

THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS IN THE ADOPTION TRIAD: A NARRATIVE PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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SUMMARY

This research was conducted in practical theology with a postfoundational narrative approach. Interviews were conducted with four adults who were adopted as well as their families. The names of two adult adoptees were obtained from the Christelike Maatskaplike Raad (CMR) in Pretoria, while the researcher knew the other two families in a personal capacity. Pseudonyms were used, and the families' identities and privacy were protected. The goal of the study was to determine the extent of the experience of loss in the adoption triad. The triad includes the adoptee, the adoptive parents, and the biological parents. The specific group of families in which adoptions took place were selected for research within specific parameters which will be detailed later in this dissertation. The narrative study focused on these specific families and therefore the results cannot be generalised to other families in which adoptions took place.

A narrative and qualitative research method was employed. The experience of loss was a golden thread in all the stories. The adoptive parents interviewed in this study mourned their inability to have biological children and were confronted with this loss before they decided to adopt. The adoptees wondered about the kind of people they would have been had they not been adopted. The biological mothers and fathers all mourned the loss of their babies and the years they could have shared with the children they relinquished. The theme of guilt was an omnipresent burden for the biological parents.

A theme of hope was also present in all stories. One adoptee, however, had no hope and described herself as depressed with few future prospects. The other co-researchers based their hope on their faith in God and saw a good and prosperous future ahead.

An adoption in a family is always a tragic event for at least one party in the adoption triad. The themes of loss, guilt, and hope were evident in all families interviewed. Some adoptees adapted very well and viewed the adoption as natural, while other families found it difficult to adapt.

KEYWORDS

Adoption triad

Closed adoptions

Deconstruction

Epistemology

Ghost kingdom

Hermeneutics

Narrative

Open adoptions

Pastoral

Postmodernism

Qualitative research

Social constructionism

View of God

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Andorette Marcelle Truter Hill-Jowett

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

My biological mother disappeared from my life following her divorce from my father when I was four years old and I lived with my father until I was seven years old. I then lived with my uncle (my father's brother) and his wife, who adopted me a year later. My adoptive parents loved me very much and the feeling was reciprocal. However, when I was young, I felt that being adopted was something that had to be kept secret. My adoptive parents were also very secretive about the fact that they had adopted me. I managed to block any memory of my biological mother and for several years, was led to believe that she had died. Some years later, she visited the school that I attended, which caused major consternation and disruptions in my young life. When I was 20 years old, I decided to make contact with my biological mother, mainly to enquire as to why she had given me up for adoption. Being an adoptee and experiencing such turmoil made me very aware of the unique challenges adopted children are faced with.

Only old friends and family members knew of my adoption. I rarely trusted new acquaintances enough to share this information with them. This meant that my friends from school and church knew me as the only child of my adoptive parents. It took many years to get closure on my relationships with the different family members. For many years I did not introduce my friends to my biological family, including my two half-brothers and two half-sisters. If my sister happened to be with me, I would introduce her as my friend and on many occasions I would introduce my biological father as my uncle.

This caused tension in the family for many years and through my ambivalence, my biological family suffered deep emotional pain. Finally, there was a catharsis when my first child was born and the whole family and many friends visited me in the hospital. Having both my adoptive and biological family present created a rather awkward situation but opened the way for an acceptance of the situation.

As most of my acquaintances and friends were unaware that I had been adopted, I was always included in conversations where the problematic behaviour of adopted children came under discussion. What became apparent to me was the prejudice of society at large regarding adopted children; the preconceptions that adopted children have bad genes and behavioural problems and thus would not become successful adults.

From ongoing discussions with numerous individuals, I understood that many people perceived adoptees as being children from the lower strata of society. They have been adopted because of their parents' inability to take care of them; likely due to lack of intelligence or funds, or because the parents were alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, or miscreants. The added perception is then also that the adoptee is adopted into a higher stratum of society; by charitable people with a higher income, intellect, or education who would be far more capable and suited to child-rearing. For most people this judgmental and flawed perception of adoption is accepted as fact.

However, through interviews with several welfare organisations such as the Rata Social Services and the Christelike Maatskaplike Raad (CMR), it became apparent that society's views on adoption are not supported by statistics. They reported that their case files show that the biological parents of adoptees are in many cases highly educated and/or from the higher stratum of society. Could society's perception regarding adopted children be mistaken? This gap in knowledge highlighted the need for further research.

Generated by biblical and classical traditions, the foundling story generally involves an aristocratic child abandoned or stolen in infancy, raised by substitute parents (usually of a lower class) and recovered when the grown child is of marriageable age and can restore an imperilled dynasty. *Oliver Twist* comes into his inheritance and *Snow White* marries the prince. "The recovery is patriarchal, just as when *Perdita* is discovered at the end of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, *Leontes* is redeemed, *Polixenes* saved, and two royal dynasties preserved" (Estrin 2002:277).

"Foundling stories simply cancel out the middle period of adoption. In the excitement of the traditional conclusion, those who save and heal the child are deemed irrelevant. What are the effects of long-held mythological beliefs on real-life behaviour?" (Estrin 2002:277-278). These myths label the adoptive parents as substitute parents until the "real" parents arrive and claim the adoptee. In a mythical context, the adoptive parents are either loveable bumblers (*Snow White's* seven dwarfs) or abusive pretenders (*Oliver Twist's* Fagin) (Estrin 2002:280). Adoptees who have not only lost their biological parents, but also their biological family and genealogical continuation, often feel like survivors. The secrecy around their adoption suggests a lower social background or a dark secret.

Some studies have shed light on how adoptees think society perceives them. In one such study conducted by Smith and Howard (1999), children experienced challenges with being labelled “different” or when they do not feel that they are accepted by their family or peers. Reflecting this theme are statements such as: “I’m sometimes afraid that if someone finds out you are adopted, they will make fun of you and treat you different from the others” and “worrying about fitting in” (Smith & Howard 1999:50). This fear of being rejected might influence the way an adoptee perceives his/her adoption.

In another study, adopted children reported that significant barriers in asking for help included that people misunderstand the experience of being adopted, insensitive remarks about adoption, and “fear of such reaction on the part of people as a repercussion of the social stigma that is associated with adoption” (Ryan & Nalavany 2003:49).

Smith and Howard note that the sense of stigma which is regrettably attached to their status as adopted children might decrease by being part of support groups. This might help adopted children realise that other children have similar thoughts, feelings and questions, which might enhance their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Smith & Howard 1999). The experience of loss might also come under the spotlight in such support groups.

The second most commonly identified behavioural and emotional issue adopted children are confronted with is the grief associated with the loss of their previous parents (Smith, Howard & Monroe 2000). The adoptive parents should help their adopted children to grieve the loss of their biological parents. The aforementioned studies focussed on the loss of the adoptees and society’s perception of adopted children. This study, however, aims to examine the loss in all three legs of the adoption triad.

In the process of gaining perspective on my own life narrative, the researcher needed to understand to what extent being adopted had an impact on me. Likewise, the researcher’s adoptive and biological parents also needed to make sense of their own narratives with respect to the adoption of and the relinquishment of a child. Recurring themes such as infertility of the adoptive parents, guilt of the biological parents, and the adoptee’s sense of self-worth will inevitably form part of the adoption stories. The experience of loss is common with all the people in the adoption triad. Each person in the adoption triad has their own past, present and

future; although their stories are interconnected, it is still an individual journey for each person involved.

As a church minister and counsellor, I have had the privilege of sharing in the experiences of other adopted children through stories they have shared with me. There existed a need for clarity on the influence that society's preconceptions have had on each person's story, as it seems that it is not just society's narrative in isolation, but the adopted person's interpretation of that narrative that influences their own story.

This research study was conducted in the Faculty of Practical Theology. To position myself in this study, it was important to know my background and take cognisance of my perceptions and preconceptions.

