



## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH POSITIONING AND PRACTICAL EXECUTION

#### 2.1 RESEARCH POSITIONING WITHIN EPISTEMOLOGY

The epistemological position of the present research adopts a narrative perspective which is based on social constructionism. Moreover, as a practical theologian I adopt a post-foundationalist practical theology which has been developed from post-foundationalism for more effective collaboration within the interdisciplinary conversation which is carried out between the various social science disciplines and theological reflection from a narrative perspective.

##### 2.1.1 Narrative perspective

“A narrative is an account of events occurring over time. It is irreducibly durative”. (Bruner 1991:6) Within their ongoing life, people experience various events and interpret these in different ways. Scholars who work within the narrative perspective are interested in the experienced narratives of people and attempt to study these experienced and represented narratives of people in the interdisciplinary field. “Using the narrative metaphor leads us to think about people’s lives as stories and to work with them to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling”. (Freedman & Combs 1996: 1) In the narrative perspective, every life story of each person is taken seriously.

The narrative perspective should be understood in terms of the social constructionist



paradigm. The major debate of social science in the earlier part of the 20th century concerned the issue of 'reality'. The modernists of that period argued that "... reality is knowable - its elements and workings can be accurately and replicably discovered, described and used by human beings" (Freedman & Combs 1996:20). They identified knowledge as an objective which can be achieved within various scientific activities; thus, the individual's knowledge could be externally situated in the material world separated from ourselves. Those holding a modernist world view believe that it is possible to discover 'objective' fact which can be generated by applicable theories and that they can approach closer to an accurate understanding of the real universe through these theories (Freedman & Combs 1996:20). Therefore, modernists made efforts "... to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic" (Habermas 1981:9) for the enrichment of everyday life; as a result they regarded the natural sciences as central. (Hermans, Immink, de Jong & Van der Lans 2001:3).

'Science' emerged triumphantly as a superior form of rational thinking in the modernist world view, which caused a marginalisation of mental or spiritual life such as religious experiences as a privatised form of subjective thought (Van Huyssteen 1999:17). Reacting to this situation, postmodernists attempt to communicate with various disciplines such as science, morality, religion, and art. As suggested, social constructionism is one of the approaches in social science which have developed from a postmodernist perspective.

The ability of human beings to make absolute rules, create general systems and precise theories which are intended to measure and describe the universe and even



human beings' lives is limited. Hence, social constructionists try to concentrate on a meaning that is interpreted from experiences (Freedman and Combs 1996:21, 22), by which people mould their realities which are never fixed and/or generated, and can change and develop through the process of reinterpreting.

One of the important features of social constructionism is that "... much attention is given to the influence of the scientific dialogues on the possible meanings. The meaning of words does not exist outside of the conversations in which it functions" (Ganzevoort 2006:2). Social constructionists consequently focus on finding different meanings and effects within the interpreting of experienced stories. This work – finding meanings and effects – can open up space to think about other possibilities for a better future and for new realities for the people whose stories are investigated.

Moreover, to discover the meanings and effects of people's interpreted stories, the latter should be considered within the larger social context. Müller (1999:46) explains social constructionism as follows: "... there is no such thing as an individual story. The story of the self cannot be told without the stories of the selves of the rest. Everyone's own story has a boundary, but is also explained by the larger story within which it functions." Our life stories cannot be explained as themselves alone. The stories are formed and developed in various interactions and influences within a broader social context. Thinking about these broader social influences on our lives can offer us a deeper understanding of the problem(s) we are facing, and we can concentrate not just on these but also on the meanings and effects of these problem(s) in our lives.



Müller (1999:46) mentioned that “... we build our realities in a social constructionistic manner, and open the way for the narrative approach”. Our life stories are never narrated alone nor are they fixed in the specific individual context. Through telling and retelling our stories, we can discover a broader context which exerts various influences upon our life stories, and we can locate the method to recognize it in the narrative approach. A distinguishing character of narrative work is that we try to make visible the discourses which are supporting problematic life stories and the discourses which are usually invisible (Freedman & Combs 2002:107). When our stories are perceived in the light of broader social contexts which influence the stories in diverse ways, the invisible discourses can be revealed, which may offer an opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct stories. Through such deconstruction and reconstruction, the narrative approach seeks to identify the preferred story that satisfies people more fully in their lives. Within this narrative paradigm that is based on social constructionism, we can always cherish a hope for the future through the never-ending reinterpreting of our life experiences. I find this constantly active process of the narrative approach quite interesting. In this present study, I concentrate on the meanings that young adult Christians accorded to their stories and effects of their interpretations in a broader social context and I attempt to discover discourses that positively influence the stories of young adult believers with non-Christian family members through the process of telling and retelling those stories. I hope that, in the light of their discourses which are supporting their present stories, they can locate the marginalised discourses – “... stories that exist, but are not widely circulated or powerfully endorsed ...” (Freedman & Combs 2002:14) – for narrating more satisfying stories in their lives.



### 2.1.2 My theology

I studied social science during my B.A, and began studying theology five years after finishing the degree. In the meantime, as a Christian who has been influenced by Korean protestant theology and by the social scientific way of thinking at the same time, I tended to separate those two paradigms. Even though I live in the postmodernist world, it seemed to be an ambiguous act, or a difficult one, to adopt religious reflections/interpretations which are experienced in the presence of God within the social scientific context.

