utter pronouncements is a coward's way of evading personal accountability.

To ethicise, (meaning to think and act in an ethicising manner), renders participation and transparency inevitable. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to make decisions or observations on behalf of other people, or to act alone. To be more exact, ethicising means that everything is being done with the participation of the others. To whom does 'the others' refer? It refers to everybody who is part of or possibly affected by ethicising in any given situation, especially in the context of therapy or research. Research is not neutral, but involves and evokes ethical issues (Kotzé 2002:21).

Demasure (2004:365) states that the pastoral theological landscape lost a characteristic moral quality with the entrance of the psychological therapeutic model. The kerugmatik, normative deductive model that was applied in both protestant and catholic pastoral encounters was challenged by psychodynamic assumptions and theories. For instance, a belief in the inherent potential of an individual guided the pastor to where s/he could help someone to help themselves, to develop their self-contained morality. This psychotherapeutic understanding sometimes led to the pastor's acceptance of the client to the extent that it often resulted in turning a moral blind eye. There is a difference between accepting a person and morally condoning their thoughts or actions. In practice, however, the pastor sometimes failed to express that. In the tradition of Rogerian therapy, the person-centred approach involves unconditional acceptance, trying to understand the client from his/her viewpoint and assuming that the client can and should accept responsibility for re-organising him/herself.

Demasure advocates the importance of ethical aspects in pastoral theology. Not only does Practical Theology as science and discipline requires ethical reflection, but the content of the pastoral conversation also makes ethical scrutiny essential. When pastoral care uses therapeutically-inspired theories, it must avoid incorporating ideas on humankind and the world that are incompatible with the understanding and calling of Christianity. In the process, the fine balance of God's character as equally righteous and merciful has been compromised to focus largely on the first equation. The moral quality of a client's ideas and actions has been overshadowed by the prevailing emphasis on merely what the client feels. The fact that feelings (even love) are highly accountable to what is fair, acceptable

and good has thus not been addressed. Christianity is not value-free, and the ethical voice of the church must be integrated into moral theological reflection on society, the church and any specific pastoral conversation that takes place.

Riggs (1998:181) describes Christian ethical reflection as a process of pondering on the meaning of moral life, and what it should be. She explains that the paradigms (or interpretative frameworks) of teleology, deontology and responsibility represent a kind of ethical continuum. These paradigms also present the 'context of meaning for doing Christian ethical reflection'. Teleological ethics pertains to the idea that no action is good or bad in it self, but should be judged by its consequences (Deist 1984:254). Deontological ethics points to the idea of duty as prescribed by divine law, and the requirement for duty to be fulfilled regardless of the consequences (Deist 1984:68).

A shift into a fourth ethical framework is taking place, which is referred to as a liberation paradigm. This seemingly unavoidable direction was prompted by the current socio-moral context reflecting pluralism and postmodernism. A liberation ethical paradigm takes into consideration the accompanying frames of reference of the specific, the contextual and the multiple associated with postmodern thinking and pluralism. Riggs (1998:183) explains that it is precisely some of the characteristic thinking of the liberation ethical paradigm that threatens the Church.

Within the liberation ethical paradigm, morality is understood in the following ways:

- It is recognised that morality is not cast in stone, but is, in fact, coloured by ideology. It flows from the social, cultural, political and economic conditions within a specific historical context of time and place.
- Morality is concerned with what is right and fair, so any issues of power and dominance must be unearthed and brought to light. Such unequal relations have in the past managed to lie concealed behind a moral façade, and were often simply accepted.
- Liberation refers to both a norm and an end.

The liberation ethical paradigm is also disposed to flexibility and creativity. It is capable of reinterpreting various ethical thinking paradigms and of forming a broader, more inclusive paradigm as it takes various discourses into account (Riggs 1998:182). These characteristics make it a fitting thought framework for addressing the fears and defensiveness of the Church in a pluralistic and postmodern society. When the Church fails to see that it is, and, in fact, always has been part of a changing society and that it could and should adapt without losing its own specific character, it easily feels threatened by those whose thought differs from the hardcore traditions and typical understandings it embraces. This reaction is regardless of whether the thinking comes from outside or inside the Church's own ranks.

The Church should, in any case, not merely rethink its formal and informal ethical policies and adapt them to societal trends or turning points occasioned by new philosophical developments when change seems imminent, or when unendurable pressure is exerted by relevant or concerned voices. Rather, it should hone a sustainable, fearless awareness of voices within and without the walls of the Church. Voices stifled by a range of 'isms': ageism, racism, anti-Semitism and sexism have, to a certain extent, found themselves relegated even to the bosom of the Church, albeit only because not enough was and is being done by the Church in recognition of its own compliancy and eradication of it. The discussions being conducted in various denominations focusing on the acceptance and ordination of, for instance, homosexual people is an encouraging sign that a brave attempt is being made to take a new look at an issue that was previously understood, labelled, packaged and sealed.

