

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a term with vast meanings that involves a wide range of experiences. It is generally equated with lack of a house or shelter. In this sense homelessness is the living condition of many people all over the world, and is a widespread phenomenon specifically in South Africa. The reasons or factors leading to homelessness may vary, but it is a reality. The demographic figures for homeless persons in the world, especially in cities, are increasing at an alarming rate. The youth now constitute a major portion of the world's homeless people. The condition of homelessness in a way dehumanises these youth. Living on the streets or in night shelters, they face many struggles, from bad weather to robbery or rape. Many of them no longer feel their human dignity and the worth of their personality. Sometimes they become desperate. In the midst of all these struggles, however, these young people retain the power of youth and are able to see the possibilities of life, to change themselves for a better tomorrow.

The homeless person's experience and expression of his/her status of homelessness is continually informed by different discourses. These may be cultural, economic, political or other discourses. Some times various different discourses may operate together. These discourses may be invisible to the homeless person telling his/her story. Identifying the discourses and discovering the impact of them in the life situations of the teller are the tasks of the researcher.

Various factors lead homeless people to the situation of homelessness and help them to survive the experiences of homelessness. Economic factors particularly impact on their discourses, vividly strike researchers exploring their life world.

This research study is a journey with homeless youth into their experiences, described through the stories they tell, in which various discourses operate. Some of these discourses, such as the economic, tend to be dominant. This study thus develops a narrative method of getting into the life world of homeless youth and their discourses, especially the discourse of homelessness and the economic impact on it. As I write this research report, the stories told by the homeless youth and their situations are vivid in my mind. All of their predicaments are basically rooted in economic need. My being with them will not directly satisfy these needs, but in telling and retelling of their stories will hopefully contribute towards finding them alternative means to meet their economic needs. This research report is intended to promote wider knowledge about and help provide work possibilities for homeless people.

This research falls under the Faculty of Practical Theology. More than just preaching the word of God, practical theology emphasises living in the human situation with the knowledge of God. It is not a theology of conference rooms and cool chambers, but rather a theology of the streets. My interactions with homeless people in the streets gave me the challenging experiences of practicing theology. My pastoral commitment encourages me to journey with the homeless youth to deconstruct the dominant discourses and help them to find new, hopeful possibilities of life.

1.1 NARRATIVE APPROACH

1.1.1 Narrative counselling

Various counselling approaches are available to a counsellor entering into the world of youth. Each individual counsellor will be attracted to a particular viewpoint and the method of counselling akin to it. Sensitivity towards the various forms of counselling may broaden the perspectives of this helping profession. At

the same time, there is a danger of confusion and the temptation to use many different methods in one counselling interaction, which can lead to a chaotic situation. What is fundamental to all kinds of counselling is the narrating of experiences by the counsellee, and the listening to these stories with empathy by the counsellor. These processes finally lead them to possible solutions or newer paths of life. Narrative approach in counselling is a useful theoretical approach, which focuses on the story telling and then on the re-telling and reformulation of the stories. The narrative approach does not blame the problematic person or prescribe solutions; instead, it moves with the person in a respectful way. "Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives" (Morgan 2000:2). It views the problem as a problem and the person as a person. It distinguishes the problem from the person. Through the process of externalizing, the story teller is helped to see the problem from outside his/her personality and to envision the different angles of the problem.

According to Freedman and Combs, "a rhythmic alternation between telling and witnessing characterizes narrative work" (2002:22). This shows that a narrative approach is not a one-man show but gives an equal role to the storyteller and to the listener. The facilitator does not merely listen to the words, but also listens to the language, the discourse, from which the particular words are drawn. Meaning is not carried only in an individual word, but also in its relation to its context. No two contexts will be exactly the same. Speaking is also not neutral or passive. Every time we speak, we bring forth a reality and a new meaning in relation to the particular context. "Human experience is structured in time and narrative. We comprehend our lives not as disconnected actions or isolated events but in terms of a narrative.... We use stories to construct meaning and communicate ourselves to another" (Anderson & Foley 2001:4). Narrative counselling is a journey with the story teller through his/her life world. That journey leads the counsellor and the counsellee to new paths of knowledge and understanding. Effective and empathetic listening is essential in this journey. The facilitator does

not have to probe the minute details of the story, but must rather move with the story teller to the unknown life stories that are important. Thus listening is an invisible but earnest search for new meanings. “When we listen ‘deconstructively’ to people’s stories, our listening is guided by the belief that those stories have many possible meanings. The meaning we as listeners make is, more often than not, at least a little different from the meaning that a speaker has intended” (Freedman & Combs 2002:26, 27). Through interaction and intervention the facilitator helps the story teller to find the meaning of his/her stories. Listening must involve thoughtfulness about the emerging new meanings.

1.1.2 Narrative research

Much research work has been done in the field of homelessness in various countries. These studies demonstrate the effects of homelessness and the factors leading to homelessness and suggest directions for effective social policies. For some researchers the homeless situation is a slide from stable housing to an increasingly unstable life situation. Some of them emphasise caring for homeless people (Walsh 1992:3). For empirical study researchers use standardised measures and devices to assess collected data. In this qualitative study, I work with homeless youth as co-researchers to discover new realities through interactions with them in their particular contexts. The narrative approach of this research is mainly based on the stories of the co-researchers and their personal interpretations. One of the roles of the researcher is to listen to the stories carefully and write them down without polluting them or manipulating the meanings implied by the story teller. Other roles of the narrative researcher are to identify the unique outcomes in the stories, help the story teller to move from thin descriptions to thick descriptions and report the data drawn from the research material. “Thin descriptions often lead to thin conclusions about people’s identities, and these have many negative effects. The person with the problem may be understood to be ‘bad’, ‘hopeless’, or ‘a troublemaker’” (Morgan

2000:13). Many homeless people initially only give thin descriptions of their life stories. In the course of narrative interaction they are equipped to construct alternate stories and thicken each story in relation to the others. The narrative researcher also undergoes a process of change, of discovery, in the processes of interaction and writing, while searching for unique outcomes. These unique outcomes are the themes evolved by the researcher through listening to and writing down the stories, drawing on interdisciplinary interrogation techniques in relation to various traditions. Thus the narrative researcher thickens the themes by using alternate stories, and applying interdisciplinary interpretations.

My research experience revealed tensions between existing empirical data and the realities of the lives of the homeless people. Sometimes their life patterns and interpretations speak more clearly than the existing empirical research. Other times the empirical research sheds light on their behaviour and responses. “Overall, the empirical studies of the past decade have yielded important and disturbing findings: the effects of homelessness on its young victims are profound and devastating” (Walsh 1992:7). This tension between empirical research and the life experiences of the homeless people is not analysed in this study, since it falls beyond the scope of this work.

The empirical study investigates samples of the homeless population selected in a standardised way. In a narrative study the members of a specific group of people are not studied as samples, but as human persons with the freedom to tell, re-tell and interpret their experiences. The researcher then reports the meanings and fields of experience that emerge from a deconstruction of these stories. The researcher does not search for specific, predetermined meanings, but discovers new meanings with the co-researcher/s. Thus through this narrative research we will come to an alternate story or various alternate stories based on the experiences of homeless youth in Pretoria. The role of the researcher could be described as that of co-author of the alternate story or

stories. Thus my story is a new story to be listened to, described and researched further.