In fact my academic study of theology started in South Africa with my MPhil, and I have been studying the narrative approach in the theology faculty since my MA, but it was still difficult for me to include religious experience and/or theological hermeneutics within the collaborative work of doing narrative. Among colleagues who have studied the narrative approach with me, an issue which frequently emerged was the isolation of theology (more precisely, theological reflection and Christian beliefs) within the narrative paradigm. For us as theologians, to discover our theological identity in our collaboration with various scientific disciplines was difficult, yet, as one who works within the narrative perspective and theology at the same time, it was necessary for me to seek this identity, particularly since the present PhD thesis is focused on the faith life of young adults. Thus, to explain the rational interaction between science and theology is imperative. Moreover, I could not establish a rational theoretical foundation for an adequate interaction between theology and social science. For the work towards my PhD thesis, Prof. Müller, my supervisor, suggested adopting postfoundationalism, a paradigm which allows me to

feel comfortable in the interaction between theology and science. Thus, for the present study I would like to base my epistemological positioning on the postfoundationalism which is outlined by Van Huyssteen. Also, in terms of the practical theology paradigm, I intend to adopt the postfoundationalist practical theology which is discussed by J C Müller.

### **2.1.3 An adequate interaction between science and theology**

Van Huyssteen (1998a:5) points out that to enter the complex and multifaceted dialogue between theology and the sciences is often daunting or confusing. He attempts to explain the difficult dialogue with postmodern attitudes as follows: “Postmodernity challenges us to deal with the fact that we have clearly been robbed of general, universal, or abstract ways to talk about the relationship between religion and science today” (Van Huyssteen 1998a:2). In fact, for Christians, people have found their significance through the story of God’s creation, salvation, and especially of God’s action in the world, which has always provided cosmic and absolute truth (Van Huyssteen 1998a:2). These are diametrically opposed to the postmodernist’s request for an interaction between theology and the sciences. Rae, Regan and Stenhouse (1994:141) aver that scientists seem to believe science on account of its empirical base. They (Rae *et al.* 1994:141) explain this scientists’ overconfidence in science: “... I think that they believe in science because it articulates aspects of a conceptual web of such richness that it overpowers all resistance. They, like St Paul in Romans 8, ‘are persuaded’”.

In the world in which we live, there exist many ambiguities which cannot be



explained and/or described in any scientific way, such as privatized and specialized individual beliefs, faith and/or supernatural experiences of the human being that coexist simultaneously with aspects that can be articulated. Without affording consideration to both of these aspects in their worlds, scientists will not be easily satisfied within their own paradigms.

Conversely, currently theological reflection seems to be firmly involved in postmodernist radical pluralism. However, paradoxically, theological reflection still seems to fall into the kind of modernist dilemma in which religious faith as a privatized form of subjective experience and opinion tends to be distinguished from scientific rationality (Van Huyssteen 1998a: 10). These contradictory and discordant attitudes of theology and the sciences lead people who would like to work with an approach recognizing the sufficient and adequate interdisciplinary connection between them into a confusing and confrontational setting.

Foundationalists tend to isolate theology from interaction between science and theology. Erickson (2001: 20) interprets the definition of foundationalism as "... the knowing process, [in which] there are certain unshakeable starting points that are not justified by any other propositions". He also refers to another element of foundationalism, which "... serve[s] as justification for other beliefs which are therefore mediately justified" (Erickson 2001:20). The foundationalism of modernists indeed focuses on invariable and warranted beliefs. The foundationalist perspective could bring about the attentive development of theology, but because of this self-confidence or lack of doubt of modernists, they could "... eliminate any possibility of discovering a meaningful epistemological link between theology and

the other sciences” (Van Huyssteen 1999: 62).

In summary, nonfoundationalism presents a strong reaction against the modernist’s supreme conviction with regards to knowledge and it highlights the fact that every historical context, and every cultural or social group, “... every social or human activity could in principle function as a framework for human rationality” (Van Huyssteen 1999:63). Utilizing the reflective notion of nonfoundationalism, postmodernism can make remarkable epistemological progress. Postmodernism that is “... moving beyond the modernist dilemma of opposing objective science to radically subjective religion seems to create acceptable context for theological reflection” (Van Huyssteen 1999:68) within nonfoundationalism. Of course nonfoundationalism could offer space for theological reflections but it tends to think theologically only for confessional purposes; thus the value and/or influences of theology tend to be reduced and/or ignored (Van Huyssteen 1999:68).

Within these notions of foundationalism and nonfoundationalism, to discover an adequate meeting point between science and theology seems to be difficult. In the light of the above difficulties experienced when foundationalism and nonfoundationalism attempt to create a rational space for science and theology, postfoundationalism is proposed as one type of attempt in this regard.

#### **2.1.4 Postfoundationalism**

Van Huyssteen suggests postfoundationalism as a safe space for rational interdisciplinary work between theology and science. He especially focuses on the





request to talk meaningfully about God, and about God's action in the world through the safe arena in which theology and science can engage in true interdisciplinary reflection (Van Huyssteen 1998a:7). Thus, a major aim of the interdisciplinary reflection on postfoundationalism is to open up the possibility in which people's religious reflections can be placed on an equal level with the interaction with the sciences.

Van Huyssteen (1998a:16, 17) notes that the postmodernist's limitation of excessive over-credulity about science is just one of many ways of knowing the world. Therefore, in the postmodern philosophy of science, postmodernists should trust the local context of practice and recognize the way that tradition shapes the daily activity of the scientists in the workplace for the purposes of performing reliable interdisciplinary work between theology and science. Also, in doing theology, theologians should reconstruct theological reflection as a mode of cognition with a legitimate interdisciplinary location (Van Huyssteen 1997:12). When we relate our religious world through the mediation of interpreted experience, we can create a context for our religious awareness (Van Huyssteen 1997:21). Through this mediated structure, theological disciplines can be revealed as a form of the interpretation of experiences in their context and can make use of the possibility of interacting with science, for the purposes of true interdisciplinary work.

Van Huyssteen (1998b:219) explains the epistemological criteria within postfoundationalism:

If we relate to the past and to our traditions through interpreted



experiences, and if we accept the fact the continuity of tradition can no longer be a foundationalist premise from which we can deduce other truths, then we have arrived in the pluralist world where many interpretations of the same tradition are alive and well.