Riggs (1998:184) sees the key task of Christian ethics as giving practical and procedural direction in forming and preserving the Church's faithfulness in a changing and pluralistic environment. She proposes an ethical stance that incorporates the following four features:

- It acknowledges its distinctiveness from other ethical stances as well as diversity within its own Christian ethical tradition.

- It redefines our present context as a time of promise rather than one of peril.
- It values consensual respect rather than mere toleration of differences.
- It promotes living into the tensions of the perceived socio-ethical dilemmas of this present era.

The first feature refers to the particular frame of reference of the Church and its justified faith claim for Jesus as God in this world in order to save the lost. It points to the Church's assertiveness. Further, the internal pluralism that exists within the Church in the light of various interpretations of this faith claim must be acknowledged in order to minister successfully in the complex context outside the Church, which means that the Church should be self-analytical (Riggs 1998:184).

The second feature accepts the belief that Jesus' coming to this world has made all the difference. Despite the apparent hopelessness and decay in the world, the hope brought through Christ will not be put to shame. Even in the face of virus pandemics, spiritual desolation, devastated natural resources and wars, a creative spiritual awareness and surrender should aid the transformational working of the Spirit to bring about transformation.

Riggs (1998:185) proposes, in line with the third feature, that the Church takes a standpoint to show consensual respect for the pluralism it encounters both within and without its walls. To promote and demonstrate consensual respect means to work actively towards cohesion and unity. It invites mutuality and solidarity while living, confidently and committed, upholding its own beliefs and character, in the context of pluralism. It stands in opposition to mere tolerance, which indeed recognises differences, but often does so with a hostile attitude.

The fourth feature of this ethical stance accepts the challenge of the postmodern, pluralistic context by 'living into the tensions of that context' (1998:185). Riggs says the Church need not focus on achieving an end result of absolute unity and integration within the Church and within society, but its role is to be continuously engaged in a mediating process between opposing sides. This should be

composed in such a way that, no matter the end result, at least 'interposition and communication' (in other words, 'living in tension with') has taken place.

If ethics can be understood as the norms of Christian conduct in particular, and the moral behaviour regarding concrete situations of people in general (Deist 1984:87), the male-dominated Christian church has the responsibility of acknowledging its impact on the way women experience their spirituality and its effects on them.

Schneiders (1986:32) mentions a number of areas where their experiences of 'religious marginalisation, exclusion and subordination have affected women's ministry and their sense of themselves in relation to God'. Whether women welcomed or despised their lower position in the Christian Church it influenced both men and women. While Schneiders views the effects of male dominance on women's spirituality in a largely negative light, she also highlights the positive effects that grew out of these hurtful and challenging circumstances. Knowledge and implementation of the positives or, as she calls it, the 'flip side' of the negative effects can, on the whole, benefit the Church as institution and its body of members, as well as helping to install and stabilise a more balanced way of addressing Christian ethics (Schneiders 1986:33). Paul Tournier (1982:57) laments the fact that males and females fail to complement each other in a balanced way as far as the family, Church and society are concerned, as God commissioned.

The part women should play in their service to Christ and others is under utilised and, worse, tolerated to what it should have been. Humankind finds it difficult to respect gender and intra-gender differences without power ratings. In Christianity, other religions, and most societies, an unseen measuring stick rates the male higher than the female (Karssen 1987:74). It throws the potential richness of life and relationships out of balance, so both sexes pay dearly for the injustice. A re-thinking and re-interpretation of the role and standing of women in the Church, and a re-assessment of the negative effects of male-domination, correlate clearly with the ideals of the liberation ethical paradigm.

Schneiders (1986:32) indicates certain areas where the effects of male dominion in the Church have had their most significant influence on women: the ministry, socialisation and women's religious experiences of God. When it comes to women's exclusion from the ministry, the fact that they could not be ordained has stunted and distorted the forming of young women's religious imagination and their self-image as females in their relationship with God. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church has never offered them the opportunity of becoming part of its formal ministry. Further, the fact that women played largely non-public roles in the secular and religious spheres, where they were male-dependant, resulted in a 'humanly destructive and spiritually traumatic' experience (1986:32). Women experienced a sense of 'sacral unworthiness': by dint of their femaleness they were not allowed even to touch the sacred vessels, bear the processional cross or be in the sanctuary during divine service. This meant they were inferior, subordinate and dependant on men to serve them the sacraments. Concomitant with their exclusion from the realm of the divine was the 'divinized' male, who was also positioned as the mediator between God and women.

