

TOWARDS A NARRATIVE THEOLOGICAL  
ORIENTATION IN A POSTMODERN WORLD:  
EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTMODERNITY  
AND SUGGESTING A THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION  
WITHIN THIS CONTEXT FOR DOING THEOLOGY IN A  
POSTMODERN URBAN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT.

1. INTRODUCTION

David Tracy (Tracy 1986: 3-31) wrote about the “three republics” of theology where he argues that theologians need to address and reflect critically in all three of these republics namely: the **church**, **society** and **academia**. He argued that theologians should reflect as well as defend their arguments in all three of these republics.

I will take up Tracy’s challenge in this second chapter by introducing, describing and defending the theological orientation of this study with regards to all three of these ‘republics’. As the title of the study indicated I propose to orientate this study within the narrative theological approach and it is the aim of this chapter to describe this narrative theological orientation as well as defend this orientation with regards to all three of Tracy’s republics.

I believe that narrative theology has a vital role to play within the postmodern context and that narrative theology can effectively respond to the challenges of postmodernity. In Chapter One, I identified the following challenge: **The need for direction and guidance in a postmodern village** (Chapter One: 4.1.3 The postmodern story of the village). It is to this challenge that I will seek to respond to in this chapter.

Firstly, I will begin by describing the postmodern condition as I interpret and understand it and then try and explain why I found the narrative approach to be an appropriate method of doing research and theology within a postmodern context.

Secondly, the study – being a narrative study – will also in this chapter give a short description of the theological narrative of the study, in other words the tradition in which this study is set as well as the various influences and experiences that had an effect on the development of the theological narrative that led to this study. This will be the description of my personal theological/spiritual story.

Thirdly, I will propose the research methodology that will accompany the rest of the study.

## 2. THE CHALLENGE OF POSTMODERNITY

### 2.1 Introduction

As indicated in Chapter One I will seek to respond to the challenges of the global economy and the effects of this economy on the local urban congregation. To be able to adequately respond to this challenge of the global village, I need to take the condition which has been named 'postmodernity' into consideration as it will influence the methodological setting as well as the theological setting of the study. This condition, which has been described as postmodern, has influenced all three of Tracy's republics - the academic world, society and the church - and therefore in the study I will seek to describe the story of these influences.

In the academic republic postmodernity has possibly had its greatest influence within philosophy, especially epistemology and the philosophy of language, and from here influenced all other spheres of human knowledge (such as sociology, psychology, natural science, etcetera). The philosophical movement from modern to post-modern was a radical move which was a turning point in the way humanity understands and interprets the world and how humanity understands and interprets what it means to be human. This new way of understanding or of interpreting has consequently also influenced society and thus also the church.

I will start with a description of postmodernity and seek a deeper understanding thereof, in other words reflecting on postmodernity within the academic (philosophic) republic before it moves on to reflecting on the postmodern condition in society and church.

### 2.2 The methodology of Chapter Two

Chapter Two will seek to describe postmodernity in all three of Tracy's republics as well as offer a justification for the use of narrative theology in a postmodern context. I will then propose a fundamentally narrative methodology as the guiding methodology for the study.

<b>The Methodology of Chapter Two</b>	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	
<b>2. The challenge of postmodernity</b>	A brief description of the challenges of postmodernity is given.

<p><b>3. An Introduction to the postmodern condition</b> I will introduce the origins of the term as well as reflect on some descriptions offered on the postmodern condition.</p>
<p><b>4. The story of postmodernity (a story in Tracy’s academic republic)</b> The story of postmodernity begins with the story of modernity. Thus I will reflect on the story of modernity, describing some of modernity’s themes, with special focus on modernity’s relationship to truth and knowledge. I will then reflect on the development from modern to post-modern, reflecting on various thinkers who challenged the nostrums of modernity.</p>
<p><b>5. The story of postmodernity ( a story in Tracy’s society and church republics)</b> I will reflect on the influences of postmodernity in church and society with special reference to the South African and urban contexts.</p>
<p><b>6. Summary: Postmodernity in Perspective</b> This will be a summary of the main themes of postmodernity.</p>
<p><b>7. The church and Modernity</b> Before I can reflect on the church’s response to postmodernity I need to reflect on the church’s relation to modernity.</p>
<p><b>8. Narrative, a response to postmodernity</b> In this section the study reflects on how narrative thought responds to some of the tenets of postmodernity and incorporates them in its thinking.</p>
<p><b>9. Postmodernity’s challenge to theology</b> This section gives a brief description of the challenge of postmodernity specifically to theology.</p>
<p><b>10 Narrative theological response to postmodernity</b> This section reflects on how narrative thinking has been incorporated into theology in order to respond to the nostrums of postmodernity. This section also reflects on the narrative nature of theology as well as the narrative roots of theology in the Christian-Jewish tradition.</p>
<p><b>11. A Narrative theological orientation in a postmodern world for “doing theology in a global village”</b> This section describes the narrative theological orientation of the study</p>
<p><b>12. Narrative methodology for the study</b> This section proposes the research methodology of the study as a combination of narrative and contextual models as well as proposing a working description for doing theology. This description will guide the rest of the study.</p>

3. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

### 3.1 In search for an adequate understanding of the postmodern condition

In the search to understand any condition within modernity, a definition of the condition was offered. Yet this is exactly one of the dramatic changes that have taken place in postmodernity. It is no longer possible to give precise definitions of conditions or phenomena, thus to try and define postmodernity would in essence be modern. The best a postmodern study can do is to offer a description of a condition. This description needs to be understood as a subjective description constructed within a certain context and a different context would probably offer a totally different description of the condition. So from a postmodern perspective I can only describe postmodernity as I understand it. This understanding needs to be seen within the context of Western tradition and thinking. In the process of seeking a better understanding of postmodernity I will describe the development (story) from modernity and what changed in modernity to give rise to the post-modern. “A key to this term is the hyphen buried within it – “post-modern”” (Lundin 1993:3).

#### 3.1.1 The origin of the term ‘*postmodern*’

The term was used for the first time in the late fifties by Irving Howe and Harry Levin, who coined the concept within the context of literary criticism to describe the demise of modernity (post-modern = demised-modern). Howe used the term to describe the move away from modern to what he called “postmodern” and for him it was symptomatic of the cultural decay that was taking place. Levin used the term to describe the ‘anti-intellectual undercurrent’ that is threatening the rationality and humanism of modernity (Kirsten 1988:29).

It was only years later in the seventies that the concept was accepted and became part of the intellectual world as it moved via Paris to the European philosophical world. Jean-Francois Lyotard, a French philosopher, presented a paper at a conference held in 1979 in Canada - *Conseil des Universities* - in which he described the intellectual revolutions which had taken place and which had formed the very basis of all the cultural developments in the Western world. He coined the phrase ‘*postmodern condition*’ as a condition which “exposes the tenuousness of the grand narratives of modernity and enlightenment” (Graham 1996: 20). Lyotard argues that “the word postmodern .... designates the state of our culture following the transformation which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts.” (Lyotard 1984: xxiii) He continues and writes that the postmodern condition can be characterised as an “incredulity towards the metanarratives” of modernity (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). “The metanarratives toward which the postmodern temperament responds with

incredulity are the stories of progress and development that have given shape to the Western experience over the last several centuries”(Lundin 1993:4).

Today the concept ‘postmodern’ is well known and is used to describe the present epoch in our history - lending its name to certain styles of architecture, art and literature. In the study I will seek to describe some of the tendencies that characterise this postmodern condition.

### 3.2 A description of the postmodern condition

As postmodernity cannot be clearly defined I can only describe it in broad terms, forming thus the parameters in which we can think and reflect on postmodernity. I will first reflect on various thinkers’ description of postmodernity. There are numerous different opinions about what postmodernity is and I will elucidate some of these ideas.

Du Toit (Du Toit 1988:37) describes the postmodern as recognising the *openness*, *indeterminateness* and therefore the *nomadic-metaphoricalness* of our existence.

Lundin speaks of the postmodern within the context of the modern when he says: “If modernism represented a desperate effort to have art and culture fill the void created by the decline of religion in the West, then postmodernism stands as the affirmation of the void, as the declaration of the impossibility of ever filling it.” (Lundin 1993:3) Lundin sees the postmodern as the affirmation of the *void* left by the *decline of religion* in the *modern western* thought.

Glanville speaks of the postmodern as “*a flight from authority*” (Glanville 1993:39) The postmodern condition is often interpreted as negative, because it questions empirical thought, rationality, reality, relativism and humanism. It can thus be seen as *destructive* and *decentralising* as it breaks down the basic authorities of modernity. Graham describes the postmodern as the age of *uncertainty*, where there is *no longer a consensus of values*. He also describes postmodernity as *destabilizing* many of the nostrums of the Enlightenment by challenging the major concepts of the Enlightenment such as truth, human nature, knowledge, power, selfhood and language. (Graham 1996:1) Postmodernity not only challenged the nostrums of the Enlightenment, but also the Romantic Movement. (Lundin 1993:4) Both the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement emphasised the self as an entity in isolation.

The self was “equipped in its solitude with panoply of powers. In Enlightenment, to be sure, faith was centred upon rationality as the instrument of power, while in romanticism it was the intuition or imagination that promised to deliver humans from their bondage to ignorance and injustice. But the adherents of the

Enlightenment and romanticism were more united by their unshakeable faith in the self than they were divided by their disagreements about the mechanisms through which that self did its work” (Lundin 1993:5).

In postmodernity the individual human being is seen as always being a cultural subject inscribed in linguistics, historical and social contexts (Graham 1996:1). Postmodernity emphasises the *indeterminacy* and *fluidity* of identity and knowledge.

In the past, science was seen as the mirror of nature that could give a faithful account of reality, yet the postmodern has questioned this knowledge because the postmodern emphasises the dependency of knowledge on *linguistic conventions* and *social-cultural systems*. Yet it cannot be described as being agnostic towards knowledge because it does not reject knowledge. It only understands knowledge to be relative to its social-cultural system and context. The postmodern recognises that there are *no neutral points of view* and therefore there is *no neutral access to knowledge* (Graham 1996:2). Knowledge is never independent of self-interest or group interest, in other words there is no neutral authority from which humanity can gather to agree on the terms by which its affairs might be ordered. If there is no shared basis from which ethics can be developed we can see the dangers and confusions that this age of uncertainty can cause. Yet it also opens numerous possibilities. “Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism as “scepticism toward metanarratives” means, among other things, that the postmodern self is free to see itself as neither defined nor confined by the historical or communal narratives that make a claim upon it. The therapeutic self considers itself free of the obligations of truth and the claims of ethical ideals”(Lundin 1993: 6). The *therapeutic self* is a concept that was coined by Phillip Rieff (Rieff 1966:13). Rieff describes this therapeutic understanding as “the unreligion of the age, and its master science” (Rieff 1966:13). Richard Rorty describes the postmodern condition as the discovery that no power outside language and the human will rules the world. Postmodernity has seen the truth of language and that is “that anything could be made to look good or bad, important or unimportant, useful or useless, by being redescribed” (Rorty 1989:7).

Alasdair MacIntyre argues and says that truth in our postmodern Western culture has been displaced by *psychological effectiveness* (MacIntyre 1984: 30-31).

If no cultural/linguistic system dominates, then knowledge remains open for dialogue and it respects the differences in understanding and the knowledge of the various cultural systems.

The postmodern accepts everything, but this does not mean that everything agrees. Its point of departure is limited, determined and personal, yet it is not subjective. The paradox is that opposites are not solved, nor does one try to solve them, yet they

respect each other. There is *no attempt to harmonise disharmony*. One cannot really describe the postmodern as being new, since relativism, pluralism and deconstruction are not really new, but in the postmodern paradigm they have a new value. In postmodernity differences are more important than homogeneity.

### 3.3 Postmodern summary

Postmodern has been described as: open, intermediate, a nomadic metaphoricalness, uncertain, a flight from authority, filling the void left by religion, psychological effectiveness, therapeutic self, destructive, decentralising, destabilising, no longer a consensus of values, no neutral access to knowledge, no attempt to harmonise disharmony in the context of relativism and pluralism.

I have introduced a few ideas with regards to postmodernity as post-modern, in other words challenging the nostrums of modernity. It is difficult to positively describe postmodernity as it is generally described not by what it is, but more by what it is not. In other words postmodernity is described by describing what it is not - *postmodern is not modern*. Postmodernity is generally described in its relation to modern and in which ways it is different from the modern. In the study I will follow this dominant method of describing postmodernity by describing in which ways postmodernity is different and has developed from the modern condition.

To understand how it came to the postmodern condition I will follow the story of development from modernity to postmodernity.

## 4. THE STORY OF POSTMODERNITY (a story in Tracy's academic republic)

In this section I will reflect on the development of the postmodern condition by reflecting on its development within Western history of modernity. The history of Western modernity is the story of the birth of capitalism, liberal democracy and positivism. This story is founded (based) on particular economic, socio-political and intellectual conditions which shaped the cultural and philosophical contours of this age (Graham 1996:4).

Within these cultural and philosophic contours of the modern age certain models were developed from the 'modern' understanding of: human nature, identity, knowledge, action and ultimate value and these "modern" models have shaped our understanding of selfhood and community. In the development from modern to post-modern these basic models of modernity are contested by postmodernism and poststructuralism thus

questioning modernity.

“The related - but separate - movements of postmodernism and poststructuralism have delineated our contemporary condition as variously one of moral and philosophical fragmentation, political cynicism, superficiality and collapse of legitimation” (Graham 1996:13).

The feminist movement also played an important role in the demise of the modern values and models of understanding. Feminists claimed that the modern values saw Western maleness and masculinity as the norm (Graham 1996:4). Although feminism can be seen as an ally to postmodernism it also is based on modernism’s understanding of basic values of human rights and justice.

Postmodernism brought with it a new way of understanding history, as Erickson says: “In history, there is the new historicism, in which history is not merely the objective discovery of the past, but actually creates it” (Erickson 1998:18).

Before I move on to describe this development I would like to highlight some of the tenets of postmodernity and then proceed to tell the story of the development from modernity to post-modernity.

#### **Tenets of Postmodernism**

1. The objectivity of knowledge is denied. Whether the knower is conditioned by the particularities of his or her situation or theories are used oppressively, knowledge is not a neutral means of discovery.
2. Knowledge is uncertain. Foundationalism, the idea that knowledge can be erected on some sort of bedrock of indubitable first principles, has had to be abandoned.
3. All-inclusive systems of explanation, whether metaphysical or historical, are impossible, and the attempt to construct them should be abandoned.
4. The inherent goodness of knowledge is also questioned. The belief that by means of discovering the truths of nature it could be controlled and evil and ills overcome has been disproved by the destructive ends to which knowledge has been put (in warfare, for instance).
5. Thus, progress is rejected. The history of the twentieth century should make this clear.
6. The model of the isolated individual knower as the ideal has been replaced by community-based knowledge. Truth is defined by and for the community, and all knowledge occurs within some community.
7. The scientific method as the epitomization of the objective method of inquiry is called into question. Truth is not known simply through reason, but through other channels, such as intuition (Erickson 1998: 18-19).

## 4.1 The story of modernity

Before I look at the story of modernity we need to give a brief glance as to what went before modernity, namely pre-modernity.

“The pre-modern understanding of reality was teleological. There was believed to be a purpose or purposes in the universe, within which humans fit and were to be understood. This purpose was worked out within the world. In the Western tradition, this was the belief that an omnipotent, omniscient God had created the entire universe and the human race, and had a plan he was bringing about. There had to be reasons for things, and these were not limited to efficient or “because of” causes, but also included final or “in order that” causes. This understanding was carried over to the interpretation of history. There was a pattern to history, which was outside it” (Erickson 1998:15).

The pre-modern believed in the objective existence of the physical world and in a correspondence theory of truth. In other words a proposition is true if it directly corresponds to the reality it describes.

Modernism kept some of these ideas, but developed others and discarded some of the pre-modern thoughts and themes. The story of modernity can be described from a philosophical, social-cultural and economic perspective. My main interest is in the philosophical story as it will focus on the philosophic developments that took place in the transition from modernity to postmodernity. But this philosophical story cannot be understood without reflecting on the social-cultural and economic setting of the story.

The philosophical ideas of a transcendent reality changed. History and reality were no longer interpreted as being determined by transcendental realities, but within history itself certain patterns could be determined and explained without the aid of any transcendental. Modernism did away with final causes or purposes as all causes and purposes were efficient causes. Thus all things that happened were not caused by some final cause or purpose, or because of some deity, but because of natural social phenomena within history.

David Wells, according to Erickson, sees the modern era being divided into two periods. The division between these two periods he believes to be a division between the age of the West and the age now (Erickson 1998: 24).

“On the other side of that line, Europe was the center of the world, politically and economically; now America is. In the earlier period, there was a sense in which Judeo-Christian values were at the center of culture, even if they were not

believed in personally. Now, however, there is no such set of values. Rather, they have been displaced and replaced by a loose set of psychological attitudes, which are now referred to as modernity” (Erickson 1998: 24).

David Wells continues and argues that the soil from which the time now has sprung is capitalism and democracy and these in turn depend on technology and urbanisation. So modernity can be seen as a transition from one social and economic order to another and as a new way of thinking. Thus in order to understand the philosophic story of modernity the soil from which this story strung needs to be taken into consideration as well. I will come back to this thought in the next chapter when I will unpack the story of the global village and how modernity, postmodernity and the capitalism of the global village are linked and connected.

I will now reflect on some of the main themes of the modern story.

#### **4.1.1 Great themes of the modern philosophic story**

##### 4.1.1.1 Science

The first great discovery of the seventeenth century was the rise of science and the commitment to empiricism, the understanding that all knowledge of the natural world is grounded on observable and verifiable facts (Graham 1996:15). This was the new key to all knowledge, and with it came a new optimism that science and empiricism had the power to discover and prove all that there is to know. Truth was reduced to that which can be empirically proven, thus all metaphysical or transcendental truth was discarded as it could not be empirically verified.

##### 4.1.1.2 Enlightenment

The Enlightenment in the eighteenth century brought with it a new way of seeing the world, society and the individual.

“It prompted a new approach to the study of society founded on the idea of the social as a distinct sphere of life, available to be analysed in human and material terms alone, and requiring no recourse to religious frameworks” (Graham 1996:16).

René Descartes and Isaac Newton were the two thinkers who ushered in the Enlightenment. Descartes saw the individual being as an autonomous rational substance living and encountering the mechanistic world of Newton (Erickson 1998:84).

The Enlightenment brought numerous other great thinkers, known as the secular

intelligentsia, who championed the idea of reason free from the confines of religion. The optimism that surrounded science was now aided by the belief that rational thought is the key to all progress in society. It was believed that humanity could solve all its societal problems without religion or moral authorities, but that true humanity and society was to be found in freedom. Enlightenment can best be described by the words of one of the greatest spokespersons of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant: “Enlightenment was man’s leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one’s intelligence without the guidance of another... Sapere Aude! Have the courage to use your own intelligence! Is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment”(Kant 1949: 132).

Rational thought in modernity was liberated from God (religion), from authority and liberated from the confines of the past (tradition). Thinkers like Nietzsche, Freud and Marx were the liberators of rational thought and challenged the church and her beliefs. Science and the Enlightenment formed the basis of the philosophical thinking of modernity. I would like to highlight some of the thoughts of this time:

### The basic tenets of Modernity

1. **Naturalism.** The idea that reality is restricted to the observable system of nature and in nature all is to be found.
2. **Humanism.** The human is the highest reality and value, the end for which all of reality exists rather than the means to the service of some higher being.
3. The **scientific method.** Knowledge is good and can be attained by humans. The method best suited for this enterprise is the scientific method. Observation and experimentation are the sources from which our knowledge of truth is built up.
4. **Reductionism.** From being considered the best means for gaining knowledge, the scientific method was increasingly considered to be the only method, so that various disciplines sought to attain the objectivity and precision of the natural sciences. Humans in some cases were regarded as nothing but highly developed animals.
5. **Progress.** Because knowledge is good, humanly attainable, and growing, we are progressively overcoming the problems that have beset the human race.
6. **Nature.** Rather than being fixed and static, nature came to be thought of as dynamic, growing, and developing. Thus it was able to produce the changes in life forms through immanent processes of evolution, rather than requiring explanation in terms of a creator and designer.
7. **Certainty.** Because knowledge was seen as objective, it could attain certainty. This required foundationalism, the belief that it is possible to base knowledge on some sort of absolute first principles. One early model of this was found in the rationalism of René Descartes, who found one indubitable belief, namely, that he was

doubting, and then proceeded to draw deductions from that. An alternative was empiricism, the belief that there are purely objective sensory data from which knowledge can be formulated.

8. **Determinism.** There was a belief that what happened in the universe followed from fixed causes. Thus, the scientific method could discover these laws of regularity that controlled the universe. Not only physical occurrences but human behaviour were believed to be under this etiological control.

9. **Individualism.** The ideal of the knower was the solitary individual, carefully protecting his or her objectivity by weighing all options. Truth being objective, individuals can discover it by their own effort. They can free themselves from the conditioning particularities of their own time and place and know reality as it is in itself.

10. **Anti-authoritarianism.** The human was considered the final and most complete measure of truth. Any externally imposed authority, whether that of the group or of a supernatural being, must be subjected to scrutiny and criticism by human reason (Erickson 1998: 16-17).

#### 4.1.2 Great themes of the modern social-cultural and economic story

The developments in the West were not only philosophical, but there were social, economic and cultural movements that were all part of this revolutionary time in Europe and North America. I will just highlight a few of these themes in the story of modernity.

##### 4.1.2.1 Industrial Capitalism

The philosophic story of modernity (with science and the Enlightenment as themes) needs to be placed within its social-cultural and economic setting, which brings me to the other great theme of modernism - the rise of industrial capitalism.

Industrial capitalism can be described in the following way:

“Production and consumption were organized on the basis of a market economy, involving large-scale monetary exchange and the accumulation of capital”(Graham 1996:17).

Industrial capitalism with its factories and industries mainly took place in the urban centres of the modern world. Thousands of people thus came to the urban centres in search of employment within these factories and industries, which is a phenomenon known as urbanisation. The people, who moved into the urban centres, had to adapt to new living conditions and social structures. The industrial workers were often separated from their families and formed new social groups such as miners and factory workers with their own set of values and norms. Urbanisation was not just the movement of

people from rural areas into the cities, but it was also the rise of a new lifestyle in these urban centres. This lifestyle can be described as a modern urban lifestyle.

Capitalism has been described as the accumulation of capital, but for capital to accumulate constant innovation and advances in technology were needed. This meant that the markets for the products being produced continuously needed to expand. There were two ways in which the markets could be expanded: 1) either by convincing people of the necessity of the commodities or 2) establishing new markets abroad through colonial expansion.

#### 4.1.2.2 Secular Democracy

The other great theme of the modernity is secular democracy. Modernity can be characterised as the era that was dominated by secular forms of power and influence (Graham 1996:17). It was during the modern period that secular governments and constitutions were developed and that the idea of the nation state developed. All over Europe revolutions took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was to take over the political and economic power from the monarchs and the church.

The revolutions were based on the philosophic themes of modernity, namely science, reason and the equality of all humans thus eschewing authoritarian and traditional forms of rule by the Monarchs and the Church. Yet the economic theme was also playing a dominant role in these revolutions as science and technology opened the door for new forms of economic development in factories and industries, thus shifting the economic power base away from the land owned by the monarchs and the church to the owners of factories.

All these great themes of the modern story: science, Enlightenment, industrial capitalism and secular democracy, are closely related and need to be seen in this relation to each other. In the study I will focus on the philosophic developments of modernity.

#### **4.1.3 The modern understanding of truth and knowledge**

To understand the development from modern to postmodern I will need to describe the shifts that took place in the search for truth and knowledge.

The intellectual search for truth in modernity was based on three epistemological enlightenment assumptions (Erickson 1998:85).

##### 4.1.3.1 Epistemological Enlightenment assumptions

1. *Knowledge is certain.* Reality can be and should be scrutinised by reason using a

method of inquiry that can prove the essential correctness of philosophical, scientific, religious, moral and political ideas. Thus truth can be empirically proven by proving the correctness of the statements. True statements are statements that can be verified universally. Knowledge attained by this empirical universal process was certain and believed to be infallible and thus a more stable and rational foundation than religion or transcendental truths. MacIntyre describes this attitude towards knowledge as the “culture of encyclopaedia”. The encyclopaedist operates with the “belief that in all enquiry, religious, moral, or otherwise, the adequate identification, characterization, and classification of the relevant data does not require... any prior commitment to some particular theoretical or doctrinal standpoint. The data, so to speak, present themselves and speak for themselves” (MacIntyre 1990: 16). MacIntyre traces the encyclopaedic culture back to the Enlightenment and the central belief of the Enlightenment that all matters of moral and theological significance can be discussed and a rational consensus reached by individuals committed to the search for truth. In other words the rational quest will discover truths which can then be universally verified by all rational beings. From this followed the belief that rational minds “freed from the constraints of religious and moral tests would make irreversible progress in intellectual enquiry” (Lundin 1993:20).

## 2. *Knowledge is objective.*

“The ideal intellectual is a dispassionate knower, who stands apart from being a conditioned observer, and from a vantage point outside the flux of history gains a sort of “God’s-eye view” of the universe - if there were a God. As the scientific project is divided into separate and narrow disciplines, specialists, who are neutral observers who know more and more about less and less, emerge as the models and the heroes” (Erickson 1998:85).

Thus empirical knowledge is objective, as the experiment can be repeated anywhere in the world and the same truths will be proven, thus no subjective or contextual influence determines empirical rational truth.

## 3. *Knowledge is inherently good.*

Ignorance was seen as the great evil from which knowledge liberates us. Thus science had the freedom to continue its process, never needing any justification for what it did. The more we know the better the world, was the motto that justified any research, no matter what the consequences. In modernity there was the belief that science together with technology and the findings of sociology and psychology will solve all of humanity’s problems. This optimism, which prevailed, was based on reason and the freedom necessary to explore. This also meant individual freedom. This was a freedom from authorities and traditions which were seen to hold back the free exploration of reason. So the enlightenment ideal for humanity was an

autonomous self, which is a self determining subject who exists outside of traditions and /or community (Erickson 1998:85).

Keith Putt uses an analogy to describe the modern human predicament in the search for truth and knowledge.

“He pictures human beings as adrift on the “infinite sea of being” (Erickson 1998:128).

This “sea of being” is an ocean of dangerous waters and human beings need to navigate through these waters by using stars which can tell us where we are.

Keith Putt’s analogy clearly highlights humanity’s need for something that can guide it through this ocean of being. This ‘something’ that functions as a guide needs to be certain. Modernity believes that rational and empirical knowledge is this something which is certain enough to guide humanity.

For Descartes it was reason that would map out the way in our infinite sea of being. Rationality gives humanity certain fixed basic points by which humanity could orientate itself. Hume and Lock added to Descartes rationality, empirical knowledge and truth.

For Putt there are two sets of certainties in the modern quest for truth: the rational journey of Descartes and the empirical journey of Lock and Hume. The basic necessity for both of these journeys is that there is some basic certainty on which their quest is founded, just like the stars on the open sea. This is also the first question of hermeneutics: What is the basis that we can be certain of? What is the bottom line that we can agree on? If such a *bottom line* is not found then all meaning and knowledge would be destroyed in a “bottomless pit of indeterminacy” (Erickson 1998:129).

Modernity was in search of this bottom line and found it in rational and empirical knowledge which is certain, objective, rational, empirically verifiable and which is non-hermeneutical and thus can guide humanity through the infinite sea of being.

## 4.2 Modern and the development of the postmodern

The collapse of the grand narratives of modernity did not come from outside, but from within the story of modernity and its quest for this bottom line based on empirical and rational truth and knowledge. Postmodernity came out of modern quest for knowledge which is certain and true, or as MacIntyre says that it was this quest for universal rational truth that opened the doors for the “genealogical school of criticism” (MacIntyre 1990:39). MacIntyre describes the task of the genealogist as writing “the history of those social and psychological formations in which the will to power is distorted into and concealed by the will to truth” (MacIntyre 1990:39).

### What changed philosophically?

Postmodernity challenged the three basic epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment and thus of modernity, namely:

- 1) knowledge is certain,
- 2) knowledge is objective,
- 3) knowledge is inherently good.

In the Enlightenment truth was based on the certainty of knowledge which in turn was based on the idea that there was a direct correlation between language (knowledge) and reality, which could be empirically verified. This empirical epistemology was the basis of **positivism**. There are five key concepts with regards to positivism:

- 1- the belief that all knowledge is derived from empirical observation and is verified by empirical experience and experiment;
- 2 - the methodological unity of all science (human and natural);
- 3 - faith in the progress of science and that science will solve all the problems of the world;
- 4 - the central role of the subject-object scheme in which reality is seen as an objective reality that can be known by a neutral subject and can be analysed according to causes and effects;
- 5 - that scientific truth is only possible through the correspondence between propositions of knowing subjects and the state of affairs of objects within reality (Pieterse 1993: 57).

These positivist ideas were challenged very early already by Enlightenment thinkers themselves, such as Kant. "From Kant and David Hume, the challenge to self-certainty came as an attack upon claims about the mind's ability to apprehend reality, the thing-in-itself, directly. The empiricists and rationalists had taken their understanding of nature and the human mind to constitute indubitable knowledge of the primary structures of reality"(Lundin 1993:49). Kant challenges this in his work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, where he argues that the self not so much discovers pre-existing order in nature, but projects that order creatively upon the world.

"Since... nature's conformity to law rests on the necessary liking of phenomena in experience, without which we could not know any objects of the world of the sense, in other words, such conformity rests on the original laws of the intellect, it sounds strange at first, but it is none the less true when I say in respect of these laws of the intellect: the intellect does not derive its laws (a priori) from nature but prescribes them to nature" (Kant 1949b: 91).

This Kantian attack on the rational self did not destroy the self, but rather opened the door for this self to rise again but this time with the power of imagination.