Both of them, science and theology, are closely related to the context in which we live. Within the process of the continually constructed traditions of the context, our interpretations of scientific and theological experiences may have made increasing use of rational reflections. Therefore, specific theories, absolute commitment, and natural science can be regarded as situated on the same level as legitimate interdisciplinary work when we recognise our world in terms of our interpreted experiences. Van Huyssteen (1998a:29) also insists that “Our ability to make rational judgments and share them with various and different epistemic communities ...” enables us to have a meaningful interdisciplinary communication between science and theology within the paradigm of interpreted experiences. When we accept our critical and problem-solving ability, we can trust that the active and continual interdisciplinary work of a collective process can lead us to rational reflections with which we can be satisfied. The above propositions of postfoundationalism do not compel theology to share the same assumptions with various social disciplines, but can help us to uncover a way in which “we can talk with one another and criticize our traditions while standing in the pluralist world” (Van Huyssteen 1998a:29).

### **2.1.5 Postfoundationalist practical theology**

Particularly, “Practical theology happens whenever and wherever there is a reflection



on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God.” (Müller 2005:2) We cannot detach any reflections on religious experience from doing practical theology. Christians usually reflect on their religious experiences and beliefs within the presence of God, and through such reflection they construct their religious identity. Also, the moulding of religious identity through reflection has happened in the practical context and theoretical context. Therefore, “... the primary subject matter of practical theology is some form of Christian praxis in the contemporary world” (LeRon Shults 2006:328). From their understanding of Christian praxis, practical theologians attempt to interpret it and to construct a theological framework for the purpose of providing practical models and guidelines for future conduct and reform (LeRon Shults 2006:328). Because the process which is seeking more rational understandings of Christian praxis in order to devise such models and guidelines is endless, it is always open to the future, which continually stimulates further studies.

Within our present postmodern world, interdisciplinary research has been challenged by social scientists and practical theologians. However, the most important task for researchers to function adequately at the interdisciplinary level is for them to explore how they can offer rational reasons for so doing: this can be done fairly successfully in the relationship between science and theology. On the part of the scientists, do they really advance sufficient reasons for satisfactory interdisciplinary work which includes the theological disciplines? On the part of the practical theologians, do they really want to collaborate with various disciplines, including social science, by adequate interdisciplinary means to gain a deeper understanding about Christian praxis, not merely by borrowing some scientific disciplines to explain it? Van



Huyssteen (1998b:213) has described the appropriate attitude of theologians as follows: “As theologians, we need to avoid the arrogance of prescribing overarching, basic rules for interdisciplinary dialogue”. Theologians need to offer rational reasons why their approaches are more adequate than others (LeRon Shults 2006:338). LeRon Shults (2006:341) argues that the transversal approach to interdisciplinary work in van Huyssteen’s model may furnish more satisfactory reasons to scientists and theologians. Van Huyssteen suggests that a new space for adequate communication between science and theology be created. He (van Huyssteen 1998a:7) insists that when we relate our world through interpreted experience, we can operate according to the values of both theological reflections and scientific reflections. In the new space of the world of interpreted experience, we can discover rational reasons for adequate transversal interdisciplinary work between science and theology.

During the last century practical theology struggled to gain equal status with scientific disciplines and with the other theological disciplines as well, rather than focusing on practical theological reflection. In this process, unfortunately, the contact with the informal forms of practical theological reflection became weakened (Müller 2005:2). In practical theology, which is always connected with ‘the moment of praxis (always local, embodied, and situated)’ (Müller 2005:2), theoretical context and practical context should be situated on an equal level. Furthermore, these disciplines of practical theology should interact sufficiently with scientific disciplines to arrive at meaningful interpretations/reflections. To adopt postfoundationalism while undertaking practical theology can contribute to the work of discovering meaning. I think that to concentrate on the deconstructing and reconstructing of the context on



the interdisciplinary level should be the major aim of doing a practical theology based on postfoundationalism. Thus, I will focus on the deconstructing and reconstructing process in ‘the moment of praxis’, which is never fixed or general, as regards my interaction with theological reflections/interpretations, various scientific disciplines and scientific reflections.

### **2.1.6 Postfoundationalist practical theology and narrative approach**

Müller (2005:7) observes that: “The idea of socially constructed interpretations and meaning of the social constructionism is clearly part of the postfoundationalist approach.” Religious experiences and theological reflections on these are also a part of our life which can be interpreted in the light of the narrative approach. However we, as narrative researchers, need to offer rational reasons as to how we can interpret those theological reflections within the narrative paradigm. As Van Huyssteen (1997:183) points out, narrativists need to operate “... in terms of the internal rules and procedures of the Bible’s own language games, not in terms of imported philosophical theories or social scientific laws” for the purpose of offering adequate Christian reflections. “The biblical narratives are already interpretations and already seen through the eyes of faith” (van Huyssteen 1997:185). The biblical narratives can be reflected in our present daily faith life and in our future life. Moreover, religious reflections cannot be interpreted in terms of any social science disciplines. They should be interpreted in the light of the biblical narratives in order to achieve a more adequate understanding of such reflections. Therefore, for more rational and integrated collaboration between religious reflections and other scientific disciplines within narrative approaches, to adopt postfoundationalism will be to offer a more

satisfactory space for such cooperation. Müller (2005:8) describes the value of adopting postfoundationalism in terms of the narrative approach as follows:

Postfoundationalist practical theology includes the ideas of social constructionism and the narrative approach, but provides us with the apparatus to better position ourselves within a theological world. It also helps us to better position ourselves against the relativistic tendencies in some approaches within social constructionism and the narrative approach.

## **2.2 RESEARCH POSITIONING WITHIN METHODOLOGY**

Within an epistemological positioning which combines a social constructionistic narrative approach and postfoundationalist practical theology, I would like to adopt the seven movements developed by Müller as a narrative research structure.