Schneiders (1986:34) mentions the upside of the negative effects of women's positions. Women's ministry had not been ritualised, which allowed it to attain its blessed, personal character. Schneiders believes that the act of ritualising leads to de-personalisation. Although ritual gains something in terms of the profound meaning it communicates, at the same time it often diminishes the individualisation of those taking part in the ritual. Women's ministry consists mainly of showing love and care in a personal way in specific and individual situations. Schneiders maintains that women's ministry has been effective in counteracting the image of God as stern, judgmental and even violent. Women have understood and conducted their ministries in a genuine effort to serve, and they have the ability to identify with and respond to the needs of the oppressed in unconventional, but truthful ways.

Their ministries of working with children, the sick and dying and those in the guilty throes of sin needing forgiveness and understanding, have not violated their involvement as a way of demonstrating power. Women are in a particularly authentic position to relate to Jesus, who himself was undervalued and humiliated.

He was without the status, power and backup of a formal synagogue position. He seemed to feel personally involved with all who crossed his path (meaning that he acknowledged every person's individual circumstances and worth), in particular the 'rough diamonds' of society. He pointed to the very real possibility of reaching for new beginnings in even the most disheartening situations. Even while he addressed the destructive work of sin in people's lives and the fact that it was unacceptable to God, He opened the door to forgiveness and reconciliation.

His unprejudiced actions towards women defied the contemporary male attitude. He promulgated the principle of 'do[ing] unto others what you want others to do unto you', an admonition that overrides the disparity between the sexes. Interestingly, the Jews credit the injunction 'Do not do unto others what you don't want others to do unto you' to Hillel, who lived a hundred years before Jesus. The vast philosophic difference between the two sayings leaves one asking: Which of them would I prefer to be applied to myself (Dimont 1962:44)?

Ethical spirituality implies a journey undertaken after we have become aware that something or someone divine is urging us to look for meaning. Or perhaps we had already started on the journey long before becoming aware that we were on it. The search on which we are invited includes searching within ourselves for answers (Vardey 1995:20). We have to recognise that we can hear and be heard by God, be it through intuition, prayer, meditation, dreams and visions or just by being aware of our very existence in this moment and in this particular place. Martin Buber (Vardey 1995:23) explains that a great treasure can be found in the specific place where one is standing at in this very moment. He calls it the 'fulfilment of existence'. We often find it hard to believe, when we experience in every moment life's deficits and insufficiencies, that our fulfilment does not lie in another time and space from the particular context in which we are standing now. We frequently feel that life is passing us by, that there must be more to life than what we have and that our 'life does not participate in true, fulfilled existence'. Buber (Vardy 1995:23) says we must find the treasure, right where we stand, to try and 'shine the light of the hidden divine life'. Why are we standing in this place at this very moment? Were we drawn here by our own peculiarities and dispositions, or was this place assigned to us as our fate, to be used in carrying out our indispensable functions?

Buber says the realisation that the quest for spirituality takes place in the very place where we are presently, makes real the possibility of experiencing a fulfilled existence.

Some people see God's presence as an abstract spiritual awareness, something that they have difficulty in delineating, and something in which they participate privately. Yet, for others, spirituality cannot be defined unless it entails finding and maintaining relationship with the rest of creation. David Steindl-Rast (Vardy 1995:22) says that, in searching for meaning, mankind will hopefully find God: as to search for meaning is also to search for belonging. The search takes place in God-territory, but because the landscape is so vast it is possible that the seeker, while exploring this territory, will never meet others exploring in other parts. When confronted with crossroads, we choose to go in a certain (mind) direction that makes it likely or unlikely to reach others where they too are looking for spiritual answers. Amongst the countless turns that can be taken at these many crossroads is the discovery that belonging is shared. Steindl-Rast expresses mysticism thus: 'If we belong to God, God belongs to us; we are in a relationship' (Vardy 1995:22). And dare it be said that, if it rings true, we also belong to each other. We are certainly accountable to our neighbour, but the kind of spirituality that looks for meaning will probably find much more than that.

According to M. Scott Peck (1990:192), mysticism takes many forms, but one of the common threads woven through the accepted wisdom of mystics of every kind of religious belief through the ages is that there is unity between humans, other creatures and even inanimate matter in the universe. There are ostensibly imperceptible, underlying knots that tie the cosmos together. Mystics are generally conscious that the world as a whole is a community and that the absence of this awareness of kinship amongst all causes division and leads to the mentality of 'us' and 'them'.