1.1.3 Narrative approach in the post- modern paradigm

The narrative approach assumes a post-modern paradigm. In contrast to modernism, postmodernism rejects any idea of an 'essential' truth and confirms that realities are socially constructed. "A central tenet of postmodernism is that at the social level, there is no single essential, 'true' body of knowledge about how people, families or societies should function" (Freedman & Combs 2002:187). Postmodernism cannot be understood as a new phase after modernity or a new cultural era. "Post modernism is, rather, an attitude, a radically different way of looking at the world of modernity, a mood that has also slowly and pervasively filtered into the way we think, and especially now into the way we do theology and science too" (Van Huyssteen 1998:5). With this in mind, the counsellor works deconstructively. Listening to, questioning and retelling stories is part of the deconstruction process. "Throughout this process, we endeavour to listen with thoughtfulness about what new constructions are emerging" (Freedman & Combs 2002:27). Through interactions and use of various discourses, new stories and interpretations of these stories emerge. Thus in a way narrative therapy is one of the most prominent developments of postmodernity. As Calvin O' Schrag rightly points out "... the very idea of a uni-versity as an unbroken solidarity of unified discourse becomes problematized and is challenged by a pluri-versity of knowledge practices" (1992:39). This approach shows that we cannot limit the possibility of a text to one single meaning, but must allow it to have a collection or variety of meanings. The meaning is not to be dictated, but rather evolved.

1.1.4 Relation between the counselling process and research

In a narrative approach research is closely related to the counselling process. Thus existing research on counselling can help me as facilitator to view the story teller in his/her particular context. Research into narrative counselling will thus supply me with the requisite knowledge in this field. Counselling work and counselling research are therefore inseparably linked in this study. In narrative research of this kind, theory, therapeutic practice and research are directly linked. The relationship of each to the other is mutual and contributory. With the help of narrative theory a facilitator is practicing narrative counselling. The interpretation of such therapeutic sessions will supplement the theory, and help the research process to progress. “The bridging or mediating role of the narrative processes is in the possibility of analysing therapeutic conversation, its contents, its quality, its dialogical aspects, as well as the conversational context” (Laitila, Aaltonen, Wahlstrom & Angus 2005:207). This use of established counselling processes and the establishment of dialogue between them will allow new topics for research to emerge. Thus the roles of theory, the narrative counsellor and the story teller are equally important here in this research work. All of them are involved in this co-authored journey towards new alternative knowledge.

1.1.5 Postfoundational research

This research study uses a social constructionist approach. It emphasises the social construction of realities. The stories shared by the homeless youth have this constructivist dimension. By telling their stories they are constructing their experiences in a new form. Through listening to and thickening those stories, new stories are constructed. In the process of constructing alternate stories, new stories are evolved. These story telling and story making processes are not based on some preconceptions of reality. As the telling process progresses, the story is unveiled. The foundationalist approach argues that all reality has

foundations, denying the non-foundationalist position that only relative knowledge of truth is possible. For a non-foundational thinker, there is no absolute truth, but everything is relative. The trap in the non-foundational approach is that of indifference to life experiences and the variety of possible meanings. In this study I take an epistemological position of postfoundationalism, which stresses the importance of local context. “Postfoundationalism in theological reflection has therefore shown itself as a viable third epistemological option beyond the extremes of absolutism and the relativism of extreme forms of pluralism” (Van Huyssteen 1999:243). Postfoundationalism is based on a social constructionist approach. It encourages the possibility of various interpretations and meanings. Deconstruction of discourses and reinterpretation are therefore important in postfoundational research.

Postfoundationalism as an epistemological approach promotes interdisciplinary methodologies, drawing on various traditions to inform the interpreted experiences in a particular context. In postfoundational research all experiences are theory-laden, and all experiences are interpreted; this positions the approach in the constructionist paradigm, since it agrees with all the constructs of social constructionism. However postfoundational research also moves beyond the possibilities of contextuality, and thus requires an approach like the narrative, in which alternate stories make a new story for research. This research study applies these approaches in the field of practical theology. Religious experiences and their interpretations are relevant in the context of homeless youth in Pretoria. My strong personal convictions and theological standpoint are relevant in a postfoundational approach, which is a comprehensive approach for social or counselling research, and a relief from rampant pluralism and extreme absolutism.

1.2 THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

All expressions and discussions of reality are unavoidable ingredients of urban theology. Economic factors cannot be eliminated from such theology. Jesus proclaimed a theology that is not theoretical but relevant and necessary for the practical life of common people, especially the poor. His first speech at the Nazareth synagogue proclaims this: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Lk. 4:18). Since this research study is in the field of practical theology, it deals with the relevance and relationship of the research matter with the practical situation of theology and encourages ‘God-talk’ in the life realities of the homeless youth.

I have a formal theological background drawn from systematic theological training in a seminary, but my research is better understood from the background of different theological emphases. Each one has its particular slant but is complementary with the others. Various key terms explicitly set out my theological concern in this research.

1.2.1 Liberation

The biblical story of exodus is a story of liberation. The Israelites were in Egypt and the king wanted to oppress them lest they increased in number and became a threat to his kingdom. In the calling of Moses, at the burning bush, God reveals his great plan for liberating the people from the bondage of Pharaoh:

Then the Lord said, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the

Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. (Ex. 3:7-8)

The biblical understanding of liberation in the exodus story gives a particular perspective of God, as one who ‘observes the misery’, one who ‘hears the cry’, one who ‘knows the suffering’, and one who ‘delivers out of oppression’. “What Gustavo Gutiérrez means by theology’s making the commitment to social justice more radical and complete – or, as he can also say, “more self-critical” – is precisely its ‘framing the political commitment to liberation within the context of Christ’s gratuitous gift of total liberation” (Ogden 1992:137). This is visible in the process of hopeful counselling, which gives a meaning for the practical approach of theology and is manifested in narrative therapy.

In attempting to understand and analyse the discourses of homeless youth, I do not want to teach them about fate or God’s will for their lives. It is easy to lead them to an understanding that each of us is destined for these experiences and that God will reward us on the final day. Instead of this approach, I prefer to listen to their stories of suffering and oppression, make them aware of their own situation and help them to see possibilities of liberation. When the prophet Isaiah writes about the meaning of fasting he says

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Is. 58:6-7)

This kindness is pleasing to the Lord, not ceremonial fasting. Jesus accomplishes such care by listening to poor people, helping them in their distress and standing against social evils. This is what he declares in his first sermon in Nazareth (Lk. 4:18) and continued to express throughout his life.

In the Book of Revelation also, John pictures unlimited horizons of liberation and hope. When he narrates the magnificent eternal world he actually surpasses the finitude of human existence and the limitations of human imagination.

John knows that human language is incapable of expressing, just as human imagination is incapable of perceiving, the reality of things in the eternal world as they truly are. But rather than being paralysed by the finitude of human existence, he is set free to portray the End in a variety of this-worldly pictures used metaphorically to allow the character of the eternal world to break through. (Boring 1989:213)

By exemplifying the limitations of articulation about the things which are not seen, John's text emphasises the importance of the moving of things that are seen towards the ultimate. John thus articulates a theology of hope in the book of Revelation.