1.1 Research field

This research is founded in the postmodern approach to practical theology. This narrative method was utilised to examine the experience of loss within the adoption triad. The adoption triad consists of three legs: 1) the adult adoptee; 2) the adoptive parents; and 3) the biological parents. This study examined the stories within the adoption triad of four families. The researcher also included the narratives of an adoptive couple and an unwed biological father as their stories added further insight. The families' stories were very personal and could not be interpreted from a foundationalist approach working with absolute truths.

Postfoundationalism evolved as a third option between rationality of foundationalism and the scepticism of non-foundationalism that claims that there is absolutely no truth. In postfoundationalist practical theology, the depersonalisation of the individual is removed. The position of the ultimate knowledge in the diagnostic medical world is avoided. Foucault's (1980:80-84) writings on how modern science carries the root of dehumanisation and objectification of people, proved to be a valuable tool in this study.

According to Demasure and Müller (2006:418), "the shift of emphasis from individual to social, from subjective to discourse, which constitutes a new epistemology in the social sciences, is also part and parcel of the post-foundationalist movement".

1.2 Research problem and gap

Many researchers have done research about adoption. Most of the studies are quantitative and investigate problems such as why some adoptions fail or have a less than desirable outcomes. Lifton (1984) employed a qualitative approach and focussed on the experiences of the adoptee. Heim (1983) employed a narrative perspective to examine the loss experienced by the birth mother. Laing (1965), on the other hand, researched the divided self and the influence on sanity and mental health. No research on the experience of loss within the adoption triad was available and therefore a research gap existed warranted investigation.

1.3 Epistemology

According to Richter (2010:9), “one can explain the concept of epistemology in layman’s terms in stating that epistemology refers to how a person came to know that which he or she claims to know and regards as truthful.” Epistemology is an inquiry into the nature and scope of knowledge; what we believe and why do we believe it is true. The term “epistemology” is derived from the Greek word for “knowledge” and “understanding”, episteme, and logos, which means “word”.

The researcher’s epistemology began with cybernetics. Gregory Bateson is generally credited with the introduction of the systems metaphor through the cybernetic programme (Freedman & Combs 1996:3). In 1950, however, Norbert Weiner coined the word “cybernetics”, which entails an emerging body of knowledge about the structure and flow in information processing systems. It was a science of guidance, akin to a cycle of incremental error corrections that, successively, keeps a boat on course. First-order cybernetics is classified as a family systems paradigm.

Freedman and Combs (1996:4-5) realised that the notion of control towards a goal seemed to invite therapists to become even more controlling towards their patients. In assessing what people needed to reach goals, therapists were unwittingly deciding what was wrong with their patients.

Second-order cybernetics evolved as a response to this issue. There was the realisation that a therapist could never stand outside of their client’s family system and make “objective” adjustments and assessments. A therapist becomes part of the very system undergoing therapy,

and therefore becomes incapable of detached objectivity. Terms such as “coevolution” and “co-creation” were often used in second-order cybernetics (Freedman & Combs 1996:5).

In Milan, second-order cybernetics developed in relative isolation of mainstream North American family therapy. “Instead of looking for patterns of behaviour in families, they were looking for patterns of meaning” (Freedman & Combs 1996:6). Their interviews focused on identifying a premise or “myth” that was shaping the meaning of family members’ actions. To find the family myth, the Milan team made use of a distinctive form of questioning, which they called “circular questioning”. “Circular questions presuppose that family members are connected in ongoing relationships, that the actions and emotions of one person affects everyone else in recursive ways” (Freedman & Combs 1996:6).

Hermeneutics and the hermeneutic circle were of great importance for Heidegger’s understanding of epistemology.

As previously mentioned, the researcher positions herself epistemologically in post-foundational practical theology, as developed by Julian Müller. “For us, the aim of research is not to bring about change, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into those stories” (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:2). There is great value in the concept of the “living human web” as described by Miller-McLemore as well as the Ghost Kingdom as described by Lifton.

1.4 Methodology

Postfoundationalism evolved from the rationality of foundationalism and the scepticism of non-foundationalism that claims that there is absolutely no truth. Foucault’s (1980:80-84) writings on how modern science carries the root of dehumanisation and objectification of people have proven to be of great value.

This study was conducted in the Faculty of Practical Theology in the Department of Practical Theology. Embedded in postmodernism paradigm, the thesis employed a post-foundationalist approach with the aid of a narrative pastoral model. Gerkin (1991:13) notes that the practical theological inquiry is concerned with both a theological concern as well as practical considerations.

According to Meyer (2010:70), practical theology is:

- Serving people and their concerns in their interaction with people within a specific social and cultural setting by;
- Drawing connections and continuity between the story of the person and the biblical narrative and in a specific point in time and a place; and
- Endeavouring to close the gap between the religious experience and their day-to-day experiences and concerns. Their religious experience often does not expand beyond a Sunday sermon or intermittent religious encounters.

In this study, practical theology functions at an academic level. Interdisciplinary research in these study fields will to a large extent be based on the narrative model. Other disciplines provide different yet important points of view. Authorities from other fields of study, including psychology, social work and philosophy were interviewed and the researcher worked closely with social workers who are involved in the adoption process.

As this research is embedded in the narrative pastoral perspective, it was necessary to ascertain the meaning of pastoral and narrative therapies. According to Morgan (2000:2), narrative therapy “views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives”.

Practical theological research as part of the narrative model provides the researcher with the opportunity to listen to people’s stories. As Müller et al (2001) suggest, these people are co-researchers and are not to be objectified.

Müller (2000:8-9) describes life as a journey; when you live, you have departed and you are on your way. The narrative approach is serious about the concept of “being on our way” and uses it. In life’s journey we travel in separately in certain respects and together in other ways. We come from somewhere and thereafter we are on our way to some unknown destiny. In our stories, we attempt to reconcile our past, present, and future together. Stories are a way to give form to our lives and help us to move towards an uncertain future.

Stories are all around us. For the interested narrative researcher, stories are in abundance.

Narrative research constitutes the gathering of these research stories, the re-telling thereof, and

the re-envisioning of it (Richter 2010:53). According to Müller (2000:1), "...people find themselves to be in a crisis when their stories do not want to take any shape. The rock which is behind is too far, and the one in front is unreachable". According to Richter (2010:22), sometimes all that is needed is for someone to listen to one's story to give one the courage to move forward.

As we organise our experiences into stories, we move forward and life becomes a journey. We take our experiences and organise it into a story, which becomes a map for an unknown future (Müller 2000:10). Freedman and Combs (1996:10) find that as family members search for answers to circular questions, they come to realise how their feelings and actions influence each other. They consider the information about the family and about each other individually. This tends to soften or flatten the hierarchy between therapists and family members. It helps to focusing on flow and the change inherent in evolution, thus de-emphasising the "stuckness" which sometimes accompanies metaphors of homeostasis.

In the development of the narrative perspective in therapy, feminist family therapists draw the attention to how first- and second-order systemic explanations and interventions were based on normative models of family functioning that assumed "separate-but-equal" power for men and women. Cultural stories could restrict a person but when the therapist helps a person to see this, their stories can reveal a richer meaning (Freedman & Combs 1996:13-18).

Restrictive cultural bias can be found in the narratives of the adoption triad and therefore the researcher had to be aware of her own cultural biases throughout the study.

"Adoption is a journey that everyone wants to go smoothly. Its paths are paved with romantic fantasies of perfect families and perfect children who, having somehow found each other somewhere along the way, are believed to live happily ever after" (Lifton 2002:207). In the real world there are many obstacles along the way. This research will endeavour to share in these obstacles, trials, and triumphs that people in the adoption triad in this study experienced.

1.5 Description of specific methods

A social worker with the CMR assisted the researcher in finding families in which there were adoptions. The researcher opted to work with adult adoptees exclusively. The thickness that can be reached in narrative research is limited by the co-researcher's vocabulary. Young children

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will not be able to give a rich description of their stories because of their limited vocabulary and immaturity. The adult adoptees' stories have had more years to develop and therefore they have had more time to make sense of their life stories. The families sampled were all from a white Afrikaner background; this by necessity since the CMR is an organisation under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Church. Although there have been many changes, the church still functions as a predominantly white, Afrikaans church.