### **2.2.1 Narrative research**

Usually narrative research is explained under the umbrella of qualitative research, but narrative research should be distinguished from traditional approaches to qualitative research. As Müller and Schoeman (2004:7) observe, the aim of qualitative research is to describe and understand the context. In the qualitative analysis of interviews with participants (narratives), the qualitative researcher tends to fracture the text in the service of interpreting and generalizing it by discussing bits and pieces (Riessman 1993:3). Unlike the character of qualitative research, the



narrative researcher focuses on the process in order to be truthful in doing research. (Müller & Schoeman 2004:8) In the paradigm of social constructionism, the possibility of absolute truth is denied. We work with possibilities. Thus, for the narrative researcher, "... the aim of research is not to bring about change, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into those stories" (Müller *et al.* 2001:77).

Another important characteristic of narrative work is evident where the researcher focuses on seeking marginalised and unheard stories; by allowing these stories to be heard, the people who are telling them can be empowered to understand and give meaning to their situation (Müller & Schoeman 2004:8). Through the empowering process, people interpret and reinterpret their stories actively, to uncover the preferred story which more fully satisfies their life. Narrative research work is never concluded and generated by specific theory. It is always open to reinterpretations and reconstruction; thus, open-ended narrative research may act as another starting place for further research.

In the present research, I have drawn on the life stories of my co-researchers by representing and interpreting those stories within an interdisciplinary framework in order to attain a deeper understanding of the narratives of the co-researchers which is an ongoing process of telling and retelling. This writing of the present study also constitutes a further continued reconstructing process of the life stories of these co-researchers.



### **2.2.1.1 The relationship between researcher and co-researcher**

Within the narrative perspective all stories are taken seriously and regarded as important. There is no single general, powerful, or correct story in the narrative context. Thus, the stories of researcher and participant are treated as of equal value. Müller *et al.* (2001:77) comment that: "... our research must not in the first instance serve our objectives as researchers, but must be of value for those being researched". This is the reason why one terms the researcher and participants the researcher and the co-researchers. In their collaboration, stories in the context are reinterpreted.

### **2.2.1.2 The role of researcher**

In conducting interviews from a narrative perspective, the researcher listens to her or his co-researcher's stories with a willingness to consider ways of thinking that would be different from the researcher's own (Gilbert 2002:229). As a narrative researcher, it is important to have an open attitude toward listening to the stories of the co-researcher. Such an attitude may be possible when the researcher listens with enthusiasm. The process of telling and retelling might otherwise be quite long and tedious. Additionally, the researcher should not exhibit any judgement and/or prejudice in analysing and/or evaluating the stories of the co-researcher. To listen to and to understand the story in terms of the latter's way of thinking enables us to understand their narratives more fully. In the present research, I should also maintain a patient attitude to listen to my co-researchers' narratives deeply. In order to maintain this position as a narrative researcher, I should really enjoy listening to the stories of the co-researchers. I expect that this joyful and patient attitude will lead me



to a meaningful interaction with their stories.

“In the narrative approach, we look for a deeper meaning; it is not about what is said but how and why it is said” (Gilbert 2002:229). Thus, the researcher tries, in seeking meanings, to concentrate on the interpretation of the co-researcher. To attain a deeper understanding of the narratives of the co-researchers means to discover meanings and effects of those narratives. The researcher attempts to seek these factors through concentrating on the co-researcher’s interpretation.

### **2.2.2 Seven movements**

For the present research, I am going to follow the guidelines proposed by Müller. I here provide a brief description followed by these guidelines (Müller 2005:9-12).

#### **1) A specific context is described**

The context/action/field/habitués of ‘now’ (the present) are described in this stage. ‘Action’ concerns the ‘now’ of the story. During the first stage of narrative research, the ‘now’ of the story should be taken seriously. Our time is never fixed and closed. We are forming our life stories continually within many possibilities. In this phase, the present context should be described in detail. If we can bring light into the ‘now’ of our life story, it may be possible to discover discourses/traditions that influence the present interpretations/reflections.



**2) In-context experiences are listened to and described**

Within this phase, the stories of co-researchers listened to during the empirical research are described in order to gain an understanding of the effect of the in-context experiences on the narrative approach.

**3) Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with ‘co-researchers’**

The researcher in this phase does not seek data, but focuses on the meanings/interpretations offered by the co-researchers so as to develop the story sufficiently.

**4) A description of experiences as continually informed by traditions of interpretation**

The specific discourses/traditions that inform perceptions and behaviour should be described during this stage. The researcher must identify these discourses/traditions and try to gain some understanding of how current behaviour is influenced by these discourses, through looking at the various social contexts which can influence the formation of discourses.

**5) A reflection on religious and spiritual aspects, especially on God’s presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation**



The co-researchers' religious/ spiritual experiences and/or understandings, in the presence of God, can be integrated into the social constructionist process. This stage is not compulsory, but should offer a valuable contribution in order for one really to hear and to acquire deeper understandings of the co-researchers' interpretations of their events.

**6) A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation**

In this phase, interdisciplinary work should be undertaken. The researcher should listen carefully to the various disciplines, understandings, and reflections and attempt to integrate them all into one. Theological disciplines can also be integrated with other disciplines.

**7) The development of alternative interpretations, that point beyond the local community**

In this stage, a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community will be emerged and be described. If applicable, the researcher can invite all the co-researchers to engage in the creation of new meaning.



### 2.2.3 Research outline

#### **Chapter 1: RESEARCH ORIENTATION**

Within this chapter, I will describe the problems to be studied, my curiosity regarding the problems, the research gap, and some sources for understanding the context.

#### **Chapter 2: RESEARCH POSITIONING AND PRACTICAL EXECUTION**

Here the epistemology, methodology, and practical execution of this study will be considered.