This biblical understanding of liberation and hope is the theological basis for my research, as I listen to the experiences of the homeless youth in their particular contexts and describe them using a variety of traditions. "The poignant stories of suffering and oppressed people in Africa – victims of war, refugees, displaced people, women who are discriminated against, people with AIDS, etc. – are a genuine narrative theology of liberation" (Healey & Sybertz 1996:22). Africa has the context of many stories of suffering and liberation. The stories of apartheid and freedom are typical examples of suffering and liberation. These stories can help those still oppressed to insight about their conditions and challenge them to seek continuing liberation. Knowing the stories of Africa and entering into the stories of the homeless youth helped me to see the immense potential in the human personality, in the particular context of homeless youth.

1.2.2 Wholeness

The unique features of Christianity include the identification and healing of hurts. These are grounded in a holistic vision of achieving fullness of life for all. The people of God are called to be effective channels of the healing and transforming power of God's love for all humanity. The mission of Jesus was to bring everyone unto the fullness of his personality. When he healed, his aim was not mere physical healing, but the granting of wholeness. When the sinful woman came to Jesus, bathe his feet with her tears and with alabaster oil, he forgave her sins and healed her completely. Jesus reveals that healing is for the whole body, soul and mind and that it leads to internal peace (Lk. 7:36-50). Jesus healed a demon-possessed man in the country of Gerasenes. The man was healed in body and mind and experienced complete salvation (Lk. 8:26-39). In a rapidly changing world, poverty, illiteracy or oppressive social structures continue their suffocating influence on the health status of people. Those suffocating influence make people unhealthy. Here, a wholesome healing of the community is needed.

In my research I encountered people with HIV/AIDS and other physical, mental and spiritual ailments. My approach was to see each person as a whole. Treating the symptoms is not the right way to heal, but rather entering into their world, helping them to find and make use of their own resources for healing. It is very easy to become judgemental towards people with HIV/AIDS, but not so easy to listen to their life experiences, which include the experiences of body, mind and spirit – the wholeness of the personality. When somebody becomes ill, he/she experiences emotions of helplessness, passivity and a loss of self-confidence. The judgemental attitude of others will only make the sick person more hopeless and destructive. Different types of personalities may react differently to diseases and other difficult life situations. The narrative approach helps me to listen deconstructively with the aim of complete healing. "Some may perceive the illness as a punishment for past misdeeds. Others may equate it with the loss of love from significant people in their lives. A careful and empathetic intervention

will only help them to overcome their misconceptions” (Burton & Watson 2000: 5). This point became very real to me in the experiences of the homeless youth of Pretoria.

The economic factors involved in disease and the acceleration of diseases are not negligible. For example, in the Bible when Paul commands the evil spirit to come out of the girl who earns money for her masters by prophesying and telling fortunes, their spiritual and economic exploitation of her comes to an end. The slave owners begin to make false accusations against Paul and Silas. They do not say, “Punish them because they took away our meal ticket,” but instead say, “These men are advocating customs that are against Roman law” (Ac. 16:16-23). Making people sick or allowing them to remain in this condition may be necessary for the profit-making, competitive marketing strategies of some multinationals, but this should not hinder the healing ministry or the work of recounting the economic stories behind disease. This kind of exploitation extends through various strata of society, through drugs and the habits of affluent living. “The producers of cocaine, crack and marijuana, the beer companies, the manufacturers of expensive clothes and shoes – all are examples of businesses that exploit the spiritual and emotional vulnerability of young people to increase their profits” (Sanders 1997:80). The holistic perspective of healing challenges us to move forward beyond the ministry of spiritual awakening to a ministry of realisations and empowering our youth.

1.2.3 Empowerment

In South Africa, the apartheid system conducted by a white minority oppressed the black majority both economically and politically. The effects of apartheid included disempowerment and lost confidence among black people to work for economic and political sustainability. Their colour forced black people out of common economic and political interactions. Their lives were secluded, lived in the black settlements far away from cities and industrial areas. Many were not

aware of their rights and strengths. Thus any social development was beneficial only for the minority of whites. In the post-apartheid era, empowerment of children, youth, women and the poor have become more possible, but require economic sustainability, greater health consciousness, and the creation of a peaceful life and enough employment opportunities for all South Africans. Problems like poverty, HIV/AIDS, crime, violence and rapid urbanisation all result in loss of power for the people of South Africa. These problems can be seen as demons possessing the South African community.

Biblical examples of healing clearly show Jesus' initiative to empower the distressed and marginalised. Jesus heals the demon-possessed and strengthens them to live as witnesses in their community for the transformation of society (Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 4:31-37). Most of the population was becoming poorer and poorer in Jesus' time. Many people could be categorized as economically disadvantaged because they were physically or mentally ill, handicapped, in captivity, widowed, or members of a broad group of marginalised people such as tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes etc. "The concern of Jesus for the disprivileged (*sic*) and marginalised was the first protest against those who had made God serve their own interests" (Nissen 1984:15). Jesus' strategy was to create awareness about the status of these people through meaningful interactions and dialogue. By bringing the marginalised to the centre of the community, Jesus initiated social change and empowered them for social transformation. In the healing miracle of the lady with haemorrhage for twelve years, Jesus brought that healed lady to the centre of the community to challenge the stigma of the society towards such diseases (Mk. 5:24-34; Mt. 9:20-22). In our time as in Jesus', empowering youth and women is a necessity.

"Nelson Mandela gives voice to the thoughts and aspirations of the voiceless. And in doing so, his life work continues to challenge the material conditions which keep so many people in silence. His words express what so many people feel, while his actions create the possibility for those millions of people to start

speaking for themselves” (Ramaphosa 2003:185). Mandela’s speeches as well as his silence empowered thousands of people in South Africa to equip themselves for their liberation. The people in the streets need to be empowered to realise their situation and emerge whole and strong from that experience. A homeless youth said to me that the status of “homelessness is powerlessness”. He was not making a blind statement but sharing his experience of homelessness. He expresses the discourse of power. If we only sympathise with his powerlessness we cannot help him, but if we empathise with him and ask deconstructive questions we can help him to untwist the power relations that hold him and create new possibilities for his own liberation.

1.2.4 Positive change

An attitude that promotes positive change is essential for working among young people, especially homeless youth in the streets. The young mind naturally takes to change. If young people are not listened to, and helped to describe and interpret their experiences, they can easily end up in violent situations and their lives in disaster. It is easy to blame people who respond negatively to their social situations, but the better choice, understanding and helping them, is only possible through more meaningful interventions. Pretoria Community Ministries is an organisation that works with the goal of such positive change. Their strategy involves building a good understanding of the neighbourhood. An article in the organisation’s newsletter expresses this in a voice of a homeless person: “If some people who don’t know my neighbourhood start to speak about how bad it is and how they pity me for the sacrifice I make to live here, I want to ask them: ‘Who gives you the right to speak like that about my home?’ After all, I choose to live here, perhaps because I enjoy the diversity, the vibe, the hope of Africa” (Pretoria Community Ministries News Letter 2005:1). If we blame the situation and condemn the experiences of the homeless youth we cannot redeem them. By accepting diversity in the lives of these people, we can listen to and describe their various life experiences with hope rather than prejudice.