In the main interview, the researcher made use of narrative pastoral conversations. This was, however, supported with the use of feedback loops, letters, and the use of electronic media such as Skype and email correspondence. The co-researchers also gave expression to their feelings through prose and poetry, which provided thickness to the narratives.

Using a qualitative research methodology and considering that the scope of the dissertation must be limited, the researcher only included the stories of four families, an adoptive couple, and an unwed biological father. A governing factor in the selection of the co-researchers was their accessibility and availability as well as logistical considerations. The sample was too small to be fully representative of the adoption triad. However, this research was not intended to make generalised assumptions and was therefore qualitative in nature rather than quantitative. For the purpose of this qualitative study, the four families were a large enough sample.

It should also be noted that the selection set is inherently biased since many adoptees have no interest in searching for their biological parents. Of those who do, many are not prepared to participate in research. This leaves a small sample set comprised of solely those who have elected to find their birth parents and who are also prepared to partake in the research. A further requirement was that at least some of the parents still needed to be alive.

The use of language to describe the stories was also part of the selection process. Where a person is fluent in a language, the stories can be developed to derive deeper understanding. Müller (2000) states that where language is deficient, and the person expresses himself/herself poorly, the story becomes inadequate and the interpretation will be deficient. With a lack of vocabulary and good grammar, the story would remain a "thin" description with less ability to grow to a "thicker" description. The way language is used to convey stories is thus very important. As it gives meaning to our experiences (Müller 2000:13). We interpret our experiences and with the help of words and grammar, we create our story.

The enrichment of language through metaphors and symbolism is important to be able to arrive at a thicker, fuller understanding of the stories. Narrative interviews were conducted and lasted between 90 and a 120 minutes. There were between two and five interviews per co-researcher, and these were followed up by regular phone calls, letters, and emails. A copy of the final evolution of their narratives was sent to every co-researcher to ensure that they were interpreted and transcribed correctly and that they were comfortable with being a co-researcher. Written consent was also obtained to use the information provided by the co-researchers. Due to the personal and emotional nature of the interviews, letters and emails, the researcher was willing to refer any co-researcher to a psychologist or counsellor if the situation warranted it.

The body language of the co-researchers was observed, although the researcher guarded against using her subjective interpretation of the co-researchers' body language.

1.6 Reflection on ethical implications for researcher and co-researcher

According to Lifton (2002:207) it is quite common for adopted children to be denied their need to know about their biological heritage.

I have had the honour to be a small part of the adoptee's and their family's journey. Family is an integral part of the journey; both the biological family and the adoptive family. That a family shares their experience of their journey with me is a privilege. To obtain a full description of the families' stories, I needed be respectful of the feelings of the individual co-researchers and their respective families.

The co-researchers are assured of the confidentiality of their participation and the anonymity of their identity in this dissertation. By reminding myself that I am in a privileged position due to each of my co-researchers trust in me, I will avoid the possible exploitation of co-researchers by respecting their right to privacy. The ethical questionnaire has been completed and signed by me, the researcher, and a copy of this questionnaire has been given to every co-researcher. All reference to co-researchers will be anonymous and data will only be divulged with the co-researcher's explicit written consent.

I remain ever grateful towards the co-researchers for allowing me to join them on part of their life journey as an adoptee, an adoptive parent or a biological parent.

1.7 Relevancy of the study

The intention of adoption is to create a life-long, permanent connection between children and parents. But life after adoption can involve difficulties in family and child adjustment, which can lead to dissolution (Coaldey & Berrick 2008). This dissolution may be present in all three legs of the adoption triad and may include the experience of loss.

David Drustrup (2016) notes that the phrase “you’re so lucky” regularly uttered by people fails to address the difficulties adoptees may experience. This includes feelings of abandonment, shame, and loss. According to Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig (1992), adoption includes a sense of unconscious and conscious loss, ubiquitous otherness, and persistent confusion. Brodzinsky (1993:24) presents a stress-coping model which states that “children’s adjustment to adoption rests on their appraisal of, and efforts to cope with, a host of subtle, but pervasive, adoption-related losses”.

This study proposes a more integrated view of the experience of loss in the adoption triad as previous research covers this topic in a fragmented way. Many quantitative studies have been conducted on adoption, while qualitative studies are few and far between. Heim (1983) and Lifton (1979) conducted sound narrative research, but only researched a part of the topic. While the authors presented an in-depth discussion on the experiences of the adoptee, they only touched on the experiences of the parents. Heim’s (1983) focus was on the experience of the biological mother.

By involving the adoptive parents, biological parents and the adoptee, this research aims to come to a deeper understanding of the experience of loss in the various adoption stories and the way the stories unfold. With time there should arise a thicker understanding of the experiences and the stories to gain a better understanding of the experiences in the families in which there were adoptions. The researcher was interested in the adult adoptees’ view of their experience of loss due to their adoption as well as the experience of loss of both sets of parents.

It was important to consider that each party in the adoption triad would have had a unique and different experience of adoption. Individual differences in perception also mean that the players in the adoption triad would all have different feelings about adoption. Perception is reality and therefore there this research was subjective rather than objective.

To balance the researcher's own interpretation with that of the co-researchers, the researcher listened to the participants' stories intently. The researcher endeavoured to gain their participation and interaction. It was imperative to ask the co-researchers to interpret their situations and feelings, to find out what their concerns and fears were; therefore transparency was vital. Mutual trust is built on transparency and this led to a thicker description of the various adoption stories.

Notes from the sessions were kept to aid the co-researchers' interpretation of their experiences. Feedback loops assisted in the process to gain a deeper understanding and interpretation of the stories. Story development questions focused on process, detail, time, context, people, and meaning.

Once space has opened enough to reveal a unique outcome or preferred development, we can ask questions to develop the story of it.... That is, story development questions invite people to relate the process and detail of an experience and to connect it to a timeframe, to a context, and to other people. In this way an event is experienced in space and time, it is peopled, and it is re-experienced in a detailed way. It becomes a story!

(Freedman & Combs 1996:131)

The co-researchers were encouraged to keep personal diaries to add value in the process of reaching a deeper understanding. When asking about hopes, motivation and goals, people can be invited to see how specific developments could influence larger life projects. Questions should also explore values and beliefs. This can help a person to gain a better understanding of what they would desire their life to be like in the future (Freedman & Combs 1996:138).

This helped the co-researchers to find meaning and perhaps re-author their stories. The co-researchers could find meaning as their stories evolved from a thin to a thick description. Unique outcomes were reached in some instances. For the adoption triad, this added a new dimension to their story, their relationship with themselves, the relationship with each other, and with other people.

1.8 Limitations of the research

The researcher approached various welfare organisations to identify potential adoptees. The process started with the social worker contacting the adoptee. If the adoptee was interested in taking part in the research, he/she was asked to contact the biological and the adoptive parents to see whether they would also be interested in taking part. With the help of these organisations, the researcher identified adoptees and their families who were prepared to be co-researchers.

Additional co-researches were identified from the researcher's circle of friends and acquaintances. As stated, key selection criteria included excellent language and communication skills, the availability of the various people involved, logistical accessibility, and a preparedness to partake in the study over the period of the research.

The adoption triad families were selected in a manner influenced by the factors described above, therefore the results cannot be generalised to all other families in which adoptions have taken place. The aim of the research was to arrive at a better understanding of the experience of loss as perceived by each leg of the adoption triad. "In qualitative interviews you listen so as to hear the meaning of what is being said" (Rubin & Rubin 1995:7).

In time, a deeper understanding of the experiences arose which allowed the researcher to better comprehend the influence of the experiences in the families in which there were adoptions.

Certain themes seem to repeat in not only the relationships in the adoption triad but also in the relationships between the co-researchers, their adoptive siblings, and their biological siblings. This illustrates the added complexity that each leg of the triad has branches that include the extended family of siblings, cousins, grandparents, and others that all influence the narratives and influence the outcome of the stories.