#### **Chapter 3: STORIES OF YOUNG ADULT CHRISTIANS**

The specific context of this study will be discussed. Interpretations and descriptions of the context will be developed in collaboration with the co-researchers. Discourses which may influence their interpretations/reflections will be identified and described.

#### **Chapter 4: RETELLING THE STORY OF THE YOUNG ADULTS**

The specific traditions in certain communities and in faith based organisations, which inform interpretations and behaviour, will be identified through interdisciplinary collaboration. Religious and spiritual understandings of the context also operate together within this level. The alternative interpretations, which point beyond the local community, will be developed and identified in this chapter as well.



## **Chapter 5: EMPOWERING AND DREAMING THE FUTURE**

The reflections of the co-researchers on their alternative interpretations will be discussed in this chapter. Some possibilities and spaces for the future, which were created from the alternative interpretations, will be suggested as well.

## **Chapter 6: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH**

The present research process will be reflected on critically and some suggestions for further research will be presented.

### **2.2.4 The aims of the research**

These encompass:

- 1) listening to and recording the stories of young adult Christians with non-Christian family members in the Republic of Korea, using a narrative approach.
  
- 2) listening to the stories of young adults who are in conflict with their parents as regards keeping their Christian faith (focusing on unmarried young people who have not yet become independent from their parents).
  
- 3) listening to the church life stories of young adult Christians with a non-Christian family. Because of their specific faith background, sometimes they feel marginalised by other Christians in the church.



4) finding alternative stories and meanings through listening to the Christian life narratives of such adults by means of a narrative approach and interdisciplinary research, in order to assist in opening up some possibilities for the future in which these people can become more completely satisfied with their life.

## **2.3 PRACTICAL EXECUTION OF THE RESEARCH**

### **2.3.1 Why did I choose young adult Christians?**

I have met so many people who are struggling with their family because of the Christian faith. They are in conflict with their parents, husband, and relatives in keeping their beliefs. In this research I am concerned especially about young adult Christians with non-Christian family members. The young Christians whom I have chosen are over 18 years of age and unmarried.

Cigoli (2006:158) refers to 'young adulthood', that is, the ages between 18 and before 30, as a transitional epoch in which the young person moves from the totally marginalised state of adolescence to the fully acknowledged social status of adulthood. He especially focuses on the period of becoming an adult that is called 'the transition to adulthood' (Cigoli 2006:158). Arnett (2000:469) also defines the period between 18 and 25 years as an 'emerging adulthood', which is distinguished from adolescence or young adulthood. In postmodern society, the phase that represents the entry into adult roles has been postponed. Gradually, the ages of marriage and the economic independence of people have been delayed and the period of education has been extended in industrialised countries (Arnett 2000:469, 478).



Thus, the phase during which a person is not adolescent any longer, but is not yet adult, has become longer. Therefore, the importance of the emerging adulthood period in a person's life cycle has recently increased. The young adults who are co-researchers in the present study are in this phase, between 20 and 26 years old, unmarried, and still dependent upon their parents economically. All of them are university students and live with their parents. In fact, they are not adults because of their physical, emotional, and economical dependence even though they have, physically, grown up fully.

Regarding the distinctive subject of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000:471) observes that "Emerging adults do not see themselves as adolescents, but many of them also do not see themselves entirely as adults". People also do not regard emerging adults as adolescents any longer. Thus, emerging adults are asked to carry more responsibilities and obligations as adults but they cannot be guaranteed the freedom and independence of fully grown adults. They are in an ambivalent situation which is evident in their society and family as well. From this background, I expected that when the young adults convert to Christianity, since this is different from their family's religious identity, they might exhibit many different relationships with their parents and siblings in their family compared with the family relationships<sup>6</sup> of their childhood and adolescence. As Arnett (2000:469) comments, most people who are emerging adults face the major tasks of determining possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews for the purpose of entering adulthood. In regard to their worldview, they are attempting to choose their own beliefs and/or a religion as a

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<sup>6</sup> I defined the family relationships within the household in terms of people who live together in a house.



worldview during this phase. Nevertheless, as I mentioned in chapter 1, the Korean family still tends to keep its religious homogeneity within the family. Because of these disconnected expectations, misunderstandings and conflict in the family could possibly occur. I would therefore like to listen to those stories of emerging adults who are in the transitional phase in their life cycle and are also experiencing difficulties in their family because of their conversion to Christian faith where this is different from their family's religious identity.

### **2.3.2 Selecting of co-researchers**

I needed to define certain boundaries with respect to selecting co-researchers for this study. I, thus, chose young adult Christians, who are over eighteen years old, not married, and still live with their parents. Regarding their family's religious background, there were several possibilities: people who are the only Christian in their family, with non-Christian parents, who have at least one non-Christian mother or father, and so on. In order to define some kind of boundary for selecting co-researchers in detail, I decided that I wanted to listen to the voices of young adult Christians coming from various religious backgrounds in their family.

I held one preliminary interview with eight young adult Christians before beginning the research interviews. Of these, six persons who participated in the preliminary interview had various religious backgrounds in their family, while two came from a Christian family. I intended to discuss the influences of family members' religion upon the faith life of young adult Christians in this session. During the interview, we ascertained that when a lonely Christian has at least one Christian parent, mother or





father, they are able to receive some support from that Christian family member, in order to retain their faith to some extent in the family and in the church as well. This support would be advantageous for their faith life, and would lessen the problems that they face<sup>7</sup>. Participants in the preliminary interview also arrived at the conclusion that the influence of one or two Christian siblings is too weak to support the lonely Christian family member in the family and in the church. For this reason, we agreed that it was more appropriate to select only those with non-Christian parents in their household for the present study. Furthermore, we agreed to allow people with Christian siblings to be co-researchers.