The Bible supports this approach of interaction in the community. On his way out of Jericho Jesus encounters two blind men who seek his help, and asks them, “What do you want me to do for you?” This question helps them to see the possibility of change, shifts their focus from simple economic benefits to a positive change of life situation (Mt. 20:29-34). Before they met Jesus all they could see was the life narrative of their struggles as blind persons and beggars. Jesus helps them to tell alternative stories about their future. In the presence of a true listener and facilitator they can now create hopeful stories of their lives. The intention of the facilitator is to listen and understand the life realities inform the tellers’ perspectives. “Even though our intention is to understand people’s realities from something very close to their point of view, their realities inevitably begin to shift, at least a little, as they expand their narrative in response to our re-tellings and questions” (Freedman & Combs 2002:27). Narrative interaction thus helps bring a narrative worldview to being in which the tellers can talk about their realities. A narrative worldview gives them the chance for positive change in their perceptions and actions. Bryant L Myers calls this “transformational development”. According to Myers the term transformational development reflects ‘concern for seeking positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially and spiritually’ (1999:3).

The narrative discourse of Jesus with the Samaritan woman is another example of positive change (Jn 4:7-30). Jesus listens to her history, her present and her future through deconstructive questioning. This process leads her to new perceptions about her life narratives. When the Samaritans hear about the interactions of woman with Jesus, they become interested to meet him. They invite Jesus to stay with them. During that stay, further interaction and exchange of narratives happens. After the discourses, the Samaritans construct a new story of their lives. “They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world’”(Jn. 4:42). They construct a new story out of their

experiences and interactions. As Myers says, “the development process is a convergence of stories. The story of the development practitioner is converging with the story of the community and together they will share a new story for a while” (1999:20). In the narrative approach the story of the story teller and the story of the story re-teller come to congruence and help formulate a new hopeful story.

1.2.5 Practical theology

This research study and its paradigm fall under the vast umbrella of practical theology. Practical theology as the “doing” of theology affects both the life situations of ordinary people, and the theologian’s theoretical framework. Effective practical theology will result in a new understanding of social issues and support the emergence of new theoretical concepts.

Some of the essential characteristics of practical theology are pointed out by Woodward and Pattison (2000:13-15):

- Practical theology is a transformational activity: it transforms not only the community and its life situation, but also the theoretical concepts used to understand the experiences of that community. Practical theology always urges positive change.
- Practical theology is unsystematic: systematic theology presents theology in a systematic framework. Practical theology in a way challenges this systematic method of presenting theological concepts, which limits the possibility of more practical meanings. Practical theology is unsystematic in the sense that it continuously re-engages with the fragmented realities and changes of the contemporary world and the issues it presents. Also, much practical theology is not systematic or complete.
- Practical theology is contextual and situation-related: practical theology excludes generalization and emphasises the particularity of a specific context.

It gives priority to the contemporary context or situation in which it is involved rather than to other situations, times or places.

- Practical theology is experiential: it gives more importance to the experiences of people than to social theories. Of course the theories might have been formulated from human experiences in the past, but contemporary situations are more relevant in practical theology, which takes people's contemporary experiences seriously as data for theological reflection and analysis.
- Practical theology is interdisciplinary: as it deals with human experiences and contemporary life situations, practical theology cannot neglect or avoid the contributions and impact of other disciplines such as the social sciences. This means that practical theology uses the methods and insights of academic and other disciplines that are not overtly theological as part of its theological method.

Woodward and Pattison put forward more characteristics of practical theology, but I have chosen these five because they contribute to the postfoundational approach and seven-movement methodology which I use in this study. The other characteristics to which Woodward and Pattison refer do not contradict the selected five, but rather compliment them. All the characteristics reflect that practical theology is theology practiced for the transformation of society. As Anderson rightly says, "practical theology is a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge" (2001:22). Thus this kind of theology is made up of experiences of theology in a specific context. It promotes critical and active dialogue with other disciplines.

Practical theology, as used in this study, is praxis-oriented theology. Its approach is neither formal nor highly academic but rather spontaneous, informal and experiential. It is an organised approach, but has no preset interpretative style. "It will be argued that practical theology, as enlightened by the postfoundationalist

ideas of both Calvin Schrag and Wentzel van Huyssteen, should be developed out of a very specific and concrete moment of praxis” (Müller 2005:74). My emphasis is on the experiences of the practical life of the homeless and my experiences of being with them. My interactions with the poor people in my ministry led me to such a practical theological position. My involvement in the work of Pretoria Community Ministries and especially in their street ministry gave me more insight; it challenged my existing understanding of the practical theological approach, and caused my experience of this study to become an adventurous journey to the unknown.

1.3 RESEARCH MODEL

We must now discuss the epistemology of the research model and the philosophy behind this model. This will help us to understand the research model and how it was applied in this particular study. The social phenomenon of periodic change influences the philosophical outlook of the world and its realities. It also influences the formulation of research methodologies. Understanding the philosophical basis of these methodologies will help us to use the chosen methodology in our particular context.

1.3.1 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is characterised by pluralism. In this approach, there is no “truth”. Rather, truth has different facets and continuously changes. The post-modern approach has the advantage of seeing the various possibilities and versions of reality. At the same time, rampant pluralism and relativity can damage the very essence of postmodernism. The correct way of understanding pluralism will yield a better understanding of constructionism. “Unfortunately, many scientists and theologians have also wrongly learned to associate postmodernism only with a rampant pluralism, with a jettisoning of reason and of epistemology, and with

some form of sceptical, gloomy and negative deconstructionism” (Van Huyssteen 1998:5). Postmodernism developed as an intellectual and theoretical movement from evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of modernity. It leads us to a newer understanding of heterogeneity and otherness. It helps us see possibility in others as well as the possibility in our framework and forms of life. In a world scenario, modernity emphasised European culture as superior, and the Enlightenment as the life force for the future. A post-modern outlook questions and challenges this Euro-centrism. It opens the way for the triumphant entry of colourful cultures from all over the world into the world scenario. It is the process of going to the margins instead of bringing all to a centre.

In the postmodernist understanding, the art, creativity, economic efforts, tastes, body languages and dress habits of different cultures penetrate the boundaries of individual nations and cultures. All walls of separation among the nations and cultures have fallen down. Even art and aesthetics has been recognised as a medium of transforming the society. Art can become an alternative discourse. An example is the work among the homeless of a Polish Canadian, Krzysztof Wodiczko. He was an industrialist designer by training but has come to be known as an artist. He challenged the modernised industrialised meanings of the well established role of homeless people, the urban poor. In Philadelphia, where he worked, he assisted the homeless people in their struggle against civic authorities by designing a convertible vehicle, to be used for shelter and for storing and transporting possessions, using as material only a supermarket trolley and a rubbish bin. Wodiczko calls his work the “vehicle for the homeless”, whom he calls the “nomads of the city” (Rossouw 1995:70). Thus his art work challenges middle class notions of possessions and shelter. It is a mobile icon, helping to assert the personhood of the homeless, who so easily are seen as “status-less non-persons” as they wander about pushing a shopping cart originally designed for middle-class use.