The very process of selection for this study results in an inherent bias in that the selection set excludes all those adoptees who did not meet the selection criteria. This left a limited sample set comprising solely of those who were both prepared to participate in the research and who have elected to find their birth parents. For the intended research, however, the four families together with the extended branches of siblings and other relatives were deemed a large enough sample.

Telling and retelling of the stories and letters are some of the techniques that were used to arrive at a thicker description of the stories. It was important to move from limited stories to alternative

stories that could be richly described. “The problem becomes the problem and then the person’s relationship with the problem becomes the problem” (White & Epston 1990:40).

The adult adoptees’ view of their experience of loss due to their adoption together with the experience of loss of both sets of parents is what concerned the researcher. The researcher prefers the use of the term “biological”, which is used to signify sons and daughters born to their parents. Heim (1983) uses the term “biological” in preference to the phrase “their own offspring”, since adoptive parents also feel, intensely and understandably, that these adopted children are very much their own.

The adoptive siblings and biological siblings of the adoptees also provided their valuable insights as many families have more than one adopted child. The relationship between different members of the families also changed after the reunion. The researcher came to realise that society, in general, perceives reunions very positively as “the lost son or daughter who comes home”. The reality, however, is often somewhat different. The biological mother might have remarried and had other children. The sudden arrival of another sibling is thus not always welcomed or perceived as good news. Due to the scope of this study, this aspect could not however be fully explored.

One of the researcher’s aims was to reach a greater understanding of the co-researchers’ narratives. While the researcher’s own world view will always be present, the researcher endeavoured to balance her own interpretations with those of the co-researchers. This was achieved by listening to the stories and striving for participatory interaction. It was important to ask the co-researchers to interpret their situations and feelings.

Chapter 2 EPISTEMOLOGY

2.1 The premodern times

Modern times began with the Enlightenment around 1650 AD. Premodern times are defined as the period before this and from the beginning of history. This is dominated by the philosophical system of the premodern viewing of the world. People believed systems were speculative and they explained the ambiguity of life through cosmological ideas. During these times, Greek and Roman gods were considered to have had a hand in all catastrophic natural disasters, but also in positive life events (for example, fertility). Knowledge was revealed from authoritative sources. Almost all world religions were born in the premodern times. The Hebrew God, Abba, was one of the sources of the ultimate truth and was known through direct revelation. Major religious groups such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity were born and still exist to this day. The respective religious texts of the abovementioned religions were also written during this period. The leaders in these different religious groups were seen as authorities in their communities.

Greek and Roman gods were contrastedly righteous or evil gods who influenced the daily lives of people for better or worse. Most religions had righteous and evil gods. The Hebrew God, Abba, was righteous and was opposed by the evil Satan. Christianity believes in the teachings of the Old Testament and the New Testament as revealed by the Holy Spirit. The Church was an authoritative institution during premodern times. The latter stages of the Middle Ages, around the 1400s, was also known as the dark middle ages, which was ruled by superstition. People were burned alive on the stake if it was suspected that they were involved in witchcraft. Mass murders was also a frequent occurrence.

The premodern world was formed through the convergence of Greek speculative cosmological ideas and an essentially Hebraic theological cosmology...The main elements of this premodern worldview were the following: a vertical metaphysical dualism, separating the celestial from the terrestrial spheres; a language of purpose (primarily organic metaphors) to describe the things in, and the order of, the cosmos; a reliance upon tradition as a source of authoritative knowledge; a view of humanity as standing at the centre of the cosmos.

(Miller, 1989:2)

In premodern times, man evolved from being a nomadic hunter gatherer – a sufficiency economy – to the surplus economy of urban life and agrarian activity. During this time, religion moved from paganism to hierarchical polytheism. The Classical Age was the beginning of philosophy; scientific theorising, and exquisite art. During this time, however, there was also a large and unequal distribution of wealth, slavery, and city populations whose main source of survival was grain (Connelly 2008:3).

2.2 The modern times

Tilly's victory over the Bohemian revolt at White Mountain in 1620 ended the pro-reformation movement and drove the idea of a mystical reconciliation underground. Consequently, the modern era, the era of religious literalism and scientific rationalism, was born (Connelly 2008:3-4).

The modern era was preceded by Latin and as this academic language became less widespread, different languages became available in the written form. Many of these languages incorporated Latin words in their language. With the invention of the printing press, writings (including religious writings) became accessible to the layman.

The modern paradigm came with the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. Science became crucial and man rid himself of the beliefs of premodern times. The emphasis shifted to rationalism and the notion that there was a scientific way to describe all in the universe. Modern man is rather arrogant in his belief that science can solve any problem.

Oden describes modernism as “the rhetoric of unrestrained, individual freedom is a prominent earmark of the spirit of modernity. The goal of modern life is to be liberated from restrictions, constraints, traditions, and all social parenting” (Oden 1990:47).

The modern man chose materialism over mysticism and scientific proof over superstition. This is noted in all the sciences that believed that truth could be proven. It led to strides in the field of psychology as psychometry was developed where tests believed to be objective are used identify certain character traits, interests, and intellectual ability.

2.3 Postmodern perspectives

The postmodern approach was a reaction to the modern approach in the late 20th century. World War I and II were two of the most important reasons for the surgence of the postmodern approach. The disillusion with the modern era was a response to the prisoner-of-war labour camp, aerial bombing that killed indiscriminately, medical “experimentation” on helpless people, and mass genocide in gas chambers. People were disillusioned by their inability to create a better world; optimism and the belief in man’s ability began to disappear (Kruidenier 2014:8).

The postmodern approach was a complete paradigm shift. It is built on a deep-rooted mistrust of the so-called objective truths and rejects all forms of foundationalism. The postmodern approach can be seen in the arts, culture, sciences, and architecture.

There are noteworthy three processes in this move from the modern to postmodern approach:

1. The end of a single belief system; more than one truth now exists.
2. There is a world culture. Different faiths are more aware of each other as well as the moral and ethical code of others. It becomes increasingly difficult to believe that one’s faith holds the absolute truth.
3. A new polarisation developed. Conflicts about truths and values existed in the form of “culture wars” about subjects such as upbringing and moral development (Anderson, 1990:6).

According to Du Toit, realism came to the fore and a need to re-evaluate the success of the modern approach became evident. The subjective experience in the interpretation of data and knowledge made the claim to objective knowledge suspicious (Du Toit 2000:52).

Postmodernism posits that there can be no more accurate and unchallenged truths.

Postmodernism questions the previous approaches to knowledge as there is no such a thing as pure and empirical knowledge.

Postmodernism advocates for the utilisation of many ways of knowing. This includes premodern and modern, as well as intuition and other ways of knowing (Hoffman, 2008:2). This would give way to dreaming of the impossible, arising from a desire of what, given the conditions and constraints imposed by modernity, is precisely not possible, which for that reason is precisely

what we most deeply desire (Caputo & Scanlon 1999:3). Individualism as a modern concept was replaced by the incredibly important role community now plays in the postmodern world (Van Huyssteen 1997:267).

Postfoundational practical theology is a way of understanding within the broad paradigm of the hermeneutical approach. This understanding develops within and from a local context. There is a specific view of understanding which includes the local context as one of the hermeneutical circles (Demasure 2006:416-417).

Postmodernism has had a significant influence on academic fields such as theology and psychology. The move from the modern to the postmodern approach also leads to difficulties in families. It is common for one or both parents to be caught in a modern frame of mind, while the children are growing up in a postmodern paradigm. Parents can then perceive that their children have disregarded their morals and values. Conversely, the children feel that their parents are caught in a rigid belief system. This is due to individualism; an important part of the postmodern way of living. The focus is on the person as he/she frees himself/herself from the collectiveness of his/her environment (Müller 1996:57).

2.4 Deconstruction

Social construction accepts the fact that language has power, but considers this power to be dependent on, or the result of material and social constructions, institutionalised practices, and social relations. In this approach, the notion of “power” is essential. As people participate in the different discourses creating a society, power is acquired (Demasure 2006:413).