Kant understood the self, not to be an isolated "I", but the "transcendental ego" of

humanity “imposing its forms upon the random facts of experience. What is given to humanity is the random information of the senses; the transcendental ego must supply the ordered meaning missing in the facts” (Lundin 1993:50). This opened the door to Nietzsche’s understanding of the individual imposing his/her will/ desire on the world. As Richard Rorty describes the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche and William James, “instead of saying that the discovery of vocabularies could bring hidden secrets to light,....said that new ways of speaking could help us get what we want” (Rorty 1982:150).

It can be argued that the work of Kant anticipated the triumph of perspectivism, as he brought about a profound shift in the understanding of the nature of knowledge. For nearly two centuries before Kant the empiricism of Francis Bacon and the rationalism of Descartes dominated the understanding of knowledge and saw the individual as a discoverer of truth. Truth was something that could be found. It was found either in the inner regions of the mind (Descartes) or in the phenomena of the natural world (Bacon).

The three modern assumptions were being challenged:

That knowledge is certain was challenged by Kant already from within the period of the Enlightenment. He argued that knowledge is not in the objective world, but within the language of the subjective knower. This idea also challenged the idea that knowledge is objective. Nietzsche very strongly put forward the idea that knowledge is driven by our subjective wills and desires and therefore cannot necessarily be seen as good.

In the last few decades the confidence in science has been shaken, with very influential books such as Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Hans Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, and Jacques Derrida’s *On Grammatology*. These books “have worked to bring about a dramatic questioning of science as a standard of epistemic certainty (Lundin 1993:34). I will be coming back to these thinkers in the next section of the study. In history also some things happened that challenged the positivist view of humanity and knowledge as Françoise Mauriac writes in the foreword to Elie Wiesel’s Book, “Night”: “The dream which Western man conceived in the eighteenth century, whose dawn he thought he saw in 1789, and which, until August 2, 1914, had grown stronger with the progress of enlightenment and the discoveries of science – this dream vanished finally for me before those trainloads of little children. And yet I was still thousands of miles away from thinking that they were to be fuel for the gas chambers and the crematory” (Wiesel 1981:8). The things that happened in the two great wars of Europe and the gas chambers of Auschwitz shattered the Enlightenment dream of goodness of the rationality of humanity. It is within this historic setting that some of these tenets of modernity were questioned and challenged.

I shall be unpacking the transition from modern to postmodern in more detail in the next

section.

### 4.3 The epistemological story of postmodernity

These positivist ideas were further challenged amongst others by Ludwig Wittgenstein as he discovered that there is no direct verifiable link between language and reality. The implication of this lack of a verifiable link between language and reality is that there is no direct correlation between words and states of affairs in reality. This means that words do not represent objects or concepts beyond the scope of language (Graham 1996:21). Language refers to language ad infinitum and nowhere is there this direct link to reality. Therefore there is no non-hermeneutical basis (the basis that modernity thought it had found in rational and empirical thought) on which all knowledge can be built. In the modern (positivist) world view, language corresponded in a one-for-one way to the objects and events of the real world. Modern epistemology was built on this basic assumption that this correspondence between language and the real world exists.

Thus the modern view of the world could be divided into subject (person with mental capacity to understand) and objective reality of the world which is there to be understood and language was the reliable and accurate link between the objective and subjective worlds. This basic concept of subject (knower) and the objective (known) world was turned upside down by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* where he says:

“5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein 1961:56).

To the postmodernists the only worlds that people can know are the worlds we share in language (Freedman, J & Combs, G 1996:28). I will need to elaborate on this epistemological development as I believe that it is here, in this concept of language that the crisis arose in modernity that gave rise to post-modernity.

To re-tell the epistemological story of postmodernity the study will reflect on the thoughts of various thinkers who struggled with new events and experiences and consequently re-authored the epistemological story of modernity into a postmodern story.

#### 4.3.1 Wittgenstein, epistemology, language and postmodernity

In modernity it was thought that the subject can understand and know the objective reality through the medium of language as the direct link to reality, which is one of the basic assumptions of positivism described above. In other words, there is a direct correspondence between the most basic fundamental name (proposition) and an

objective (state of affairs) in reality. This direct correspondence was the non-hermeneutical basis of all positivist epistemology. This direct correspondence was never empirically verified, but was accepted a priori. Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was fascinated by this proposed direct correlation between language and objective reality of the world which made all knowledge possible.

He used the idea of a picture to analyse this correlation.

“2.11 A picture presents a situation in logical space, the existence and non-existence of states of affairs” (Wittgenstein 1961).

For the picture theory to make any sense these pictures need to be understood as isomorphic pictures (Stenius 1960:90). For two pictures to be isomorphic the following needs must be fulfilled:

- 1) the categorical structure of both pictures needs to be the same,
- 2) there must be a one to one correspondence between the elements of each of the pictures.

If both these conditions are fulfilled then one can say that the pictures are isomorphic. The relationship between language and reality is accepted a priori to be isomorphic. In other words language is understood as a picture of reality where the categorical structure of language and that which it describes is the same and there is correspondence between the elements of each.

It is as if the picture has feelers which reach out to the corresponding reality.

“2.1515 These correlations are, as it were, the feelers of the picture’s elements, with which the picture touches reality” (Wittgenstein 1961).

The question if a picture is true or false is basically a question if the picture is isomorphic or not. But how does one know from the picture if it is isomorphic if one does not have access to the reality it represents and depicts? Therefore from the picture alone we have no possibility to tell if it is true or false.

When Wittgenstein says: “2.221 What a picture represents is its sense” (Wittgenstein 1961), he is actually saying that the sense and meaning of a picture or a proposition is internal to the picture or proposition (Mounce 1981:23).

This implies that the only thing we have is our language and language is our world. There is no direct link between humanity and reality besides through the medium of our language.

Steiner (Steiner 1989:93) calls this the “break of the covenant between word and world“. This radical new understanding of language within the philosophy of language broke

down the epistemology of modernity (positivism) as well as the subject-object dualism of modernity (positivism) and hailed in the post-modern.

“...if indeed there really is no world (to speak of) apart from language, then there really isn't much reason to become distraught over the alleged fact that we can never get it quite right. From this perspective, in other words, there is nothing to 'get'; there is only language itself, discourse, texts, 'social constructions' of the world, nothing more” (Freeman 1993:11).

Freeman argues that this absence of getting it right is not so much a failure as it is a non-possibility: “...language, rather than referring to the world 'itself', refers only to language (which refers only to language, which refers only to language, and so on ad infinitum)” (Freeman 1993:11).

“To postmodernists the only world that people can know are the worlds we share in language, and language is an interactive process, not a passive receiving of preexisting truths”(Freedman & Combs 1996:28). Understood as such language then tells us how to see the world and is not a direct reflection of the world, but a creation of the world as we know it (Freedman & Combs 1996: 29).

“If texts refer to anything at all, it might be held, it is only to other texts, this chain of 'intertextuality' being endless, infinite; and what this implies, in turn, is that there may really be no 'lives' apart from this infinite play of language itself” (Freeman 1993:8).

I would like to reflect on Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of language as I believe that his understanding of language played a vital role in the demise of the modern epistemology and especially with regards to the epistemological assumption that knowledge is inherently good.

In an argument written in 1873, Nietzsche asked the old question: “What is truth?” The answer that he came up with was:

“a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are: metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins....To be truthful means using the customary metaphors – in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all” (Nietzsche 1976: 46-47).

For Nietzsche all knowledge is a matter of perspective, thus an issue of interpretation, “and all interpretations are lies” (Lundin 1993: 38). Nietzsche understood the relationship between language and things and reality to be a relationship that is based on desire, power and acts of violence. Thus he believes that one lies so as to satisfy ones deepest needs and desires. “The man in this condition transforms things until they mirror his power – until they are reflections of his perfection” (Nietzsche 1968: 72).

It was this kind of thinking that brought about the dawn of deconstruction or poststructuralism which has its roots in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. “Saussure propounded a series of exceptionally influential arguments about the relationship of language to reality. According to Saussure, the relationship of the signifier (a word) to the signified (the object to which we attempt to point with words) is always an arbitrary matter of the will and linguistic convention. There is no essential connection between a given word and what it connotes” (Lundin 1993: 187). Thus, the meaning of words according to Saussure was not to be found in the word’s relationship to an object or even to history, but through their formal relationship to one another (Saussure 1966: 120). This line of thinking, of Saussure, was taken up by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who helped to make structuralism a dominant force also in social sciences. Jacques Derrida took up this line of thought in a book *Writing and Difference*. In this article he criticises the modern dualism between nature and culture. This is a dualism which argues that whatever is “universal and spontaneous” belongs to nature, while culture is that which gives society its norms and regulates the affairs. Derrida believes that this dualism was important as it kept the myth alive that there was something stable and thus a foundation upon which all could be founded. This is a fundamental human desire (Derrida 1978: 278-279). Derrida means that the emptiness is at the heart of language because there is nothing behind it or within it. Language carries within itself the acknowledgement that there is nothing behind, below or within it save the free play of human desire. “Language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique”(Derrida 1978:284). This led to the rise of post-structuralism that there is no possible centre, no point of certainty or stability outside the world of the interpretive play of signs and symbols.

Some of the thoughts of Wittgenstein and Nietzsche are echoed in the work of Richard Rorty, whose work can be seen as a response to this post-structuralism. Rorty sees his own work not so much as constructionism, but as therapeutic (Rorty 1979:9). Nietzsche’s perspectivism led Richard Rorty to question some of these modern assumptions. He attempted “to undermine... confidence in ‘the mind’ as something about which one should have a ‘philosophical’ view, in ‘knowledge’ as something about which there ought to be a ‘theory’ and which has ‘foundation’, and in ‘philosophy’ as it

has been conceived since Kant” (Rorty 1979:7). In his first book (Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature) Rorty took on foundationalism and the bankruptcy thereof. He argues that the collapse of Enlightenment ethics and epistemology has left the world with nothing else but hermeneutics. “Hermeneutics ... is what we get when we are no longer epistemological” (Rorty 1979:325).

Rorty refers back to a distinction that Kant once made between determinate and reflective judgement. Determinate judgment “ticks off instances of concepts by invoking common, public criteria,” while reflective judgement “operates without rules, ... searching for concepts under which to group particulars” (Rorty 1982:143). The determinate judgement provides us with hard knowledge, while the reflective judgement provides us with the pleasing images that our imaginations crave. For Kant, real knowledge was that which is based on determinate judgements, but this has been called into question, so that we are left with reflective judgements only. This opened the door to romanticism and the creative spirit as the new avant-garde of all knowledge. “According to the new criticism, the object produced by the imagination is the tightly constructed work of art. In Rorty’s scheme of pragmatic poststructuralism, the product of particularly creative activity is a new paradigm that gives order to cultural life and intellectual endeavours” (Lundin 1993: 189).

For Rorty, it is this hermeneutical understanding of knowledge that has brought with it that distinctively postmodern characteristic or as he says “attitude” which is “interested not so much in what is out there in the world, or in what happened in history, as in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses. When we loose faith in the power of language to mirror the truth, that is, we acquire a newfound appreciation for its therapeutic capacity to help us get what we desire (Rorty 1979:359).

Rorty’s thoughts can be seen as having strong romantic tendencies, as he argues that the postmodern culture will be a thoroughly romantic and literary culture. This pragmatism is metaphysical idealism or romanticism in a new guise, but what distinguishes it is the total abandonment of the notion of discovering truth (Rorty 1982: 151).

In Rorty’s understanding there are two types of textualists, namely “strong” and “weak”. The weak textualists are amongst others the structuralists who seek to “imitate science” by using “a method of criticism” and agreement once they have “cracked the code.” The weak textualists need the assurance and the “comforts of consensus,” while the strong textualists (who are the followers of Nietzsche) simply ask questions similar to the questions asked by the engineer or the physicist when confronted with a puzzling physical object: “How shall I describe this in order to get it to do what I want?” (Rorty 1982: 152-153). The textualists have given up all hope in finding any truth, or what Rorty

calls “*privileged vocabulary*”. They see all knowledge, reading and all intellectual activity as a form of therapy, in other words a person reads and thinks in order to get what they need to get by. Thus any vocabulary that is used, be it the vocabulary of the New Critics, the analytical philosophers, the devout Christian or Muslim does not point to any truth, according to Rorty’s understanding, but only points to the needs of its user for a “means of dealing with life’s devastations and disappointments” (Lundin 1993: 199).

In another book Rorty argues with Nietzsche that history can be seen as successive metaphors and thus the poet will be seen as the vanguard of the human species (Rorty 1989: 20). Rorty had quite an influence especially within the circles of the literary critics and he was strongly attacked especially by those with Marxist sympathies. For example, Lentricchia argues that “Rorty’s vision of culture is the leisured vision of liberalism; the free pursuit of personal growth anchored in material security” (Lentricchia 1985:20). Lentricchia says that since all interpretations of reality are constructions these constructions should be constructions from the view of history as a social struggle (Lentricchia 1985:11). Lentricchia and Rorty might be arguing about which point of view of history should be used in the construction, yet their fundamental ideas are the same. They both base their ideas on what can be called the postmodern ideology of desire. “In the secular eschatology of desire, the kingdom to come at the end of history is a realm in which expressive individuals enjoy expansive and flexible freedom. That freedom is put into the service of the self’s quest for expression, acquisition, and satisfaction” (Lundin 1993: 37).

It was within this thinking about language that literature and thus narrative started to play a vital role, especially in the Romantic Movement.

C. S Lewis in a book *An Experiment in Criticism* seeks to establish what is a good book, in other words, what are the criteria for a good novel/ good narrative? He uses criteria which are largely influenced by Kantian epistemology and understanding of the arts (Lundin 1993:213). Lewis sees all reading as an escape from “immediate concrete actuality.” The question that he then asks is where do humans escape to? On this basis he classifies between lower class readers and higher class readers. The lower class readers escape to egoistic castle-building, which according to him can either be harmless fantasizing or turn into something “brutal, prurient and megalomaniac.” The sophisticated readers “escape into mere play, divertissements which may be exquisite words of art” (Lewis 1961:52). Yet both ‘high’ and ‘low’ class readers according to Lewis forget that the order that is found in art is not the true order found in reality (Lewis 1961:74).

Thus narratives, art and stories give us moments of freedom from the boredom and randomness of actual reality, or they provide glimpses and visions of a glorious world that is to come, but we must never mistake them as comments on the actual order of our

present reality or lives (Lundin 1993: 217). Frank Lentricchia says in similar words to Lewis commenting on the world: “human desire, conscious of itself as ‘lack,...confronts a grim reality which at every point denies us our needs... our ‘environment’ is alien, but...its very alien quality beckons forth our creative impulses to make substitute fictive worlds” (Lentricchia 1980: 33-34). For Northrop Frye, the glory of literature consists in its ability to transform this alien environment. In this sense literature exists as a surrogate for the kingdom of God (Lundin 1993: 218).

In another book, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, Lewis writes: “If the author’s plot is only a net, and usually an imperfect one, a net of time and event for catching what is not really a process at all, is life much more?” (Lewis 1975:20).

Yet it is impossible to get out of our own skins, so Lewis writes that reading is in a sense to get out of our own skins, but we never reach that goal, but we “make at least some progress towards it”, by at least eliminating “the grosser illusion of perspective” (Lewis 1961: 101-102). He uses the allegory from Plato’s cave to say: if I can’t get out of the dungeon I shall at least look out through the bars. It is better than sinking back on the straw in the darkest corner”(Lewis 1961: 101-102). Lewis states that the primary impulse of the self is aggrandizement and the “secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness. In love, in virtue, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in the reception of the arts we are doing this”(Lewis 1961:138). So why literature, why narratives, stories and even art if it cannot really help humanity understand reality? Lewis answers: “The nearest I have yet got to an answer is that we seek an enlargement of our being,” “We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own”(Lewis 1961:137). The reason behind this desire is to escape the dark dungeon of our own imprisoning consciousness. Humans do not want to be Leibnitzian nomads, but seek windows or doors and literature, as Logos, could be the very doors and windows that human seek.

So one of the consequences of right reading according to Lewis is the feeling that one has got out, or “I have got in”, pierced the shell of another nomad wandering the desert of reality. The alternative to right reading is imprisonment within the dungeon of self or imprisonment within the impersonal collective, for “the man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others”(Lewis 1961: 137-138). Thus, literature has the gift to heal wounds, without undermining the privilege of individuality.

“By reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do” (Lewis 1961:221).

Yet we cannot be solipsistic entities, because the very language we use connects us to language communities both past and present. These communities pass on to us certain prejudices with which we interpret our language and our selves. I will come back to this thought when discovering the contribution that Hans-Georg Gadamer brought the search and understanding of knowledge. Lewis' insights are very useful, but he remains largely in the romantic paradigm as he distinguishes between "reception" and "use" of art or literature. He argues that "right reading" is the passive reception of the thoughts of the other in contrast to the active "self-interest" inherent in the *use* of everything. Lewis understands there to be a two stage process with regards to our encounter with literature.

"First we *hear*, as we are filled with the thoughts of the author who has written what we read; we are able to hear, Lewis says, because we have become detached and unselfish. Then, when that experience of hearing has ended, we return to our everyday tasks and ordinary desires. We may be able *to make use of* what we have received by applying the truth to our lives. Yet all the while we are aware, Lewis appears to say, that our mundane use is derivative and inferior to the experience in which we had our initial disinterested encounter" (Lundin 1993:223-224).

**Wittgenstein, epistemology, language and postmodern:**

1. There is no direct link between the subjective knower and the objective world.
2. The only link there is, is language and therefore no direct correspondence to reality
3. The only reality there is, is the reality of language

There were some other thinkers that brought an end to positivism, namely Dilthey and later Popper, Kuhn, Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur (Pieterse 1993:60). I will highlight some of the lines of thought of these thinkers with regards to the breakdown of positivism and the development of the tenets of postmodernity described in a previous section (4. The story of Postmodernity).

#### **4.3.2 Karl Popper, subjective truth and postmodernism**

Karl Popper as a scientist developed the idea of *critical rationalism* thus bringing into rational empiricism an element of critique not known before in positivism.

Language is the epistemological link between the knower and the known / knowledge and reality and yet this link is not a direct correspondence. Thus language always refers again to language and never directly to reality. Thus no matter how much more knowledge or understanding humanity gains about reality it remains an open infinite

process.

Popper's epistemology is a process where through critical scrutiny mistakes are discovered and thus discarded. For him all knowledge was open to critique and falsification, which means there are no general (universal and timeless) truths, only temporary truths. For Popper scientific knowledge is a process of development as hypotheses are established and tested through the process of falsification (Pieterse 1993:63). Science for Popper rests on the empirical falsification of statements, hypothesis and theories (Pieterse 1993:63). Empirical knowledge is thus always temporary and hypothetical and so universal timeless truths or absolutely certain knowledge is not possible. (Compare with 4.1.3.1 Epistemological Enlightenment assumptions: *Knowledge is certain.*)

Another breakthrough in Popper's thinking was that observation is always interpretation of facts in the light of a formulated theory (Pieterse 1993:63). According to this, neutral or objective observation is not possible as humanity always interprets facts or reality in the light of a certain point of view, perspective, expectation or theory. Thus for Popper all observation is theory laden (Pieterse 1993:63). A scientist cannot formulate observations into hypothesis in a neutral vacuum, but always does this within a scientific tradition.

The formulated hypothesis is also tested within this scientific tradition.

Popper still believed in the importance and possibility of objective knowledge. He believed that knowledge should be as objective as possible, therefore he introduced another important aspect into his critical rationality, namely the inter-subjective dialogue and critique that needs to take place within the scientific community. It is in the dialogue and critique of the scientific community that objective knowledge is to be found. It is this scientific community which determines the truth and viability of scientific statements (Pieterse 1993:64).

#### **Popper, critical rationalism and the postmodern**

1. He introduced the idea of knowledge being always uncertain and that theories, statements only exist as long as they are not falsified.
2. He placed all knowledge within a scientific tradition (history) therefore no knowledge can be neutral or objective.
3. He introduced a dialogical character to epistemology as he placed it within the scientific community which determines the truth of scientific statements.

### 4.3.3 Thomas S Kuhn, historicity of knowledge and Postmodernism

Thomas Kuhn is famous for introducing the concept of paradigms and paradigm shifts into the scientific world. Paradigms became central to Kuhn's understanding of the development of knowledge. He believed that each scientific community has certain basic beliefs, theories, values and models in which scientific inquiry takes place and this forms the paradigm.

The scientific community and the scientist do their research within these paradigms. The paradigm determines the models of research and thus creates the space for solution to new puzzles to be found (Kuhn 1970: 182-187). Kuhn argues that the sciences are not just simply raw empirical observations and replicable experiments that add to the sure and steady progress of science, but that this progress is a process within scientific communities who are guided by dominant paradigms that are not so much definitively disproved as relegated to the sidelines by boredom and lack of interest (Kuhn 1970: 41. 53).

These paradigms, according to Kuhn, change through time and this change he describes as being rather abrupt. The change from one paradigm to another can be described as a scientific revolution. A creative new concept makes this revolution possible - the *Gestaltswitch*. It only takes one new concept to bring about a *Gestaltswitch* within science. For Kuhn the new key concept opens the door to a new paradigm which is totally different from the previous paradigm (Kuhn 1970: 103).

In history there are numerous thinkers who introduced such creative key concepts which brought about paradigm shifts within their various fields. Ludwig Wittgenstein and his analytic language philosophy brought about a totally new way of understanding language as well as empiricism. Karl Marx and his material historicism brought about a totally new way of understanding the historical dialectic as well as the social world. Sigmund Freud and his psycho-analyses brought about a totally different way of understanding the human psyche. These thinkers brought about paradigm shifts within their various fields of expertise, but these shifts had repercussions that went beyond their specific fields as they transformed the way the world was seen and understood and after which it was impossible to go back to the former ways of understanding.

Kuhn argued that the scientist chooses the paradigm in which he or she will work and this choice of paradigm is a subjective choice determined by various factors such as personal biography, social context etcetera. Thus for Kuhn objectivism, as understood by the positivist was no longer possible (Pieterse 1993: 69). It is thus also no longer possible to speak of an objective reality, as the reality depends on the way that we see it and through which paradigm we interpret it. Truth becomes relative to the paradigm in

which it is stated. It is in this context that hermeneutics starts to play a dominant role as truth becomes relative to the interpretative framework in which it is stated.

**Kuhn, paradigm shifts and postmodern**

1. Knowledge is a process and this process takes place within paradigms.
2. Objective knowledge is not possible as it depends on which paradigm the knower is working from, in other words to which scientific community he/she belongs.
3. Knowledge is linked to history because with each paradigm comes the method of research and a method for understanding reality.

**4.3.4 Edmund Husserl, phenomenology, hermeneutics, romanticism and postmodernism**

The reality of human experience and action can only be understood adequately by interpreting and studying the values and intention that are behind human actions and behaviour (Pieterse 1993:72). Therefore science must discover the meaning that an individual gives to his or her actions (Pieterse 1993:73). This brings me to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

The starting point of Husserl's phenomenology is the consciousness of the thinking, speaking and describing subject (Pieterse 1993:73). This consciousness of the subject is always intentional, according to Husserl, as it is directed towards reality. The conscious subject gives meaning to the reality perceived and thus humanity plays an active part in what the reality means for him or her.

“No distinction can be made between what is perceived and the perception of it” (Flew 1979:157).

According to this quotation of Flew, the world cannot be understood separate from the subjective interpretation of the individual. This brings me back to Wittgenstein's Tractatus where he says: “5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein).

The only meaning that the word has is the meaning of language and thus the meanings that humans give to it.

This meaning is determined by the intentions of the conscious subject. We hear in Husserl's thought echoes of the ideas which Immanuel Kant put forward with regards to language and the conscious self. Thus for Husserl there was no way in which humans could grasp reality with theories or models of discovery, as reality is formed through

these very theories and models. Husserl needed a different approach to reality and found it in phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena which are the daily experiences of reality perceived through the senses and these phenomena form the basis of science. Phenomena could not be understood with the use of theories and models, as inherent to these models and theories are the subjective conscious intentions of the researcher. If this is the case then Husserl believed that the only method to understand the core characteristics of phenomena is via intuition, a *Wesenschau* (intuitive understanding of the character of phenomena) (Pieterse 1993: 74). These ideas opened the door for the rise of the Romantic period.

Kant and Husserl made it impossible for the individual (self) to retain some credibility as it was no longer possible to trust in the rational ability to discover truth, therefore the self had to find a new basis on which to ground its thirst of knowledge and truth. This new basis was found in the intuitive capabilities of the self and this became the characteristic of the romantic period.

This opening up to the intuitive self again opened the door to religion. As Abrams says: “the Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what too many writers seemed the imminence of chaos; and the resolve to give up what one was convinced had to give up of the dogmatic understructure of Christianity, yet to save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values” (Abrams 1971: 68).

For many this dawn of the romantic age was a victory for the arts and literature. “Since the romantic age, after all, it has been the goal of many defenders of literature and the arts to see such values – which have to do with the intangible realms of human feeling, desire, and spirit – established at the heart of Western societies” (Lundin 1993:33).

Science within modernity was seen to have the task of describing the world around us, the inhuman environment we inhabit. But only literature has the task of creating for the individual a land and for society the “home” we all long for. The artists “job is not to describe nature, but to show you a world completely absorbed and possessed by the human mind” (Frye 1964:32-33). This was a typically modernist understanding of the relationship between art and literature and the sciences and philosophy. This view of the relationship is clearly still based on the empiricist understanding of knowledge. Thus for a very long time large domains of knowledge were abdicated to science and its rationalistic and empiricist methods of enquiry.

Kant’s understanding of art was very influential in the rise of the Romantic Period. Kant believed that when humans produce works of art they are “creating alternate worlds in

which we hope to discover the purpose and order missing in our “real” world” (Lundin 1993:51). Kant’s understanding of art brought about a major revolution in the history of western culture and the rise of the romantic understanding of art as expression.

“Rather than being a *mirror* held up to nature, art became a lamp illuminating an otherwise darkened world; instead of attempting to *re-present* reality, the artist now sought to *express* himself or herself – that is, to press out to the surface whatever was within the self” (Lundin 1993: 51).

This understanding brought about the idea that art and literature could be moved from the sidelines to the centre of the human endeavour. Thus the Romantic Period restored the necessary confidence in the self, by placing the emphasis not on the rational mind, like Descartes, but the intuitive heart. The individual self was saved from the attacks of perspectivism on the rational self. “By linking human consciousness to God and nature by means of human feeling, the romantics were able to sustain the Cartesian tradition’s faith in the self’s ability to discover truth” (Lundin 1993: 71).

The individual was still at the centre, although no longer the rational empirical self, but the intuitive self now stood at the centre of the quest for truth and knowledge. The irony of the Enlightenment and romanticism was that the “geocentric picture of the world was replaced with as a matter of course by the anthropocentric” (Barth 1969: 15-16). The great transition from pre-modern to modern was that in the pre-modern world everything revolved around the world and its moral and ethical purposefulness. Then the modern world of science discovered that this world is just a speck of dust within the larger universe and that everything does not revolve around this little planet called earth. Yet the Enlightenment and the romantic period replaced this geocentric world view of the pre-modern with the anthropocentric world view and later even smaller the egocentric view of the therapeutic self. “The hero of the anthropocentric world became the free and powerful self”(Lundin 1993: 83).

Husserl’s phenomenology did not only usher in the romantic period. It also brought about a shift in the sciences. It is only via intuition that a researcher is able to understand the intentions behind phenomena. To be able to do this *Wesenschau* the individual had to be very aware of his or her own conscious and intellectual processes and place all assumptions in brackets (Flew 1979:266). The consciousness is then directed only towards the phenomenon and can perceive the phenomenon purely. If the intentions and processes of the researcher’s consciousness are bracketed then the way of intuition can lead to pure knowledge.

In this way Husserl wanted to understand the “lived” world which is the world of experienced phenomena. This real world is the world in which we live with all our experiences. Husserl later on developed the idea of “*Lebenswelt*”. The *Lebenswelt* is the

world where individuals live as historical beings (Pieterse 1993:74). It is the world of an historical being experiencing and interpreting these experiences within this historical setting. It is also “a communal world and involves the existence of other people as well. It is also a personal world, and in the natural attitude the validity of this personal world is always assumed” (Gadamer 1975:219).

Within the field of phenomenology the subjective “I” again regains a central role, for it is the subjective “I” that creates the reality. Thus intentionality becomes important as well as the values that are attached to such intentions as the individual is seen as a “value being” (Gadamer 1975:216).

“This was to culminate in the claim that intentional phenomenology had made the mind, as mind, the field of systematic experience and science and thus totally transformed the task of knowledge. The universality of absolute mind embraces all beings in absolute historicity in which nature as construct of the mind also finds ‘its place’” (Gadamer 1975:215).

It is with these ideas that the concept of constructionism was developed, which meant that the individual constructs his or her own reality. Constructionism sees all human activities and behaviour as creative expressions of individuals within interpreting communities. In other words individual’s construct their own realities.

Gregory Bateson and Norbert Wiener coined the term ‘cybernetics’ within systems thinking and the process of gaining knowledge within systems (Freedman & Combs 1996:3). Modernity’s epistemology can be described as first order cybernetics as the individual researcher has access to an objective reality which she/ he can understand and interpret from a neutral point of view. This view then changed with the developments in philosophy and especially language philosophy and the concept of constructionism developed where the individual has no objective neutral access to reality, but constructs his or her own reality. This constructionism can be seen as second order cybernetics (Müller 1996:81).

To gain any kind of knowledge about the “*Lebenswelt*” of others within the field of phenomenology a process known as symbolic interaction was introduced. The researcher has a vague idea of what he or she wants to research. This vague understanding of a specific social reality is then used to get a better understanding of how the people living in this social reality interpret their world and what concepts they use to make sense of their existence. The researcher has to enter into this “*Lebenswelt*” as much as possible to be able to interact with the people she or he is researching (Pieterse 1993:75). Researchers within the constructionist theory believed that they could enter the “*Lebenswelt*” of social groups as neutral observers and seek to understand how this social group constructs their reality.