Theology has also been radically changed by the paradigm shift of postmodernism. It has been a shock to church authorities from which many have not recovered. Theological interpretation has moved out of the strong walls of church buildings and created new waves of awareness and creativity in the streets. Postmodernity has contributed a new outlook to theological interpretation. The mission of the church has become relevant once again in the market place where common people live and share their experiences. Instead of church authorities dictating a public theology, more down-to-earth public theologies have evolved, interpreted and continuously informed by the specific context of peoples, communities and cultures.

1.3.2 Foundationalism and non-foundationalism

The foundationalist approach to theology emphasises the strong historical foundations of belief systems and theological understanding. This approach is thus in a way a modernist approach. It holds that the truth is well defined and well, as did the modernists. “Foundations theories are motivated by the idea that all justified belief derives ultimately from the evidence of our senses and that evidence comes to us in the form of beliefs” (Pollock & Cruz 1999:61). Established churches are one of the dominant factors which dictated these foundations. Questioning these established foundations tended to be punished by persecution even to martyrdom. Foundationalist approaches thus tend to deny that we can move out of our own understandings of history and tradition. Our horizons are already set and allow us to enjoy some fixed form of life. The authority of the church hierarchy and the biblical teachings of this hierarchy are considered to be unquestionable in the foundationalist approach. Church authorities have the final say in many faith issues, and the role of the common people is neglected.

Non-foundationalists reject many of the arguments that foundationalists raise, such as strong foundations. “Non-foundationalists deny that we have any of

these alleged strong foundations for our belief systems and argue instead that our beliefs all form part of groundless web of interrelated beliefs” (Van Huyssteen 1998:22). They question all kinds of foundations in faith and practice. Non-foundationalism supports the non-existence of foundations.

1.3.3 Postfoundationalism

A postfoundationalist epistemological position helps us to view cultural traditions as things we construct out of the phenomena of history. A tradition is not a set of facts and derived stories, but rather a series of new stories evolving through continuous encounter with many discourses. Such an understanding brings us beyond the limits and boundaries of our own understanding of tradition and our own forms of life. According to Van Huyssteen, the “principles and goals of postfoundationalism stand over against the alleged objectivism of foundationalism and the extreme relativism of most forms of non-foundationalism”. For him, postfoundationalism in theology and science wants to:

First, fully acknowledge contextuality and the embeddedness of both theology and all the sciences in human culture;

Second, affirm the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic values that inform our reflection about both God and our world;

Third, at the same time creatively point beyond the confines of the local community group or culture, towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation;

Fourth, find the epistemological warrant for this interdisciplinary conversation in the biological sources of human rationality. (Van Huyssteen 1998:24)

Any generalisation of issues is totally out of the question in this approach. The emphasis on the local context affirms the authenticity of the stories and allows the story tellers their own interpretations and descriptions. The influence of tradition, including religious tradition, comes to the fore in this approach. Any discourse, even “God-talk” can be relevant in narrative conversations, since a postfoundationalist approach allows true interdisciplinary conversation. Through such interdisciplinary conversation we are achieving not only better knowledge of other disciplines but also a united search for and continuous construction of new realities. This can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the stories; in other works, the postfoundationalist approach works by thickening the descriptions made by the story teller. The stories and their interpretations also always point beyond the local context. The findings of any particular postfoundationalist research study will resonate in similar contexts anywhere in the world, because of the universality of the themes involved in the life realities of human beings.

1.3.4 Methodology

For my research in the field of practical theology I follow the Seven-movement methodology of Julian Müller (2004:8-11). I chose this methodology because it yields a wide perspective of meaning through its religious and interdisciplinary approach, and because it goes beyond the local. This methodology is based on the epistemological position of postfoundationalism as derived by Calvin O’Schrag and Wentzel van Huyssteen. A postfoundationalist approach is necessary because we cannot make mere generalizations when doing research in the field of practical theology, but rather need to focus on the specific context. Postfoundationalism moves ahead of social constructionism, opening the possibilities of moving beyond the local. According to Van Huyssteen,

a postfoundationalist theology wants to make two moves, First, it fully acknowledges contextuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted

experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and nonepistemic values that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be God's presence in this world. At the same time, however, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to point creatively beyond the confines of the local community, group, or culture towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation. (1997:4)

On the basis of this approach, Müller describes the seven steps as follows (2004:8-10):

1. A specific context is described, the context, field of action or *habitus* of the particular study. The vision and goals of practical theology determine the precise focus of this step.
2. Experiences recounted according to this context are listened to and described. Knowledge of the particular context must be shared along with the personal story of the researcher, since the researcher fits him/herself into the specific context. The experience of moving from listening to describing is important here.
3. Interpretations of these experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with "co-researchers". Balancing the interpretations of the researcher with those of the co-researchers is important in this step, in which facilitating the interpretations of the co-researchers is the focus.
4. These experiences are described as they are continually informed by the various traditions of interpretation operating in the context. Exactly which traditions of interpretation need to be studied is determined by assessing which methods are used for understanding the experiences in context.

5. The religious and spiritual aspects, especially God's presence, are explored as they are understood and experienced in the specific situation. Important here is exactly how the researcher facilitates God-talk in the narrative conversations and how this influences the God-experiences of the researcher.

6. The description of experience is thickened through interdisciplinary investigation. Themes are formulated for further interdisciplinary investigations and the reason behind the process discussed. Non-theological resources are balanced with theology in this step.

7. Alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community are formulated here. Important questions here are multiple. How is the researcher to move beyond the local context without falling into the trap of "generalization"? How are the results of the research to be made relevant and available to a larger audience? These questions, which conclude the seven steps of this research project, thus also open the possibility of further research.

1.3.5 The seven movements and this study

I am researching the dominant discourses of homeless youth using a narrative approach. I believe that the seven movement methodology is particularly useful for this research, since it vividly gives a picture of the research theme with its various dimensions. A general outline of the issues to be discussed will not serve the purpose of a study like mine, which focuses on a specific context, that of the homeless youth who come to the Street Centre in Pretoria. By seeing the specific context the seven movement methodology prepares the ground for listening to the experiences of the youth in their context, to reveal stories of despair, hopelessness and powerlessness. My life world as researcher is also important and should be understood through continuous description and interpretation of experiences. As the homeless youth describe and interpret their experiences, they have the full right and freedom to tell and re-tell their stories as they wish. I

am not in a position to judge, correct or edit their descriptions and stories. The meanings constructed by their interpretations enter into dialogue with existing research knowledge. Each young person's experiences before, during and after homelessness may be different and the sharing of them will lead him/her to new understandings. The interaction of the various traditions of interpretation that influence their experiences will also be traceable. "Human service providers have long been aware that the most critical ingredient in helping another person is an understanding of where that person is coming from. At its essence, a helping relationship requires that the helper know how the other person makes meaning out of his or her world of experiences" (Walsh 1992:1). The understandings and discourses within each young person's story are guided by the discourses of wider society. Thus narrative research also facilitates interaction between the discourses of homeless youth and those of society.

We cannot avoid God in any experiences of human life. A postfoundationalist, narrative methodology can yield a thick story of the teller's understanding of God in the specific context. Facilitating God-talk and bringing the resources of spirituality into the interaction between researcher and co-researcher is a genuine experience in this methodology. "This is not a forced effort by the researcher to bring God into the present situation. It is rather an honest undertaking in order to really hear and understand the co-researchers' religious and spiritual understanding and experiences of God's presence" (Müller 2005:84, 85). Homelessness can be defined as being orphaned, and a young person who experiences it as such can feel despairing. Thus there is a place for God-talk in this counselling. Listening and initiating God-talk is an honest undertaking here. The knowledge of God as the One who can understand their life experiences can help the homeless youth to see the brighter side of their future.