Peck (1990:188) describes how, from personal experience, he has come to understand human spiritual development. Suffice it to say that he names the stages as: Stage 1: chaotic, antisocial; Stage 2: formal, institutional; Stage 3: sceptic, individual: Stage 4: mystic, communal. People in the last stage have been

transformed to such an extent that they are willing to embrace and penetrate the unknown, the mysterious. They have grown past the need for the simplistic, black and white dogmatic structures of Stage 2. Those described as mystics recognised the supernatural interdependence in our world, and the vast unknowingness of the possible worlds beyond this one we inhabit, even looking deeper into the heart of life itself. They developed the insight to move beyond their own prejudices and fixed ideas. The emptying of self allowed the opening up to what is different, to the otherness of people, ideas or God (Peck 1990:226). To empty yourself involves the sacrifice of something that has found a home inside you, something that has became a part of you. In addition, emptying is not an end in itself, but simply the means to an end. 'Emptying' seems to make space for another in your heart and mind. It makes space for acceptance, inclusiveness, grace, spiritual power, holiness and humility. Emptying creates silence, which, in turn, makes listening possible because 'it makes room for the other' (Peck 990:212).

Peck (1990:212) reminds us that Christian mystics sometimes use the expression 'before the Word there was silence'. Indeed, out of the silence of the formlessness and emptiness of the origins of creation, God brought His Word forth in Genesis 1:1-3:

> In the beginning God prepared and created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and an empty waste, and darkness was upon the face of the very great deep. The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.

Emptying almost always leads to risk and vulnerability. Paradoxically, from the Christian perspective, to become empty (to die to self) indicates becoming able to receive something new from outside of oneself. To be vulnerable implies a willingness to be wounded, but such a 'wounded ness' speaks of strength, since all are vulnerable but only some courageously and truthfully demonstrate this in their lives and relationships. Peck regards all people as teachers, healers and ministers (not only those who are in the so-called helping professions), and says that the more we are willing to acknowledge our weaknesses and imperfections, the more truthful and reliable we appear (1990:226).

Doing research from a narrative perspective embraces the idea that researchers enter the research context as subjective participants, well aware of their own prejudices, vulnerabilities and uncertainties as well as those of their research projects. The narrative research perspective even provides the opportunity for researchers to acknowledge these qualms and reservations. Instead of using psychological defences and scientific-empirical distances as tools in research, narrative researchers communicate from a position of 'emptiness' and even vulnerability and inquisitiveness, because they do not know for certain. A kind of communal spirituality is present when researchers are willing to share themselves, not just their research undertaking, with the relevant research others. Attempting to share with and learn from the co-researchers, they enter into something that goes beyond gathering information, especially if it is harvested in a respectful way. That 'something' entered into is the moving forward to a place where honest human, personal relationships are possible, a place where all the participants will probably be changed.

Hudson and Kotzé (2002:269) propose a spirituality that is life-giving and ethical, and suggest how it can be formed within the context of everyday life. They describe (2002:270) three ways in which a narrative approach can provide an ethical spirituality that is meaningful not only to Christians, but also to those who belong to other faith traditions or who do not have any faith orientation. In the first instance, they point out that the character of a narrative approach does not tolerate the imposition of scriptural truths, morality or spiritual principals on the lives of others. Such an approach is an improvisation rather than an imposition. Instead, the truths and stories of scripture are laid over people's personal stories in a way that allows for contextual, individual movement. In other words the sacred text of Scripture is seen as a living transcript that speaks into people's lives, but at the same time is pliable enough to receive those stories into its own outline.

Secondly, a narrative approach invites critical reflection on what people say and do to those around them. In pondering on the effects of what we choose to do, as well as what we neglect to do, we learn about responsibility and ethical sensitivity.

Thirdly, a narrative approach points to an individual's socio-political background, the broader context in which that person's experiences are grounded. The relationship of power/knowledge (White & Epston, in Hudson & Kotzé 2002:272) means that we experience the effects of others' power over us at the same time as we have power over them (cf Foucalt 1980). Professional and laypersons working narratively are thus especially accountable to the bigger picture that houses social processes.

Throughout the research process as well as during the writing of this thesis a high degree of sensitivity was maintained concerning the power relationships between the researcher and co-researchers, and where needed, these power relationships were deconstructed and reconstructed by means of the application of the essential ethical principles such as informed consent (see Adendum A), voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, benevolence, non-malificence, and respect.

In summary, this chapter explained the epistemological points of departure and its related methodology. The research positioning was described in terms of practical theology, feminist practical theology, postfoundational practical theology and pastoral narrative theology, while the research methodology was explained from a social constructionist, narrative perspective as applied by means of the 'Seven Movements'. In the following four chapters the stories of the couples/co-researchers will be introduced and their relevant discourses discussed.