**Husserl, constructionism, romanticism and postmodern**

1. The social reality exists only in the consciousness of people and cannot be seen separate thereof
2. The social reality is continually constructed and reconstructed by the subjective “I”
3. The social reality is determined by people’s definition of their situation in terms of their own context and experience (Pieterse 1983:76).

**4.3.5 Modernity, the individual self and the return of Gnosticism**

If reality exists only in the consciousness of people and cannot be seen separate thereof and if reality is random and devoid of all meaning and purpose is this not too much to bear for the self? Biologist Stephan Jay Gould argues that because humanity cannot bear the randomness of nature, therefore they seek to concoct “comforting answers.” He says: “our error lies not in the perception of pattern but in automatically imbuing pattern with meaning, especially with meaning that can bring us comfort, or dispel confusion.” He continues and says that humans have continually “tried to impose ‘heart’s desire’ upon the actual earth and its largely random patterns.” The reason that he gives for this is that the human mind is not made to function with the “rules of probability, though these rules govern our universe.” Therefore, just like Husserl had argued, humanity takes the essence of an entity and then arranges all judgements about it “by the degree of similarity to the assumed type” (Gould 1991: 467-468).

The only difficulty is that this order that is perceived when we “match to type” is an order that has been imposed upon reality. For Gould the individual is caught in a dilemma between the unfeeling and random laws of matter and logic, on the one hand, and our desire and instinctive need to create or construct meaning on the other (Gould 1991:469). This brings us to the heart of the Romantic Movement which believed that it is not important what propositions we believe but what vocabulary we use (Rorty 1982:142).

These thoughts of Gould also sound very much like an ancient form of Gnosticism, which understands there to be a dualism between matter and spirit and that truth and deliverance is to be found in the understanding of this dualism.

Gnosticism has been a trap for the church throughout the centuries, but I will come back to this later when reflecting on the church and modernity as well as the church and postmodernity.

This dualism between matter and spirit has its roots already in the Enlightenment. Karl Barth believed Leibniz to represent the essence of Enlightenment humanism and thus of

the secularization of the spirit (Barth 1969: 11-57). Leibniz philosophy of the nomad gives us a perfect example of this individual self standing in contrast to the universe and all matter. Barth speaks of this Leibnizian nomad in the following way: "This simple and utterly individual, indeed unique spiritual substance is the fountain-head of all reality." The individual in the Enlightenment rationalism and the intuition of romanticism exists alone with God and "the physical and moral evil in the world which man imagines to be actively opposed to him contain in truth nothing positive, but are, so to speak, only shadows fleeing before the light" (Barth 1969:56-57).

It was the belief that the natural world was devoid of any purpose or meaning and thus dead and that the individual self, with his/her rational and intuitive powers needs to bring it to life by granting it meaning.

"To be sure, the dualism formulated at the beginning of the modern period did not oppose a spiritual God to an evil natural world; rather, it posited a vast chasm between the divine self and the oppressive lifelessness of nature and tradition. Whether in the rational faculties of the disciplined mind or in the intuitive powers of the creative spirit, the Enlightenment tradition honoured the disembodied power of the self"(Lundin 1993:83).

Robert Solomon attacked this dualism and the Enlightenment self, or as he called it the "transcendental self....whose nature and ambitions were unprecedentedly arrogant, presumptuously cosmic, and consequently mysterious" (Solomon 1988:4). He argues that the Enlightenment as modernity can be characterised by "its humanism, rationality, and universalism" (Solomon 1988:9). At the core was a belief that the individual self had the power to discover truth and knowledge and that these truths were universal and binding in areas of science, politics and morality. Within this understanding of humanity it is also believed that all rational individuals could come to the same conclusions all over the world as truth was seen to be objective and universal. For this to be possible the individual had to be autonomous and thus universal knowledge was directly connected to individual autonomy (Solomon 1988:11).

Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the Modern self was eager to free itself and gain autonomy "from the contingency and particularity of tradition" (MacIntyre 1988).

Yet certain things happened which toppled the Enlightenment and romantic self from his/her throne. The "Napoleonic wars, slavery and civil war in America, the trauma of the Great war, and the unspeakable horrors of Auschwitz and Hiroshima – have helped to topple that imperial self from its throne" (Lundin 1993: 86).

"In the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard scorned the palatial pretence of faith in universal rationality and inevitable progress; Marx attacked what he took to be

the oppressive rule of the bourgeois individual in the West; and Nietzsche mocked his culture for its having contrived to seek pleasure and peace at the right hand of the divine father whom, in effect, it had already slain” (Lundin 1993:87).

Towards the end of modernity the confidence in the self was being eroded away by various socio-political events, but also by the avant-garde of science and philosophy.

Solomon says that the work of Foucault and Jacques Derrida can be understood as “wholesale rejection of the transcendental pretence... and its expansive sense of self, its confidence in our knowledge, its a priori assurance that all people everywhere are ultimately like us” (Solomon 1988:194). He reflects on this new development in philosophy as something which would be post-Christian, and post-Enlightenment, or “just more of the same, a final, negative expression of the old transcendental pretence”(Solomon 1988:196).

“Solomon’s postmodern theory neither offers access to the secret truths of the world of pure spirit nor promotes the romantic vision of the self’s power to transform history and the natural order. Instead he or she preaches the gospel of language; its saving message is that language does not lead us to any secret truth or havens of beauty and power but rather is itself the only place of safety and delight in a hostile world. In the contemporary theory, the ironic, playful consolations of language are the postmodern equivalent of a Gnostic heaven in which weary souls may find rest”(Lundin 1993:89).

Rorty echoes this thought of Solomon when he says:

“Their contribution [that of William James and Nietzsche] was to replace romanticism by pragmatism. Instead of saying that the discovery of vocabularies could bring hidden secrets to light, they said that new ways of speaking could help get us what we want. Instead of hinting that literature might succeed philosophy as discoverer of ultimate reality, they gave up the notion of truth as a correspondence to reality”(Rorty 1982: 150).

MacIntyre follows a different route in criticising the Enlightenment (modern) self. He sees this self to have failed by its own standards and that the search for epistemological certainty, objectivity and universality brought with it the downfall of the self’s search for knowledge. The appeal “to genuinely universal, tradition-independent norms... was and is the project of modern liberal, individualistic society” (MacIntyre 1988:335).

He argues then....

”the most cogent reasons that we have for believing that the hope of a

tradition-independent rational universality is an illusion derive from the history from the history of that project. For in the course of that history liberalism, which began as an appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition, has itself been transformed into a tradition whose continuities are partly defined by the interminability of the debate over such principles” (MacIntyre 1988:335).

MacIntyre, in his rediscovery of tradition in the search for knowledge and truth is following the thought of Gadamer and Ricoeur. He argues that the proponents of “post-Enlightenment relativism and perspectivism claim that if the Enlightenment conceptions of truth and rationality cannot be sustained, theirs is the only possible alternative” (MacIntyre1988:353).

He criticises this thought, as it is still based on modern/Enlightenment assumptions that knowledge must be certain, universal and objective. These pragmatic post-structuralists reject the idea that truth might reside in something else, for example in the very traditions that during modernity had been repressed, neglected, or forgotten. Therefore MacIntyre and others like Wendell Berry (Home Economics 1987) and Richard Wilbur (New and Collected Poems 1988) reject the “Gnostic detachment of the self from the traditions of the past, the communities of the present, and the mysteries of the creation” (Lundin 1993: 90).

These thinkers begin to the ask the question whether truth can only be conceived as something constructed or is it possible that truth can be imparted to us as well?

Therefore Berry criticises this absolute focus on language as an object of study in itself. When language, in the “specialist approach”, is detached from the objects it depicts and the actions it describes it becomes a study within itself. “It echoes within itself reverberating endlessly like a voice echoing within a cave”(Berry 1987:83). Although such specialist approach to language does indeed lead to very interesting and important insights it adds very little to the understanding of nature and history. It is absurd to think that one can study language isolated from the deeds and objects that language refers to, as it is in the very nature and essence of language “to turn outward to the world, to strike its worldly objects cleanly and cease to echo – to achieve a kind of rest and silence in them” (Berry 1987:83). Ricoeur says something very similar: “the structural point of view also excludes...the primary intention of language, which is to say something about something” (Ricoeur 1974: 84).

This work of language to carry back to reality is “not a specialist work but an act generally human, though only properly humbled and quieted humans can do it” (Berry 1987:80).

MacIntyre argues that one of the great errors of modernity was the total rejection of tradition as something oppressive. According to MacIntyre was a misconception of tradition and tradition can play a totally different role. Genuine tradition is not marked by unreflective rigidity but is distinguished by its very ability to respond to the various challenges of the present. In a similar way Berry sees the community not only embedded in traditions but also in nature. So Berry claims that the self is in a dynamic tension with nature and therefore he criticises the Gnostic dualism. He argues that there is no divisibility between humans and nature, but it is also wrong to argue that there is no difference between the natural and the human (Berry 1987:139). Thus the Gnosticism that had begun in modernity and influenced romanticism had been challenged.

Yet the self still stood on the centre stage of the universe. Solomon argues that this obsession with the subjective self had its origin in the very thought of Descartes. "Indeed, there is no question but that Descartes... was also the founder of the modern philosophical obsession with self" (Solomon 1988:5).

#### **4.3.6 Hans-George Gadamer**

Before we come to Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics, I would shortly like to reflect on the word "Hermeneutics". It is a word that has its origin in the Greek mythology. It derives its name from Hermes who was the messenger between the gods and the mortals. Hermes had one task and that was to convey words of divine judgments on human affairs. The basic idea that is taken from the Greek mythology was that Hermeneutics is the practice of taking divine words and translating them into the context of human practice. In other words divine authority was translated and made relevant to certain communities. This idea has changed dramatically from its original meaning to the understanding that exists today. For example during the romantic period, after the sciences had questioned the credibility of the classic religious texts, hermeneutics was understood as seeking ways in which to find meaning in the sacred texts to explain the experiences of the individual. The understanding of hermeneutics was turned 180 degrees around. Hermeneutics was no longer the 'science' of understanding and communicating divine words into specific contexts and communities, but the 'science' of interpreting divine words with the meaning and experiences of the community/context. The meaning and understanding did not come from the divine words anymore, but rather from the community and context.

Gadamer criticised the phenomenology of Husserl as he believed that it placed too much emphasis on the methodology that is used to understand social realities. The danger that he saw in this emphasis on methodology is that the method used also

determines the way we understand reality and so the reality is reduced to the reality of the methodological framework being used to understand / interpret the social reality (Gadamer 1975: 55-146).

Gadamer shifted the emphasis away from the *Lebenswelt* to the tradition, out of which insights are formulated and thus used to understand and interpret the social reality. Insights are fundamentally part of the tradition and find their expression in the *Lebenswelt*. These insights can only be understood through the interpretation and understanding of tradition. He argued that the modern critique of authority distorted the whole role of authority given to us in tradition. Gadamer argued that the Enlightenment and its search for knowledge that is objective had one prejudice and that is “the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power” (Gadamer 1989: 270). He says by depicting authority to be “diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind obedience,” the Enlightenment established an absolute “antithesis between authority and reason” (Gadamer 1989:277-279). Gadamer argued that authority had nothing to do with blind obedience, but much more to do with the recognition of knowledge – “knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight” (Gadamer 1989: 279).

Heidegger agreed with Gadamer in that he also criticised the belief that humans could have access to knowledge or truth unveiled and unobstructed. All perception and reflection on truth and knowledge is enmeshed in language and its history and tradition. Heidegger argues: “when we have to do with anything, the mere seeing of the things which are closest to us bears in itself the structure of interpretation... when we merely stare at something, our just-having-it-before-us lies before us as a failure to understand it anymore” (Heidegger 1962:190).

Gadamer believed that these insights from tradition lie beyond the scope of scientific methodology, but rather are to be found in the experiences that are associated with art, philosophy and history. Science and the tools of science, such as analogy, are limited and thus the language of metaphor which is the language of art and history expresses certain truths that the language of science cannot. Art, philosophy and history are “all modes of experience in which truth is communicated and cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science” (Gadamer 1975: XII).

Human existence, for Gadamer, is limited, finite and in a sense broken and therefore humanity is dependent on authentic experiences of life and these authentic experiences are to be found in tradition as expressed in art, philosophy and history. In other words this limited, finite and broken human existence cannot find meaning that transcends its own limited and finite existence and thus needs to turn to metaphor, art and history.

Thus he argues that “history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves in the self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live” (Gadamer 1989:276).

Therefore to discover truth or knowledge the tradition that comes to us from the past must be recognised and taken seriously.

Thus the paradigm that Gadamer proposes for epistemology is a symmetrical interaction between two equal dialogue partners (Gadamer 1989). The past in the form of history and tradition enters into the dialogue as one of the conversation partners. For Gadamer there are various forms of interaction:

- 1 - Where the dialogue partner is not seen as a subject in his or her own right, this interaction leads to manipulation and the achievement of the researcher's own personal goals and objectives.
- 2 - Asymmetrical interaction where the partner is not taken seriously, thus the researcher is not open for critique of his/her personal opinions, but already knows, before the conversation, what he or she believes to be right or wrong.
- 3 - A completely symmetrical interaction where all the partners are open for critique as well as new insights and interpretations of reality (Pieterse 1993:81-82).

For Gadamer epistemology can be described as dialogue and communication/ conversation. To understand and to interpret is basic to human nature, but our interpretation is always within a tradition as humans are in a living dialogue with the past and it is our language that connects the past to the present. Truth is thus something that is to be found in true symmetrical dialogue between dialogue partners and in dialogue with the past (tradition). Truth is to be found there where the present and the past enter into a symmetrical dialogue with each other. Dialogue is the only way to truth, because of the finiteness of human existence and human knowledge (Pieterse 1993:82).

For Gadamer there is an ontological relationship between language and reality and this relationship is the hermeneutical experience. The relationship between reality and language is the basis of the hermeneutical experience. To understand and gain knowledge is only possible within the context of a dialogue (Pieterse 1993:82). Knowledge is therefore inter-subjective and based on consensus, which means the locus of knowledge is within community (Müller 1996:81).

This means that reality is no longer constructed in the mind of an individual, but is constructed within the context of an interpreting community. This is known as social-

constructionism and Paré describes this as third order cybernetics where knowledge arises within communities of knowers (Freedman & Combs 1996:3).

For Gadamer this basic principle of hermeneutics is not only appropriate for the human sciences, but for all science including natural science. In other words any science is an open dialogue with reality. Thus science or any other form of knowledge about reality is part of a continuous process within language and thus a continuous communicative process. Yet any form of understanding is based on a pre-understanding, because no person approaches reality from a neutral point of view. In the epistemological process this pre-understanding or prejudice needs to be reckoned with. "That is why prejudice of the individual far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being"(Gadamer 1989: 276-277).

This means that prejudice needs to be consciously taken into the understanding process. "Prejudices then serve as the necessary foundation of all understanding"(Lundin 1993:222). Our understanding of tradition is always an understanding from within our own horizon of our time and context. These horizons are placed in a critical dialogue with the past tradition, allowing tradition to criticise and reformulate our horizons. Thus tradition has a dynamic "*Wirkungsgeschichte*" in the present (Pieterse 1993:83). Human beings are products of this *Wirkungsgeschichte*, but are also part of the process of re-interpreting and re-writing this story.

Therefore understanding is never final, but always in process. Insights that are gained from understanding need to be practically applied to the context/situation. The context is changed as the insights are practically applied and the situation then in turn needs to be re-interpreted. This practical application is thus an integral part of the understanding process.

Hermeneutics for Gadamer is the understanding of the same tradition in a specific context and time, in other words in a specific horizon, in a new way. This new interpretation of tradition applies better to the situation (Gadamer 1975:275). Gadamer would thus disagree with Lewis' two stage approach for the encounter with texts as Gadamer would argue that there is no reception without some kind of use. In other words a text only really has power over us if we sense that it could be of use to us.

It is this understanding that Gadamer brings to epistemology that is the bridge between historical reason and practical reason. "Gadamer draws this relation when he points out that Aristotle's concept of phronesis or practical wisdom may serve as a model of the process of understanding"(Browning 1991:38).

The question that is now raised is: what is the relationship between the general

universal tradition and the specific application of the tradition within a specific context and time? To answer this question Gadamer resorts to Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis*, *episteme* and *techné* and he finds the answer in Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis* (Gadamer 1975:278-289).

Praxis in the past was understood as the technical application of rational thought and science to the objective reality. In the study I described modernity as rationalistic and where there is a division of the world into subjective rational humans and the objective reality. In modernity praxis is the application of pure rationalism on the objective reality and the only moral norm for this application was technical (rational) progress. This was part of modern relationship between rationalism and object reality and praxis was the application of the rational ideas to the objective reality, thus destroying any form of moral character within the field of praxis. The only motive was development and progress. For Gadamer praxis is practical knowledge and the doing of the right thing that will change the circumstances of human existence. Gadamer therefore saw in epistemology a certain moral or ethical dimension.

"If we relate Aristotle's description of the ethical phenomenon and especially of the virtue of moral knowledge to our own investigation, we find that Aristotle's analysis is in fact a kind of model of the problems of hermeneutics" (Gadamer 1989:289).

In the above section the integral role that practical application played in the hermeneutical epistemology was stressed. Thus Gadamer argues that human sciences are moral sciences. This interlacing between praxis and hermeneutics makes the threefold interconnection of science, hermeneutics and praxis explicit (Pieterse 1993:84).

As practical science is the gaining of practical knowledge it is the methodological model for human science. Understanding is a form of practical reasoning and thus practical knowledge (*phronesis*). *Phronesis* moves away from the differentiation between *techné* and *episteme* in other words between practical theory (*techné*) and basic theory (*episteme*) and brings them into a dialogical relationship. *Phronesis* is the value orientated discussion of the interchange between practical experiences and the knowledge and theory which is part of tradition. "When these practices become problematic, we try to orient ourselves by re-examining the classic sources that have shaped our present practices. The classic sources are generally religio-cultural texts and monuments" (Browning 1991:39).

Gadamer's concept of "effective history" also needs to be mentioned as a fusion of the whole of the past with the present (Gadamer 1989: 273). In other words, the past will always shape the present and the present is always a product of the past. The past

shapes our fore-understandings and is the basis for our prejudices and thus it is the past that influences the questions which the individual or the community brings to the texts that are in need of interpretation.

Thus Gadamer sees understanding as a fusion of horizons between the horizon of the past that shapes the questions brought to the text and the horizon which is projected by the text itself. Yet the meanings of these texts have already shaped the questions that we bring to them (Gadamer 1989: 173-174, 331-341).

In the social sciences there are certain perspectives which place the notion of practice at the heart of the dynamics of the formation and maintenance of the social order (Graham 1996:97). From this perspective society can be understood in two different ways:

- 1 Society is an agglomeration of random activities and choices of individual actors thus placing the emphasis on subjectivity.
- 2) Society and human relations are determined by the laws of history, and the forces of nature, in other words an objective structuralist approach to society where subjectivity of the individual agent plays no role.

The concept of 'practice' seems to solve this dilemma between these two opposing positions - structuralism and agency.

"Rather, practice emerges as something which mediates between structure and agency, seeing culture as a human creation which nonetheless persists over time; and of the norms of practice as in some sense rule-governed and institutional but still dependent on individual and collective agency for their maintenance"(Graham 1996: 97).

This means that humans partake in the maintenance and creation of society, but they are also at the same time imbedded in an already existing structure and culture. Ultimate truth claims are therefore to be found in purposeful practices (Graham 1996:97). Social structures are patterns of behaviour which are enshrined over time within society and not only external, but also internal like language. Praxis is therefore certain behaviour which follows certain rules and patterns, although there is also an element of agency which is not enshrined in structure. Alasdair MacIntyre develops the concept of praxis as the means by which human action carries historically rooted system of values (Graham 1996:98).

#### **Gadamer, dialogue and postmodern**

1. He introduced the idea that humans' existence in the *Lebenswelt* is dialogical.
2. Understanding is to be found in symmetrical dialogue.

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| 3. Knowledge is communal and inter-subjective. |
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#### 4.3.7 Paul Ricoeur, texts, structural analysis and postmodernity

Paul Ricoeur in his book *The Symbolism of Evil* argues that the Cartesian ideal of a free and indubitable starting point for all knowledge is impossible (Ricoeur 1967:19).

Ricoeur's contribution to the hermeneutical process of understanding was to bring in a critical element that was missing in Gadamer's work. Ricoeur introduced the concept of texts. He understood texts as having an autonomous existence in their own right. Ricoeur's texts are not only written texts, but also human actions. Spoken communication gets permanence in written texts and human actions find permanence in social patterns.

Social patterns and structures are more permanent forms of human communication and are autonomous in the sense that they are independent from their authors and the time in which they were created. Thus the meaning of a text can only be found in the text itself. The meaning of a text is immanent to the text itself. Critical thought cannot hold every assumption in abeyance therefore it must start somewhere namely "from speech that has already been said in some fashion" (Ricoeur 1967: 348).

Yet the interpretation of texts is subjective and into this subjective interpretation a critical objective element needs to be introduced. Ricoeur believed that this would be possible by introducing structural analysis to the understanding process. The text itself needs to be seen as a complex unit and its language system and structure needs to be analysed (Pieterse 1993:87). For Ricoeur all thought is grounded in the unconscious resources encoded in the history of language and experience. Thus language gives us the symbols, but what these symbols give is an occasion for thought, in other words something to think about. But before one can think about its meaning it needs to be received and then can be doubted and criticised (Ricoeur 1967: 348).

For Ricoeur the meaning of the texts as a whole must be seen as an interpretation hypothesis. The various units that make up the whole are then interpreted within this hypothesis. This hypothesis can be defended with various arguments and it is in this dialogical encounter that the hypothesis is tested.

<p><b>Ricoeur, texts, structural analysis and postmodern</b></p>
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ricoeur understood "texts" to have an autonomous existence,</li> <li>2. thus these texts need to be analysed,</li> <li>3. yet the interpretation of texts is subjective.</li> </ol> |
|---|

4. To minimise this subjective element the text as a whole must be seen as an interpretation hypothesis.
5. The various units of the whole are then interpreted within this hypothesis.
6. The hypothesis can be tested and defended in dialogue with other hypothesis.

#### 4.3.8 The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas enters into the hermeneutical discussion with the search for rational knowledge that has human action as consequence (Habermas 1972:301). Rational knowledge for Habermas was to be forged out of collective speech communities (Graham 1996:144). He is very critical about the subjective agenda that is behind the search for knowledge and that if this agenda is not exposed the illusion of value-free-knowledge is created.

For Habermas all knowledge comes into existence through specific group interests (Pieterse 1993:92). In modernity it was the interests of modernity that dominated the epistemology. For him the interest of modernity was a *Zweckrationalität* (instrumental technical reason). Weber calls this entrapment of knowledge in the interests of modernity - the iron cage of bureaucracy (Graham 1996:144).

Habermas identified three different levels of approaching reality according to different interests:

- 1 - The first approach towards reality is an **instrumental** approach where the interest lies in the maintenance of reality as it is and where human actions are focussed, instrumental and effective. This approach is motivated by a technical interest of dominance over the objective reality and is seen in the empirical analytical understanding of reality.
- 2 - The second approach is a **communicative** approach as humanity seeks to understand reality. This approach is inter-subjective as the reality is understood in conversation.
- 3 - The third approach is motivated by an **emancipatory** interest. In this approach the imbalance of power is what needs to be overcome. For this third approach critical reflection is necessary (Pieterse 1993:94).

These different levels of approaching reality according to the different interests, determines the type of knowledge that is gained. Thus there are also three different types of knowledge for Habermas, namely emancipatory, practical and technical (Graham 1996: 145).

Habermas agrees with Gadamer, but criticises Gadamer's dialogical approach for not being critical towards the power imbalances that are inherent within the structure of language. The whole debate of inclusive language makes this point very clear as one recognises how bias language is towards masculinity.

Habermas also criticised the idea that knowledge is inherently good. His critique came in a time after the Second World War where it became clear how knowledge can be misused for destructive purposes.

Habermas' argument was that knowledge is not neutral, but is linked to power, which means that knowledge is dependent on who controls and who has the power within society. The dominant constructions of reality are constructed by those who have the most power within society.

Thus knowledge plays a role in the domination and exploitation of groups of people. Michael Foucault argued that scientific reason never existed independent of an associated project to objectify or dominate (Graham 1996:21). Derrida pointed out that "the human world, because it is bathed in language, is ambiguous, complex and heterogeneous that any attempt to capture it and hold it steady, as if it were an object, a physical thing, is simply not possible" (Freeman 1993:10). This attempt to get a grip on the world, Derrida described as being totalization. Many groups have done exactly that - they have 'gotten a grip' on the world and forced others to accept their *grip* on the world.

For Habermas it was important to create '*Herrschaftsfreie Kommunikation*', communication that is free of power imbalances and where the conversation partners are truly equal (Pieterse 1993:92). This is the only way in which humanity will be helped to live in a society without imbalances of power and oppression. The human sciences should be motivated by an emancipatory interest (Habermas 1972:310). The communicative actions between human beings should strive towards an ideal communication situation where there are no power imbalances and where communication is free (Pieterse 1993:93). To the hermeneutic process of Gadamer needs to be added, an ideological critical element to expose the power imbalance that are hidden within language structures.

In the communicative action the three reality domains need to interact with each other. The three reality domains are: the objective reality of things and events, the social reality of values and norms and the subjective reality of intentions, needs and emotions. Understanding takes place in the interaction of all three of these reality domains as human beings seek to understand themselves and their situation.

Habermas emphasises the importance of rationality in this communicative action which implies that in principle the interpretation that takes place in each of these domains can

be criticised. For each interpretation and understanding there are supporting arguments which can be criticised, analysed and refuted and therefore, for Habermas, rationality is to be found in this communicative practice. Habermas thus places rationality into this communicative discussion. There are three forms of discussion based on the three domains of reality. For Habermas, a theory of undistorted communication depends on how various claims of individuals and groups are validated or redeemed (Habermas 1979:2). For him communication is based on the idea that individuals or groups have the capacity to give reasons for or at least support the validity of their claims.

All communication for Habermas entails claims about the comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness of what is said. Communicative competence is based on these three claims. Humans need to be able to advance reasons for their actions that will make sense even to “outsiders”, in other words those who do not share the same presuppositions (Habermas 1979:2, 57-58).

The **theoretical** discussion is where the objective reality is discussed. The **practical** discussion is where appropriate understanding is sought for the *Lebenswelt*. The **therapeutical critical** discussion is where truth is sought and the self is understood (Pieterse 1993:93). In modernity the technical discussion dominated the other two, which in turn meant a distortion of human reason and thus an alienation of humanity. Habermas introduces an emancipatory element into the hermeneutical process that can free society from the alienation that is caused by dominant interpretations.

Feminist philosophy took up some of these ideas of the critical theory of Habermas. The feminists pointed to the ideological power imbalances that are found in the dialogical hermeneutical process and thus also in praxis and therefore in social structures and which are the cause of alienation. In the feminist context it was the andocentric values and norms which brought about the alienation of humanity as a whole. Human praxis is constitutive of identity, meaning and knowledge and therefore an emancipatory praxis needs to be found to truly liberate within all three forms of discussion.

#### **Habermas, critical theory and postmodernity**

1. Rational knowledge that had human action as consequence was to be found in collective speech communities.
2. Knowledge is formed by the interests of certain groups
3. Habermas identified three different types of knowledge according to these interests (emancipatory, practical and technical),
4. therefore reality is constructed by the interests of certain groups.
5. There is the need for a critical awareness of the power imbalances implicit in all knowledge.

6. *Herrschaftsfreie* speech communities need to be formed to develop knowledge that has emancipation as consequence.
7. Domination free speech communities are critical communities where the three domains of reality (objective reality, social reality of values and norms and the subjective reality of intentions, needs and emotions) are in equal dialogue with each other.

## 5. THE STORY OF POSTMODERNITY (a story in Tracy's society and church republics)

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous section was a reflection on the story of postmodernity in Tracy's academic (philosophical) republic. In this section the study will reflect on the story of postmodernity in the social, cultural and church republics. This includes a reflection on how the philosophic developments influenced the socio-cultural republics and also the other way around.

In the study I will reflect on two major historical events which can be seen as a turning point in modern history and the beginning of postmodernity.

### 5.2 Two Major Historical Events

The one event that I will reflect on is an event that had international repercussions and the other is a local South African event.

#### 5.2.1 The fall of the Berlin Wall

The fall of the Berlin Wall can be seen as the political historical event that marked the end of the modern era (Erickson 1998:46). It marked the end of a historical era where the world was divided into socialist and capitalist countries. The Berlin wall came down and with it a whole system (ideology) that had for years been a critical challenge to the capitalism of the West. Now this system had disappeared and with it the only real challenge to capitalism. It left an ideological vacuum behind and nothing was there to really replace this vacuum. The consequence of this vacuum was that capitalism lost its conscience. Capitalism won the battle and now it didn't need to justify itself, but has complete freedom. A single global economic system (ideology) without any challenge or a conscience is dangerous.

#### 5.2.2 The release of Nelson Mandela and the New South Africa

The postmodern in one way or the other affects the whole South African community. The old authorities of traditional rural communities do not hold ground anymore as they are exposed to the pluralism of values and various different authorities. South Africa in the past was relatively protected from the effects of postmodernism - the church and the censorship board playing an important role in this.

A number of things happened that helped to usher postmodernity into the South African community.

Firstly, Nelson Mandela was released and with this event a process began that would be the beginning of the New South Africa. This process was not only the beginning of the new, but also the end of the old South Africa.

Secondly, the church lost its credibility as an authority on values and truth as it was associated with and supported apartheid. Can the church still be trusted as an authority on values and on what is right and wrong within society?

Thirdly, the new constitution brought with it many new debates and the possibility of debating about these issues without one universal standard of authority which is accepted by all. Issues as the death sentence and abortion tumbled South Africa into a value vacuum which is characteristic of the postmodern as these issues needed to be debated in a pluralistic context without one set of authoritative values.