“To deconstruct is to undo, not to destroy: to undo...a tradition that has dominated Western thought since early Greek philosophy and which lies at the very roots of our common-sense understanding” (Sampson 1989:7).

According to deconstructionism, we will never really be able to understand other people. There will always be space for questioning. The world behind the text is however very important. Whenever one system or idea is replaced with another, deconstruction takes place (Kruidenier 2014:25).

Implicit in the deconstructivism approach is the analysis that questions the current evident understanding of a text in terms of hierarchical values, ideological underpinnings, presuppositions, and frames of references.

2.5 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) opines that “self-knowledge only comes through our understanding of our relation to the world and of our life with and among others in time in the world” (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:1).

At first glance, and taking superficial judgements into account, people at large erroneously deduce that adoptees and other marginalised people will become the product of what they as society believe them to be, “not good enough, different or flawed”. As a result of this attitude and expectation, they attempt to prove this preconceived idea. One of the challenges of this research is to attempt to re-align such shallow personal and societal pre-judgements with the aid of Ricoeur’s Phenomenological Anthropological Hermeneutics, which is in itself a delicate instrument, with that of the “capable human being” who is constantly discovering themselves, amid dynamic interpretations of life as their environment and time allows.

Ricoeur’s initial academic training focused on reflexive philosophy, whereby asking about when the human “I” comes to be aware of itself, its thoughts and actions; the moment we become aware of being, i.e. existing, thinking and acting, is the moment we start our experience of reflective consciousness. “This focus on reflexive consciousness always played a role in organizing Ricoeur’s thinking” (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:2).

Ricoeur’s phenomenology takes the stance, that what we can understand comes to us, through our use of language. Hereby philosophical language will always aim to use unambiguous concepts in contrast to actual language that always has polysomic definitions or translations. In the end, all language calls for interpretation. The resulting development for Ricoeur was, and he came to emphasise this in his later work, the fact that we live in time and in history. Through this focus, he concluded that the importance of language was central to his philosophy.

Ricoeur’s writings reflect a direct concern for making sense of personal identity and selfhood as something that goes beyond the epistemological subject and for ethics at both the societal and

individual and political levels. This led to his essays on the idea of the just and the possibility of mutual recognition and states of peace (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:3).

In *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950), Ricoeur posits that the voluntary and the involuntary dimensions of human existence are complementary; a never mentioned dialectical symbiosis.

This is evident through a phenomenological description of the three structures that constitute the voluntary: deciding, choosing, and moving to action. This includes the necessary consent to the involuntary as that which is acted upon through humans' embodiment – the organ of our action. We see no seamless harmony between these dimensions of what is ultimately only a finite freedom. Human beings must struggle with the tension between them, and ultimately consent to their embodied lives and the world as something they do not fully create. Human freedom is made “human” through a fragile resolution of this conflict. This provides humans with their distinctive identities both as individuals and as members of larger historical communities and ultimately, humanity (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:4).

Ricoeur examines the possibility of misusing freedom and the reality of bad will. This is the result of the uneven balance between the infiniteness of existence and the finiteness of human existence. This leads to the stance that there is disparity between the finite and the infinite in all human endeavour and existence, which influences human thinking and emotions.

Due to this disparity, humans are never entirely at one with themselves and therefore may be led astray. Humans are fallible, yet not evil, and the misuse of human freedom is neither necessary nor original, merely always possible (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:2). Furthermore, this disparity does not render human existence meaningless. Instead, it makes everyone unique and because of this uniqueness, humans can know themselves as one human being among many. “At the same time our fallibility makes it possible for us to communicate with each other through our use of the logos which seeks to transcend our localised points of view” (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:3).

There is unity among humans. One cannot exist without being part of the larger whole. Humans are part of this collective and plural unity in which the unity of destination and the different destinies are to be understood through each other (Ricoeur 1986(1960):138). Therefore, the unity

that binds people together is their shared quest for recognition and esteem. People share a genuine mutuality that expresses their shared esteem for individual worth inherent in their common humanity and uniqueness. Self-understanding only comes through signs laid down in imagination and memory.

What we say and do would be meaningless if it did not fit into some structure or pattern established by natural processes, on the one hand, and into what we say about such doings which intervene in those processes, on the other. Our words and deeds are intended to express the meaning of what exists, because they give meaning to the *status quo*. Thus, our words and deeds derive their significance from being responses to contexts not wholly of our own making. Essentially, exercising our finite freedom has efficacy and worth only by virtue of our embodiment in a cultural and natural setting that is largely not of our own making. This is a world that we seek to appropriate through our words and deeds and our use of a productive imagination (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:4).

Ricoeur regarded the conception of disproportion as a characteristic of human beings insufficient to account for the existence of evil deeds and bad will. Self-understanding is realised through “signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions” (Ricoeur 1995:16). After Ricoeur came to this insight, he came to his “linguistic turn”.

Ricoeur attempted to investigate the existence of evil in *The Symbolism of Evil*. He argues that people have tried to understand the existence of evil and their inability to make sense of it by using language from the myths and symbols that speak of the end and of original sin. In this kind of language, there is more than one meaning and therefore language always needs to be interpreted. It is philosophy’s task to understand this language and learn to think, starting from it (Ricoeur 1967:247-257).

Discourse is defined as sign systems that are used to convey meaning (Ricoeur 1967:247-257). Discourse always involves a speaker or writer and a hearer or reader, as well as something said in some situation about some reality, ultimately a world that we might inhabit. It follows that any interpretation of a form of discourse requires both the objective sort of analysis for which structuralism provides a tool and an acknowledgment that there is always a surplus of meaning that goes beyond what such objective techniques seek to explain. There is a surplus of meaning because we apply objective techniques to concepts we already understand as having a possible

meaning without fully exhausting that meaning. The meaning of acts of discourse is always open to new interpretations, particularly as time passes and the very context in which interpretation occurs changes (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:4).

Spoken language disappears swiftly. The meaning of the text becomes the object of interpretation, although this might not even be the author's intention. An interpretation needs to be re-interpreted and later re-evaluated in order for the possibilities of both internal and external critique to fall into place (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:5-6).

Ricoeur examined several forms of extended discourse. Starting with the metaphoric discourse, he regarded the live metaphor as saying more than one thing at the same time. As a product of sentences, live metaphors are not merely the result of replacing one word or phrase for another for rhetorical effect or decoration. They presuppose a "metaphoric twist". It says "is not" and "is" simultaneously, which re-describes reality (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:6).

Another form of extended discourse is narrative discourse. It gives form to physical events in the narrative form. The history of this discourse makes sense because it relates to what happened during the event. In a practical manner, it resolves the tension between the present and understanding of time as the past. This is a present with a past as well as a future, known as cosmic time (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:6-7).

We find many forms of religious discourse, as found in the Christian and Hebrew biblical tradition in laws, hymns, parables, narratives, wisdom sayings, and prophecies. These discourses "name" God and are part of poetic discourse. "...such texts are sacred to traditions, which take them as legitimating the traditions founded on these texts, something discovered through their reading and interpreting of such texts" (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:7).

The final discourse Ricoeur examined was political discourse. It is rhetorical, as it aims to persuade. Politics is about power, making decisions, and commanding others. We are now faced with a dialectic between utopia and ideology. Ideology must bridge the difference between what politicians say and "what is". Ideology further seeks to legitimise the positions of those in power. Conversely, utopian thinking imagines the world beyond or without ideology, however, utopia does not exist. To live together, humans need to employ political discourse (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2016:7).

Ricoeur realised the importance of the idea of a narrative identity and proposed a “wounded cogito” (Ricoeur 1984-1988). The self has a narrative identity and in this hermeneutic of selfhood, one is self as one is self among other selves.

2.6 Social construction

One of the implications of following the social constructionism approach would be that we must examine the stories we take for granted and rewrite our own stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:17). Social constructionism includes a wide spectrum of viewpoints. The metaphor of a family can be used to demonstrate the essence of this approach, namely: family members share some things with each other, but they may also differ on several points (Burr 2004:2).