After discussing several possibilities for selecting co-researchers in the preliminary interview, I selected four co-researchers from Pungsunghan Presbyterian church in Korea for the present investigation. They are 20, 24, 25 and 26 years old, not married, still live with their parents, and are cell-leaders of the church. All of their parents are non-Christian while two of them have one Christian sibling in their household. Those young adult Christians consisted of one male and three females. I hope that these criteria will enable us to listen more effectively to the stories that will be told.

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<sup>7</sup> Some people with no Christian family member in their household disagreed about selecting young believers who have at least one Christian father or mother for this research interview. Participants in the interview narrated various influences from a Christian mother or father upon individual faith life and church life as well. I will discuss these influences in detail in chapter 3.



### 2.3.3 Research methods

#### 2.3.3.1 Interviews

Narrative researchers work with stories in which people interpret their experiences of lives and accord meanings to these in their own way of thinking. To listen to those stories, the narrative interview has been selected as a major method for doing narrative research (Greenhalgh, Russell & Swinglehurst 2005:444). The major purpose of the narrative interview is to perceive the lives of the co-researchers through their own eyes. Within the interview, one can come closer to understanding the meanings that people accord to specialised events of their lives (Ely 1991:58). When the researcher is closer to such understandings, she or he can capture those stories in the interview as data and interpret them appropriately (Greenhalgh *et al.* 2005:444).

The research interviews in this study took place between January 2006 and August 2007. They were carried out once a week with the four young adult Christians described. In the initial phase of the research interviews for this study, the individual interviews were conducted mainly to listen to their interpretations of the present faith life stories and to the meanings they gave to the latter.

In the individual interview, I tried to understand the stories of the co-researchers fully and the meanings within those stories, from their way of thinking. For this understanding, open-ended questioning was commonly used. Ely (1991:66) suggests some examples for asking questions in open ways, as follows:



*What did you mean by.....?*

*You said you liked watching the joggers. Tell me a bit more about that, please.*

*You told me you love tennis. Why is that so?*

The open-ended question does not confine co-researchers' interpretations within any structured way of thinking. Using this kind of question, the researcher minimises interrupting the narrative of the co-researchers, and focuses on the responses of co-researchers in order to open up the possibilities of reinterpreting the specific event. Riessman (1993:34) notes that the open-ended question assists co-researchers to arrive at interpretations of their experiences together with the researcher, by telling a story that often links with different points in the interview.

I also requested feedback from the participants with respect to my description of the stories as narrated by them. I hope that this feedback enabled both the participants and me to understand the stories more fully and to participate more actively in the present research.

### **2.3.3.2 Web-activity**

In order to assist in developing the story that was narrated in the first stage of the individual interview, I created an internet homepage. I used it in order to listen to the different voices of co-researchers more effectively so as to develop the narrative of the context. The web-activity was carried out between July 2006 and June 2007.



In terms of this activity, I would like to collaborate with various voices for the purposes of more effective developing of narratives. Of course, the stories of the co-researchers were represented on the website, and some literature and other people's stories that were connected with our research topic were also included on it. These sources could be read by the co-researchers on the website and could provide a voice that might collaborate with the stories of the co-researchers. Furthermore, in order to add various voices to the stories of the co-researchers for the purpose of more effective collaboration in the web-activity, I also aimed to include a number of people whose family backgrounds are different from those of the co-researchers, to include various voices in our story developing process as 'different voice givers'. I hope that they will offer unique interpretations which stem from different viewpoints to those of the co-researchers' stories, so that I and the co-researchers are able to work with more various voices.

We (the co-researchers and I) discussed the selection of people who could add different voices to our stories; we thus agreed to select three 'different voice givers'. Two of them belonged to pastors with Christian family members while one was that of a young adult Christian, also with Christian family members. The co-researchers wanted to ensure a sense of security so that they could tell their stories, free from any kind of intervention<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, we determined that only the researcher, the co-

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<sup>8</sup> Co-researchers urgently requested this kind of security. They were quite sensitive to allowing people within our research boundary. They wanted to tell their stories to confidantes who understood their stories fully without any judgement or evaluation. The co-researchers seemed to think that most others insufficiently understood them. I attempted to discuss this issue with co-researchers in the interview session, and will represent it in chapter 3, 4.

researchers and the selected three ‘voice-givers’ could enter, read our stories and reflect on these on the homepage.

On this website, all of the participants (researcher, co-researchers and ‘the different voice-givers’) were able to tell and interpret their own stories, reflect on those of the other participants and ask questions in order to understand the stories more fully. Also, various interdisciplinary sources requested by the co-researchers for a deeper understanding of the context represented on the web-homepage were provided. I expected that the activity on the web-homepage would provide an exciting space for all of us to listen to the voices of each other and to reflect on the different voices more easily and fully. Through these activities, discourses/traditions might be revealed which could act as a starting point to tell alternative stories that could open up space for the future.

### **2.3.3.3 Literature study**

I studied the relevant literature in order to gain more understandings of the context so that I might more actively participate in the present research and could understand co-researchers’ interpretations of their experiences more fully.

Moreover, the reading of specialist literature assisted me in identifying some of the possible discourses operating in the lives of the young adult believers with a non-Christian family. Thus, the participants and I could consider possible discourses. After identifying the discourse in the context, the researcher would try to gain some understanding of how present behaviour is influenced by the discourse through



listening to the story-telling of the co-researcher and to the literature, the art, the culture of a certain context, religious understandings, and experiences of the presence of God (Müller 2005: 10, 11). These understandings of the discourse may develop alternative interpretations of experiences.