In South Africa the paradigm shift from modern to postmodern was not a gradual process, but it happened nearly overnight as a country and its value systems were turned upside down. The congregant is struggling with this new situation as his/her world has been turned upside down and s/he hopes that at least in the church things will remain the same. In the new South Africa cultural pluralism has its very own dimension as two worlds that were separated for years all of a sudden have become *one nation* sharing schools, job opportunities and sharing the same church bench. Two worlds meeting at a time where everything is being questioned adds to the complexity, relativism and confusion which are all characteristics of postmodernity.

### **5.3 The social-cultural aspect of postmodernity**

#### **5.3.1 Universal truths, norms and values as the basis for ethical judgement.**

In the philosophic story of postmodernity the study reflected on the postmodern world as a world where there is no longer any non-hermeneutical basis from which to establish universal truths or norms on which individuals and communities can base their ethical

judgments. If there are no longer any universal truths or norms by which standards can humanity then judge actions and behaviour? Everything is relative from the hermeneutical point of view and there are so many options to choose from in a pluralist world.

### 5.3.2 Fragmentation of values and beliefs in an age of relativism and pluralism.

The end of universal truths and norms has opened the door to pluralism and relativism and at the same time globalization has brought the world's religions and ideologies into the urban centres so that the individual, family and community living in the global village within the urban centre is confronted with the confusing reality of this pluralism. The individual congregant will be confronted with this pluralism in his/her home via the Internet, TV news and other forms of media as well as on the street and at the work place. The individual needs to find some form of system of meaning in which he/she will be able to find themselves - a system of meaning which can give meaning and purpose to their lives and can make sense of the suffering and brokenness which they experience. This system of meaning is transferred to the individual via the family system, cultural system or religious system, but in a pluralistic urban centre the individual will be exposed and confronted with different systems thus questioning her/his system of meaning.

The individual in the church - although he/she has the Christian tradition as a system of meaning - is confronted and questioned by the plurality of other systems in the urban centre.

Postmodernity is described as an era of relativism and pluralism, as I have tried to describe in the section on the philosophical changes, where nothing is certain – which means that everything is equally uncertain and therefore everything is acceptable. There is no non-hermeneutical basis of certainty by which to judge anything, be it science, morals, a choice of lifestyle or religion. This lack of authority or basic certainty is a freedom which is unbearable, because for too long humans have been conditioned by modernity to hold onto absolute universal truths. We have not learnt to live or cope with this freedom and thus are experiencing numerous socio-cultural challenges. Oden does not see postmodernity separate from modernity, but as the consequence of modernity. His socio-cultural analysis is very useful. He uses the following key features to describe this period in which we live - **moral relativism**, **narcissistic hedonism** and **autonomous individualism** (Erickson 1998:46).

**Moral relativism** is the result of there being no certainties and thus everything is feasible and possible. This freedom together with there being no social accountability creates the space for absolute misuse of this freedom.

### **Narcissistic hedonism**

The individual throughout the story of modernity has lost many different forms of authority. S/he lost the church as an authority, then tradition as an authority and now in postmodernity science and human rights are losing their authority - the individual is reduced to him or herself and together with the aggressive market one cannot blame humanity giving themselves over to hedonistic pleasures. The media entices humanity into this world of temporal pleasures. These pleasures are seen to have the highest value and give meaning to the human existence.

**Autonomous individualism** is the result of the individual losing all other forms of authority so that the individual himself/herself is the only authority. Thus the individual decides what is right and wrong for himself/herself without any regard for others.

This filters through to everyday life, where we experience rising corruption, violence and rising crime. The moral fabric of family and society has changed and many would describe this as moral decadence. Various groups have their own standards of values, yet there is no standard that transcends these groups by which to judge or guide. I do not want to oversimplify the condition of the world we are living in by saying that all the ills can be reduced to this moral relativism, but I believe that it plays an important role. As capitalism without a conscience is given the freedom to exploit and market anything, from war to violence to sexual perversions, it will – together with the psychological and emotional frustrations of the loss of ideals and values - have major effects on our society, such as ever rising drug abuse, rise in violent crimes, rise in suicide rates as well as divorce rates, etcetera. Society has not learnt the skills to live in a postmodern world and therefore the postmodern angers, frustrates and causes immense hopelessness because we cannot think beyond the terms of modernity. Our whole language is based on what we believed in modernity. Our dependence and the longing for universal absolute certainties have not disappeared with the philosophical impossibility thereof.

The socio-cultural challenges of the postmodern era are frightening and a great task lies ahead to seek responses to these challenges.

## **5.4 The broad context of postmodernity within church and society**

Postmodernity in church and society is experienced negatively as the demise of absolute values and universal truths. This absence of a universal norm or basis raises numerous questions also for the church. Can the church place tradition and the Biblical witness as an authoritative absolute norm in a world of relativism, pluralism and value disorientation because of the loss of universal truths and absolutes?

This study is motivated by various experiences of this postmodern era as described earlier, for example the confusion and uncertainty that is found in the urban congregation of Berlin and South Africa.

Postmodernity can be described as an era of confusion as the absolutes and certainties of modernity are replaced by relativism and pluralism. There are no more absolute truths or authoritative value systems and thus each community and individual has to find its own system of meaning and values. Although an individual is socially conditioned within a certain context, which has its own values and system of meaning, the urban individual is confronted by a pluralism of such systems of values and meaning which in turn begin to question the individual's system of meaning.

#### **5.4.1 Postmodernity and the urban context.**

Postmodernity is most acutely experienced in the urban centres of the world where the latest ideas and trends are developed. It is in the urban centres where the global economy brings together people from all over the world, thus bringing with it the world's religions, ideologies, systems of meaning and interpretation. Here individuals are exposed to cultures and religions from all over the world.

The pluralism of postmodernity is to some extent also the result of globalization - the world becoming smaller and smaller as global trade and global communication unite the world into a global village. In this global village we are exposed to the whole world via television, World Wide Web, or the foreign companies and their work forces. Globalization adds to the pluralism of postmodernity.

## **6. IN SUMMARY: POSTMODERNITY IN PERSPECTIVE**

Postmodernity can be characterised by certain understandings and interpretations of human nature (ontology), authoritative knowledge (epistemology), the trajectory of history and what is thought to be the good of life (teleology), personal identity (subjectivity) and the individual's inhabitation of the social and natural world (agency). Postmodernity emphasises the importance of language: that all that the world is, is our language. There is no direct link to reality - only language.

### **6.1 Postmodern ontology**

In modernity it was believed that to be human meant to be a rational being based on the ideas of Descartes and Pascal (Graham 1996:27). Postmodernity on the other hand

emphasises the diversity and contingency of human nature, which is socially constructed by various factors such as class, sex, race and religion. In postmodernity there is no longer an essential or abstract universal human being, but a human being that exists within history, a specific context and time.

## **6.2 Postmodern subjectivity**

Modernity through the ideas of the Enlightenment placed great emphasis on the subjective self as a rational self. A rational self is a self that transcends embodiment, desire or specificity and thus forms the basis for identity (Graham 1996:28). This enlightenment idea of transcendent subjective self was already questioned by Freud - who denied the possibility of unitary ego that is unaffected by desires and instincts. In postmodernity selfhood is realised in interaction with others, culture, tradition and language.

## **6.3 Postmodern epistemology**

The changes that took place in epistemology have already been discussed in the previous section in 3.4.1. "Postmodern epistemology regards truth as a web of discourse, with rules and assumptions shaped by context and self interest" (Graham 1996:29). "Language therefore constitutes reality, rather than reality being communicated through the neutral vehicle of language" (Graham 1996:29).

## **6.4 Postmodern agency**

In modernity the rational self was the agent of rationally planned actions in pursuit of calculated ends. In postmodernity society plays a much larger role in agency, which means all activity is governed and to a certain extent controlled by the social context in which the individual lives; a context to which the individual reacts rather than acts or creates. "There is thus an ineradicable link between will, reason and action; and language is held to be 'referential', the transparent expression of objective, external reality" (Graham 1996:29). In postmodernity there are no teleological criteria which guide human purposeful action, thus all is practice and nothing rests on metaphysical categories. "Personhood is not a set of metaphysical or ontological qualities but the discursive result of our inhabiting a culture" (Graham 1996:10). Agency can only be understood as the agent reacting to the context rather than self-actualising, and the agent is constituted by discourses of power rather than the creator of his or her own social world.

## **6.5 Postmodern teleology**

Modernity saw within history progress and this was the teleological end purpose of all. Within a postmodern world view there are two different teleological understandings: 1- a scepticism towards any grand narrative that does not respect the local contextual issues; 2- any theoretical or historical narrative is redundant as no one can make claims that apply to more than the local, specific and provisional (Graham 1996:31).

## 7. THE CHURCH AND MODERNITY

### 7.1 Introduction

To understand the church's response to postmodernity I will need to briefly reflect on how the church responded to the developments associated with modernity.

### 7.2 Theology's story in modernity

The Enlightenment, which ushered in modernity, was also the beginning of the process of dethroning theology as the absolute authority. The Enlightenment placed greater emphasis on science and rational thought than on religious authorities and thus theology's struggle began with modernity. Theology had two possibilities: 1) to journey with modernity and seek to be accepted as a rational science, or 2) to seek an alternative route to modernity and establish itself separate from modernity.

#### 7.2.1 Theology in close relationship to modernity

In the early beginnings of the Enlightenment, theology had to prove itself as a science to be acceptable to the modern times. One of the first "*modern theologians*" was Schleiermacher, who fought for theology to be recognised as a science and thus keep its academic place at the European universities of the eighteenth century. Schleiermacher was the first modern theologian who recognised the value of the Enlightenment and wanted to build a bridge to modern humanity by reflecting on the Christian faith on the basis of the experience of the subject (Heitink 1999:19). The theologians during this period of Enlightenment were pressed to demonstrate the relevance of Christian faith to the "cultured despisers", "many Christian interpreters in the Enlightenment and romanticism pared the biblical narrative into an appealing shape in their attempts to appeal to an educated and often cynical audience. Whether they were promoting a rational or a romantic God, these early modern interpreters were often willing to spend the capital of Christian belief in exchange for earning high interest in the marketplace of intellectual currency" (Lundin 1993:40).

This was the beginning of a long relationship between theology and the modern developments in science. It began very early. Soon after the great thoughts of Descartes, Benedict de Spinoza would seek to apply these Cartesian principles to theological thought. Spinoza studied the Bible and declared: "I found nothing taught expressly by Scripture, which does not agree with our understanding, or which is repugnant thereto." He believed that the Bible sets reason free, and thus he concluded,

“Revelation and Philosophy stand on totally different footings” and “that Revelation has obedience for its sole object.” Thus Spinoza brought in the schism that would separate reason and philosophy from faith. “. . .in purpose no less than in foundation and method, revelation stands entirely aloof from ordinary knowledge; each has its separate province, neither can be called the handmaid of the other” (Spinoza 1951:9-10). Spinoza opened the door for this gap to develop between faith and science, or faith and reason, which in the eighteenth century grew wider and wider with the rise of the Enlightenment. The thoughts of Enlightenment seemed to prove that religion is no longer necessary as an explanatory device, because physical science, politics and philosophy were seen to be much more effective in explaining phenomena in the world.

Schleiermacher admitted to this demise of theology’s ability to explain phenomena and that the astute people of his day did not really need religion anymore. Suavity and sociability, art, and science have so fully taken possession “of their minds that they have no room for thoughts of the Holy Being.” He addressed the cultured despisers, “you have succeeded in making your earthly life so rich and varied, that you no longer stand in need of an eternity” (Schleiermacher 1958: 1-2).

If religion did not offer anything to humanity for understanding the world out there, maybe it still had something to offer to the inner world of the individual’s soul or consciousness. This inward turn of religion opened the door for faith once again during the romantic period.

“I maintain that in all better souls piety springs necessarily by itself; that a province of its own in the mind belongs to it, in which it has unlimited sway; that it is worthy to animate most profoundly the noblest and best to be fully accepted and known by them” (Schleiermacher 1958:21).

Schleiermacher took the second step after the one that Spinoza had taken to bring a divide between theology and the sciences. Helmut Thielicke observed that the effect of Schleiermacher’s romantic reconstruction of religion was to conflate the separate disciplines of “anthropology (human conditions), theology (divine qualities and modes of action), and cosmology (the nature of the world)” (Thielicke 1974:45). Schleiermacher denied “theological rank” to any theological proposition that could not be translated into anthropological language without any loss of value. For Thielicke this was opening the door to make the anthropological analysis of experience the norm (Thielicke 197:45). Schleiermacher’s romantic understanding of theology meant that the hermeneutical task was no longer to translate divine demands or imparting revelatory knowledge to eager listeners, but rather making the historical text palatable to the enlightenment reader or listener. Karl Barth criticised Schleiermacher’s view of hermeneutics, as “nothing remained of the belief that the Word or statement is as such the bearer, bringer, and

proclaimer of truth, that there might be such a thing as the Word of God". Barth continues that Schleiermachers' understanding of kerygma is a "kerygma that only depicts and does not bring, that only states or expresses and does not declare. Truth does not come in the spoken Word; it comes in speaking feeling" (Barth 1982:210).

The modern emphasis on the subject, as a rational being, was later challenged by Freud who emphasised that the subject is also influenced by instincts and desires. This led to a whole new direction in theology and especially in pastoral theology, taking up the challenges that Freud placed before theology. Theologians that took up Freud's challenge were amongst others Jung, Tillich, and Hiltner (Heitink 1998:55-67).

Theologians who journeyed with modernity were driven by the desire for theology to be recognised and to be respected as a modern science and thus incorporated the ideas and practices from the social and human sciences without being critical of the underlying world views (Graham 1996:67). One could say that a certain marriage took place between theology and the sciences. Paul Tillich and his correlational theology saw systematic theology in the following way: "it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions" (Graham 1996:70).

Besides psychology the rise of sociology also had an impact on theology. The social theories of Max Webber and the social economic analysis of Karl Marx challenged theology to respond.

This is the one possibility of theology in modernity namely the apologetic route of seeking acceptance as a modern science.

### **7.2.2 Theology in reaction to modernity**

The other possibility was the route of strong critique which came from two different positions namely the protestant evangelical movements as well as from the neo-orthodox theologians.

Neo-orthodox theologians like Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen saw the need that theology needed to return to its Biblical roots. "Neo-orthodoxy sought to return to the theology of the Bible and the Protestant Reformers which emphasized the absolute authority of a transcendent God who could only be apprehended through the vehicle of God's own self-revelation and not the exercise of human reason" (Graham 1996:74).

From within the protestant evangelical movement developed a form of fundamentalism and a return to pre-modern acceptance of religious authorities.

Theology's relationship with modernity has been varied and certainly not an easy journey, with many challenges. Postmodernity has challenged many of the modern ideas and by doing so questioned the very system that theology has been struggling with for so long. The grand narratives of modernity have collapsed and with it the basis for value judgement and universal truths. In this context, what do the church's truth claims mean amongst the plurality of public narratives and truths? Is Christianity anachronistic with regards to its understanding of tradition, knowledge and truth? Or does postmodernity free theology from its apologetics towards modernity?

The rise of postmodernity has also opened up new possibilities for the church as modernity and its emphasis on scientific and objective truth has challenged the church tremendously. In postmodernity there are new opportunities for a re-discovery of the mystic, spiritual and numinous, thus re-opening doors within theology that seemed closed during modernity.

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## **8. NARRATIVE AS A RESPONSE TO POSTMODERNITY**

### **8.1 Introduction**

"...narrative and story appear to provide a cure, if not a panacea, to a variety of Enlightenment illnesses" (Hauerwas & Jones 1989:1).

The concept of narrative is very similar to postmodernity in that it is just as difficult to define and there are numerous opinions about what exactly narrative thinking is all about. In the previous section (6. Summary: Postmodernity in Perspective), five basic

philosophic characteristics could be identified as describing the postmodern story from the perspective of the academic (philosophic) story. These five characteristics are not new characteristics, but have developed and drastically changed from how they were understood in modernity to how they are understood in post-modernity.

I understand these five characteristics to describe postmodernity from the philosophic perspective. These basic characteristics of post-modernity broke down a whole world view and the way humanity understood itself and the world. I began the previous section (What changed philosophically) with the thoughts of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the limits of language. “5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”. It is in following these changes that I would like to introduce the concept of narrative and how narrative thinking incorporates these postmodern characteristics.

In the section (4.3 The epistemological story of postmodernity) various thinkers were introduced, who played a vital role in the development of these characteristics of postmodernity. I began with Wittgenstein’s (4.3.1 Wittgenstein, epistemology, language and postmodernity) argument and also discussed how his ideas could easily lead to solipsism, in other words that the subjective “I” constructs reality through language, which is also reflected in the ideas of the phenomenology of Husserl. Gadamer pointed out that the reality is constructed in dialogue with others and the past, in other words the construction of reality is a communal process.

“If the realities we inhabit are brought forth in the language we use, they are then kept alive and passed along in the stories that we live and tell” (Freedman & Combs 1996:29). The human realities are thus storied realities that one could say: *The limits of my stories mean the limits of my world*. Humanity’s understanding of reality is thus narrative. This understanding of reality is not just based on a single narrative, but various narratives (social, cultural, political, etcetera)

In a certain sense postmodernity has caused confusion and relativism and the question arises: Is there a ‘system’, without returning to modernism that can incorporate these postmodern characteristics and create the boundaries in which humanity can seek to understand itself and the world? The world is our language and this language is constructed and prone to illusion and manipulation by ideological powers. The self is a constructed self through language and this language is always a fictitious artefact and there is thus no direct empirical access to reality or truth.

Yet there is a reality out there as one does not bump into a word, but a table (a tangible real object). I can express this bumping into a table in words. These words are not one’s own, but belong to the language and cultural tradition into which one is born. Yet after all is deconstructed and analysed the feeling remains that there is more to life than

these deconstructed realities. There is meaning and purpose that lies beyond the scope of language and construction as well as deconstruction – that *wordless meaning* which Wittgenstein said should rather be passed on in silence and Gadamer said that it is passed on in the language of metaphor found in art and poetry. The postmodern nihilism does not do justice to life and something needs to be found not to reconstruct what has been deconstructed, but to find some form of reasonable response incorporating the claims of postmodernity. I believe that narrative is this reasonable response to postmodernity's claims, without denying them, but by incorporating them. I will be introducing various narrative thinkers and how they incorporated the postmodern characteristics into their narrative thinking.

MacIntyre argues that there are various diverse uses of narrative. He argues that:

- 1) intelligible human action is narrative in form,
- 2) human life has a fundamentally narrative shape,
- 3) humans are story-telling animals,
- 4) people place their lives and arguments in narrative histories,
- 5) communities and traditions receive their continuity through narrative histories, and
- 7) epistemological progress is marked by the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narrative forms of narrative (Hauerwas & Jones

1998:8).

I will look at some of these narrative uses that MacIntyre has pointed out.

## 8.2 Narrative and human action

In reflecting on narrative as a response or an outcome to postmodernity, I will be introducing and integrating numerous ideas from various thinkers. I will be reflecting mainly on the thoughts of Ricoeur, Crites and MacIntyre. Each of these thinkers began their narrative understanding with an interpretation of human action.

### 8.2.1 Action in modernity.

In modernity (analytical philosophy) actions were broken down into very small atomic segments and analysed according to cause and effect. These atomic segments are called basic actions which Ricoeur describes as those actions which we know how to perform without first having to do something else in order to perform them (Ricoeur 1992:153).

One of the changes that characterise postmodernity was the change that took place in the understanding of the relationship between cause and effect. The direct connection

between a cause and an effect was questioned and thus a new way needed to be found to understand and interpret actions for actions to be intelligible.

### **8.2.2 Narrative intelligibility of human actions**

Ricoeur's revision of the modern understanding of action was to lengthen the action segments and not to analyse basic action, but action segments. He proposed that action segments should be lengthened to action units which he understood as units of praxis. Each unit of praxis has its own specific principle of organization and coherence. The question thus was: what exactly forms this coherence or principle of organization?

MacIntyre, seeking to answer the question of coherence, also believes that to understand actions one needs to expand the action segments.

He uses the example of a man working in the garden – a basic simple action, but this action can be characterised in numerous different ways for example digging, gardening, taking exercise, preparing for winter or even pleasing his wife (MacIntyre 1989:91).

For the actions of the man in the garden to be intelligible (to be '*correctly*' interpreted), one needs to understand the intentions behind the action. By placing human action into the context of intentions the basic action is transformed into an episode within history. This history can be understood as a narrative history in which the intentions can be clarified and the actions are found to be intelligible.

#### **8.2.2.1 Narrative history of an action**

The first step in understanding an action is placing the action into the context of intentions, thus into a narrative history (MacIntyre 1989:92).

To understand what is meant by narrative history, I will turn to the thoughts of Stephen Crites.

Crites understood actions to be "altogether temporal. Yet it has unity of form through time, a form revealed only in the action as a whole. That temporal form is what we mean by style" (Crites 1989:66).

Crites also argues that actions are conscious movements in time (Crites 1989:66). For an action to be conscious movement in time it must also be intended. To place an action into the context of the intentions behind the action means to understand the action as a conscious movement in time.

Time on the other hand exists in three modalities, namely past, present and future.

Crites refers to Augustine of Hippo who ponders on these three modalities of time and the apparent paradox that the future which does not yet exist, should pass into the past, which no longer exist through a present which is nothing more than a quasi-mathematical point (Crites 1989:67).

He solves this paradox by understanding the three modalities of time not as independent metaphysical modalities, but as the necessary modalities of an experiencing consciousness. The experiencing consciousness brings these three modalities together. It is in human consciousness that humans experience the future as anticipation, attends to the present and remembers the past.

An action as a conscious movement is thus linked to these three modalities of time by the conscious mind.

The past actions and events (experiences) are remembered and stored in memory. Crites argues that memory gives consciousness and experience its coherence, because without memory the consciousness would be locked in bare, momentary present (Crites 1989:73). Memory has coherence because it orders events and past actions by a simple order of succession which enables human beings to recall and to consult their memory. The events in memory are not stored in atomistic units, but in episodes with basic succession, thus to be able to recollect from memory it is obvious that one would do that via the telling of the story of the episode.

For Crites the most obvious way of recollecting is thus to tell a story, although the story is not just the recital of a chronicle, but meaning is given to the chronicle in the process of telling the recollected events. Thus memory is in essence narrative.

There is a distinction between memory and experience. In the chronicle of memory there is simple temporality of succession namely, duration, before and after, but not the decisive tensed distinction between past, present and future. It is this distinction between past, present and future that provides experience with its tension and demands the tenses of language (Crites 1989:76).

From the three modalities of time only the present exists, but it does not exist by itself. The present only exists as the transition of future into past.

“I want to suggest that the inner form of any possible experience (*or action*)<sup>1</sup> is determined by the union of these three distinct modalities in every moment of experience. I want further to suggest that the tensed unity of these modalities requires narrative forms both for its expression (mundane stories) and for its own sense of the meaning of its internal coherence (sacred story)”(Crites 1989:77).

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<sup>1</sup>I included ‘*or action*’, it was not part of the original quote.

These tensed modalities require narrative forms for their expression and I have already reflected on the narrative form of memory. The future also takes on a narrative form. The way that humans think about the future in guesses, predictions, dreams, wishes, hopes, hunches and aspirations exist in the form of stories. Crites calls these stories of the future, 'scenarios of anticipation' (Crites 1989:77).

These scenarios of anticipation are formulated to lay some plan with regard to our projected course of action. Within these scenarios of anticipation are also the intentions of actions, which is the first step in understanding an action. "We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and other repel us, some seem already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable" (MacIntyre 1989:101). There is a certain *telos* that beckons us forward towards the future. Yet the future is not that clear, but it is in the future that the surprising and unpredictable can happen, thus one can argue that the scenarios of anticipation are composed by the coexistence of teleology and unpredictability. Therefore the scenarios of anticipation are never as coherent as the chronicles of memory, as there remains a degree of uncertainty and unpredictability with regards to the future, as life turns out differently to how things were planned and expected.

These two stories, the story of the past and the story of the future, are connected by a certain continuity and coherence. This coherence and continuity is necessary for experience or for actions to be intelligible. The past and the future must be connected in some way for present actions and present experiences to make sense. The question is: what is it that connects the future to the past without it being too determined that there is no space for the unforeseen and the unpredictable? What I am looking for is a link which connects the past to the future on the one hand, but on the other hand allows for the absolute distinction between past and future. The future cannot be determined from the past and this incoherence between future and past also needs to be taken into account.

Ricoeur introduced the idea of plot from narrative to link the past remembered and future anticipated (Ricoeur 1992: 141). Yet on the other hand the distinction between memory and anticipation is absolute because it is not a plain story line as if the present was only an indifferent point moving along a single unbroken line. Thus plot, according to Ricoeur, needs to be described in dynamic terms as a competition between the demand for concordance and the admission of discordances. Concordance is the way in which the past is remembered as an ordered arrangement of facts or events as taken from the chronicle of memory, while discordance is the misfortunes and unexpected

events that challenge the ordered arrangements of facts and events.

Before I can move on I need to clarify how the concordant past remembered and the discordant future anticipated meet in the present.

Past and future do not just meet in the present.

“Memory and anticipation, the present of things past and the present of things future, are tensed modalities of the present itself. They are the tension of every moment of experience, both united in the present and qualitatively differentiated by it” (Crites 1989:78).

In this momentary present the past is fixed, a chronicle that can be reinterpreted, but which has a basic concordant chronicle of events that cannot be changed. At the same time in the present there is the future which, contrary to the chronicle of the past, is fluid, indeterminate and subject to various alternative scenarios. Thus the two are absolutely distinct.

The present moment contains this tension of absolutely distinct and yet unifying the past and the future. This tension can only be contained in a narrative form which gives it unity of form.

“I propose to define discordant concordance, characteristic of all narrative composition...” (Ricoeur 1992:141).

The present is always the critical and decisive point in the story and gives it its dramatic character. It is in the present moment that action and experience join in what Ricoeur terms *emplotment*. *Emplotment* inverts the contingency of events (actions) in that it incorporates the action into the effect of necessity or probability which is exerted upon the event by the configuring act of plot. Thus there is a certain narrative necessity that is created and the action becomes an integral part of the story.

For an action to be intelligible there needs to be this close relation between action and narrative. This close connection is not a new invention, but was already present in Aristotle’s thinking. Aristotle defined tragedy as the imitation of action and understands action as a connection of incidents, of facts, of a sort susceptible to conforming to narrative configuration. He specifies: “The most important of the six [parts of tragedy] is the combination of the incidents of the story. Tragedy is essentially an imitation [*mimesis*] not of persons but of action and life [*bion*], of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of [*en*] action; the end [*telos*] for which we live is a certain kind of activity [*praxis tis*], not a quality [*ou poites*]” (Ricoeur 1992:152).

**Conclusion:** For an action to be intelligible the basic action needs to be understood in the light of the intentions of the action, which can only be understood within the narrative history of the action. The narrative emplots the action thus inverting the contingency of actions into the effect of necessity or probability.

#### 8.2.2.2 The narrative history of the social setting of an action

I return to the man working in the garden.<sup>2</sup> I have lengthened this action segment by placing the action within its narrative setting. The intention of the man could be to get the garden in order before the winter or to please his wife. To understand the action of the man I will need to discover which intentions are primary to the man working in the garden. To understand which intentions are primary I need to distance myself even more from the basic action and try and understand the setting of the episode. A setting for the episode could be annual garden activities or their marriage. MacIntyre argues that each setting also has a history, in other words a story. To understand a specific action one needs to place the episode into this history of the setting, because without understanding the history of the setting and its changes through time the individual action will not be intelligible (MacIntyre 1989:92).

Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1992:156) uses the example of a simple movement of a pawn on a chess board to explain the basic action within the context of a unit of praxis within the practice of the game of chess. This basic movement of a pawn (action) only makes sense if understood within the context of the game of chess (practice/setting). Thus, it is the practice of the game of chess which gives this basic action meaning.

If we place the man working in the garden into the narrative setting of his marriage, we can interpret his working in the garden as an action to please his wife. Ricoeur, from the example of the chess game, uses the idea of a constitutive rule from the game theory. He argues that we can only understand the action within the context of the constitutive rule which gives the action its meaning (Ricoeur 1992:154). The setting of the marriage also has certain constitutive rules, but these “rules” are not set by this solitary man, gardening. These “rules” have a history and it is within this history of marriage that the man in the garden is set.

“These practices do not arise in a vacuum nor are they created by a solitary performer, but the practice has a long history be it skill/profession or game. The practice is learnt by the apprentice and although the tradition can be violated it first needs to be assumed” (Ricoeur 1992:156).

An action or human behaviour can only be identified and understood if one takes the intentions, beliefs and settings of the action seriously.

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter Two: 8.2.2 Narrative intelligibility of human actions

Thus to understand the action of an individual we need “to place the intentions in temporal causal order with reference to their role in his or her history; and we also place them with reference to their role in the history of the setting or setting to which they belong “(MacIntyre 1989:94).

The narrative history of the individual or of the setting needs to be taken into account when seeking to understand human action.

A human action can only be understood within its narrative setting, which has historical as well as social implications.

It can thus be said that narrative history and setting is basic and essential for any characterization of any human action (MacIntyre 1989:94).

This narrative quality of action can be expanded to longer segments of action such as life plans and the whole of life. As Aristotle argues: “Tragedy is essentially the imitation [mimesis] not of persons but of action and life” (Ricoeur 1992:157).

**Summary: Narrative intelligibility of action**

- 1 Actions are temporal.
- 2 Actions are conscious movements in time.
- 3 Actions in time can only be understood in the narrative context of plot (concordance – discordance).
- 4 Actions are intelligible in their narrative settings and these settings in turn have social settings, which also have a narrative history.

### **8.3 Narrative understanding of human existence**

In the previous section of the study I reflected on the narrative character of human action and that human actions can only be understood if they are placed within the context of narrative history as well as social narrative setting. In this section I would like to reflect on the identity of the person who is doing the action. This means that I will move from the action to the agent. What somebody is doing is closely related to who is doing it. In this section I will reflect on this “who” and by doing so I will seek to respond to the postmodern understanding of ontology, subjectivity, agency and teleology.