Interdisciplinary investigation opens the multiple facets of reality and helps us to go beyond the local. "[W]e should be able to enter the pluralist, interdisciplinary conversation with our full personal convictions and at the same time be

theoretically empowered to step beyond the limitations and boundaries of our own contexts or forms of life” (Van Hussteen 1997:29,30). Many understand and seek interdisciplinarity for interpreting ideas, and I use it to facilitate dialogue between disciplines to construct new meanings for existing discourses.

I could even say that I am the “co-researcher” in this study and the homeless youth, my clients, the researchers. If I call the storyteller an “informant”, “subject” or “counsellor”, I minimise and regulate the possibilities of his/her role as storyteller. Of course I extract and record the meanings generated in the narrative interactions, but the storyteller is the one who interprets the story and actually reveals these meanings. The youth find the new stories. Thus as co-researcher I simply see, listen to and write down their findings for my dissertation. I do not want to re-author their stories or manipulate their meanings. However, as I write their stories and their interpretations down I also create alternate stories, so I am also part of this process of constructing new stories.

1.3.6 Methods used

In this study I use the method of interviewing to collect data. Interviewing does not always necessarily always involve approaching the client with a set of questions standardised to existing measures. In this qualitative research project I allow my co-researchers to share the stories of their experiences without my directives or corrections. This gives the research openness and a wonderful world of new meanings. “Interviews can explore areas of broad cultural consensus and people’s more personal, private and special understandings” (Arksey & Knight 1999:4).

During my interaction with the homeless community in Pretoria, I was able to listen to different stories from many different people of various cultural and social backgrounds. For the purpose of this study I chose ten young people whose stories are saturated with the dominant discourses of homelessness and its

economic factors. These dominant discourses and their economic facets are not measurable in empirical terms. They are complex concepts which have to be understood by sharing the experiences of the storyteller. The number of informants was limited to make analysing the data derived from the discourses manageable. (This is also the reason for limiting the focus of the analysis on one main theme, economic influences on homelessness and its discourses.) The ten researchers chosen are from different cultural and economic backgrounds, so that their stories cover a wide range of experiences and diverse dimensions of the reality of homelessness in Pretoria. Some of the researchers expressed their feelings through songs, dances and poems. In these interactions I am of course limited, since I can describe them in words alone in this thesis. However, I came to understand these poems and cultural art forms and their interpretations through living with and experiencing the life realities of the homeless people.

Through the counselling process each homeless youth, as researcher, searches out the realities and possibilities of his/her life. As co-researcher I carefully walk along with him/her and note down ideas relevant to the purpose of this work. I use any information only with the consent of the researcher. Overall, I try to keep in mind the basic purpose of narrative therapy as articulated by Morgan: “[T]he key question for narrative therapists becomes: how can we assist people to break from thin conclusions and to re-author new and preferred stories for their lives and relationship” (2000:15)? In my interactions with homeless youth in Pretoria I felt more comfortable with and more meaningful in this paradigm and methodology than any other approach.

1.3.7 Qualitative research

Research can use quantitative or qualitative methodologies or a combination of both. In this study I follow purely qualitative methods for collecting, describing and explaining the data. “The application of quantitative methods makes it much easier to collate data across a number of people. When individual experience is

encoded as a number rather than a word, phrase or sentence, a range of operations can be carried out which can facilitate the research process” (McLeod 1994: 45). But in a qualitative study, concepts, insights and understandings are developed from the patterns in the data, and meaning derived according to subject’s perspective. “A brief definition of qualitative research might be to view it as ‘a process of systematic inquiry into the meanings which people employ to make sense of their experience and guide their actions’” (McLeod 1994:78). Qualitative research involves illuminating and uncovering the meaning of their stories.

Sociology, psychology and other scientific disciplines have their own understandings and theories about homelessness. An approach that draws on all these fields opens up wider horizons for the youth, which will become relevant for the wider community of which these young people form a part. Openness for alternative interpretations can only increase the creativeness of my research. The process of developing a new story from the stories told and retold by the researchers will yield wisdom applicable beyond the specific context of this study. “The bold move should be taken to allow all the different stories of the research, to develop into a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community” (Müller 2005:85). The possibility of forming new stories gives meaning to the future of the existing stories and gives insight into other stories outside the specific context.

Thus since I use narrative counselling as a data gathering method, a qualitative approach is relevant and practical for my research. In the social constructionist paradigm, there is no set meaning; instead this meaning emerges through interaction and interpretation. If I prepare set questionnaires I hinder the rich counselling and meaning-making process, and restrict the different possibilities of data evolving through the counselling process. Qualitative research can be used in a social constructionist paradigm, which has the basic knowledge that “realities are socially constructed”. We construct the world through talk (stories,

conversations), through action, through systems of meaning, through memory, through the rituals and institutions that have been created, through the ways in which the world is physically and materially shaped. The role of the researcher and co-researcher is to be part of the construction of knowledge and its diverse meanings. Qualitative research must keep the human conversation open and point out that there is no one truth, thus opening up new possibilities of reality.

Qualitative research thus involves an integrated approach. It must not negate any area of knowledge but rather incorporate it, so as to elucidate new possibilities, new stories. “Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials-case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual’s lives” (Denzin & Lincoln 2006).

In recording qualitative research, some basic rules must be followed:

1. The research should be written in a form that will communicate with practitioners.
2. The report should include enough qualitative research text to allow readers to develop their own interpretation of the material.
3. The procedures through which the researcher collected and analysed the material should be clearly explained.
4. It is helpful to describe the context of the study, including not only the “pre-understandings” of the researchers but also the social and institutional environment in which the research took place.

5. At the end of the analysis or at the beginning of the discussion section of the report it is useful to include a “summary representation” of what has been found. The presence of a summary representation gives future researchers a set of preliminary hypotheses or understandings against which they can compare their own findings, thus allowing a cumulative, “joined-up” body of knowledge on the topic which can be constructed (McLeod 2001:146,147).

1.4 CHAPTER DIVISION

This table shows the chapters of this report, which are structured according to the seven movements of the chosen methodology. The table lists the movement described in each chapter and its relation to the research problem.