Knowledge is not a construct with the person perceiving the situation, but rather a joint construct within the community. There is joint participation between all the parties and they construct a new reality together. Each participant therefore contributes to constructing the dialogue. Each social group will have unique ideas and beliefs. People construct their ideas together but they also differ in their ideas. This is communicated via written language and spoken language, specifically their tone of voice and body language (Kruidenier 2014:22).

A person is the product of all the relationships in which he/she has been in the past as well as the relationships he/she presently in. All these influences form a tapestry of viewpoints and affects the individual. An individual’s identity is socially formed and therefore our culture, age, and gender are part of this tapestry. “When people interact, it is rather a dance in which they are constantly moving together, subtly responding to each other’s rhythm and posture. This means that we create rather than discover ourselves and other people” (Burr 1995:28).

Burr makes a distinction between micro and macro social constructionism. Micro social constructionism involves using language between individuals, while macro social constructionism is influenced by society, social relationship, societal discourse, and power of certain individuals or groups. Language enables certain groups of people to have power over others (Burr 1995:28). Power is essential to this approach. It is acquired as people participate in the different discourses involved in creating a society. “What people say or write is part of a certain discourse and is conducive to that particular discourse” (Demasure 2006:413-414).

“In the social constructionist view, the experience of self exists in the ongoing interchange with others...the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into these narratives” (Weingarten 1991:289). People use language to tell stories from their point of view. They will justify themselves, paint a colourful and positive picture in which they can either be the hero of the story or the victim. Dry facts, often with no relation to each other, are thus linked to emote and lead to a specific conclusion about the story.

Social constructionism therefore proposes the idea of a “relational self”. Characteristics attributed to people, such as caring, friendliness and shyness, receive their meaning in relationship with others. “Identity consists of the tissue of many different threads. Every thread represents a choice from a limited number of available discourses, and a person can make a choice from these discourses (Demasure 2006:415).

2.7 Scientific discourse

The sciences come about through a process in which scientists separate the object under study from the sensory as well as the imaginary world of “myths and the social structures in which they are imbedded” (Changeux 2004:234). Scientific thought can and ought to account not only for its own occurrence but also for the occurrence of non-scientific thought, although that lacks objectivity or universality (Changeux 2004:262).

Ricoeur argues that we will never really understand ourselves without scientific knowledge. We must, however, take the human that brought the knowledge about into account. We must question scientific practices and their results, and take human vulnerability and capabilities into account (Changeux & Ricoeur 2000:125-129). As the scientist is himself/herself a human being, there will always be a subjective element to any scientific endeavour.

2.8 Wentzel van Huyssteen

Van Huyssteen questions why and how some people are committed to some form of faith amid the confusion of the postmodern age. How can people speak of a certainty of faith, deep convictions, and commitments? Can Christian theology ever really claim to join this postmodern conversation, and if it does, will it be able to maintain its identity in the conversation without retreating to an esoteric world of private, insular knowledge claims? “How does theological reflection relate to other modes of intellectual inquiry, especially to natural scientific knowledge,

which very often is accepted unchallenged as the ultimate paradigm of human rationality in our times?” (Van Huyssteen 1997:1-2).

“Can this kind of theoretical reasoning ever be considered ‘rational’ in any significant sense, particularly when compared with the apparent rigour of the natural sciences?” (Veldsman 2008:222).

“It took me a long time ... to grasp that in trying to understand what scientific reflection is about, and in trying to understand what theological reflection is about, the answer is hidden in the understanding itself” (Van Huyssteen 1999:1). Searching for the “hidden answer in the understanding itself”, Van Huyssteen is convinced that rational thought is not the domain of science to be claimed at the cost of theological reflection and religious faith (Van Huyssteen 1999:2).

Van Huyssteen opines that a postfoundationalist epistemology can negotiate the complex rational demands of the scientific and theological dialogue as it will provide a link between theology and the sciences:

- Both are embedded in human culture.
- Interpreted experience and the way tradition shapes epistemic and non-epistemic values plays a crucial role that informs our reflection about God and the world.
- It will creatively point beyond the confines of the local community, group or culture, toward plausible forms of trans-communal and interdisciplinary conversation (Van Huyssteen 1999:8-9).

2.9 Post-foundational approach

The postfoundational approach makes two assertions:

- It accepts the influences of what we believe to be the presence of God in the world and our reflection on it.

- It understands rationality in theological reflection as creatively pointing beyond the boundaries of a local group, community, or culture. This will open the interdisciplinary conversation (Van Huyssteen 1997:4).

The postmodern approach rejects foundationalism. Foundationalism is a very rigid and inflexible position to take; when other disciplines are confronted with such a rigid approach, all interdisciplinary collaboration falls away. Foundationalism is often rejected for non-foundationalism. The stance of non-foundationalism is that fundamentals and foundations do not exist and that the only truth is different opinions (Müller 2009:5).

Non-foundationalism is crucial to the resources of postmodernism. This approach is based on the premise that together our beliefs form part of a web of interrelated beliefs. In this web, every context and community has its own rationality and any social activities may function as a test case for that rationality (Van Huyssteen 1997:3).

This extreme form of pluralism prevents any fruitful interdisciplinary conversation from taking place. Ironically, we often find Fideism in non-foundationalism. This extreme belief holds a blind notion in that faith is independent and superior to reason. Fideism can turn out to be foundationalism in disguise.

In theology the basic Fideist move therefore occurs when a specific set of beliefs, in which we hold our faith commitment to God, is first isolated in a very definite protective strategy and then confused with faith in God itself. What is believed and trusted here is not so much God, but our own various sets of beliefs about God, about the nature of God, about God's action in the world, and about what we see as God's will for us and for our world.

(Van Huyssteen, 1997:3)

Religion is always interpreted through the lens of our own belief system and culture.

"...language gives us access to experience, while experience in turn predetermines linguistic expression" (Van Huyssteen 1997:22). Religious commitments and beliefs include important values and value judgments. The rationality of theological reflection is shaped by this (Van Huyssteen 1997:22).

A postfoundationalist notion points to the different and complex understandings of rationality. Natural science is the best example of rationality; this rationality cannot be applied to theology, although theology and other sciences share many characteristics with natural science.

According to Van Huyssteen (1997:6), Christian theology must depart isolating itself and only being concerned with the Church and its own community. Theology must relate plausibly and publicly to the intellectual world of today (Van Huyssteen 1997:6). Science and theology can never have certain foundations. There is the critical role of being an agent to make the best possible judgement within a specific context and for a specific community. Contextual decisions are epistemologically fallible, however, and all our knowledge is experimental and interpretive (Van Huyssteen 1997:264).

As part of the postfoundationalist movement, there is a visible shift from the individual to the social, and from the subjective to discourse (Demasure 2006:418). “Practical Theology happens whenever wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the experience of the presence of God” (Demasure 2006:416).

Opposite foundationalism and non-foundationalism, we find the postfoundational approach. We can listen to the narratives in the Bible, while taking the tradition and social context of the text into account. In the postfoundational approach, we listen to the context as well as the true-life circumstance from which these stories stem. We are confronted with practical and real situations. The researcher will work from a postfoundational approach, as this opens the door to really listen to the co-researchers’ stories. The researcher accepts that the story is much more than just a story with a beginning, middle, and end. There are multiple layers in every story, characters that feature, and characters that are omitted from the story. The question will be the reasoning behind these characters’ omission, while other characters are included.

Postfoundationalism acknowledges the role of content and the crucial role of experiences that are interpreted. Tradition also has an important role to play in giving religious values form. Postfoundationalism points beyond the restriction of local culture or community towards interdisciplinary and cross-contextual conversation (Van Huyssteen 1999:113).

A postfoundational model of rationality pays attention to the experience of knowing. This model of rationality specifically implies accountability to human experience. “And through the crucial

epistemic role of judgement in the interpretation of our experience, the difficult question whether our personal convictions, opinions and beliefs can be transformed into ‘genuine’ knowledge may finally be answered positively” (Van Huyssteen 1997:14-15).