Postmodernity can be characterised as challenging some fundamental assumptions with regard to humanity namely ontology, subjectivity, agency and teleology. The

modern human being was seen as a rational subjective self. It understood the self as standing apart from the objective reality. This objective reality the self could experience and understand through a rational process of inquiry. Then Wittgenstein introduced his thoughts about language as the medium that stands between the subjective self and the reality (objective world). In a previous section I also discussed the ideas of Husserl (4.3.4 Edmund Husserl, phenomenology, hermeneutics, romanticism and postmodernism) and how the self constructs his or her own reality within his or her language. Later this view was challenged by the social constructionists who believed that the individual is set within a language tradition and a social, cultural and historical context. The language that the individual uses to construct his or her reality is the language he /she is born into and thus the reality is constructed communally.

The question that I seek to answer in this section is: is narrative a possible new way of understanding the human self, human agency and subjectivity?

The first question about the 'who' is: Who is this who and who is the agent of the action? This brings me to a reflection on the identity of the 'who.' The whole concept of personal identity has its own story within the philosophical debate. I will reflect on this story before seeking a narrative understanding of identity.

### 8.3.1 Philosophical debate on personal identity

The question on personal identity has in the past revolved around two different views of what fundamentally forms personal identity.

“Let me recall the terms of the confrontation: on one side, identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *mêmeté*); on the other identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*, German *Selbstheit*, French *ipséité*)” (Ricoeur 1992: 116).

Now sameness and selfhood are not the same and the difference needs to be considered especially when one is seeking to understand identity with regards to permanence over time. It is exactly this permanence over time that has been at the centre of the philosophical debate with regards to identity. The debate sought the criteria by which one can judge if person X is the same person today as she or he was yesterday and will be tomorrow? This question formed the central question of the philosophical debate on personal identity.

The debate in the past revolved around the two mentioned possibilities for establishing personal identity through time.

#### 8.3.1.1 Personal identity and sameness (*idem*)

Sameness as identity can be subdivided into two different qualities namely numerical

identity and qualitative identity. Firstly, **numerical identity** is where identity denotes oneness and is contrary to plurality. Therefore sameness as numerical identity is the possibility of identifying somebody as the same because x number of physical or non-physical attributes can be re-identified as being the same x number of times. The use of identity photos in passports and identification documents is based on this idea of identity as numerical sameness. At the passport control the officer looks at the eyes, nose and ears of the person on the photo as well as the person standing in front of him / her to see if they are the same. The officer looks for numerical identification.

In the second place there is **qualitative identity**, which is extreme resemblance (Ricoeur 1992:116). This is when two people are wearing the same clothes and are so similar that they are interchangeable without semantic loss. These two components of identity as sameness are irreducible to one another. It is only when time and the permanence of sameness in time comes into the question of re-identification that the two complement each other. As time progresses, hesitation can come into the re-identification of same. Then the extreme resemblance between two or more occurrences can be introduced to reinforce the numerical identity (Ricoeur 1992:116). If the passport photo is a rather old photo the re-identification of the person can become difficult.

In other words with the progress of time this re-identification becomes more and more difficult that there can be no proof without doubt that person  $X^1$  today is the same as person  $X^2$  50 years ago. To overcome this doubt the idea of *uninterrupted continuity* was introduced. Uninterrupted continuity within the notion of identity is the continuity between the first and the last stage of the developed of what one considers to be the same individual (Ricoeur 1992:117). How can uninterrupted continuity be proven? It seems that something needs to be found within the substance of the person that does not change with time to be able to prove without a doubt the sameness between  $X^1$  and  $X^2$  50 years later. Sameness is extremely difficult to prove with regards to permanence over time.

I will introduce a story of a young man (Sipho) to accompany the reflection on the development in the understanding of personal identity.

**An accompanying story:** A young man (Sipho) proposes to a young woman (Sibongile) and they plan to get married very soon. Sipho and Sibongile were both very active in an Anglican youth group. Sipho was also an active member of the United Democratic Movement. He found great inspiration in Black liberation theology which gave him hope and courage to get involved in the liberation struggle. Shortly before the wedding day young Sipho is taken captive during the

state of emergency and disappears for 15 years. He returns to a New South Africa to marry the woman he proposed to 15 year prior.

The 15 years that Siphon was gone have certainly changed him. The years have changed the way he looks. Sibongile would like to know if Siphon is the same man who proposed to her 15 years ago. Personal identity as sameness (*idem*) would argue Siphon is the same man if there are certain characteristics that Sibongile can use to re-identify Siphon, in other words if there are certain attributes that are still the same today as 15 years ago or at least an extreme resemblance. What Sibongile is looking for is something (uninterrupted continuity) that can tell her that this man she once loved and was prepared to spend the rest of her life with is still the same.

### 8.3.1.2 Personal identity as selfhood (*ipse*)

The question that came out of personal identity as sameness is: Is there something that transcends time on which identity can be based? Personal identity as selfhood seems to be able to transcend time and thus be a basis from which to judge personal identity.

There are two models of permanence over time which can be connected to the question “who” as well as to the question “what”. The two models are *character* and *keeping one’s word* (Ricoeur 1992:118).

For Ricoeur the character model expresses the almost complete mutual overlapping of the problematic *idem* and *ipse* while faithfulness to oneself in keeping one’s word marks the extreme gap between the permanence of the self and that of the same (Ricoeur 1992:118).

Sibongile fell in love with Siphon, she loved the way he walked and talked and she could listen for hours to what he said. She was amazed at the way in which he understood and interpreted the world. Sibongile was in love with Siphon’s character. She could identify him from far by the way he walked. If she read something in the local news letter she immediately could tell if Siphon had written it. Sibongile had many things by which she could identify Siphon.

#### 8.3.1.2.1 Selfhood as character

“By “character” I understand the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same. By the descriptive features that will be given, the individual compounds numerical identification and qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time. In this way, the sameness of the person is designated emblematically”. (Ricoeur 1992:119)

Character designates a set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognised over time. In this way character has the ability to constitute the limit point where the *ipse* becomes indiscernible from the *idem* (Ricoeur 1992:121). What is the temporal disposition of character that makes this possible?

The first notion that Ricoeur describes that makes this possible is habit. Habit exists over time in double sense namely that of habit already acquired and habit being formed. “Now these two features have an obvious temporal significance: habit gives history to character, but this is a history in which sedimentation tends to cover over the innovation which preceded it, even to the point of abolishing the later” (Ricoeur 1992:121). It is this sedimentation which gives character the permanence over time that makes the overlapping of *ipse* and *idem* possible. It makes overlapping possible, but it does not destroy the difference between the two. “Each habit formed in this way, acquired and become a lasting disposition, constitutes a *trait* - a character trait, a distinctive sign by which a person is recognized, reidentified as the same - character being nothing other than the set of these distinctive signs” (Ricoeur 1992:121). Sibongile could identify Siphoh by the way he walked and spoke or wrote - his character traits. Siphoh’s selfhood (character) was the same today, yesterday and tomorrow and it was in this character that Sibongile fell in love with.

There is also the notion of acquired identification where the other enters into the composition of the same. Siphoh identified himself with certain values and norms of the liberation struggle and black theology. The struggle and theology played an important part in who he was. It formed him as he identified with the ideas and values of the struggle and the liberated consciousness found in black theology.

“To a large extent, in fact, the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, in which the person or the community recognizes itself” (Ricoeur 1992:121).

This identification with heroic figures or values is an incorporation of the other into oneself. This brings with it an element of loyalty and fidelity into character as the character seeks to maintain the self over time. It is within this aspect of loyalty that the two poles of identity *ipse* and *idem* accord with each other. One cannot consider the sameness (*idem*) of a person with regard to values, norms, ideal, models and heroes without also considering the selfhood (*ipse*) of the person.

**In summary:** character gives to the question of identity some stability. Character is created from acquired habits and identifications with certain norms, values and heroes. The test for identity is: can Siphoh be re-identified as the same person? Can Sibongile find enough character traits, habits, values in Siphoh’s character that she

loved and which have certain permanence, an uninterrupted continuity that she is prepared to marry this man?

This overlapping of *ipse* and *idem* is not complete, so that one should give up all attempts to distinguish between them.

“The dialectic of innovation and sedimentation, underlying the acquisition of a habit, and the equally rich dialectic of otherness and internalization, underlying the process of identification, are there to remind us that character has a history which it has contracted, one might say, in the twofold sense of the word “contraction”: abbreviation and affection. It is then comprehensible that the stable pole of character can contain a narrative dimension, as we see in the uses of the term “character” identifying it with the protagonist in a story. What sedimentation has contracted, narration can redeploy” (Ricoeur 1992:122).

#### 8.3.1.2.2 Selfhood as keeping one’s word

There is a difference between the permanence of character over time and keeping one’s word over time. It can be seen that keeping one’s word is a denial of change and therefore a challenge to time. In other words even if the desire or the inclination should change one would remain faithful to one’s word which was given in the past.

Sipho has changed and many things have happened to him in those 15 years in which he was separated from Sibongile. Experiences that have shaped and changed his character to such an extent that re-identification becomes difficult. Is Sipho bound to his word? Or is Sibongile bound by her promise to marry Sipho?

“This new manner of opposing the sameness of character to the constancy of the self in promising opens an interval of sense which remains to be filled in” (Ricoeur 1992:124).

This interval of sense is opened by the polarity of two models of permanence over time.

It is here in this twofold sense of sameness - sameness as consistency of character over time and sameness as faithfulness to a promise - that mediation is sought within the temporal. Ricoeur believes that narrative can mediate in this interval as it oscillates between the two limits. The two limits for Ricoeur are:

- 1) the lower limit where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse* and
- 2) the upper limit where *ipse* is identity without the aid of *idem* (Ricoeur 1992:124).

Thus the only way that Sibongile can understand the change that has taken place in Sipho’s life is if mediation takes place in which he tells the story of these 15 years. The

story is the only way that Sibongile can connect the Siphos she once knew to the man 15 years later.

### 8.3.2 Narrative understanding of self /personal identity.

The question of identity seems to revolve around the three questions: What, Who and Why. What is person X doing? Who is person X and Why is person X doing what s/he is doing? Is person X the same today as s/he was 20 years ago, and **what** is there that connects the two? In the previous section Ricoeur introduced the idea of character as being able to connect the two questions *who* and *what*. Character for Ricoeur is the stable pole of identity as it not only expresses sameness, but also selfhood. The character has a history in which she/he has acquired certain dispositions, habits and identified values and norms, therefore character needs to be understood within the context of this narrative history. Siphos character cannot be understood separate from his history. The way he walks he learnt from his friends at school, the values he believes in he discovered in books and his activities in the liberation struggle. Siphos can tell the story of each habit acquired and each value identified with.

This narrative history takes us back to the narrative understanding of action which I reflected upon in (8.2 Narrative and human Action). Ricoeur moves from the action to the character who is the conscious subject of the action. The action receives coherence and unity as it is placed within the plot of a narrative history. Actions only make sense once the intentions of the agent are understood and these intentions are intrinsically part of the narrative history.

Ricoeur argues that the characters of agents can also be understood within the context of plots (Ricoeur 1992:143)

“It is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by emplotment, that the character preserves throughout the story an identity correlative to that of the story itself” (Ricoeur 1992:143)

Or as Crites puts it: “The self in its concreteness is indivisible, temporal, and whole, as it is revealed to be in the narrative quality of experience. Neither disembodied minds nor mindless bodies can appear in stories” (Crites1989).

Thus narrative for Ricoeur joins together the two processes of emplotment namely that of character and action. The questions who?, what? and why? form a chain that is none other than a story chain (Ricoeur 1992:146).

This concordance-discordance synthesis integrates the contingency of the event/action into the narrative necessity, which is only recognised retrospectively in the history of a personal life which is the same as the identity of a person (Ricoeur 1992:147).

In other words a person's character can only be understood within this dialectic of concordance-discordance.

In the section on personal identity (8.3.1) personal identity is based on *ipse* and *idem*. So what personal identity seeks is uninterrupted continuity. Strict identity means that "I am forever what ever I have been at any time for others - and I may at any time be called to answer for it – no matter how changed I may be now" (MacIntyre 1989:102).

The two limits that Ricoeur referred to in the previous section are expressed in this quotation of MacIntyre. Character in the previous section was one of the models which fulfilled this criterion of personal identity according to the lower limit, where permanence in time, expressed by the overlapping of *idem* and *ipse*, means that I am forever what ever I have been at any time for others. In other words selfhood (*ipse*) is the same (*idem*) through time. The narrative understanding of character, namely character as plot, gives character this unity (uninterrupted continuity) through time. This continuity is a narrative continuity of plot (concordance - discordance). The other model was keeping ones word where *ipse* is identity without the aid of *idem* which responded to the upper limit, where I have changed to such an extent that there is not much left of *idem* (sameness). In other words, where people might say to you: "Your character has changed completely!" Yet I can be called to answer for this change that has taken place. Ricoeur understood these two models as being the two limits of identity between which only a narrative understanding can mediate (Ricoeur 1992:124).

Sipho can give an account of what happened in those 15 years that has brought about the changes in his character. He can tell the story of the various events and experiences and how these experiences changed his life (character). He can tell the story of how he was in prison and then escaped and lived in exile and during this period how he was introduced to the writings of Malcolm X and how this changed the way he understood himself and the world.

Thus identity cannot be based on the continuity (sameness) or discontinuity of selfhood. "The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the unity of a character" (MacIntyre 1989:102). This unity of character is a narrative unity – not only the narrative understanding of character, but also the narrative account that can be given of any drastic changes that have taken place in the character. Thus personal identity is narrative identity.

Narrative gives to life a certain unity and wholeness, or as Dilthey coined the concept *Zusammenhang des Lebens* (connectedness of life) (Ricoeur 1992:141).

MacIntyre argues that the narrative concept of identity requires two things:

1) the self is that which others justifiably take him /her to be in the course of living out the personal story. If personal identity is narrative identity then you are that character of your personal story. The self is the subject of a unique history which is his/her own and nobody else's and this personal history has its peculiar meaning (MacIntyre 1989:102-103). This also means that one is accountable for the actions and experiences which compose this narratable life. This narrative account links the self to different stages through time which causes the overlapping of selfhood with sameness.

“Thus personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of character which the unity of narrative requires” (MacIntyre 1989:102).

2) The second aspect of the narrative concept of self is correlative. The self is not only accountable, but can also ask others to account for their narrative selves. The narrative account of the self is, to a certain extent, developed in this interaction of accountability. As humans in community give account of their actions and listen to the accounts of others their own stories develop. The accounts and explanations of what one did and the explanations and accounts that others give of my actions are the essential constituents of simplest form of narrative. It is in this interaction that actions become intelligible as selves discover meaning in the exchange of accounts. Without this accountability of the self, the trains of events that constitute these simple narratives would not be possible and without this accountability narratives as well as actions would lack the continuity required to make them intelligible.

A narrative account needs to be given of what has changed (discontinuity of selfhood), or why my character has so changed that it cannot be recognised as the same, to make any sense of the changes that have taken place.

Sibongile and Siphon used to understand the world, interpret their actions and the events of history within the dual communities of the activists and the Anglican youth group. In interaction with friends they made sense and justified their actions. The justifications of their actions in the struggle were based on what they believed to be the goal of the struggle. They identified with the goals, values and norms of the struggle.

This narrative account, to be intelligible, will need to incorporate an understanding of the teleological aim of life to make sense of the changes that have taken place. The teleological aim of life can be understood as that which the individual believes to be good and right.

Walter Benjamin, in an essay entitled “The Storyteller” describes the art of storytelling as the art of exchanging experiences, in other words practical wisdom; a wisdom which never fails to include estimations and evaluations that fall under the teleological and deontological categories (Ricoeur 1992:164).

In an above section (8.2) I have reflected on projections into the future, that the future is characterised by two aspects, namely the teleological expectations and the unexpected. These teleological expectations are in unity with the experiences of the past, which means that there is a narrative unity between the past and the teleological expectations. MacIntyre calls this unity the unity of the narrative quest (MacIntyre 1989:104). He uses the word ‘quest’ as in a quest there is some understanding of the good. It is this teleological quest for the good which helps the individual order and evaluate experiences as Benjamin says is intrinsically part of any narrative. The changes and the unexpected events that make up a life are ordered according to this teleological quest or the understanding of what compromises a good life.

Sipho changed in the 15 years in which he was away from Sibongile. When they were together they ordered their reality and their actions according to the teleology of the Christian (black) liberation struggle. For Sipho this *telos* changed in the 15 years, as he adopted a new teleological understanding which he found in the Muslim faith. Sibongile can understand this change that happened to Sipho if he tells her about the shift in his understanding about what is right and good.

To return finally to the questions of personal identity and narrative mediation between the two limits:

“Where, finally are we to locate narrative identity along this spectrum of variations extending from the pole of selfhood as sameness belonging to character to the pole of pure selfhood of self-constancy? The answer to this question would appear to have already been given: narrative identity stands between the two: in narrativizing character, the narrative returns to it the movement abolished in acquired dispositions, in the sediment of identification-with. In narrativizing the aim of the true life, narrative identity gives it the recognizable feature of character loved or respected. Narrative identity makes the two ends of the chain link up with one another: the permanence in time of character and that of self-constancy” (Ricoeur 1992:165-166).

In conclusion I agree with MacIntyre that personal identity must be understood in relation to narrative, intelligibility, and accountability (MacIntyre 1989:104).

From the above, I can argue that in order to understand the self, memory is primary, as

understanding is primarily recollection (Freeman 1993:29). It is only from the narrative of the past that one can identify character, style, plot, values, norms and the telos of the personal narrative and thus make predictions and anticipations about the future. If certain unexpected event does occur this can force the self to reinterpret the past, but he/she will be able to give an account of this re-interpretation. "... the history one tells, via memory, assumes the form of a narrative of the past that charts the trajectory of how one's self came to be" (Freeman 1993:33).

Sipho could tell Sibongile his story of the 15 years and how these years changed his character. He did this because of his faithfulness to his promise. A certain understanding of the value of promises made them keep their promise to each other and made them accountable to each other for the changes that had taken place.

**Summary: Narrative understanding of human existence**

1. The character of the agent of an action needs to be understood in the context of narrative.
2. The subject of an action is thus a narrative subject.
3. Narrative understanding of a character mediates between the two limits of personal identity (identity as the continuity (sameness) of selfhood and identity as selfhood without continuity).
4. Human existence is essentially narrative.
5. Memory is primary in understanding the self.
6. Human lives are texts (narratives) of lives, in other words literary artefacts.

#### 8.4 Social setting of narrative

I have in the process of discovering a narrative understanding of personal identity reflected upon the narrative understanding of human action, character, agency, subject and teleology. In this section of the study I will reflect on the social construction of narratives. The intelligibility of personal identity narrative or the narrative in which human action is understood is based on the narratives in which they are set. These narratives in which actions and personal identity are set are not constructed in isolation, but are socially constructed. The narratives in which human identity and actions are set are the narratives of a community, tradition and context. Sipho and Sibongile could make sense of Sipho's activities in the liberation struggle, because these actions were set within the context of the story of liberation. It was the story of the liberation that made these actions meaningful. Sipho identified with the story of liberation and thus his identity narrative found meaning once it was understood in the liberation story. Sipho's character (identity narrative) is not something he created himself as he was only a co-

author of this narrative together with the Anglican youth group, the liberation movement, the South African context, Sibongile, his parents and his traditional roots amongst others. Siphos identity narrative is co-created as it is an interwoven tapestry of all these different stories.

Crites argues that there are different types of narrative/stories, namely sacred and mundane stories, in which humanity co-creates its identity narratives and creates an understanding of reality.

#### **8.4.1 Sacred stories**

Sacred stories are stories that lie deep in the consciousness of cultures, so that in a sense they form consciousness (Crites 1989:69). The cultures are not necessarily always aware of these stories, as they cannot be directly told because they live in a culture. These are stories where the meaning of the story is passed on in silence (Wittgenstein), but comes to us in the form of art, history, tradition and philosophy (Gadamer). Crites calls them sacred “because man’s sense of self and world is created through them” (Crites 1989:70).

For a story to be told it needs to be placed into a context. This context does not have to exist it can also be an imagined context.

“For the sacred story does not transpire within a conscious world. It forms the very consciousness that projects a total world horizon, and therefore informs the intentions by which actions are projected into the world. The style of these actions dances to its music” (Crites 1989:71).

#### **8.4.2 Mundane stories**

The mundane stories are the stories that pass between people when they tell each other where they have been, what they have done, etcetera. These stories find their setting within the world of consciousness. The mundane stories are thus also the stories that people use to make sense of the world of consciousness or to teach their children the “ways of the world”(Crites 1989:71). Mundane stories are the stories we tell each other to give account of our actions. They are the stories of our lives that make up our characters / identity narratives.

Between the mundane and sacred stories there is a distinction without there being a total separation. “...all a people’s mundane stories are implicit in its sacred story, and every mundane story takes soundings in the sacred story” (Crites 1989:71). It is in our mundane stories that sometimes the sacred story resonates.

The experiencing consciousness is what mediates between the sacred and the mundane stories. "For consciousness is moulded by the sacred story to which it awakens, and in turn it finds expression in the mundane stories that articulate its sense of reality"(Crites 1989:72).

The individual consciousness is moulded by the sacred story into which it awakens. The individual is born into a culture/ tradition with its own sacred stories.

In the previous sections the study took from narrative the idea of plot to understand actions and character. I concluded that life is essentially narrative.

Yet this narrative of life is not an artistic production with perfect articulation and the coherence of the narrative of a fixed script where one knows the outcome, but life is rather rudimentary. Crites argues that life also imitates art as the individual drama is not isolated, but placed within a tapestry of stories and dramas. These stories are taught to the individual from infancy through the fairy tales and other stories that are told that help the child to understand himself or herself and understand the reality around him /her. Thus the child develops an understanding of himself / herself via the stories that are told. It is via these stories that we interpret our actions and our selves. In a sense our narrative identity is not only our story, but is determined by our social history. We have a certain social identity (MacIntyre 1989:105).

Stories we hear, dramas we see performed, the films we watch and the sacred stories that are absorbed without being directly told all shape our inner story of experience. It is from this tapestry of stories that the individual stories imbibe a sense of meaning. These stories affect the form of the individual's experience as well as the narrative of his or her action. A person cannot answer the question: "what am I to do?" without first answering the question "of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" (MacIntyre 1989:101). Thus according to MacIntyre there is no way that we can understand any society as well as our own except through the stock of stories which constitute its original dramatic resources.

The dramatic resources are the resources humanity uses to interpret themselves, to interpret experiences and to interpret each other's actions and experiences. In other words this tapestry of stories, which is made up of both sacred and mundane stories, forms what Geertz calls a *world view* – a setting in which our narratives make sense. A world view is a "picture" which a group shares "of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order"(Hopewell 1987:55).

The community over time develops an idea of how things are and what is going on, yet these world views are fragile and incomplete constructions of reality and can be compared to the paradigms in science which only hold as long as they are not challenged. No world view is irrefutable. A crisis can challenge the world view of individuals as well as the world view of a community or society. Siphon understood himself as well as his world through the stories of the liberation struggle from a Christian liberation theological point of view (world view) - a world view that he shared with his comrades in the movement and in the youth group, a world view that was created in this community of comrades. Siphon's world view was challenged in the 15 years in which he was away from his friends and comrades and was introduced to a new set of stories by which to interpret his world. These new stories were set within the context of radical black consciousness from a Muslim, Malcolm X's, perspective and they helped him re-interpret his reality and thus create/construct a new world view with his brothers he found in the Muslim faith.

Geertz describes this link between crisis and world view in the following way:

“The strange opacity of certain empirical events, the dumb senselessness of intense or inexorable pain, and the enigmatic unaccountability of gross inequity all raise the uncomfortable suspicion that perhaps the world, and hence man's life in the world, has no genuine order at all - no empirical regularity, no emotional form, no moral coherence. And the religious response to this suspicion is in each case the same: the formulation, by means of symbols, of an image of such a genuine order of the world which will account for, even celebrate, the perceived ambiguities, puzzles and paradoxes of human experience” (Hopewell 1987:56)

I am aware of the differentiation that some anthropologists make between *world view* and *ethos*. I will interpret world view as the interpretation of the universe that is socially constructed within a group, while ethos reflects the values and dispositions that a social group maintains.

#### **8.4.3 Different narrative settings**

Crites argued that life also imitates art (Crites 1989:79). The drama of life is not as coherent as a stage drama played according to a fixed script, yet it seeks meaning and intelligibility from the dramatic resources available to the social group. These dramatic resources often include the written plays, films and novels we read.

If life stories and the stories of personal identity are fictitious and if life imitates art, then to understand life stories one can make use of the literary tools available to characterise

and understand life stories. I will make use of Western literary tools as these are the only tools available to me as I was educated within the Western tradition.

I will reflect on the dramatic resources that a community uses to repair or reconstruct the socially constructed settings, in the context of a crisis which threatens the setting/world view. The crisis that I will reflect on is somebody being diagnosed with terminal cancer. What are the different stories friends and family tell the patient to make sense of his/her crisis? In the Bible there is the story of a very similar situation namely the friends of Job who came up with all sorts of stories to make sense of what was happening to Job in order to protect their world view which was being threatened by Job's crisis.

Hopewell uses four different narrative genres as the four basic dramatic resources used to construct a world view, namely: comedy, romance, tragedy, irony. These four genres can be placed on a circle like the four points of a compass in a clockwise order. The structure of any literary work or any story we construct can be found on this circle, sometimes between two points (Hopewell 1987:58). I will outline some characteristics of each of these literary genres based on Hopewell's understanding of them (Hopewell 1987:58-62).

#### 8.4.3.1 Comic tales

The essential element of a comic tale is not that they are funny, but that they have happy endings. A comic tale moves towards the direction of the solution of the problem. The problem, in a comic tale, is generally solved by overcoming a misunderstanding that existed and caused the problem. For example the comic tales told to the cancer patient are tales of people who recovered from cancer and who overcame the problem. The friends tell these comic tales to convince the patient that the fear that she/he has of the illness is an illusion (misunderstanding) and that it can be overcome and conquered. The comic tale counters the crisis of cancer by re-interpreting cancer as a problem that can easily be overcome and that to see cancer as this terrible disease is a misunderstanding. The friends of Job in their attempt to keep their world view in place, not allowing it to be threatened by the crises Job was going through, told Job that he must be misunderstanding something and that if he solves this misunderstanding things will be repaired.

#### 8.4.3.2 Romantic tales

The romantic tales are similar to the comic tales in that they also foresee a solution to

the problem, but the road to recovery is not by a new understanding of the situation but through a heroic adventure. The crisis is seen as a challenge to go on a spiritual adventure seeking God's will and God's presence within the crisis. This is an adventure that will take the hero on a journey where he/she will have to face evil which will want to prevent him/her from reaching the goal, but in the end the hero will be victorious. The fight with cancer is seen as a journey where deeper spiritual truths can be discovered about suffering and God. It is a journey which in the end will be victorious even if there are certain set backs on the road.

#### 8.4.3.3 Tragic tales

Tragedy unlike comedy and romance portrays the decay of life and there is an element of sacrifice of self before resolution can be found. In tragedy there is also a hero/heroine, but the hero/heroine does not conquer, but submits to the harsh authenticity of the world. The tragic hero/heroine is obedient to the Other and submits to the Other (God or world order). The story of Christ is a tragic story in the sense that His incarnation and crucifixion is a story of submission to the will of God and the harsh reality of sin in the world.

The tragic world: "It is a world that is separate from us who inhabit it; it will not yield to our desires and fantasies no matter how desperately we need it to do so. This means that in tragedy, recognition - anagnorisis, the banishing of ignorance - is a major goal. We question the tragic universe to discover its laws, since they are what we must live by. The worlds of comedy and romance, by contrast, are shaped by our hearts' desires and in history we are busy remaking the world to suit ourselves" (Hopewell 1987:60).

"The tragic hero is not cured but saved, by an identification with the transcendental pattern of tragic life" (Hopewell 1987:61).

#### 8.4.3.4 Ironic tales

In ironic tales, good people come to the fall and good plans turn sour. It challenges any form of heroic or purposive interpretation of reality and life. Life is unjust and cannot be justified, not even by transcendental realities. The meaninglessness of life comes out very clearly in these tales.

Our personal narratives are set within these dramatic narratives which give our personal stories meaning, purpose and in which their plot can intelligibly unfold. These personal narratives can be understood by setting them within two of these narrative genres, for example comic-ironies or tragic-romances, but they cannot be set in directly opposing

genres such as comedy and tragedy.

It seems as if there are again two different sets of stories, namely the inner story of experience and the stories through which our inner stories achieve coherence. These two sets of stories cannot be so clearly differentiated as they interpenetrate each other to form a virtual identity.

Ricoeur reflects on this process of interpenetration between literary stories and our personal stories of experience. It is because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively (Ricoeur 1992:162). All stories are thus fictitious constructions.

For Ricoeur there are some fundamental differences between life and fiction. Firstly he sees that life does not have a clear ending nor beginning as fictions have, because both our birth and our death are not really re-collectable from memory. Secondly real life experiences are entangled in the experiences of other people (*in Geschichten verstrickt*) around the individual. “We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making” (MacIntyre 1989:99). In a sense we are not really the author of our own life story, but only the co-author in that we can give meaning to events and settings that we did not create ourselves, but into which we were placed (Ricoeur 1992:161-162).

Ricoeur argues that there is a dialectic between literary narratives and life experiences. “This dialectic reminds us that the narrative is part of life before being exiled from life in writing; it returns to life along the multiple paths of appropriation...” (Ricoeur 1992:163).

These social dramatic resources into which we are born give the individual dramas of experience meaning in that they give a definite sense of how the scenes (events) are connected.

“Both the content and the form of experience are mediated by symbolic systems which we are able to employ simply by virtue of awakening within a particular culture in which those symbolic systems are the common currency. Prevailing narrative forms are among the most important of such symbolic systems” (Crites 1989:79).