#### **2.3.3.4 Recording**

So as to retain the data of the interview, I recorded our conversations, and kept the information in my personal computer as an MP3 file. A number of researchers commonly use an audio recording for their interviews because it is an easier and cheaper process than video recording (Ely 1991:82). In fact, video offers greater advantages than audio. It can convey the atmosphere of the interview, and the gesture, facial expressions, tone of voices, and activity of the interviewee (Ely 1991:82). But, I have found that audio taping may have less impact on the interview environment than video taping. For both of these techniques, audio and video, it is compulsory that the researcher gain consent from participants (Marshall & Rossman 1999:148). Basing the technique on the consent of participants, one can start recording, but it is difficult for the participant to relax and to be unaware of the recording. Audio taping may reduce those influences in the interview because of its lesser intrusiveness than video. After several minutes from the beginning of the interview session, participants seemed to become unaware of the audio recorder and relaxed in order to tell their stories. Of course, if the participant asked me to turn off the recorder for a while, I did so.

The recording process provided me with some advantages with regards to the present

research. Firstly, it helped me to plan for the following interview. After finishing each of the interview sessions, I replayed the recording, which gave me further direction and enabled me to compose further questions for the next interview. Secondly, the recordings rendered the transcribing for the current undertaking easier, while also helping to recall the experience of the interview, expand on the details, and often providing a fresh perspective on the context (Ely 1991:82).

### **2.3.3.5 Transcribing**

Transcription can be understood as the “... graphic representation of selected aspects of the behaviour of individuals engaged in a conversation” (Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke 2004:248). The researcher can represent a more accurate record of the interview through transcription than using memory alone (Fraser 2004:187). The most important issue with regards to transcribing is the manner in which it allows one to draw closer to actual stories in the practical field of the interview. However, in order to represent conversations of the interview for narrative analysis more accurately, understanding the languages of co-researchers in the interview should precede transcribing the interview. When we tell the stories of our experiences, we usually use language to explain, interpret, give and develop meanings (Müller 1999: 7). Moreover, the words used in the interview can convey different and/or various meanings in different cultures (Temple & Edward 2002:5). Thus for a closer understanding of the co-researcher’s languages, the understanding of their culture should also be considered. I enjoy an advantage in this regard, because I come from the same cultural environment and speak the same language, Korean, as a first language, with the co-researchers in this study. This has helped me to understand and



interpret the conversations of the interview more fully.

The present study was conducted in Korean. I first transcribed these conversations in Korean from the data of the audio recordings. Riessman (1993:56) advises that when transcribing for the purposes of further interpretation of the conversations and narrative analysis, one should "... begin with a rough transcription, a first draft of the entire interview that gets the words and other striking features of the conversation on paper, then go back and retranscribe selected portions for detailed analysis". The process of retranscription in the text could allow some space to analyse interruptions, pauses, and other spoken features of discourse within the practical interview field (Riessman 1993:57). I further retranscribe from the first rough transcription in Korean in order to analyse those conversations more effectively, and then selected certain portions from the retranscription for presentation in the current thesis. I translated the selected portions of the said transcriptions of the interviews into English.

### **2.3.3.6 Interdisciplinary work**

Through the process of developing the stories of the co-researchers, discourses/traditions of interpretations in this context might become evident. I investigated these visible discourses/traditions of interpretations further at an interdisciplinary level. The investigation could include reading literature, conducting interviews with professionals relating to a specific context, interviews with relevant people and so on. Müller (2005:11) comments that "... the interdisciplinary movement is part and parcel of practical theology. It includes the conversation with





other theological disciplines and with other relevant disciplines”. In postfoundationalist practical theology, the theological reflection can be integrated with various scientific disciplines as a cognitive scientific form. Therefore, as a researcher, I should endeavour to be enthusiastic with regards to both the theological reflections and other scientific disciplines.

Van Huyssteen (1999:264) insisted that:

... first, we should be able to enter the pluralist, interdisciplinary conversation between disciplines and research traditions with our full personal convictions intact, while at the same time reaching beyond the strict boundaries of our own intellectual context; second, we should indeed be able to justify our choices for or against a specific research tradition in interdisciplinary conversation.

As an expert in my field, I should possess the conviction to decide which interpreted traditions need to be studied in interdisciplinary work. If I carefully concentrate on the conversations of the co-researchers and their interpretations of their experiences, I will probably unearth socially informed traditions which need to be studied further.

### **2.3.3.7 Theological reflection**

The clues to guide theological reflection could comprise comments by the participants with respect to how the young adult Christians understand their narratives in the presence of God and how they mould their relationship with God in

their faith life. To judge the religious reflections of the participants on the basis of my personal experience, or to force them to express the presence of God in their narratives, would inhibit or distort our quest to understand our stories more fully and to open up future possibilities. Thus, I will try to listen to the co-researchers' religious reflections and experiences in the presence of God and accord them the same value as other narratives, including my theological reflections.

It is quite possible that these co-researchers may be influenced by my own positive or negative experiences of the presence of God, as could be explained against a background of social constructionism. Müller (2005:11) insisted, "The researchers' own understanding of God's presence in a certain situation is also a valuable contribution they have to make". I am also one of the participants who, together, are constructing our story in the present research. In this process, we might be influenced by each other to create preferred stories for the future.

#### **2.4 Ethical considerations for the present research**

Narrative researchers work with people and their storied experiences and seek to understand and identify meanings of the stories. Working with people is the major feature of conducting narrative research. Therefore, the possible disadvantages for people (participants in the research work) should be seriously considered during the very first stage of conducting narrative research. For the sake of ethics, I would like to state several ethical principles that I considered for this study.

Smythe and Murray (2000:312) indicate that the traditional ethical principles of



qualitative research are insufficient for narrative research. For this reason they recommend several ethical principles regarding the practice of narrative research. I also took account of these with respect to the current study, and would like to present them below.

#### **2.4.1 Recruiting**

“Participants in narrative research are asked to share more personal and identity-laden data than traditional research, thus can incur particular kinds of risks” (Smythe & Murray 2000:329). This risk may be affected by the discretion of the researcher when selecting participants (Smythe & Murray 2000:329). In order to avoid this kind of risk, I organised a preliminary interview to discuss the intended research theme and, together, narrow the boundaries for selecting participants. Within this interview, people could achieve an understanding of some of the characteristics of narrative research and become aware of the detail of the research problems. Furthermore, we (I and the participants in the preliminary interview) could identify detailed criteria with regards to selecting the co-researchers of the present study. This process enabled those preliminary participants to consider this research undertaking as a collaborative study.