The postfoundational approach listens to the stories of people struggling in real life situations (Demasure 2006:417). Real life situations have a time and place, and happen to a specific embodied person. This is a concrete situation, but also reaches beyond the local context.

Contextuality of language is paramount to postfoundational language. The starting point for academic reflection is a concrete, real, and definite context (Müller 2009:2). Vital to practical theology practiced by a postfoundational approach, the local contextual situation needs to be the starting point of reference (Müller 2005:3). According to De Kock (2011:8), this approach will lead to an affirmation of the pastoral cycle and will lead to identifying the pastoral concern. The pastoral concern seeks to understand and value people’s experiences in their theological reflection. It reaches out to social sciences to provide more insight on a given pastoral concern and the global nature of any reality is considered (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:137).

It has become clear that to address and take part in a dialogue with local cultural resources, to be part of the pastoral cycle, cognisance must be taken of not only the human sciences, but the natural sciences. This then becomes tailor made for each situation. For example, ecological concerns could involve sciences such as biology, geography, or chemistry. Furthermore, addressing the crisis of an individual would entail the insights of psychology, psychiatry, or sociology (Ganzevoort 2010). Political science, economics, and philosophy also have a role to play in further enquiry that may lead to knowledge and understanding.

As mentioned previously, when engaging in dialogue with other sciences, each representative of a science needs to present their unique viewpoint and prejudices. The challenge for practical theology to be part of this narrative is for it to declare its wide variety of interpretations of Scripture, history and systematic theology and other disciplines.

When working with Christian and cultural sources, one needs to take the epistemological shift into consideration, which will lead to employing a non-foundationalist approach to practical theology. The theoretical moment of pastoral reflection must result in a proposal for pastoral action, which must occur in the form of real-world intervention (De Kock 2011:9).

2.10 A critical correlational hermeneutic

A postmodern critique of the foundationalist postulation will be an important part of a postfoundationalist model of rationality and will form the way theology is viewed in the setting of interdisciplinary reflection (Van Huyssteen 1997:13). Correlational hermeneutics is positioned within the second part of the pastoral cycle, known as “pastoral reflection”. The critical correlational hermeneutics is important in a postfoundationalist approach to theology and practical theology.

Poling and Miller (1985:30-60) considered a “critical scientific approach”, which focuses on the importance of the human sciences. The authors describe the critical confessional approach, emphasising the importance of the Christian tradition. The critical correlational approach is placed in the middle and seeks to hold the above two ways in tension, while allowing for mutual engagement and change.

Correlational approaches are available in many varieties. Ballard and Pritchard describe the three principal approaches as follows: 1) as a dialogue between the situation and the theological tradition; 2) one which seeks to combine ethics with pastoral concerns (Ballard & Pritchard 2006:66); and 3) the hermeneutic approach, where it is important to interpret biblical stories, on the one hand, and one’s situation, on the other (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:139).

Browning (1991:44) identifies two poles:

- The confessional approach sees theology as a witness to the narrative structure of faith.
- The apologetic approach tries to increase the plausibility of faith to the secular mind and therefore defends faith’s rationality.

Browning believes that these two poles should not be split up (Browning 1991:44).

In correlational hermeneutics, the Christian tradition and human sciences are in creative tension. Neither one enjoys dominance over the other and each side is open to change or revision. This correlational hermeneutic will seek to hold the Christian tradition and human science in creative tension. In this critical dialogue, each side is subject to potential change or revision. A threefold dialogue comes forth once the pastoral concern becomes clear. In the Christian classics and the

human sciences, pastoral concern meets further sources for reflection. This is when the relevant insights interact and will plot a way forward (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:140).

The human experience will always be the starting point of scientific research. The challenge is that with the pastoral concern as starting point, the way in which other sciences speak in this dialogue will always be influenced. The practical theologian will have to acquaint himself with an array of knowledge about different sciences to the point that it at least paves the way to a hermeneutical conversation. This will also include the other sciences' languages. All communication, whether verbal or non-verbal, scientific or ordinary, living is influenced by the context of the speaker. All knowledge is therefore subjective as it is influenced by the background of the researcher and his religious beliefs. Despite the notorious difficulty of interdisciplinary work, it is very rewarding. The researcher was in the privileged position to have interdisciplinary input in this dissertation.

The human sciences are not neutral and the effect of the shift to non-foundationalism and postmodern critique also needs to be taken into account (Pattison 2007:21).

Macallen and Hendriks (2013:144) assert that the "...basic thesis regarding the use of the various sciences in Practical Theology has been that it ought to be conducted in light of the postfoundationalist turn, while taking into account the critique of reason and knowledge that the Enlightenment held dear" (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:144).

In the Christian classics, we see the Church's tradition and the Christian Scriptures. Macallen and Hendriks note that the subjective nature of our selection with regard to the content of these sources is inescapable. Which Scriptures? Which resources do we consult? Whose tradition? Whose interpretation of Scripture? They propose that the practical theologian ought to try to bring into account as many diverse perspectives as is possible and realistic (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:146).

The researcher regards the foundationalist approach as rigid in the belief that the Bible is a solid footing on which to base any interpretation. If any opinion can be justified from scripture, it leaves people with theology that can be disregarded, except in the instance of applied theology. The researcher agrees with Macallen and Hendriks that there is a need for chastened rationality.

“A chastened rationality means that, no matter how certain we think our interpretation of Scripture is, we remain finite human beings” (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:149).

The broken nature of Christians’ interpretations is clear through the existence of so many different Christian dominations. It would be extremely arrogant to think that Christians’ interpretations are the truth and therefore above critique. As the body of Christ, Christians are also called upon to engage with other denominations. This would lead to a fruitful discussion between the Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic Church as well as many other denominations. Christians must be deeply aware of their “glasses” or coloured perspective with which a text is viewed.

“Scripture that is read humbly, ecumenically, and in a way that seeks to cohere with other knowledge forms, will help us with the “critical side of things”. This is a significant attempt that shows Christian classics and human science engage with the two sources of correlational hermeneutics (Macallen & Hendriks 2013:152-153).

The researcher believes that hermeneutical engagement between theology and the human sciences is possible. The researchers need to come to each other in humility, especially the theologians. The consequence would be mutual learning, affirmation, and correction, meaning a non-foundationalist approach must be taken.

2.11 Transdisciplinary approach

While not a new discipline or super-discipline, transdisciplinarity is nourished by disciplinary research and in turn, disciplinary research is clarified by transdisciplinary knowledge in a new and fertile way (Nicolescu 2002:44-45).

A discipline’s boundary is clearly defined within the discipline. When scholars from different disciplines work together on a project, amalgamation may be necessary. There must be a true willingness to learn and accept changes to established boundaries as each discipline would influence the other discipline hermeneutically. To be truly transdisciplinary, people from outside academic circles should also be included. Van Huyssteen completed interdisciplinary work and got the opinions of other scholars, however he did not work on the same project with experts in other fields. Most of Van Huyssteen’s work was therefore not truly transdisciplinary.

“In transdisciplinary research the embodied contextually of knowledge is underscored, and knowledge is not separated from the knower and the knower’s context” (Loubser 2015:2). Transdisciplinary research must be aware of being part of the life-world. The sciences are abstractions of this world. Transdisciplinary research, both science and practical research, must remain aware of the fact that we are operating and living in the life-world. Scientists should accept and know that the different sciences are abstracted from the life-world. They can contribute to the common image by looking at the experiences in the life-world and discussing their interpretation thereof (Leiner & Fläming 2012:13-14).

Furthermore, transversal reasoning has non-hierarchical and different, but equally valid ways of viewing problems, specific topics, disciplines, or traditions. The different voices do not need to be opposed to one another or be in danger of absorption and assimilation but they should rather be in a dynamic interaction.