MacIntyre argues that it is not only the content and form that is mediated through the stories, but that in the telling of stories we are educated into the virtues of the specific culture or tradition (MacIntyre 1989:102).

“But the way we remember, anticipate, and even directly perceive, is largely social. A sacred story in particular infuses experience at its root, linking a man’s

individual consciousness with ultimate powers and also with the inner lives of those with whom he shares a common soil” (Crites 1989:80).

”The sacred story in particular, with its musical vitality, enables him to give the incipient drama of his experience full dramatic dimensions and allows the incipient musicality of his style to break forth into real dance and song” (Crites 1989:81).

The critical concern of Foucault needs to be incorporated into this section - that human beings in their history force unity and wholeness in the fictionalization (construction) of the past experiences. I would like to emphasise the need for an awareness and an appreciation of the discontinuities and raptures of life stories to be critical of the totalising narratives humanity forces on the past.

The individual’s identity narrative is thus not just the construction of a narrative by the social stories of the context, but an individual is also a conscious individual who needs to express him/herself by projecting various forms of action into the world.

Thus in summary: “to speak of the social construction of the self and of the narratives used to represent the self is not to claim that we are prisoners of history, mechanically determined by our conditioning. ....Nor is it to claim that we are endowed with the magical ability to stand wholly apart from history, gazing at what goes on as if we didn’t always already know. I prefer to say that while what I think and feel and do and say is surely a function of the time and place in which I live, and while it would surely be audacious if I thought otherwise, I also have the power - contingent, of course, on the conditions present, whether they are stultifying or liberating - to become conscious enough of my world to shape my destiny” (Freeman 1993:217).

**Summary: Social setting of narrative**

1. Individual identity narratives are set within the narratives of a specific culture or tradition thus our identity narratives as well as our interpretation of reality are social constructions.
2. The meaning of the individual narratives are to be found within these cultural narratives
3. The individual is not prisoner of these social constructions, but can within the dramatic resources of his/her context, to a certain extent, determine his/her own destiny.

## 8.5 Narrative and epistemology

In the section (4.3 The epistemological story of postmodernity) I reflected on various epistemological crises that occurred as the nostrums of modernity were eroded away and postmodernity was hailed in. I reflected on the thoughts of Wittgenstein, Popper, Kuhn, Husserl, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Habermas. In this section I will seek a narrative interpretation of postmodern epistemology.

Knowledge in postmodernity cannot be thought of beyond language and language cannot be seen separate from its cultural-social setting. Thus epistemology, as the search for knowledge and truth, cannot search beyond the scope of language and or as the previous sections have shown not beyond the scope of narrative (metaphor). Knowledge is rooted in the narratives of the social context (culture) in which knowledge is sought. Halbfas argues that only in stories can truth be found. This is a truth which escapes the rationalised subject-object scheme of modernity (Halbfas 1977:61).

MacIntyre seeks to understand what it means to share a culture.

“It is to share schemata which are at one and the same time constitutive of and normative for intelligible action by myself and are also means for my interpretations of the actions of others. My ability to understand what you are doing and my ability to act intelligibly (both to myself and to others) are one and the same ability” (MacIntyre 1989:138).

An individual may come across a totally different schemata of understanding and interpreting action and reality. In the global village this is very common as people of different cultures meet and thus different schemata meet. This is what creates an epistemological crisis when two conflicting or alternative schemata confront each other. The schemata of the other may bring about new insights which will disrupt the individual's present schemata of understanding/interpreting reality. A person is driven by two ideals namely truth and intelligibility and the other's schemata might give a more intelligible account of reality or a more “truthful” account and thus questioning the schemata of the individual. This epistemological crisis can only be resolved by a construction of a new narrative that gives account of how the person could have held onto certain beliefs and how these beliefs have misled her /him (MacIntyre 1989:140). MacIntyre thus suggests that epistemological process consists “in the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives and forms of narrative and that epistemological crises are occasions for such reconstruction” (MacIntyre 1989:142).

MacIntyre defends this suggestion by referring to myths as the earliest form of understanding of primitive people and that in the development of children, fairy tales

play an important role in the way a child creates order from the chaos in his /her inner life. These fairy tales help the child to order and interpret his/her reality. As the child grows older he or she goes through various epistemological crises exchanging fairy tales for other narratives to interpret his/her experiences and reality. This is not only true of children, but for the whole of humanity as we learn our beliefs and as Martha Nussbaum would argue, also our emotions, not through propositional philosophical arguments, but mainly through stories. Stories express the structure and the dynamics of the various beliefs (Nussbaum 1989:217).

In an epistemological crisis the person realises that the schema of interpretation which he /she has trusted thus far has broken down. This means that human search for knowledge, truth and understanding is always within a certain tradition, a tradition which gives the dramatic resources for interpretation and understanding.

However a tradition itself can be going through an epistemological crisis. A tradition, with its resources for interpreting and understanding reality, is confronted with challenges and scepticism and if these challenges increase the tradition will struggle to withstand the scepticism. In this chapter I have discussed how the nostrums of modernity slowly gave way to the pressures of postmodernity. Modernity as a philosophic tradition was no longer capable of withstanding the pressures of post-modern thought and it found itself within an epistemological crisis.

MacIntyre argues that a tradition is constituted by a conflict of interpretations which itself has a history of susceptible of rival interpretations (MacIntyre 1989:146). For example the Christian tradition is constituted by a continuous argument about what it means to be a Christian. Thus for MacIntyre any tradition - be it religious, political, intellectual - involves an epistemological debate as a necessary feature of their conflicts (MacIntyre 1989:146). A tradition therefore does "not only embody the narrative of an argument, but it is only to be recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings" (MacIntyre 1989:146). It is in the narratives of tradition that reason, knowledge and understanding are to be found. These traditions are confronted with epistemological crises and thus they have to undergo a revolution as the narratives are reconstructed.

In the previous sections, reflecting on narrative understanding of identity and action could only be understood within the context of dramatic narratives (concordance - discordance). Thus according to MacIntyre natural science as a human activity can be "a rational form of inquiry only if the writing of a true dramatic narrative - that is, of history understood in a particular way - can be a rational activity" (MacIntyre 1989:159).

Consequently science can only be understood in terms of historical reason.

If a certain scientific tradition comes into an epistemological crisis and is thrown over by a new theory, a paradigm shift occurs. The two paradigms are connected to each other by a historical narrative which explains the change. The new paradigm provides a narrative that not only explains and understands the object of inquiry better but also provides an intelligible narrative account of why the previous paradigm is no longer acceptable. Certain epistemological ideals and values are carried over from one paradigm to the next.

It becomes clear that any form of knowledge and the search for knowledge, no matter from which tradition – be it human science or natural science, can only be seen as being rational if it is understood within its historical narrative.

**Summary: Epistemology and narrative**

1. The search for knowledge is not done in a vacuum, but from within historical narratives.
2. These historical narratives are set in specific cultures and traditions
3. Therefore knowledge is set within the historical narratives of a tradition and cannot be seen apart from it.

## 8.6 Narrative and truths

In this section I will be reflecting on narrative's ability to respond to humanity's need for transcendental truths, be it God or some other truth that transcends the plurality and relativism that is so prevalent in postmodernity.

Postmodernity has raised numerous questions. Although these questions might still be part of a modern mind set they are very real questions, such as: Is there a reality that can be discovered which is not fashioned or constructed? If individuals (personal identity), reality and knowledge are all narrative, is everything fiction or is there fact as well? In this section I will reflect on narrative's ability to respond to these questions.

Richard Niebuhr has suggested that there are two different types of history (stories) - external history and internal history (Niebuhr 1989:29).

### 8.6.1 The external history (an analytical story)

Niebuhr's external history can be described as the story of natural science, human

sciences, metaphysics, etcetera. He describes it as the story of observation and discovery of occurrences from a safe distance (Niebuhr 1989:29). The tools of external history can be described as the tools of analogy. Analogy is traditionally the tool used by the metaphysician on his or her voyage of discovery. What drives the metaphysician, just like the scientist, is a belief that he/she can discover truths and facts about reality. Each step along the way of analogy is one step closer to the truth. This journey of discovery is set within a narrative history as discussed in the previous section 8.4. The journey of the scientist is set within a scientific tradition and thus a history of epistemological crisis. The crisis is solved by the re-writing of the scientific narrative. Yet the new narrative, although it gives a better (more intelligible) interpretation of whatever is investigated, is only temporary until it is refuted and a new paradigm comes into being to challenge the old paradigm. Thus ultimate discovery is postponed indefinitely (Lash 1989:117). The metaphysician can easily be discouraged or become a sceptic as true knowledge (truth) will always elude him/her. Truth is thus relative to the paradigm and the context in which it is found or in which it is held to be true.

### **8.6.2 Internal history (a metaphorical story)**

Niebuhr argues that there is also the internal history where one “ponders the path of one’s own destiny to deal with the why and whence and whither of one’s own existence” (Niebuhr 1989:29). Metaphor is the tool used by the storyteller of internal history. The storyteller is conscious of his / her responsibility to help his/her audience to shape their lives, experiences and themselves (Lash 1989:117). The storyteller of the internal story is not discouraged like the scientist, but easily falls prey to the temptation of constructing a world according to his/her own whims and fancies and thus creating an ideology or an illusion.

Habermas already indicated the danger of social constructions of realities as power plays a too important role in these constructions. Who constructs the realities in which we live? Who dominates the narratives by which we interpret ourselves and our world? How can one protect oneself from illusion?

If these are the two paths to “truth” and knowledge they are both not very attractive as the one tends towards scepticism and the other towards illusion.

Are these the only two alternatives left in a postmodern world: 1) the road of scepticism and resignation of the analogist or 2) the social construction of reality with the dangers of ideology, or narratives without metaphor and thus meaningless narratives?

Or is there a meaning in the world that is not fashioned (constructed) but found - an

ultimate meaning which transcends human construction (Lash 1989:119)?

Ultimate meaning lies beyond the scope of language and is found in sacred stories that cannot be directly told (Crites) or is meaning passed on in art, poetry, history (Gadamer) via metaphor. Humanity uses these sacred stories to interpret and fashion our inner stories.

In this question, whether there is meaning which is not fashioned (constructed) but found, the two stories collide with each other as the question about the existence of ultimate meaning is essentially metaphysical (analytical). Lash argues that reflections on metaphor raise questions that cannot be answered metaphorically, because anthropomorphism cannot be anthropomorphically transcended (Lash 1989:119).

The inner history raises questions about ultimate meaning and thus questions about God and these questions, in the past, were sought to be answered by the way of analogy.

Lash uses Aquinas' "way of analogy" in his reflection about God to explain the function of analogy, in other words the external story, in reflections about the transcendental. Analogy cannot prove or disprove the existence of any transcendental reality. I would like to bring in Wittgenstein's analytic philosophy in the Tractatus to substantiate this point. Analogy cannot prove the existence of any transcendental reality nor can it disprove the existence of a transcendental reality. Transcendental realities are beyond the grammar of analytical language. Wittgenstein says language limits what we can speak about and the rest we must pass over in silence (Wittgenstein).<sup>3</sup>

"We cannot pretend to offer a description of a transcendent object without betraying its transcendence, "(Lash 1989:128).

Certain things need to be left for inner history or the story of metaphor to say. Metaphor functions in the midst of differences - it says what it says in a metaphorical way in the midst of the ruins of literal sense.

Thus in the midst of analytical deconstruction of language which brings it to the limits of language, metaphor speaks metaphorically about that which is beyond the limits of language.

In the internal history one can go beyond the limits of language and construct transcendent realities, but herein lies the dangers of ideology. Metaphor can tell stories of ultimate meaning and it can tell stories of God, but it must constantly remind itself that it is metaphor and not science (analogy) that is telling the story.

It is thus important to bring in this continuous critical element from the sciences (which

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<sup>3</sup> "7 What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" Wittgenstein Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

themselves are narrative constructions within their specific traditions).

The point that Lash is making is that external history sets critical boundaries for the inner history (metaphor).

**Summary: Narrative and transcendental truth**

1. There are two paths to knowledge and truth – the path of analogy or the path of metaphor. The one is more at home in the external history of science and metaphysics; the other more in the internal history in the search for meaning.
2. Science in the postmodern has become very aware of its limits
3. Metaphor has become aware of the dangers of ideological construction of realities
4. The two stories need each other to keep a critical check on each other

### 8.7 Summary: Narrative response to postmodernity

1. For human actions to be intelligible they need to be placed within a narrative historical setting.
2. Personal identity is only intelligible within the context of the personal identity narrative which can mediate between the two limits of identity (identity as the continuity (sameness) of selfhood and identity as selfhood without continuity).
3. Identity narratives are social constructions
4. All human knowledge is set within the historical narratives of tradition.
5. The two paths to knowledge - the path of analogy and the path of metaphor – need to keep a critical check on each other.

## 9. POSTMODERNITY'S CHALLENGES TO THEOLOGY

Postmodernity, as described in the study, challenges theology in fundamental ways as theology seeks new ways in which to respond to the challenges that the church faces today.

Postmodernity has closed certain doors to theology, for example the door of universal absolute truths that are discovered objectively in abstract theories. Thus the church cannot resort to universal absolute truths that reach beyond the boundaries of the church to non-church members. Although certain doors have been closed, others have been reopened such as a new emphasis on spirituality, the mystical and the emotional aspects of religion. Great new opportunities have been opened, since the demise of the scientific fundamentalism of the objective and neutral rational, to symbolic and metaphorical understanding of God and ourselves (Pieterse 1993:16).

I discovered that truth, understanding and identity cannot be interpreted in isolation, but

are constructed in dialogue and in community. Therefore theology also can no longer be seen as an abstract science, but needs to be rooted within a context of the faith community as Moltmann says:

“Theologie ist eine Gemeinschaftsaufgabe: Daraus folgt, daß die theologische Wahrheit wesentlich und nicht nur zur Unterhaltung - dialogisch ist” (Moltmann 1995:14). “Theologie ist für mich keine kirchliche Dogmatik und keine Glaubenslehre, sondern Phantasie für das Reich Gottes in der Welt und für die Welt in Gottes Reich und darum immer und überall öffentliche Theologie, aber niemals und nirgendwo religiöse Ideologie der bürgerlichen und politischen Gesellschaft, auch nicht der so >>christlichen<<” (Moltmann 1995:15).

Truth is no longer found in abstract theories, but within the communities of faith, where these communities are in dialogue with each other, their faith’s tradition and their context, seeking the best possible pastoral action within the context of their community. Postmodernity also places more emphasis on practice and practical reasoning and this challenges theology to focus on its practices.

“Communities of faith are both communities of tradition and practical enactment, and their fundamental truth claims are embodied in the practical reasoning of purposeful pastoral activities” (Graham 1996:89). There is thus a basic movement from practice to theory and back to practice.

#### **Major challenges of postmodernity to theology and church**

1. The postmodern understanding that truth, Christian identity and Christian interpretation of reality are constructed within the community of faith as it struggles with the experiences of the context and its faith tradition.
2. The postmodern emphasis on practice.

## 10. NARRATIVE THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO POSTMODERNITY

### 10.1 Introduction

I have reflected on the story of postmodernity and how it developed from modernity. I have also reflected on narrative thinking as an appropriate response to postmodern thought as well as the church’s story with modernity and a brief description of the major challenges of postmodernity to theology. In this section I reflect on the possibility of incorporating narrative thought into theology, thus proposing a justification for the narrative theological orientation which I have adopted for this study.

“Narrative or story is a means of expression uniquely suited to theology...” (McClendon

1974:188).

Narrative is 'suited to theology' for a number of reasons which will be introduced in this section.

## **10.2 Narrative as a dominant genre in the Biblical as well as in confessional Christian witness.**

The Bible does not only contain narratives about God and His people, but also contains other literary genres such as letters, poems, chronicles and prose, yet it would seem that narrative plays a dominant role within the Bible. The Biblical scholar Lohfink distinguishes three basic literary forms in the Biblical language namely: 1) *Argumentatio*, 2) *Appellatio* and 3) *Narratio*. (Weinrich 1977:47). He argues that *Narratio* (narrative) is dominant in the sense that it is determining. ".....die narrative Sprache grundlegend und bestimmend ist und alle nichtnarrativen Elemente nur sekundäre Funktion haben" (Weinrich 1977:47).

For some time scholars (Gerhard van Rad, Oscar Cullmann and G. Ernest Wright) have become aware of the importance of *Heilsgeschichte* (story of salvation) in Biblical theology. The core of Scripture is a set of salvation narratives which serve as the common denominator for the whole of Scripture (Stroup 1984:136).

Within the genre of Biblical narrative there is no uniformity as there are various different kinds of Biblical narratives such as the historical narrative, myth, sage, chronicle and parable to name just a few. Stroup gives two reasons why narrative is the dominant genre in Scripture: the one philosophical-sociological and the other theological (Stroup 1984:145).

The philosophical-sociological reason has been discussed in section (8.3.2 Narrative understanding of self/personal identity). Narrative embodies the shared memory and communal history of the faith community which binds the individuals into this community.

The second reason that Stroup offers is the theological understanding of Jewish - Christian faith as being *this worldly* and *historical*. "Redemption and salvation are not just images or ideas but realities which are understood to be rooted in events that happened in the past and realities which continue to unfold in the present and future" (Stroup 1984:146). Salvation is to be found within history in historical events, such as the Exodus from Egypt or the Crucifixion of Christ.

The story of God's salvation is a story that is intertwined with the history of people and the world. In this context of historical faith confession of faith is a confession of how

something that has happened in the past (Exodus, Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ) “lives” on today and that these past events have redemptive or transforming effects on the believer’s life today. This confession necessarily must take on a narrative form.

Dominant parts of the Bible are narrative, as the community (Israel / Early Church) confessed their faith in the historical God, who reveals himself within history.

This Christian-Jewish identity narrative is not only rooted in the Biblical narratives, but also in the narrative of their respective faith traditions. There is no gap between the historical redemptive event and the believer today, but rather a history/tradition that connects the two. In the faith tradition the historical events of Christ’s incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection have been interpreted and reinterpreted so that there is a continuous story found in tradition between the believer and the event.

### 10.2.1 Narrative and Torah

In the Jewish tradition the central confession around which their faith is built is the covenant between YAHWEH and the people of Israel. The covenant, as an event/action, has its setting within the historical account of the exodus from Egypt. Yet this covenant is not just something of the past, but is a living reality in the present for the Jewish community. “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. It is not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us here today” Deut 5:2-3 (New International Version 1986:175). The life and faith of the Jewish faith community is bound to the narrative which accounts the salvific history of Israel’s covenant relationship with YAHWEH (Stroup 1984:147). This narrative appears in its abbreviated creed in Deuteronomy 26: 5-9:

“Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptian mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey;” (New International Version 1986:191).

Stroup argues that the above quoted text is not a narrative as such, as narrative is understood by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, to require the presence of a story and a storyteller (Goldberg 1982:201). Narrative has a few generic features which

characterise most narrative forms that need to be taken into account. “There is always “movement”, “direction” or some form of “plot” in a narrative” (Stroup 1984:90). Or as Crites would understand narrative, as that which characterises human experience and emerges from the tensed unity of the modalities of time namely: past, present and future (Crites 1989:77). Narratives have a unity internal to their structure – a unity which moves and directs from what was to what will be.

The text in Deuteronomy 26 is thus not a narrative, but refers to the narrative of the exodus from Egypt, which forms the central narrative of the Pentateuch and the other narratives of the Pentateuch are theological expansions of this central narrative (Stroup 1984:148).

There are certain historical events which function as the basis of this central narrative, or creed of the Jewish faith.

The Jewish faith is not based on some philosophical, or metaphysical speculation about reality or a transcendental deity, but on concrete tangible historical events in which God’s relationship to Israel is revealed. The faith tradition refers to these specific historical events in their “collective past in which YAHWEH has been decisively and redemptively at work” (Stroup 1984:149). Therefore Israel can only confess their faith in the context of human history.

Thus narrative form as a genre is indispensable for a proper understanding of Jewish faith. If the Jewish community should ever be cut off from these narratives, it would not be able to survive (Stroup 1984:149). It is not that the faith community is called to remember the events and stories of the past, but that the community identifies with these events. Thus narrative plays a vital role in understanding Jewish theology and faith.

### **10.2.2 Narrative and the New Testament**

In the New Testament narrative also plays a dominant role as Christian faith is based on the salvific events (Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection) in the history/narrative of Christ. I will argue that the central confession of the Christian faith community is summed up in 1 Cor 15:3-7:

“ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one normally born” (New International Version 1986:1011).

As in the text quoted from the Old Testament this text refers to certain events within history that form the basis of what the Christian community of faith confesses, without this narrative of Christ there would be nothing to confess. It is on these two fundamental narratives that the whole Bible is constructed. Stroup uses the Gospel according to Mark to illuminate the use of narrative in the Bible. He argues that the Gospel of Mark is essentially an identity narrative in a twofold sense, "It is a narrative that identifies who Jesus is and in so doing raises the questions of whether the reader is truly a disciple of him" (Stroup 1984:157). Stroup argues that the Gospel of Mark is an identity narrative about the identity of Christ as well as an identity narrative about the identity of the believer (disciple). What is important for Mark is that one cannot know the identity of Christ apart from the narrative of the Gospel. In a previous section I have reflected that identity of a person is always narrative identity, as only narrative can mediate between the two limits which make up identity. (8.3 Narrative understanding of human existence) In a similar manner the identity of Jesus merges with the events that make up the story of Jesus according to Mark.

I can conclude this section by arguing that narrative is essential for theology as it plays a vital role in understanding scriptures and in understanding who God and Christ is. The character of God is directly connected to the narratives of God in Scripture as well as the identity of Jesus as the Christ, which can only be discovered in the narratives of Jesus.

### **10.3 Narrative and experience, self and meaning**

In the section (8.3 Narrative understanding of human existence) I reflected on the role that narrative plays in understanding experience, self and identity. I reflected on how the individual makes sense of his or her experiences by placing them in a narrative setting. Experiences, actions and events are only intelligible once they are placed within the historic (life story) narrative of the agent. Similarly human actions are only intelligible if understood within the context (setting) of the history of the agent's life. Yet the individual is not an isolated individual who constructs meaning for his/her experiences and actions in a vacuum, as the individual is not a solipsist, but makes sense of his /her reality (experiences and events) via the use of language. The language that the individual uses binds him/her to a tradition (history of the language used) as well as a community in which the language is used. The narrative that the individual constructs to understand his/her experiences is not constructed by himself/herself, but is a social construction by the narratives that make up the narratives of the community in which the individual exists as well as the history of the community (tradition).

Crites refers to these stories that we use to understand our reality as sacred stories (Crites 1989:70). The meaning and purpose of human existence is constructed from these sacred stories that exist within the communities and traditions in which humanity lives.

“The “religious dimension” of human experience is interpreted as having something to do with the narratives people recite about themselves or the narratives they use in order to structure and make sense out of the world” (Stroup 1984:72).

Thus I can argue that personal identity and the understanding of self and of experiences are only understood in the context of narrative and that these narratives are only understood in the context of the religious (meaning) narratives of the individual. From the above one can argue that a person’s autobiography, the way an individual understand and interprets his/her life, is an indication of the person’s religious story.

“McClendon suggest that theology “must be at least biography.” To that end the biographies or life-stories of specific individuals become the theologian’s primary material for investigating the meaning of the doctrines and confessional claims of Christian faith” (Stroup 1984:76).

Sallie MacFague argues that “Autobiographies give practical wisdom because they are the story of the engagement of a personality in a task, not of the task alone. It is this peculiar meshing of life and thought that is the heart of the matter with autobiographies and which is I believe, their importance for religious reflection” (Goldberg 1982:97).

The individual and his or her religious understanding cannot be understood apart from the personal identity narrative of the individual.

#### **10.4 Narrative and the identity of community**

Similarly the identity of a community such as a church (congregation) is based on the narratives the community uses to understand its collective experiences, events in history as well as dreams, hopes and plans for the future.

“A community is a group of people who have come to share a common past, who understand particular events in the past to be of decisive importance for interpreting the present, who anticipate the future by means of a shared hope, and who express their identity by means of a common narrative” (Stroup 1984:133).

Stroup goes on to say that what distinguishes a community from a mob is a common memory which expresses itself in the living traditions and institutions. The identity of a community is thus very similar to that of personal identity in that we can only understand the identity of a community, just like an individual, by listening to the narratives of the

community. Hopewell argues that a group of people cannot gather for religious purposes without “developing a complex network of signals, and symbols and conventions - in short, a subculture - that gains its own logic and then functions in a way peculiar to that group” (Hopewell 1987:5).

Webber calls this the “web of significance” and this web distinguishes one congregation from another (Hopewell 1987:46).

It is in the community that individuals find the narratives by which he/she finds meaning and understanding of their own reality. The Christian faith community would have at its centre the narratives of the Christian faith and it is with these narratives that individuals in these communities would then interpret their lives and realities.

Hopewell identifies three functions of narrative within a faith community such as the local congregation:

- 1) The congregation’s self-perception is primarily narrative in form.
- 2) The congregation’s communication among its members is primarily by story.
- 3) By its own congregating, the congregation participates in narrative structures of the world’s societies (Hopewell 1987:46).

To illustrate the second point that Hopewell makes he argues that human interaction with each other is narrative and as the congregation meets and tell stories they are in the process of fortifying the narratives of the congregation. The history and the story of the congregation is learnt via this narrative (story-telling) form. The third point that Hopewell makes is that a congregation’s stories are not unique, but are part of the stories that structure that society in which the congregation finds itself.

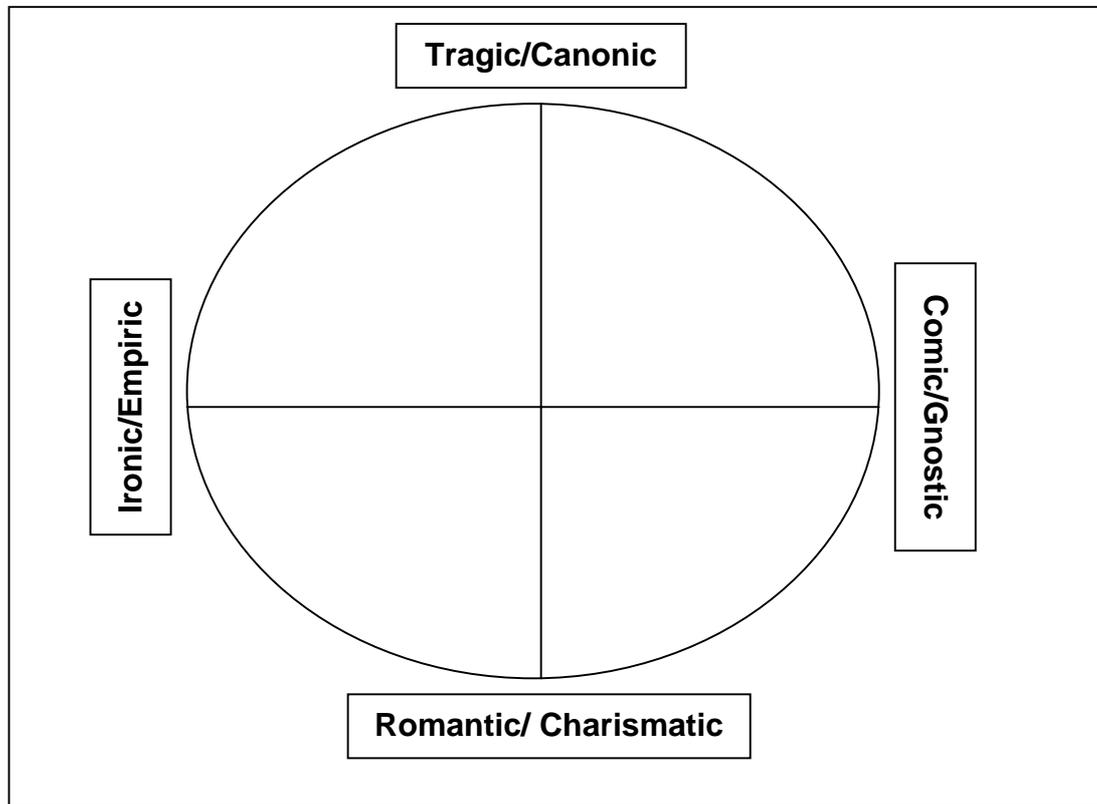
#### **10.4.1 Congregational narrative setting**

Narrative thus plays a vital role in the self understanding of each congregation which means that the identity of the congregation can only be known from the stories of the congregation. Just like with personal identity, the identity narrative is set within a narrative of meaning. These narratives of meaning can be classified according to different western literary genres. The personal narratives of the individual were set within the four compass points of literary genres: comic tales, romantic tales, tragic tales and ironic tales.

Similarly one can understand and interpret the congregation’s narratives as set within these literary genres. “Any single work of literature is a recognizable bit of the gigantic circle of human interpretation. No human being sees the whole. Each instead is oriented, by a story, towards some direction within the total horizon” (Hopewell 1987:67). Congregations adopt a similar orientation with this circle of genres.

Hopewell (Hopewell 1987:69) utilises four categories to characterise a congregation’s

orientations in understanding their faith, namely: canonic, gnostic, charismatic and empiric. In the next chapter of the study, I will seek to get some insights into these orientations that characterises congregant's understanding of faith.



#### 10.4.1.1 Canonic (similar to tragic characterisation)

“Reliance upon an authoritative interpretation of a world pattern often considered God’s revealed word or will, by which one identifies one’s essential life. The integrity of the pattern requires that followers reject any gnosis of union with the pattern but instead subordinate their selfhood to it” (Hopewell 1987:69).

#### 10.4.1.2 Gnostic (comic)

“Reliance upon an intuited process of a world that develops from dissipation towards unity. The ultimate integrity of the world requires the deepening consciousness of those involved in its systemic outworking and their rejection of alienating canonic structures”(Hopewell 1987:69).

10.4.1.3 Charismatic (romantic)

“Reliance upon evidence of a transcendent spirit personally encountered. The integrity of providence in the world requires that empirical presumptions of an ordered world be disregarded and supernatural irregularities instead be witnessed” (Hopewell 1987:69).