Moreover, Smythe and Murray (2000:329) draw attention to the participants’ ability to understand the concepts of the narrative perspective as a factor when recruiting participants. In terms of this consideration, Gottlieb and Lasser (2001:192) advise that: “Postmodern approaches focus on inequalities in our culture and teach us that no one’s voice should be privileged over that of another”. When we consider the



capacity of participants in this regard, certain voices might possess the possibility of wielding greater power over other voices, but for more effective narrative research work, participants need to be aware of the narrative intentions and characteristics. In order to avoid the abovementioned problems, I did not consider the ability of participants to understand the narrative perspective when recruiting for my narrative research interviews. Nevertheless, sometimes co-researchers who do not understand the characteristics of narrative conversations, experience a sense of hierarchy in their relationship and this feeling might have affected our research conversations. (During the first stage of these conversations, on occasions, the co-researchers waited for answers or solutions from me, as an expert and leader.) So as to minimise this sense of hierarchy, I did not provide any answers or solutions during our research conversations. I explained certain features and expectations of narrative research during the contact sessions, reflected on the previous session(s) and requested the co-researchers to re-reflect on my reflections at the beginning of each session. This activity should have assisted them to understand some of the characteristics of narrative conversations and the meaning of co-researching in the context of narrative research. Once the hierarchy has been flattened, this could facilitate active and spontaneous participation in the present research.

#### **2.4.2 Obtaining Consent**

In terms of the open-ended, unpredictable character of narrative inquiry, and the depth of self-disclosure, the researcher should continually obtain the consent of the participants (Smythe & Murray 2000:330). The authors mentioned suggest some practical methods for obtaining the consent of participants: “When individuals are



invited to participate in narrative research, do researchers clearly say, ‘I want you to tell me your story so that I can interpret it and retell it from my perspective’” (Smythe & Murray 2000:330). This comment is included in order to inform participants of the open-ended and ongoing nature of narrative research work. I will also continually bear in mind the need for the consent of participants throughout the process of the research interviews and the presentation of the research with regards to the current thesis. With respect to the consent of the participants, I applied the format of verbal convictions in order to examine their consent in terms of the depth of self-disclosure stories throughout the process of the research interview, as well as conducting informal conversations to disclose and discuss the multifarious effects of narrative work.

### **2.4.3 Interviewing**

Within the interview, in order to avoid any potential harm to participants when telling individual stories in depth, when participants paused or hesitated to tell their stories I waited for them until they were prepared to share their own stories without any judgement and/or oppression.

Moreover, participants in this study requested strict confidentiality during the research interview. They did not want to allow the inclusion of any person who had not received the permission of all the participants in the individual interviews and web-activity. Thus I gave serious consideration to the confidentiality that they requested and if somebody’s participation was needed I endeavoured to obtain agreement from all the participants.



#### **2.4.4 Analysing the data**

As I mentioned earlier, transcribing the interview data accurately is important for analysing the information in order to represent it and to reinterpret it at the interdisciplinary level. Smythe and Murray (2000:332) suggest consulting with participants in order to ensure that their transcripts accurately reflect what they say and to obtain a more accurate analysis of the data. In the individual interviews of the present study, in order to ensure the accuracy of my first transcription, which was in Korean, I suggested to the participants that they read it, but they did not want to do so. However, in the web-activity they would freely have had the opportunity to verify their story telling at any time. Participants in the web-activity were encouraged to read both their own and the stories of the other participants in order to reflect on these as well as to develop their own.

#### **2.4.5 Writing the Report**

In writing any thesis, the researcher(s) should bear in mind the impact of their interpretations on participants. The relationship between the researcher and co-researchers does not end with the completion of the practical interview (Smythe & Murray 2000:332). Participants in the interview and even the readers of the written research report might be affected by deconstructing and reconstructing their stories continually according to the interpretations of the researcher because of the nature of the ongoing narrative research work. In order to include in the research report the possible impact of the interpretations of the researcher on the participants, I



requested the participants to reflect on my alternative interpretations during the very last phase of writing this thesis. I expected that this consistent process would demonstrate to us (I, the co-researchers, and even the readers of this study) that no one possesses a privileged interpretation of any narrative (Smythe & Murray 2000:332).

Furthermore, I employ fictitious names for the narrators of the stories of the participants to protect their privacy. Because of the depth of the interview employing the narrative approach, some readers may recognise who the participants are although I do employ pseudonyms. Furthermore, I obtained permission from participants to write down their stories, but only for the purposes of my PhD thesis.

## **2.5 SUMMARY**

I have positioned myself within the social constructionist narrative perspective and postfoundationalist practical theology for the purposes of the present research. A narrative paradigm in this respect enables us to listen to the co-researchers' faith life stories more fully from their viewpoint on these and to deconstruct and reconstruct those stories for a more satisfying life in the future through collaboration with the co-researchers and various disciplines in the context. For collaboration within the field of narrative research, various disciplines and theological reflections can also be integrated to discover alternative interpretations of the co-researchers' stories against the backdrop of postfoundationalist practical theology. I intend to adopt the seven movements developed by Müller (2005:9-12) as a narrative research structure for the present research.



In terms of the present research, I focus especially on young adult Christians with non-Christian family members. These young adult Christians are over 18 years old, unmarried and still dependent upon their parents. All of them are in the period of ‘emerging adulthood’ in which they have already grown up physically but are still under the influence of their parents emotionally and financially. In this difficult situation, the co-researchers are struggling with their non-Christian family to keep their Christian faith life. To listen to their stories, I undertook individual interviews, group interviews and a web-activity.