Chapter title	Description
1. Introduction	Introduces the narrative approach, my story, postfoundationalism and the research model which will be used
2. Discourses of homeless youth and the economic factors in these discourses	Describes the youth in their context, identifies the discourses present in their stories and the economic factors involved
3. Listening to the heard and unheard stories of inner city homeless youth in context of Pretoria	Discusses youth and their discourses in general, my relationship with the youth and the theological context of this study, and presents examples of the counselling sessions describing the stories of the homeless youth

<p>4. Describing and interpreting the stories using a narrative approach</p>	<p>Sets out the process of listening to and facilitating the story-telling of the co-researchers, the development of their discourses through various methods of interaction and my position as researcher</p>
<p>5. Description of experiences continually informed by traditions of interpretation</p>	<p>Explains the selection of traditions of interpretation and scientific response, and the analysis of experiences, in context and informed by these traditions, including the God experiences of the researcher, his facilitation of God-talk and the co-researchers' God experiences in relation with the research process</p>
<p>6. Thickening stories through interdisciplinary investigation</p>	<p>Finds relevant material about homelessness from other disciplines and puts these in dialogue with practical theology, to describe how these disciplines interact in the specific context of homelessness</p>
<p>7. Alternative interpretations pointing beyond the local community: conclusion</p>	<p>Traces the wider multiple possibilities which point beyond the local situation, discusses the relevance of the results to homeless youth around the world, develops alternative interpretations, challenges the context of homelessness in different parts of the world and reflects on the process, limitations and possibilities of this research study.</p>

1.5 MY STORY

1.5.1 Background

Relevant aspects of my own story must be mentioned to prepare the specific experiential platform for the process of listening to and re-telling the stories of the youth. I am a Christian pastor from India who belongs to the Marthoma Church of India, serving the Indian Christian Community in Southern Africa. I received my theological training in India. Before entering into the seminary I had the theological outlook of a layman, namely that sacred texts should be interpreted in relation to the daily experiences of life in the world. During my time in the seminary this understanding developed, and I thought that interpretation should reflect the original meaning of the text, and so more or less lead to a history of the text. Instead of aiming to know the meaning of the text, I concentrated on investigating the background of the formulation of the text. This is a modernist style of interpretation. After leaving the seminary, as I worked among the people, my theological understanding and convictions developed further, and I learned to prefer practical theology, which has direct relation to life and its experiences. Practical theology for me is not just doing theology in a specific context. It is seeing new meanings in the context and helping myself and others to find new ways of doing theology. According to Müller, “practical theological research is not only about description and interpretation of experiences. It is also about deconstruction and emancipation” (2004:1).

As I am from India, I am accustomed to the stories in Indian religion, epics and mythology. India is famous for its diverse stories and storytelling methods. In my school years the stories from Hindu epics and religion were part of my studies. These stories exposed me to a wide variety of images and interpretations. Almost all Indian stories lead to a moral lesson. If the moral of a particular story is not well known, the story teller has the privilege of interpreting and formulating the moral lesson. From this story world of my youth I moved on to university

studies, and then to theological studies. Before my theological studies I had the opportunity to work among children as a field staff member of the Scripture Union and Children's Special Service Mission (SU&CSSM). Here I was exposed to the telling of theological stories. As I told the biblical stories, I found that each listening child would have his/her own personal stories to tell, in relation to the story I told. Some of them shared these stories, which are full of imagination and creativity. This opened to me the wonderful world of telling and listening to stories, especially those of children.

1.5.2 Training

In the course of my theological studies I was introduced to various branches of theology such as liberation theology, Minjung theology, Dalit theology and evangelical theology. These theological approaches exposed me to a variety of theological understandings and paradigms. Although these theologies have their own fruitfulness and effects on particular contexts I prefer a more practice-oriented theology, which responds creatively and theologically to the realities of day-to-day life.

The preaching and practicing of theology always have a systematic approach. Through the human experience the theologian seeks answers for theological questions in a structured way. In my seminary studies the emphasis was on preaching and teaching of the word of God in a systematic way, but I did receive some practical training, which gave me some insight into the doing of theology. "Practical theology justifies the first part of its name by the fact that it is concerned with actions, issues, and events that are of human significance in the contemporary world" (Woodward & Pattison 2000:7). My involvement in pastoral ministry for the last 13 years has given me many eye-opening experiences, which urge the necessity of practical theology.

In pastoral ministry the pastor practices the theory learned from the seminary. Thus theoretical theological understanding is transformed through continuous

interaction with the experiences of others and listening to the stories of others. Tradition also plays an important role in this formulation process. The pastor's theology is no longer an idea, but enfolded in creative responses and interventions manifested in society. "In the post modern paradigm the relation of theory to practice is no longer linear but is interactive" (Anderson 2001:21). During pastoral training we learn theology, not because of curiosity to know about theories, but because we want to make an impact on the life situations of humanity. When we practice theology in this way, it will surely transform the community. The impact of practicing theology is noticeable and unavoidable. It is something different from social activism, which also aims for social transformation. Practical theological activity is an attempt to understand and respond to contemporary human issues from a theological perspective which is likely to affect people's views of themselves and the world, however infinitesimally. This represents a kind of transformation or change. While a social activist tries to change the society using his/her own approach, the practice and goal of a minister practicing theology is to facilitate the people's own approaches for positive change. Thus my ministry began to include helping the people on different levels, including the economic, spiritual, emotional and mental.

By a decision of my church's synod, I was transferred to a Southern African parish of our church. This parish has about 1000 members residing in four countries, namely South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. When I came here I realised that I would have to travel a lot to care for the people. I used to travel on weekends and stayed with local families, mostly Indian, and extended pastoral services in each place. But in the social life of these areas I found I had to relate with black, white, coloured and Indian communities here. As our church is in full communion with the Anglican Church, I had opportunities to attend church services and youth meetings of this denomination in various parts of Southern Africa. I also organised youth fellowships in various different universities, where I was able to listen to the stories of youth from different cultural milieus, social levels and economic strata. All these activities have

helped me to know the people of Southern Africa and gave me the chance to listen to the various cultural stories and discourses.

1.5.3 Narrative family therapy

In spite of my hectic travel schedule I view my placement as God's appointment, so that I can gain a better understanding of ministry, find out the deeper possibilities of my personality and help the people around me irrespective of caste, colour or religion. Thus I am open to different cultural stories and to hearing the multiple possibilities of life. As I live in Pretoria I decided to study further at the University of Pretoria, where I was admitted to the Masters course in practical theology and narrative family therapy. This immeasurably widened my view of the possibilities of stories and their telling. It is interesting to listen to people's stories. The post-modern counsellor is not a problem solver, but rather a facilitator who helps storytellers to tell and retell their stories, and to formulate alternate stories. This approach suited me more than the client-centred approach with which I have up till now been familiar, but I found the new approach difficult to adapt to. When I was introduced to the narrative approach by Prof. Julian Müller, this difficulty made me really uncomfortable, but he patiently listened to my stories of my experiences and helped me through proper interventions to unlearn my client-centred approach and enter the narrative paradigm. The continuous support of my fellow Masters students and of my professors, and the ample opportunities I got for counselling young people at the Street Centre, Pretoria, enabled me to complete my Masters degree successfully. This challenged me to learn more and I joined the PhD programme in pastoral family therapy, in the hope that I can contribute to the world of knowledge and ultimately benefit the community.

The world of deconstructive listening was a new experience for me. I was accustomed to the role of the professional counsellor, the person with the necessary technical know-how. The narrative approach requires that I take a

position of not knowing; the storyteller has sole authority over his/her story, and the right to re-tell it or tell alternate stories. My role is now rather to facilitate the telling of alternate stories. To achieve this I have to listen to the unique outcomes of each story. This is not always easy because this meaning does not come out directly all the time. “Unique outcomes constitute openings that, through questions and reflective discussion, can be developed into new stories” (Freedman & Combs 2002:31). Each instance of describing a positive effect of the problem on the storyteller is a potential opening into an alternate life story.