10.4.1.4 Empiric (ironic)

“Reliance upon data objectively verifiable through one’s own five sense. The integrity of one’s own person requires realism about the way things demonstrably work and the rejection of the supernatural” (Hopewell 1987:69).

These are four characterisations of the interpretive horizons which the congregant uses to create their own setting (world view). Often the congregant is caught between two characterisations and in the struggle between the two finds meaning and understanding. Ricoeur (4.3.7 Paul Ricoeur, texts, structural analysis and postmodernity) argued that only in dialogue is truth and meaning to be found.

## **10.5 The Narrative structure of Christian Faith/ narrative understanding of soteriology**

I have reflected on the narrative understanding of personal identity and that the person makes sense of his/her world via the narratives of the community he/she comes from. In this section I will seek to understand the process by which an individual comes to faith within the context of certain “meaning” narratives (sacred stories), in other words how these meaning narratives illuminate the individual’s narrative. Stroup argues that there where the narrative identity of an individual collides with the narrative identity of the Christian community revelation is experienced (Stroup 1984:170). Crites describes this moment when these two narratives intersect:

“...and sometimes the tracks cross, causing a burst of light like a comet entering our atmosphere. Such a luminous moment, in which sacred, mundane, and personal are inseparably conjoined, we call symbolic in a special sense” (Crites 1989:81).

The individual comes into contact with the faith community’s narratives and experiences revelation and then begins the lengthy process of re-interpreting his/her past and in a sense re-authoring their identity narrative. Michael Root argues that the soteriological task of theology is to show how the stories of the Christian community is the story of individual redemption (Root 1989:265). Before I can continue I will reflect on the Christian understanding of revelation.

### 10.5.1 Revelation

A few reflecting thoughts need to be introduced with regards to the understanding of revelation.

Stroup makes three points about revelation (Stroup 1984:42-43).

- 1) Revelation is a disclosure of new understanding of reality and thus revelation is bound to a specific context and time.
- 2) Revelation cannot be initiated by human will, but the human being is the object of the revelation; the subject is that which is disclosed.
- 3) In revelation God is disclosed

Karl Barth described three different forms of revelation.

- 1) God reveals Himself in proclamation. Proclamation is the preaching of God's word by human words, but through the power of the Spirit God's true Word can be heard in the midst of the human words.
- 2) The written Word (Scriptures) is a witness (testimony) to God's activity in history and again, through God's Spirit He can reveal Himself through the written word.
- 3) Christ is the third form of revelation for Barth and again Christ's story is the objective reality which can become a subjective revelatory reality through the power of the Spirit (Stroup 1984: 46-48) (Karl Barth K.D. I 2 1953: 124f).

Thus I can conclude that the identity narrative collides with the narratives of the Christian faith community and "revelation" only takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### 10.5.2 Narrative understanding of revelation

Goldberg identifies three different narrative understandings of revelation which I will shortly reflect on.

#### 10.5.2.1 Revelation as structuring the story

Goldberg identifies the theologian Hans Frei with the idea of *structuring the story*. Frei saw Biblical narratives as realistic or history-like narratives (Frei 1989:61). Thus Frei believed that to take the structural shape of Biblical narrative seriously is to take it as the shape of reality (Goldberg 1982:162).

Sallie McFague agrees with Frei in her reflection on the parables. For her the structure of parables and the structure of reality are mirror images of each other (Goldberg 1982:163). For both these thinkers the shape (structure) of the story and the shape of

experience go hand in hand. For them it was no longer important to fit the biblical story into the other story but rather incorporating the other story into the Biblical story (Frei 1989:50). The Biblical narratives thus give a truthful account of reality and experience.

“There is an area of human experience on which the light of the Christian gospel and that of natural, independent insight shine at the same time, illumining it in the same way” (Frei 1989:49). The structures of Biblical narrative and reality coincide and therefore the Biblical narratives are illuminating to reality, revealing new insights and understanding. The stories of the Christian faith community can bear an illustrative relation to the reader’s life. “The story illustrates certain redemptive truths about self, world and God” (Root 1989:266).

#### 10.5.2.2 Revelation as following the story

Goldberg identifies two theologians that he characterises under *following the story*, namely Paul van Buren and Irving Greenberg. Paul van Buren believes that there is only one way to have any understanding of who God is and that is through the Biblical stories. Believers will be able to discover who God is by following these stories and through them identify who God is. Rather than making abstract propositions that cannot be proven anyway he believes that in the Biblical story all is contained that there is to know (Goldberg 1982:165-168). Greenberg uses the Exodus story, as the normative perspective and the orientating experience, by which all of life and all other experiences can be judged (Goldberg 1982:169). Thus he also believes that in the story, a specific normative story, all the meaning is contained by which experiences and history can be examined and understood. The Biblical story itself reveals its meaning and by this meaning humanity can interpret reality and history.

#### 10.5.2.3 Revelation as enacting the story

Goldberg identifies Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder as theologians whose thinking he characterises as *enacting the story*. Hauerwas begins from an ethical point of view, as for him ethics is not about doing good deeds, but about being good people. Ethics is not about good deeds, but good characters who do good deeds. A person’s character can only be discerned from a person’s narrative and this narrative in turn is shaped by the faith community to which the individual belongs. Thus there exists a storied relationship between the individual and the faith community’s narratives (Root 1989:266). Soteriology thus needs to explain how the individual’s story is included in the faith community’s story and how this story is the story of redemption. Thus the individual has a new identity story, which is the story of personal redemption.

To be a human being means to act intentionally and the way that one intends, depends on how one attends to the world (Goldberg 1982:175). What one believes about the world and how one understands the world will determine what one intends to do. Thus religious narratives play a vital role in shaping the way one sees the world and thus in the way one acts.

I will incorporate ideas from all three of these different approaches to narrative understanding of revelation.

I have argued that revelation is that moment in experience where the Holy Spirit illuminates our personal narrative in such a way that new understanding is brought about so that the personal narrative is re-written. The person can thus confess or give testimony on how the personal narrative has been re-written. Stroup argues that confession is Christian narrative in its final form (Stroup 1984:175).

### **10.5.3 Narrative, revelation and confession**

To understand the relationship between conversion and confession I will once more reflect on the thinking of Karl Barth. Barth divides this discussion into two parts, namely the object of faith (*fies qua creditur*) and the act of faith (*fides quae creditur*) (Stroup 1984:186). The object of faith for Barth is Jesus Christ, by which the full range of Christian experience is ordered. Christ is however not only the object of faith, but also the initiator of faith. "Faith, Barth insists, is a free human act, but its human possibility has as its presupposition "the will and decision and achievement of Jesus Christ the son of God that it takes place as a free human act, that man is of himself ready and willing and actually begins to believe in Him"" (Stroup 1984:186). Christ as the object and basis of faith constitutes the Christian subject. In the act of faith the believer is constituted by Christ - but not in isolation, but within the community of faith. This act of faith can be analysed and can be separated into three mutually related terms: "acknowledgement, recognition, and confession" (Stroup 1984:187).

#### **10.5.3.1 Acknowledgement**

Acknowledgement is the acceptance and obedience to faith's object - Jesus Christ (Stroup 1984:187). Jesus Christ as object of faith is not some dogma or abstract proposition, but the revealed living Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Barth argued that the Word of God can be understood in three forms, namely proclamation, Scripture and both proclamation and Scripture are about Christ. Thus the individual comes into contact with the object of faith within the faith community and it's faith narratives. The individual's identity narrative collides with the faith narratives of the faith community and in this collision revelation takes place, as the faith narratives re-author

the individual's narrative.

#### 10.5.3.2 Recognition

These different moments of the act of faith are not sequential, but recognition is included in acknowledgement as the individual, in acknowledging Christ, also recognises Him. This is no objective recognition because no objective words can be identified as Christ, but it is an inner recognition of Christ as Lord and thus determining the individual's identity and self-understanding. The story of Christ is re-enacted in the narrative of the believer and thereby the believer's narrative is re-authored by the story of Christ.

This then brings the believer to the third moment of the act of faith.

#### 10.5.3.3 Confession

Confession is that moment when the individual believer can reconstruct personal identity by means of what is acknowledged and recognised to be the truth about Jesus Christ (Stroup 1984:190).

Confession necessarily takes on a narrative form as the individual re-authors/tells his/her identity narrative from the point of view of the collision between his/her identity narrative with the faith community's narratives through which Christ was revealed to him/her.

Stroup argues that confession is not a discourse about what it means to understand Christian faith. It is not a language about faith, but the language of faith. "Confession is first order religious language" (Stroup 1984:201). Confession is narrative and therefore the importance of narrative in theology can no longer be disputed.

## **10.6 Narrative roots within the Jewish tradition**

One last argument in support of a narrative theology is taken from the Christian faith community's historical roots in the Jewish faith tradition.

### **10.6.1 Jewish understanding of revelation**

The Jewish faith community believes that God revealed himself to His people on Mount Sinai. This revelation is recorded, in its written form, in the Torah (the Decalogue) or the Pentateuch and the Tanach (The First Testament). This revelation is not believed to be final, but is open-ended right until today. As the written Torah the Tanach is still being re-written all the time in the oral Torah of the Talmud, which eventually also was written down and collected (Denecke 1996:87). Both the written Torah as well as the oral Torah

are seen as the Word of God. The actual Word of God nobody would be able to write down or even hear. All that is given was the first breath of the revelation of God. When God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai He certainly did not give him the whole Decalogue as humans would not be able to grasp God's word. Tradition believes that all that was given to Moses was the first breath of the first letter of the word "I" which in Hebrew is *Alef* of the word *Anochi*. This first letter *Alef* is not pronounced, it is breathed as if to begin to speak. This is how God spoke to Moses, said Rabbi Mendel Torum von Rymanow (Denecke 1996:89).

It is up to the faith community to discover and interpret the meaning of this *Alef*. It has been interpreted in two forms namely as "law"/tradition (*Halacha*) and as narrative (*aggada*). It is in these two forms that the Word of God must be re-interpreted and re-written continually for each new context and situation.

#### 10.6.1.1 Halacha (law, tradition)

Halacha is the law, the limits of revelation, the boundaries within which interpretation can take place and this is decided by majority vote of the Rabbis.

#### 10.6.1.2 Aggada (narrative)

Aggada is the creative telling of stories that tell about God and the world and make sense of our world.

These two forms are in a dialectic with each other and continually develop and change each other according to the situation and the context. These creative stories seek to find meaning in the world and re-interpret tradition and the laws that set the boundaries of our being.

### **10.7 Summary: Narrative as an appropriate theological orientation within postmodernity**

In this section I reflected on the appropriateness of narrative as a theological orientation within the postmodern world and identified a number of reasons why I believe narrative to be an appropriate orientation in the postmodern world.

#### **Narrative and theology**

1. Narrative is the dominant genre in Biblical witness.
2. The postmodern understanding of self (identity), action, human experience and meaning need to be placed within narrative settings to

- be intelligible.
3. The individual needs the faith narratives to understand and give meaning to his/her personal narratives.
  4. The identity of a faith community is also dependent on the narratives of the community. Therefore to understand a congregation's identity its narratives need to be taken seriously.
  5. Christian soteriology and the structure of Christian faith necessarily take on a narrative form.
  6. The confession of faith also necessarily takes on a narrative form.
  7. The Christian-Jewish faith is rooted in a narrative tradition.

## 11. A NARRATIVE THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION IN A POSTMODERN WORLD FOR "DOING THEOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE"

### 11.1 Transformative praxis as the focal point of the study's narrative theological orientation

In the section on human action as well as personal identity (8.2 Narrative and human action & 8.3 Narrative understanding of human existence) the focal point was on the actual present moment of human action there where the future moves into the past. The future was described as that which can be anticipated (the story of projected teleological dreams and hopes), but which is at the same time always also unpredictable and unexpected. Thus narrative coherence and unity is found in the past from where one can identify a person's character, style and identity. It is in this present moment of action that the narrative horizons (of past remembered and future anticipated) merge, meaning is sought and revelation takes place.

The study's narrative theological orientation thus needs to focus on this present moment of praxis. I would like to place this focal point at the centre of my theological orientation. Rationality and truth can only be sought within this moment of practice and therefore theology also needs to find its place within this moment of practice. Metz argues that rationality can only find its true place within the context of social-political reason (Metz 1977:16). Any human science needs to strive towards conditions where the use of reason for all of humanity is possible, therefore the human sciences have to strive towards a transformation of social conditions (Metz 1977:15). Van Niekerk would agree with Metz in that he argues that there are two criteria for the rationality of human sciences:

- 1) that interpretation must bring about new meaningful life-possibilities and
- 2) that the theory which develops out of the interpretations must lead to new improved practical conditions (Pieterse 1993:99).

“Theology is above all concerned with direct experiences expressed in narrative language” (Metz 1989:252). These direct experiences need to be interpreted within the context of the narratives of the faith community.

The narratives that are constructed are always prone to ideological distortion in the sense that certain groups within society hold the power of interpretation and thereby totalising their interpretation and forcing other’s experiences and interpretations into submission.

## **11.2 The dangers of uncritical construction of narratives**

Nicholas Lash argues that there are four dangers in the constructions of narratives.

- 1) Religious discourse/ narratives are shaped by the context of their construction. The Biblical narratives, as confessional narratives of peoples’ experiences with God in the past, are influenced by the context of their construction. So Paul, writing about the position of women in the church, was influenced by the social narratives concerning women of the time in which he was living. So also a person’s confession is influenced by the world view of his/her time and context and thus any confessional narrative is prone to ideological distortion (Lash 1989:120).
- 2) Religious discourse tends to attribute an unwarranted universality to the particular narratives (Lash 1989:120).
- 3) Any narrative of meaning is a construction and thus a fictional construction. The individual imposes order on events and experiences to give the overall narrative meaning and coherency and very often forces coherency on events and experiences and discards the discontinuities and incoherence of life.
- 4) “In the forth place every narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But “end” ambiguously signifies both conclusion and goal, both terminus and purpose” (Lash 1989:120). Yet the individual stands in the middle of the history and thus forces incidents and events, for the sake of unity and the coherence of the plot, into a narrative unity which is determined by the goal of the narrative.

A community can thus easily create idealist or ideological stories.

### **11.2.1 The conflict between experience and the narratives of the community**

One of the major challenges for theology is this relationship between praxis (direct experiences and the internal story of meaning) and theory (theological narratives of the faith community, such as dogmas, historical exegetical discoveries, etcetera). The challenge: what role does the concrete context play and what role does the theory (Bible theological tradition as well as other sciences, for example psychology and sociology) play?

#### **11.2.1.1 Context (praxis) versus confession (theory)**

“Practical theologians use the relationship between theory and praxis to come to grips with their subject matter” (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:23). This relationship is important as it forms the basis of the methodology used in this study.

##### *Theory priority over praxis*

There are theologians that would like to see theory maintaining the priority over praxis, but this idea is difficult to hold on to when today it has been shown that epistemology and the formation of theory cannot be seen as separate from the historical context in which it is formed.

##### *Praxis priority over theory*

Another possibility is where praxis is seen as the priority. Here the context and the experience dominates and directs the approach to doing theology. This approach runs the danger of maintaining the status quo as it does not allow theory to challenge experiences as well as the context and therefore it runs the danger of becoming an ideology. It can become an ideology if it offers no critical element that challenges the praxis and the status quo is thus unchallenged. (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:30)

##### *Theory and praxis equivalent*

Theory and praxis being on an equal basis with each other, opens a wide variety of possibilities of how they could relate to each other for example: equal but totally separate, equal and marginally touching each other, equal and overlapping, etcetera. I would see the relationship between theory and praxis as a relationship of dialectic tension where the two open up to each other as dialogue partners on a journey, arriving at various points on the journey of either unity or critical disunity.

### **11.2.2 Phronesis as a critical awareness to ideological distortion**

I would like to argue in this study that practical wisdom or phronesis is a model which incorporates a critical awareness of ideological distortion. This coming together of the two sets of narratives has been described in the study in various different ways. Niebuhr describes it as 'external history' and 'internal history'. Nicholas Lash describes it as 'metaphor' and 'analogy' and from the Jewish tradition I reflected on the differentiation between '*Halacha*' and '*Aggada*' and Gadamer refers to '*techné*' and '*episteme*'. Although I cannot argue that episteme, Halacha, analogy and external history all refer to the same thing there are certain parallels between them.

*Halacha* (law, dogmas, historical critical tools) and episteme (basic theories, such as in the sciences, philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics etcetera) can all be grouped together as external history, while *Aggada* (stories of meaning - metaphor found in poetry, stories, art) and *techné* (practical theory) can be grouped together as internal history as that which gives meaning to experiences.

External history along the journey of analogy seeks to discover the boundaries of knowledge and language. It is an infinite story of discovery and of new temporary truths about the world and reality. Yet absolute truth, meaning and reality elude external history continuously.

Internal history constructs meaning and realities without the scepticism of external history. It puts into words through metaphor and narratives that which external history cannot speak of.

In other words these boundaries of external history are challenged by internal history. On the other hand external history continually reminds internal history of its limits so that for example metaphor never seeks to jump the boundaries of metaphor.

Gadamer describes this focal point as phronesis. Phronesis is not the application of abstract theological principles or dogmas on concrete situations, but a dialectical dialogue between practical experiences (*techné*) and the tradition which contains the dogmas and systematic theological propositions (*episteme*). Phronesis can be described as practical wisdom as the value orientated dialogue that takes place between the two, namely tradition (dogmas) and experience. *Halacha*, external history (science, psychology, sociology) and episteme brings into the dialogue the historical narrative of tradition (dogmas and laws) which contains the boundaries wherein theological reflection can take place while *Aggada*, internal history and *techné* brings into the dialogue the narratives of experiences that challenge the *Halacha*. The *Aggada* brings into the dialogue that which can only be said in metaphor and thus exposing the limits of the *Halacha*. The *Halacha* again reminds the *Aggada* of the limits of metaphor.

“If the history of Christian faith and spirituality is a history of exuberant metaphor (verbal, ritual, and iconographic), it is – just as insistently – a history of silence,

simplicity, and iconoclasm: of a sense that what needs to be said cannot be said. Not the least powerful of the pressures generating this apophatic dimension in Christian history has been the experience of suffering. If ‘ideology ... dulls the tragic vision’s alertness to limits,’” (Lash 1989:123).

This interaction takes place in practice there where congregations and individuals struggle with daily ‘reality’ and try to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Theology is done there where meaning narratives are written and re-written within a tapestry of the faith community’s narratives. Yet theology is not only done within the narratives of the faith community, but also in dialogue with the narratives of philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics all forming episteme.

### **11.2.3 Ideological critique from within the Christian - Jewish narratives**

In South Africa we have experienced that Apartheid was not only a political theory, but influenced the whole sphere of human existence including the academia. Society is today still interpreted and understood and theories developed (*episteme/Halacha*) from an andocentric point of view. This is a point of view which is related to the question of who holds the power within society. The narratives that are not aware of these power imbalances are necessarily ideological.

In this study I therefore need a critical element which I can incorporate within my theological orientation to warn against these power imbalances and ideologies.

The one critical element discussed above was the dialectical relationship between internal and external history.

The other critical element is found within the Biblical narratives as well as in the experience of life itself.

The idealism that is constructed with its perfect unity and coherence is shattered by the reality of suffering. It challenges the limits of our constructed narratives and the cross of Christ stands against any form of idealism or ideology.

Besides the cross the eschatological hope of justice, peace and reconciliation also criticises any totalising or legitimising of current social narratives (Metz 1977:17). Metz speaks of subversive memory as dangerous memory which remembers past unfulfilled expectations, unfulfilled hopes, dreams and possibilities which breaks the magic of the present consciousness by reminding it of these past unfulfilled hopes, dreams and possibilities (Metz 1977:21). This memory is essentially a memory of suffering, as suffering questions the totalising and legitimising ideological narratives by showing how these narratives do not include the experiences of those who suffer as a result of the

system that is constructed by these narratives. In the South African situation it was the narratives of oppression that became louder and louder that the narratives of apartheid could not longer hold true. Therefore one needs to bring into the dialogue the experiences of those whose narratives have been marginalised and whose narratives have not been heard. An ideal speech situation (4.3.8 The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas) needs to be created in which all the narratives have equal chance to be heard.

The Biblical narrative incorporates this element of hearing the narratives of the oppressed. Internal to the Christian-Jewish faith narratives are numerous ideology critical elements, namely the eschatological hope, the cross and the Biblical bias for the marginalised. Thus these Biblical narratives will continually strive to transform social conditions as these Biblical narratives collide with the constructed narratives of society.

### **11.3 Summary: Narrative theological orientation for doing theology in the global village**

- 1) The narrative theological orientation places its focus on practice and transformative practice.
- 2) It is in the moment of practice that the various narratives collide and meaning is sought, revelation experienced and confessions of faith constructed.
- 3) I sought a critical element that is weary of the ideological distortion in the construction of meaning narratives.
- 4) I found two critical elements:
  - 4.1 Phronesis (practical wisdom) as a critical value orientated discussion of the dialectic between direct experience and tradition (faith communities' theological tradition as well as the traditions of science such as psychology, philosophy, economics, sociology, etcetera).
  - 4.2 The second critical element is provided by life itself (suffering) which is internal to the Biblical narratives (Cross of Christ). The Biblical narratives' eschatological expectations create awareness of present conditions of suffering as well as the Biblical option for the marginalised. All bring in a critical element by which to criticise the constructed narratives of the faith community.

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## **12. NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY**

### **12.1 Introduction**

The study is not about confessional statements of faith, or dogmatic faith formulations, but about the daily experiences of congregants living in a global village and how the

congregants seek meaning and understanding of their experiences from the dramatic resources available to them from their faith tradition and faith community. The study will place itself within the tradition of practical theological wisdom as understood by Müller (Müller 1996:2); practical wisdom which can be understood with the concept *Phronesis* of Aristotle as developed by Gadamer as a value orientated discussion of the dialectic between practical experiences (context) and tradition (the epistemological story).

The faith community is not the only dramatic resource from which to construct meaningful personal narratives, but there are numerous other resources as well. I believe that the global village is such a constructed narrative setting which provides dramatic resources with which to understand and interpret ourselves and our experiences. At the workplace, the work narrative is constructed not only with the faith community's resources, but also with the resources of the global village story. I presume (a presumption that will be reflected on in Chapter Three: Insertion and the story of Need) that the global village story is the dominant story of our time, which means that it provides the dramatic resources to understanding and interpreting personal identity, personal worth and life in general. I will seek to discover in which ways the faith community's narratives offer an alternative (unique outcome) narrative to the global village narrative, in other words in which ways the Christian faith community's narratives offer dramatic resources to re-author the identity narratives of individuals living in a global village. In essence the study is narrative, yet the context of the global village plays a vital role in the study, so the study could be described as a **narrative contextual study**.

In section 8 of this chapter I defended the appropriateness of narrative thinking and theology for doing theology in a postmodern world. In this section I will introduce the narrative research methodology of the study based on ideas adapted from narrative therapy as well as ideas taken from a contextual theological research model and the Fundamental Practical Theology as put forward by Don S. Browning in his book, *A Fundamental Practical Theology, Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (D. Browning 1991).

## **12.2 Seeking a theological working description for narrative contextual theology**

In the search for a working description for the theological approach for doing theology in the postmodern global village in South Africa I will reflect on various definitions (descriptions) which have influenced this study and then seek my own appropriate description.

Pieterse classifies the different theological approaches in South Africa into three broad

categories namely confessional approach, correlational approach and contextual approach (Pieterse 1993:99-17). David Tracy understands there to be two main poles namely the confessional approach and the apologetic approach. George Lindbeck in his book, *The Nature of Doctrine*, distinguishes between the cultural-linguistic approach and the apologetic approach. In the study I will shortly be reflecting on these different approaches to theology. I then propose a fifth approach namely a narrative approach in combination with a revised correlational approach.

### 1. The confessional approach

The confessional approach emphasises the importance of the traditions and confessions of faith such as Scripture. In South Africa a major advocate for this approach is Willie Jonker with his definition of theology:

“...die woord van God onder die gesigspunt van die diens van die kerk” (Pieterse 1993:103).

Tracy sees the confessional approach as an approach “which sees theology as primary witnessing to the narrative structure of the faith”(Browning 1991:44).

### 2. The cultural-linguistic approach

This approach sees Christian dogma having a narrative structure that creates and shapes the life and practice of the Christian congregation or community. This approach argues that the linguistic expressions of religion need to be taken very seriously, because, as was discussed in this chapter, our perception of experience is bound to language and our language structures. There is no such thing as an experience beyond the scope of language (Lindbeck 1984:39).

Thus the truth of any religious narrative, sacred stories (Crites 1989:69), can never be proven or demonstrated by any evidence outside of the story/narrative itself. The truth of the narrative lies within the narrative. Thus the truth of narrative is essentially categorical. This truth needs to be distinguished from propositional truth which corresponds to reality, or symbolic truth which gives expression to a deeper abiding experience (Lindbeck 1984:47). Narrative truth makes such inner coherence that it “makes meaningful statements possible” about what is “most important” to the faith community (Lindbeck 1984:44-45).

This cultural-linguistic approach has roots in the confessional approach or confessionalism of Karl Barth. It was partly inspired by H. Richard Niebuhr, who argued that all theology has a metaphorical base (H. Niebuhr 1963:149-160). And in contemporary theology it has found support in the work of Stanley Hauerwas, (1974, 1977, 1981), Johann Baptist Metz (1980), and Craig Dykstra (1981) (Browning

1991:45).

“These positions emphasize the way the linguistic structures of Christian stories and narratives shape the character and lives of Christian communities and individuals. They also emphasize how this happens without the help of either external philosophical categories or religious experiences independent of these narratives. This perspective attempts to advance theology without apologetics” (Browning 1991: 45).

### 3. The apologetic approach

The apologetic approach “defends the rationality of the faith and tries to increase its plausibility to the contemporary secular mind” (Browning 1991:44). George Lindbeck subdivides the apologetic approach into propositional-cognitive and experiential-expressive approaches (Lindbeck 1984: 16).

### 4. The correlational approach

The correlational approach is strongly supported by European practical theologians such as Heitink and Zerfass (Pieterse 1993:108). They view theology as a science of action as they focus on the activities and actions of the church. In this approach the Word of God plays an important, but not exclusive, role as the Word of God is heard together with other theories and sources of knowledge from the social and human sciences.

David Tracy proposed a critical correlational approach and Don Browning makes use of Tracy’s critical correlational approach to develop his own *revised correlational approach* (Browning 1991:45). Browning sees Tracy’s approach combining the best of the cultural-linguistic approach and the apologetic approach. “Of the apologetic approach it makes special use of the experiential-expressive view, although to some extent it employs the propositional-cognitive approach as well” (Browning 1991: 45). Yet this approach is thoroughly hermeneutical and therefore also cultural-linguistic as it recognises that the classic religious texts shape the faith community before they interpret them.

In other words faith and confession very often in religious communities precedes reason and a critical approach towards the classic texts, passed down to the community via tradition.

If we take Gadamer’s (Gadamer 1989: 273) understanding of “effective history” seriously (4.3.6 Hans-Georg Gadamer) then we need to take into consideration that the past and tradition will always shape the present and the present is always a product of the past. The problem with the global village is that most faith communities are exposed to various cultural and religious traditions (sacred stories). Thus the postmodern

individual has a whole variety of confessional beginning points (Browning 1991: 45). This has as consequence the questions that lead the faith community to the classic texts which have their beginning points not only within the Christian context or tradition, but come from a pluralistic background. “The conflict between contending theory-laden practices means that their questions emerge out of the conflict between the Christian and non-Christian aspects of their lives” (Browning 1991: 45).

This pluralist context in which theology needs to be done in the global village forces one to adopt a correlational approach to theology, as one cannot ignore or pretend that the other sacred stories, of other religious or ideological backgrounds, are not there and are not heard.

For this reason I would like to incorporate the Tracy’s correlational approach in my thinking, because I believe it important that both the confessional context as well as the social cultural setting needs to be incorporated in the theology of this study. Yet Tracy put forward a critical or revised correlational approach (Tracy 1975:430-463).

This critical or revised correlational approach sees the task of theology to be a critical task that incorporates a critical dialogue between the implicit questions and the explicit answers of the Christian classics and the explicit questions and implicit answers of the contemporary cultural experiences and practices. A critical correlational theologian must be in conversation with “all other ‘answers’” no matter from which religious or ideological background they might come (Tracy 1975:46).

#### 5. The contextual approach

The contextual approach places the greatest emphasis on the context in which theology is done, reflecting on the social political context as well as the context of the faith community. I would like to highlight some of the ideas of contextual theology which I believe are important to bring into consideration.

- A hermeneutical commitment to the poor and oppressed and critical reflection on the construction of realities from their point of view
- The shift of focus away from the church to a broader focus of society
- Emphasis on the incarnation of Christ

These are just a few insights that specifically contextual theology brings into the theological dialogue.

#### 6. The narrative approach

The narrative approach finds certain similarities to the correlational approach in the sense that narrative theology is the journey to reflect on human practice in the light of

the Christian faith community's narratives, to evaluate the practices and to shed new light on them. "Praktiese teologie is die sistematies-gestruktureerde, voortgaande hermeneutiese proses, waardeur gepoog word om menslike handeling, wat verband hou met die verhale van die Christengeloofsgemeenskap, teologies te verhelder en te vernuwe" (Müller 1996:5).

### 12.2.1 Working description

I would like to incorporate elements of the above mentioned theological descriptions into my own working description of the theological process of the study.

**A working description of the narrative theological orientation of the study: The narrative theological orientation of this study can be described as a systematically structured, continuous hermeneutical process of critical reflection on Christian activities (praxis) within the social context and in the light of the various narratives that form the dramatic resources with which the faith community constructs and interprets their reality.**

There are numerous terms that need to be clarified in this working description of the theological approach of the study.

#### 12.2.1.1 Systematically structured, continuous hermeneutical process

I reflected on this in the section on narrative and truth (8.6 Narrative and truth). The importance of placing theological reflection within some form of systematically structured context brings in an element of critical awareness - this means a critical and important balance between personal existential faith experience, expressed in metaphor and the analytical reflection of this experience, placing metaphor within its grammatical boundaries. This systematic structured reflection is a reflection which incorporates other theological disciplines, such as the exegetical disciplines as well as dogmatics and other non-theological disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, etcetera. The systematically structured disciplines, which are similar to the Halach within the Jewish tradition, forms the boundaries in which the hermeneutical process may journey. These boundaries are not stagnant but are in a dialectic process.

*Continuous hermeneutical process:* I described theology as a continuous hermeneutical process, in other words it is a journey of discovery. This is a journey of discovering God, oneself, the community of faith in which one finds oneself, and the relationship between God and the world. A process that is described in Exodus 3:14-15 where something of

God's identity is revealed not as an abstract metaphysical proposition, but in relationship to humanity.

Exodus 3: 14-15 "God replied, 'I am who am.' Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you."

God spoke further to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, this is my title for all generations" (The African Bible 1999).

God is discovered in a continuous hermeneutical process of remembering the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remembering (interpreting and re-interpreting) His story with humanity.

#### 12.2.1.2 ...of critical reflection on Christian praxis within the social context

Christians do not act within a vacuum, but within specific contexts and depending on how they understand these contexts they also act differently. To be able to describe Christian praxis one also needs to be able to describe the social context in which the Christian community acts. In other words the study incorporates the critical correlational approach as proposed by David Tracy (Tracy 1983:76).

#### 12.2.1.3 a critical reflection in the light of the various narratives that form the dramatic resources with which the faith community constructs and interprets their reality.

The activities of the Christian faith community need to be critically reflected upon in the light of the dramatic resources by which they interpret and construct their reality. The dramatic resources are Scripture, denominational tradition and history and a congregation's individual history and spirituality, as well as the non-Christian dramatic resources of the context which also play an important role in how the faith community understands itself. I reflected (11.2.3 Ideological Critique from within the Christian – Jewish narratives) on the internal critique that exists within the narratives of the Christian-Jewish faith community:

- 1) The cross and suffering continually challenge any construction of reality and by doing so also challenge the constructions of idealism and ideology.
- 2) The eschatological hope inherent in the Biblical narratives also continually criticises the present conditions of suffering and injustice.
- 3) The clear thematic option in the Biblical narratives for the poor, powerless and oppressed offers another critical reflection on the construction of realities from

the point of view of the marginalised and excluded.

## 12.3 The research methodology

The research methodology of the study will be incorporating two related yet separate traditions, namely Don Browning's understanding of fundamental practical theology as put forward in his book, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* and secondly adapting certain ideas from narrative therapeutic models. The methodology will also be influenced by the contextual model of the pastoral hermeneutic cycle as this was the tradition that was part of my theological formation.

### 12.3.1 Narrative research methodology

I will be focussing mainly on the therapeutic model proposed by Müller in his two books *Om tot verhaal te kom* (Müller 1996) and *Companions on the Journey* (Müller 1999), together with other narrative therapy concepts.

Müller's model has five basic movements, which he compares to dance movements rather than strategic movements (Müller 1999: Ch 8).

#### 12.3.1.1 The story of need

The story of need in the therapy situation is when somebody seeks a pastor or a therapist because of some problem which he/she is struggling with. They come to the therapist with a problem saturated story. "It is as if the story of the past and the story of the future has collapsed in the present" (Müller 1999: The Story of Need). This implies that there is no story line that moves from the past through the present into the future.

#### 12.3.1.2 The story of the past

The past is the building material whereby the story of the future is constructed (Müller 1996:111). I have shown how character and personal identity can be understood from the story of the past and that no future can be constructed without identity, style and character which come into the present from the past. Müller argues that the therapist does not only accompany the individual on the journey of retelling the past, but of "re-experiencing the past" (Müller 1999). Müller proposes various techniques in this journey of discovering the story of the past namely the genogram, lifeline and the ecochart (Müller 1999). I will adapt some of these ideas from the individual therapeutic context to the context of a congregation and the whole question of how I do theology. Browning argues that if the crisis is serious the faith community will also need to look at the story

of the past. “Eventually if it is serious, the community must re-examine the sacred texts and events that constitute the sources or the norms and ideals that guide its practices.

The community brings its questions to these normative texts and has a conversation between its questions and these texts. This community of interpreters will see its inherited normative sources in light of the questions engendered by its crisis. As its practices change its questions change, and the community will invariably see different meanings in its normative texts as its situation and questions change” (Browning 1991:6).

#### 12.3.1.3 The story of the future

“The story of the future still lies like an embryo in the womb of the past” (Müller 1999). In a problem saturated story of the past there does not seem to be a clear future story. There might not be a future perspective at all, which means total hopelessness. It is normally this impossibility of seeing a clear future that brings the individual to the therapist (Müller 1996:115).

#### 12.3.1.4 The re-authored story of the past

The story of the past is re-experienced and re-authored.

“The difference between the telling of the story of the past (second movement) and reframing of the story of the past (fourth movement) can be explained by means of two concepts, namely *backtracking* and *looping*. The telling of the story of the past is equivalent to backtracking. If you add looping, it is similar to the one being followed succeeding to elude the follower, and the former now becomes the follower behind the latter’s back. It is similar to following yourself, to walk back on your own tracks, and to try to understand your own ways anew” (Müller 1999).

One process that is generally used amongst narrative therapist in re-authoring the story of the past is the externalisation of the identified problem and seeking unique outcomes.

#### 12.3.1.5 The imagined story of the future

One constructs a future story in that the individual projects himself/ herself into the future and with this story can journey into tomorrow (Müller 1996:134). Müller uses the ideas of metaphor and imagination to create imaginative creative stories of the future. This aids the individual to see things in a new light and see new connections between things.

### 12.3.2 Fundamental practical theology

Don Browning in his book *A Fundamental Practical Theology* proposes that all theology is essentially practical.

“Theology can be practical if we bring practical concerns to it from the beginning. The theologian does not stand before God, Scripture, and the historic witness of the church like an empty slate or Lockean tabula rasa ready to be determined, filled up, and then plugged into a concrete practical situation” (Browning 1991:5). “A more accurate description goes like this. We come to the theological task with questions shaped by the secular and religious practices in which we are implicated – sometimes uncomfortably. These practices are meaningful or theory-laden. By using the phrase theory-laden, I mean to rule out in advance the widely held assumption that theory is distinct from practice. All our practices, even our religious practices, have theories behind and within them” (Browning 1991: 6).

I would like to go along with Browning that theology starts and ends in the practical context of a religious community seeking meaningful responses to practical contextual concerns. Browning bases his understanding of all theology being basically practical on Gadamer’s understanding of Aristotle’s phronesis (4.3.6 Hans Georg Gadamer). Gadamer sees understanding, interpretation and application to be intimately related to each other. Therefore we can argue with Browning that application is an essential moment in the hermeneutical experience.

“Application to practice is not an act that follows understanding. It guides the interpretive process from the beginning, often in subtle, overlooked ways. Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory clearly breaks down the theory-to-practice (text-to-application) model in theological studies as well. It implies more nearly a radical practice-theory-practice model of understanding that gives the entire theological enterprise a thoroughly practical cast” (Browning 1991:39).

Browning bases his fundamental practical theology largely on Gadamer’s understanding of phronesis and I believe Browning’s model to be an appropriate response within the context of postmodernity as Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory challenges many of the nostrums of modernity such as: realism, positivism, and various forms of Kantian or phenomenological idealism and the attempt to rid knowledge of history, tradition, finitude, and partiality. Epistemology both in the *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften* can only be understood as a dialectical movement from traditions of theory-laden-practice to theory and back to new theory-laden-practices (Browning 1991: 40). This hermeneutic understanding of epistemology is what Browning calls the envelope of practical theology.

### 12.2.2.1 The four movements

Browning proposes four movements in his fundamental practical theology and I would like to introduce these four movements as I will be incorporating these movements in my methodology.

#### 1. Descriptive Theology

Descriptive theology is the first movement and is the description of theory-laden religious and cultural practices. "Its task is to describe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions that generate all theological reflection. To some extent the first movement is horizon analysis; it attempts to analyze the horizon of cultural and religious meanings that surround our religious and secular practices" (Browning 1991: 47).

This descriptive task is a multidimensional and hermeneutical dialogue between the researcher and the material being researched, describing the context as well as the horizon and then discovering the questions that are being raised within the faith community.

"The interest of descriptive theology are practical. These interest dominate all efforts to understand. The concern of descriptive theology is to capture in all their richness the basic human questions practical theology takes back to its classics. Its interests are practical because, in the end, it wants to appreciate and criticize current social, cultural, and ecclesial practices"(Browning 1991: 93).

This step is similar to the story of need in the narrative approach. The faith community can find itself in a crisis and therefore tell its story of need. "When a religious community hits a crisis in its practices, it then begins reflecting (asking questions) about its meaningful or theory-laden practices" (Browning 1991:6). A faith community finds itself in a crisis as there seems to be a gap between the tradition, the dramatic resources and the context and the ethical demands of the context, which is the exciting starting point of any theological journey and the journey of this study.

This is a continuous process and not a once off event. "Religious communities go from moments of consolidated practice to moments of deconstruction to new, tentative reconstructions and consolidations"(Browning 1991:6). It is for this reason that I will be using the metaphor 'journey', as I see this theological process as a journey for both the individual as well as for faith communities.

Questions will emerge from the theory-laden practices and they need to be posed to the central texts and monuments of the religious community's faith, which is then the

second step.

## 2. Historical Theology

“Historical theology, asks, What do the normative texts that are already part of our effective history really imply for our praxis when they are confronted as honestly as possible?” (Browning 1991:49). This second step of historical theology is a *critical* dialogue or conversation with the classic texts of the faith tradition. I stress the word critical as Browning would also see it as being vital that the exegetical critical tools be used to bring the texts into a critical dialogue with the faith community (Browning 1991:49). This turning towards the historical texts is also not something that should be done in isolation, but within the faith community. The early hermeneutical schools were rather individualistic in their hermeneutic approach. I agree with Browning that the approach should be rooted in a faith community. It is only later in the works of the American pragmatist, Charles Pierce and pragmatic idealist Josiah Royce that the hermeneutic process was seen as a social process, rather than an individual one. This is a movement away from the early beginnings of the hermeneutic understanding of epistemology in Heidegger who saw the isolate individual in his work *Sein und Zeit* in the search for understanding and knowledge.

Within the narrative understanding of individuals as well as actions we cannot go this route of the isolated search for understanding. “Our knowledge of reality is mediated by signs. To gain relatively reliable knowledge we need to rely on the interpretive skills of entire communities” (Browning 1991: 51). This brings this approach in line with the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas as discussed in 4.3.8 The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas.

## 3. Systematic Theology

“Systematic Theology when seen from the perspective of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is the fusion of horizons<sup>1</sup> between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts” (Browning 1991: 51). This fusion between the present and the past is not just an application of the past to the present, but it is a critical dialogue between the two.

“Systematic theology tries to gain as comprehensive a view of the present as possible. It tries to examine the large encompassing themes of our present practices and the vision latent in them. The systematic character of this movement comes from its effort to investigate general themes of the gospel that respond to the general questions that emerge from such general trends of modernity, liberal democracy, or technical rationality (Browning 1991:51). Browning sees this process to be guided by two

fundamental questions:

1. What new horizon of meaning is fused when questions from the present practices are brought to the central Christian witness?
2. What reason can be advanced to support the validity claims of this new fusion of meaning? (Browning 1991: 51-52)

The second question is the obligation of systematic theology to bring in a philosophical and critical element into the journey of doing theology in the postmodern context. Browning believes that this is the task of theological ethics to test the validity claims of systematic theology (Browning 1991: 52). These validity claims can never be absolute truths, but they can constitute good reasons and thereby open the door to conversation and dialogue between competing perspectives, which is vital in a pluralistic context. In the twentieth century systematic theology was seen as a discipline mainly concerned with how religious belief can be meaningful for the modern individual.

It seemed to have been very concerned with the grounds for belief:

- Schleiermacher was concerned with religious experience
- Kant, Ritschl, and Bultmann were concerned with moral experience
- Barth and Brunner, the neo-orthodox, turned towards revelation.
- Tillich, Tracy and Ogden turned towards metaphysics
- The followers of Wittgenstein turned towards linguistic systems

Browning's view on contrast sees systematic theology to concern itself with the concrete themes of praxis specific to a particular context. "Further, it would be concerned with how modernity undermines these common themes of practice; its attention to how modernity threatens our beliefs would be subordinated to this (Browning 1991: 53-54).

#### 4. Strategic Practical Theology

A crisis arises in a faith community and this, if described and interpreted brings, forth certain questions that can then be brought to the historical texts. Browning sees there to be a least four basic questions that drive us to strategic practical theological thinking:

1. How do we understand this concrete situation in which we must act?
2. What would be our praxis in this concrete situation?
3. How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation?
3. What means, strategies, and rhetorics should we use in this concrete situation? (Browning 1991: 55-57)

*The first question* deals with the "special histories, commitments, and needs of the agents in the situation. It consists of the interplay of institutional systems and how they

converge on the situation. And it includes an analysis of the various religio-cultural narratives and histories that compete to define and give meaning to the situation” (Browning 1991: 55).

*The second question* seeks to answer the question strategic practical theology needs to build on after the first three movements of theology within a practical context. “It brings the fruits of descriptive theology and practically oriented historical and systematic theology back into contact with the concrete situation of action. It brings the fruits of historical and systematic theology into contact with the analysis of the concrete situation first begun in descriptive theology and now resumed in strategic practical theology” (Browning 1991:55-56).

*The third question* is where the correlational approach differentiates itself from a simple confessional narrative approach or cultural linguistic approach. It is a question that incorporates the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas and seeks to provide “validity claims” (Habermas 1979:2) that practical theology can enter into dialogue with other critical disciplines and other faith communities.

Browning proposes an alternative to Habermas’s approach to validity claims, as he contrasts his five dimensions of practical theological thinking to Habermas’s four validity claims (Browning 1991: 56).

Validity claims can seem to be a return to some form of foundationalism, or absolute claims to truth, but that was not the intention of Habermas or Browning.

Validation does not mean returning to some form of foundationalism as was the case in modernity, but rather to put forward critical reasons and arguments “which are themselves embedded in the practices that have been developed in the course of history,” (Bernstein 1983:163) to support the claims that one makes. Only then is true dialogue possible in a pluralistic society.

The five validity claims that Browning puts forward are intended so that faith communities can enter into dialogue with the other religious communities, without having to resort to absolute relativism.

Browning’s five claims are:

1. the visional level (which inevitably raises metaphysical validity claims);
2. the obligational level (which raises normative ethical questions);
3. the tendency-need level or anthropological dimension (which raises claims about human nature, its basic human needs, and the kinds of premoral goods required to meet these needs);
4. an environmental social dimension (which raises claims that deal primarily with social-systemic and ecological constraints of our tendencies and needs);
5. the rule role dimension (which raises claims about the concrete patterns we should enact in our actual praxis in the everyday world) (Browning 1991: 71).

*The fourth question* is a communication question as it asks the question of where people are and now ministry in its various practical forms takes the initial steps in the process of transformation. “These arts of ministry should not only be concerned with the church’s internal worship and preaching; they also should be concerned with both the public liturgies and rhetorics of the church and the liturgies and rhetorics of the public” (Browning 1991: 57). This is done within the context of a broadened understanding of Tracy’s revisionist correlational approach. This happens when theology critically correlates its investigations and interpretations into the two principal sources of theology. These two sources are “Christian texts and common human experience and language” (Tracy 1975:43). If we take this understanding into practical theology it can be said: “the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation” (Tracy 1983:76).

When Tracy speaks of common experience he is referring to common cultural experience (Browning 1991: 61). This common human cultural experience needs to be unpacked a bit. James and Evelyn Whitehead did this in their *Method in Ministry* (1980) as they differentiated this common human experience into two separable poles of reflection, namely *personal* and *corporate* experience (Whitehead 1980:12). Browning proposes to go even one step further and differentiate common human experience into three poles:

1. interpretations of the practices, inner motivations, and socio-cultural history of individual agents
2. interpretations of relevant institutional patterns and practices
3. interpretations of the cultural and religious symbols that give meaning to individual and institutional action (Browning 1991:61).

These three poles can be compared to the different levels of understanding human action within the narrative context (8.2.2 Narrative Intelligibility of Human Actions).

Descriptive theology should include these poles so that a fuller description can be given of the personal history behind the practices, and thus will also guide the interpretations of the questions that will be posed to the classical texts as well as offer a deeper understanding of the prejudices or pre-understanding with which we approach the classical texts.

##### 5. A concluding remark on Browning’s Fundamental Practical theology

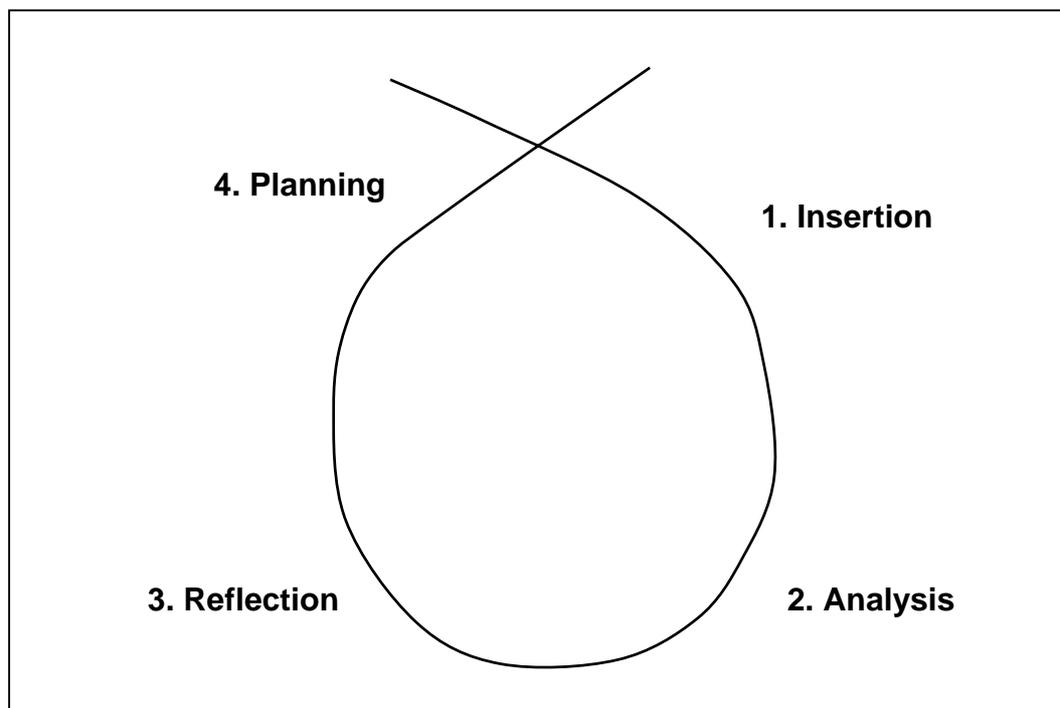
This approach is a combination of wisdom of the cultural-linguistic approach, narrative and confessional viewpoints.

### 12.3.3 A contextual approach (pastoral hermeneutical circle)

It was mentioned earlier that I believe certain elements from the contextual approach to be very important and therefore I will shortly reflect on the contextual approach, although I find my proposed approach more in line with the ideas of Browning. I will integrate some of the ideas of the methodological approach from contextual theology - the pastoral hermeneutical circle – with the narrative therapy ideas of Müller and into the research approach of the study. This circle was introduced within contextual theology by Segundo (Segundo 1976) and developed by Holland and Henriot and adapted for the South African context by Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991: 13-25). It was also adapted for the urban context by De Beer and Venter (De Beer and Venter 1998:47-119).

#### 12.3.3.1 The pastoral hermeneutical circle

The pastoral hermeneutical circle consists of four movements. In contrast to the five movements of Müller these four movements do follow each other in a strategic manner although the process is circular or a spiral as it is a continuous process.



#### 1. Insertion

Insertion is the first phase of this method of doing theological research and involves describing the context of research, describing the personal experiences of the subject of the research as well as the experiences of the faith community being studied.

2. Analysis

Analysis is a deeper analytical understanding of the context as described by the first phase (insertion). In this phase the economic, social and political elements of the context are analysed and described and the ecclesiastical analysis is done.

3. Theological Reflection

Theological reflection takes place in this phase, where various sources (Biblical, tradition, theological books as well as spiritual journeys and experiences) are brought into dialogue with the context described and analysed.

4. Pastoral Planning

In this phase a pastoral plan of action (transformative praxis) is developed and the findings of the previous phases are incorporated into the pastoral plan.

One aspect that I would like to incorporate into the study, from the pastoral hermeneutic cycle as understood by Segundo, is the partiality to the poor as being central to the Christian witness (Segundo 1976:33).

## **12.4 A combination of a contextual, fundamental practical theology and narrative approach**

### **12.4.1 Insertion/ descriptive theology / story of need**

In the study I will seek to understand or at least describe the story of the global village as I see and interpret it. I believe (and at this point in the journey I am aware that it is a prejudice or a pre-understanding) that the stories constructed with the dramatic resources (the story of the global village) are problem saturated stories. This perception has prompted this study. I will in Chapter Three: Descriptive Theology / Story of Need listen to these problem saturated stories of the global village as experienced in Pretoria. This chapter will be a descriptive chapter where the context will be described with the aid of the stories that people tell. Stories of both those who partake in the global village such as business people as well as those who have been marginalised from the village such as unemployed homeless individuals will be listened to.

### **12.4.2 Descriptive theology / analysis / retelling the story of the past and the darkened story of the future.**

This will be Chapter Four of the study. In this chapter of the study, I will further describe the stories told in Chapter Three. I will retell the story of the past in order to understand

and interpret how things developed and use descriptive tools to describe power relationships and developments. This process can be described as unpacking the story of the past to try and understand why the stories told in the global village are problem saturated stories. In this section of the study I will be working intra-disciplinary by bringing in descriptive tools from various other disciplines such as sociology and economics, and then integrating these insights into the theological approach of the study, or as Browning would say that if the other disciplines, such as sociology, were conceived hermeneutically they would eventually also ask the descriptive theological questions, as eventually the questions need to be asked: “What reasons, ideals, and symbols do we use to interpret what we are doing? What do we consider to be the sources of authority and legitimation for what we do? For those who claim to be Christian, this process inevitably leads to a fresh confrontation with the normative texts and monuments of the Christian faith (Browning 1991: 48). If sociology is understood hermeneutically then eventually it will be confronted with the sacred texts that amongst other things determine human action (8.2.2 Narrative intelligibility of human actions). It is in this section that I will also be looking at the other factors that influence and determine the faith communities’ actions, besides the religious stories. The economic and the political and the ideological stories also need to enter into the conversation and in this section of the study the horizon of these “other stories” will be described so that they can enter into dialogue with the Christian stories in the following chapters. It is in this context that the study adopts the critical correlational approach. I will conclude the descriptive theological journey in Chapter Five by bringing together the reflections of Chapter Two (postmodernity) and Chapter Four (global village) and thus describe the *postmodern global village*.

#### **12.4.3 Historical Theology / theological reflection**

This will be Chapter Six of the study. In this chapter I will reflect theologically on the issues raised in Chapters Three, Four and Five by bringing into the conversation various theological resources such as the Bible, theological books, personal faith experiences, meditations and spiritual journeys.

#### **12.4.4 Systematic Theology / re-authored story of the past**

In the second part of descriptive theology, unpacking the story of the past, the general questions that characterise the situation of the present context had been described. These questions now need to be brought into dialogue with the general themes of the Gospel and theology. Certain Gospel themes and insights will have been developed from the historical theology of the previous chapter and these insights will be brought into dialogue with the questions of the *postmodern global village* under certain

systematic theological themes. I will focus on the systematic theological themes of Eucharist as the central element of worship and meaning within the faith community and secondly reflecting on various Biblical models of ecclesiology.

#### **12.4.5 Strategic Practical Theology / imagined story of the future/model of pastoral action**

This will be Chapter Seven of the study and here I will reflect on a practice of reconciliatory ministry in the postmodern urban South African context, thereby reflecting on a creative imagined possibility of being church in the global village with both villagers and marginalised.

This movement of the study will not be done in isolation, but this journey will be a journey with the faith community. I will make use of group discussions, congregational council reflections on various texts and Bible study reflections on texts and in this way bring into the dialogue the faith community. I will seek to incorporate Habermas' idea of ideal speech communities where knowledge can be extracted from the classic texts which are emancipatory and creative.

### **12.5 The theological story of the study: clarifying my own roots and theological story**

I need to conclude this chapter by telling my story – the story with which I embark on my journey of discovery.

#### **12.5.1 The theological roots of the story**

##### **12.5.1.1 Lutheran story**

My life story is closely linked with the Lutheran church in South Africa. I was born and grew up in a Lutheran family and home. My father worked as a farm manager for the Berlin Mission Society on a farm in the Northern Cape in the vicinity of Barkley West. The closest city was Kimberley approximately 30 km from the farm. The farm, being a mission farm, brought us as family into close contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa which was the "black" Lutheran church in South Africa.

I was baptised and confirmed in a small German speaking Lutheran congregation in Kimberley.

I believe myself to be called into ministry and studied theology in Pietermaritzburg where I lived in a commune of Lutheran students from all over Africa as well as a few

students from Germany. I did various internships in Lutheran congregations and was ordained into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa.

This close contact with Lutherans has formed my thinking to appreciate and to be critical of certain aspects of my tradition. I believe that the Lutheran story will certainly be one of the main dramatic resources from which I interpret and construct my theological story.

#### 12.5.1.2 Ecumenical story

The white Lutheran community in Kimberley / Barkley West was small and the congregation did not offer many activities besides church services twice a month. I started my schooling in a Catholic school and attended their catechism classes for first communion.

In Pietermaritzburg during my theological training I stayed in a Lutheran community yet the School of Theology at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) was ecumenical and in class we were from all sorts of denominational backgrounds ranging from Evangelical (Evangelical House of Studies - Ethos), Anglican, Methodist to Catholic students. This ecumenical context of study forced us to reflect critically on ones own tradition, but also widened the perspective to incorporate the other traditions.

The lectures at the School of Theology at Pietermaritzburg came from various denominational backgrounds and the study material they offered came from a wide ecumenical perspective.

After completing my theological training I married a Dutch Reformed minister, so in a certain sense I got married to the ecumenical story.

This ecumenical emphasis in my theological story, which was not so much choice as it was circumstance, has formed my theological thinking so that ecumenical perspective in doing theology has become very important to me. This perspective will be reflected throughout the study as the study will be integrating sources from various theological backgrounds. The research for the study as well as the spirituality that carries the study comes from various denominational backgrounds so that I believe this study will be an ecumenical study although its focus is a Lutheran congregation.

In short, the various traditions have formed the various aspects of this study. The contextual and liberation traditions have influenced my emphasis on taking the context and specifically the poor and marginalised seriously and analysing (describing) the constructed realities from their perspective. The Lutheran Reformed background will

play an important role in the theological Biblical reflection seeking a sound systematic theological approach to the challenge of the global village. The Catholic influences will come into the story when seeking a new spirituality and the Evangelical influence when seeking appropriate praxis. The traditions will not be confined to the above description, but in a broad context the various traditions have influenced me to incorporate these various aspects.

#### 12.5.1.3 Contextual theological story

The School of Theology at Pietermaritzburg placed a great emphasis on contextual theology, liberation theology, black theology and feminist theology which all formed part of the curriculum for systematic theology. This theological approach provided for me the dramatic resources to make sense of the South Africa I was living in. It provided the resources to make sense of my experiences in the inner city of Pretoria where I worked for nearly three years.

The theologians who were my companions on this journey through their books were Maimela, Cone, Nolan, Gutierrez, Ruether and Daly.

#### 12.5.1.4 Urban concern story

The urban context that has been chosen for the study is also part of my theological story. I have worked in various urban congregations and never in a rural congregation, although I grew up on a farm. It is these urban experiences in Germany and South Africa that have been woven into a story that has become a passionate drama within the story of my calling.

It is this passion for the urban church that has motivated this study as well as the belief that in the urban centres of our world the crises of our times are experienced. It is my belief that theological reflection in these times needs to be urban theological reflection, thereby not ostracising the rural areas, but considering that the majority of the world's population lives in urban centres. I believe this bias is justified.

The urban centres of the developing world are growing at tremendous rates and philosophical, cultural and social developments seem to be most acute in urban centres.

#### 12.5.1.5 Integral and holistic approach

The influence of contextual theology as well as the experience of inner city ministry has made me very aware of the need for holistic ministry - a ministry that sees the individual

as a whole within his/her context and not just as a *soul* that needs to be saved. In the past, many of the mainline churches stayed away from a holistic approach in fear that they might mix politics with church matters.

A holistic ministry goes beyond these dichotomies of private and public (political) or soul and body and sacred and secular. I will seek a method of ministry which integrates the personal with the public and the secular and the sacred.

I will seek to develop a holistic ministry that addresses the personal emotional needs of the urban individual, but also the social public as well as environmental spheres in which this individual lives, in other words a ministry that embraces the totality of the person with all the systems and spheres that influence him/her. It is this whole story that I would like to incorporate and therefore the need for an integrated, holistic approach.

#### 12.5.1.6 Shared journey

This study is not an individual process but a shared journey of discovery. Besides the academic reflection on theological ideas and theories these theories and ideas are internalised and lived out in the process of journeying with friends, family, colleagues and congregants.

It is a community's journey as theology can only be done in community (Moltmann 1995:14). The theological journey/story that has led up to this study was not an isolated journey in a vacuum, but was influenced and determined by the various communities in which I have found myself.

I therefore suggest that the theological journey of this study is a shared journey of people bound together searching for God in the confusion of the *postmodern global village*, people coming from various different backgrounds – from professionals benefiting from the global village to those who are marginalised from these benefits. All will journey together seeking to listen to God's story in the global village.