1.5.4 My position in this paradigm

Müller’s seven-movement methodology is based on a postfoundationalist approach. “The concept of postfoundationalist practical theology is in itself a rediscovery of the basic forms of practical theology. It is an effort to move beyond the modernistic boundaries of practical theology as a very formal, rationalistic venture” (Müller 2005:72). The seven-movement methodology is a harmonious mingling of a narrative approach with social constructionist postfoundationalist theory. The methodology is interdisciplinary and facilitates the emerging of meanings from the specific context by opening a wide world of knowledge and experience. It is not a formal application of theological theory, but rather an experience of discovering new realities.

At the beginning of my seminary course, I was interested in Old Testament studies. However, as I learned Hebrew and criticised texts, I realised that this type of study is useful only to help us understand biblical truth better in its original context. This work is only indirectly related to the everyday issues of life. Thus when I took a counselling course, I responded to the immediate relevance of the work. The course really triggered my passion for exploring the specific context of the community around. I started learning and practicing client-centred therapy, pioneered by Rogers and Carkhuff, which empowered me as a counsellor. In the beginning, though, I struggled to develop the counselling techniques necessary, such as empathetic listening, exploration, personalising and initiating decisions.

Rogers puts forward four preconditions for client-centred therapy (Fuster 1991:27, 28):

1. Congruence: the counsellor must be congruent, that is, his words must be in line with his feelings;
2. Acceptance: the counsellor must have a warm acceptance and esteem of the counsellee as a separate person;
3. Empathy: the counsellor must have the ability to see the counsellee and his/her world as the counsellee sees them; and
4. Communication: the counsellee must experience him/herself as fully received, that is, accepted just as he/she is by the counsellor, no matter the counsellee's feelings, silence, gestures, tears or words.

Rogers' client-centred therapy or non-directive counselling inspired many training programmes and influenced counselling practice in various countries. This counselling approach emphasises the interpersonal relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. It underlines the special gift of the counsellor to influence the counsellee for behavioural change for a better life pattern.

This approach gave me as the counsellor an influential role in the counselling process and in the counsellor-counsellee relationship. It made me feel that I knew something about counselling and about the dynamics of the human mind and thinking. Through various counselling sessions and experiences I came to be able to manage the emotional expressions of the counsellee and help him/her to explore and to evaluate experiences. In the client-centred approach the counsellor influences the thinking and behavioural patterns of the counsellee. "The thing to bear in mind is that the counsellor in all circumstances has an

impact on the counsellee. This may be either for her improvement or for her deterioration” (Fuster 1991:32).

Thus my counselling experience when I came to South Africa was exclusively in the client-centred approach. Then, as I mentioned above, I enrolled for the Masters course in narrative therapy at the University of Pretoria, and as I explained above had to make a difficult paradigm shift. Before I came to Pretoria University, I had already begun reading some post-modern literature. The basic theoretical position of postmodernism, that there is no essential truth, challenged my position as the influential counsellor. The new approach of narrative therapy, which added to my post-modern reading, showed me how counselling can be a process of co-creating meanings for life and its experiences. “Life narrative is always open-ended, always revised and expanded, and it is important that, as therapists, we recognize the relativism inherent in life narratives we hear and cocreate” (Josselson 2004:124). The meanings are co-created in relation with the other. I came to realise that my truth is different from those of others. Thus influencing the client hurts his/her truth and hinders his/her interpretation of this truth. Thus my Masters studies gently led me to the green pastures of ‘not knowing’ as a narrative counsellor.

The process of telling and re-telling stories widened my approach and led me to redefine my position; rather than a counsellor I am a co-researcher. The story teller is in the position of the author of his/her stories and the sole interpreter of these stories. I position myself as a co-researcher and accept the reality that the informant is the researcher. Epston’s model, which has the counsellor as researcher and the informant as co-researcher is not entirely different from this position; both stress that as the counsellor must be respectful and continuously facilitate new possibilities. “I chose to orient myself around the co-research metaphor both because of its beguiling familiarity and because it radically departed from conventional clinical practice. It brought together the very respectable notion of research with the rather odd idea of the co-production of

knowledge by sufferers and therapist” (Epston 1999:7). The approach I use in this thesis, then, is a meaningful combination of respectful counselling and co-creating knowledge. I step aside for the story teller by listening to him/her carefully and move with him/her to new discoveries. The twin processes of narration and listening open up the wide and deep world of expanding meanings.

1.6 CONCLUSION

Youth all over the world face the problems of unemployment and marginalisation. In the specific context of South Africa, the transitions from traditional clan-lineage systems to a modern colonial system and then to a post-apartheid system have each delivered blows to the developmental skills of the youth in South Africa. “Many African peoples, for example, have been profoundly affected by the introduction of western technology-in the view of some observers, they have been affected disastrously since old established ways of community living have been seriously damaged” (Milson 1972:21). The rapid introduction of a democratic system of government has further contributed to a destabilizing of values, which has been negatively affected the lives, attitudes and experiences of many young South African people. The transition from the old community system to an industrialised system has had various effects on the social, economic and psychological experiences of common people. With these changes and experiences have grown up a set of discourses with which people, the young among them, attempt to justify or curse their circumstances.

This research study therefore addresses relevant questions and describes the dominant discourses that can be drawn from the stories told by young homeless people. It investigates the economic factors involved in homelessness in South Africa, through the stories heard, interpreted and retold.

The first chapter introduces the narrative approach, this study's theological context and the research model and methodology. It gives structure of this report, and recounts my practical and theoretical background in practical theology.

The second chapter focuses on the particular context, generally introducing the problem of homeless youth and then exploring the South African context in detail. The process of identifying the young people's discourses and their economic elements is also discussed here.

The third chapter narrows down on the context of the homeless youth in Pretoria and the narration of their stories. These are reported using a narrative approach, and reflected upon from a position of ignorance.

The fourth chapter discusses methods of listening and their relevance. The stories of the homeless youth develop here with new insights. Various themes are identified in the discourses, which influence the experiences of the young people in their particular contexts.

The fifth chapter describes the youth's experiences as these are continually informed by traditions of interpretation. Tradition and its particular impact on the experiences and stories of the homeless youth are assessed. This includes a discussion of the importance and meaning of God-talk in narrative conversation.

The sixth chapter describes the interdisciplinary approach used to thicken the stories, and opens a dialogue between theology and other disciplines, to broaden the relevance of this study.

The final chapter opens with an inquiry into story telling and listening methods, and uses the data gathered in the narrative conversations to develop discourses and interpretations of the stories. These interpretations are not limited to a particular context, but are relevant beyond the local situation. The development

of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local context of homelessness is discussed, and the relevance of these interpretations for further research mentioned. The concluding section evaluates the researcher, methodology and results, to improve the quality of this study's findings.

Listening to the experiences of young people in the streets and describing them from a position of humble ignorance are the challenges and aims of this research. As I listened to these youth, I noticed that particular discourses are dominant in their stories. Homelessness thus functions as a specific context for these discourses, and the discourses exemplify various factors of the situation of homelessness. Particularly important are the economic factors. Thus this study, in which uses the seven movement methodology and the techniques of narrative therapy in a constructionist postfoundationalist paradigm attempts to address pertinent questions and gaps of knowledge about homelessness, its dominant discourses and the economic factors involved in it.