To work with a complex system, we need to make model choices. Our choices will be influenced by our academic background, the way we see the world through our coloured glasses and our personal lives. Transversal reasoning is also not confined to our verbal responses but includes non-verbal communication. Our belief systems and the background will also influence our reasoning as well as others’ understanding of our reasoning.

This self-conception always shapes what we regard as the most plausible reasons for the choices we make, the beliefs we commit ourselves to, and the actions we take. Rationality thus clearly entails an unavoidable investment in the interest of others (Van Huyssteen 1999:153).

“Knowledge includes a knower. This would entail that transdisciplinary theologians develop exceptional empathic skills” (Loubser 2015:4).

It is through empathy that our moral values and ethics emanate. We get to know the other person through their physical being and not just their minds. Empathy helps us to gain access to the processes and mental acts of others, and we discover the values and feelings of others. As we get to know others’ convictions, we start to share an intelligible and intersubjective world. We move beyond language to make sense of each other (Van Huyssteen 2011:455-456). It can be said that empathy is to see the world from another person’s point of view, with their glasses on.

Krznaric (2014) explores the habits of highly empathetic people. Their habits include stepping into other people's shoes, shifting mental frameworks, and exploring unknown cultures and lives through immersion. They develop curiosity about strangers. They listen and transport themselves into other people's minds. As vehicles for this, they immerse themselves in literature, art and film (Krznaric 2014:xv).

To have empathy with another person one must experience the other person's entire embodiment as well as their psyche. A person is made up of all his/her previous experiences, interactions with other people, and knowledge. To have genuine empathy with another person, means one will experience the same emotions as that person. This is also how actors "become" the characters they portray. They will draw from their own experience and emotions to become one with the experience and emotions of their characters. The character will in turn "touch" the actor because of what the actor now experiences.

2.12 The narrative approach

The "narrative turn" stems from the three perspectives discussed above:

- Ricoeur's hermeneutics;
- Social constructionism; and
- Postfoundationalist practical theology (Demasure 2006:410).

The narrative approach captures the story and flows from the postfoundational approach in the understanding of language as a powerful tool. The stories we tell give meaning to our lives and help to shape our personalities. Such stories are found in many forms, such as journals, letters, or family histories. Stories encapsulate yesterday, today and tomorrow. The story about the past is never entirely accurate as it is always perceived through the lens of the individual. In the present, the story is current, while tomorrow's story is still being formed. Stories are also about what a person brings with him/her, even before the stories are formed. Experiences are always subjectively interpreted, for example, how the description of the same accident differs when told by two different people. Stories can also relate the feelings of the people in those stories. Stories reveal more than actions; they tell us about every character in the story, such as their actions, emotions, plans, and whether they are, for example, a kind or an evil person. Stories are

influenced by both the teller and the listener. The listener also brings his/her own context and coloured lenses to the story.

The answer to the question: “Who is that person?” is rarely answered by the announcement of a name. “The answer is usually constructed through the telling of stories about that person” (Demasure 2006:412). “People act in the world and tell stories about it. The acting is the prefiguration, which provides the raw material for the construction of stories” (Demasure 2006:411).

Narrative therapy flows from the narrative approach and is a form of counselling that works with the concept of people as the experts on their own lives. Narrative therapy is unlike psychometry and psychotherapy as it is non-judgemental and does not classify people into pathological groups as with the DSM-V. For example, a person diagnosed by a professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist will refer to themselves as being bipolar or depressed. This ignores the richness of a person’s personality and their ability to work through their problems. Narrative therapy does not work with professionals’ intent on solving a patient’s problem.

People can live out new possibilities for relationships, new self-images and futures within new stories. Now they can find ways to let other people know about their success stories. The circulation of the individual triumphs keeps the culture growing and flowing (Freedman & Combs 1996:16-18). Stories are made up of events that link together over time and have a specific theme. The stories describe people’s perceptions of their own lives, their families, and their perceived success or failure in life, also known as identity stories. The therapist and client will work together to reach a “deep” and rich story, and from this, new themes and possibilities will become palpable.

While it may go unnoticed, the sharing of stories can build relationships, challenge ideas, enhance understanding, and provide new models for future behaviour. In telling stories, we may see some of ourselves and be influenced, little by little, by the attitudes, values, and knowledge thereof. It has been said that once we have heard a story, we can never “unhear” it (Burns 2005:4).

Narrative therapy views people as distinct from their problems. It considers their culture, gender, age as well as their abilities, values, and skills. Through this unique combination of every

individual's ability, it is believed that the person can work through their own problems. It gives the client the opportunity to relate stories about their lives. These stories will link their past with their present and their future. A person can become stuck in the story and in their lives, but by telling and re-telling a story, the person or family might be able to work through the "stuckness". Circular story-telling can also work to reach into the future.

The storying approach found that people do not tell stories only for the purpose of entertainment, but that the core of life is captured in stories. A story presents the combat between thinking, decision-making, and action. In stories, we not only discover our identity, but we also build our identity (Müller 2002:10).

Language brings people into being. It provides us with a structure that enables us to give meaning and form to our experiences. What people say and write is part of a certain discourse and is thus conducive to that discourse (Demasure 2006:414).

Narrative therapy is a non-blaming, respectful approach to community work and counselling. It sees people as the experts of their own lives. Narrative therapy views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many competencies, skills, values, beliefs, commitments, and abilities that will assist them in reducing the influence of problems in their lives (Morgan 2000:2). "Although we sometimes may have the illusion of a unique understanding of reality, it is always received" (Müller 2004:299). We can never experience the world and reality without interpretation. There is no single truth or correct understanding of reality, therefore reality is interpreted reality.

According to Müller, we understand reality as a co-product of a broader community. "The idea of socially constructed interpretations and meaning is clearly part of the postfoundationalist approach" (Müller 2004:299).

A family does not necessarily comprise a middle-class father and mother with kids. There are many kinds of families. A group of people who consider themselves a family would be a family. This might include a homosexual couple with or without kids, an orphanage where the kids take care of each other, a newly formed family, a second marriage, or a family with an adopted child or adopted children. Families are constituted by stories and are the primary group of people; the first circle of closeness. The circle provides for our need for intimacy, and the need to care for

others and to be cared for. In a narrative approach, family is seen as being constituted by stories and not through objective measurements and definitions. (Müller 2002:14-24).

As family members search for answers to circular questions, they come to realise how their feelings and actions influence each other. They consider the information about the family and about each other. These factors tend to soften or flatten the hierarchy between therapists and family members. They helped with the focus on flow and change inherent in evolution, thus de-emphasising “stuckness” that sometimes goes accompanies metaphors of homeostasis (Freedman & Combs 1996:10).

With all these different kinds of family structures, it is important that the researcher stays aware of her own pre-conceived ideas of what a family is. To come up with a deeper description of the families’ stories, the researcher must be respectful of each individual co-researcher and of each family. In the research of families in the adoption triad, family plays a cardinal role.

The researcher will have the privilege to be part of the adoptee’s and their family’s journey. The biological as well as the adoptive family is very important in the journey and it is crucial to come to a well-rounded description of both families’ stories.

Müller describes life as a journey. When you live, you have departed. You are on your way (Müller 2000:8-9). The narrative approach is serious about “being on our way”. In life’s journey, we travel separately and together. We come from somewhere and are on our way to some unknown destiny. In our stories, we link our past, present, and future together. Stories are a way to give form to our lives as we attempt to get a handhold which can help us move more easily toward our uncertain future.

Stories can help us connect with the past and reach toward the future. We organise our experiences through stories as we attempt to find our path to the future. We take our experiences and organise it into a story, which become a map for the unknown future (Müller 2000:10).

The sharing of stories can build relationships and friendships. It can influence future behaviour, the way we see the world, and even transform our lives. Stories are an integral part of life. Through time stories have been a part of human life, how we learn, our values, and culture. Irrespective of religion, language, sex, race or age, stories will always be an important part of our lives. Our religion, language, culture, and science exists because of stories (Burns 2005:5).

Stories can be found everywhere. The narrative researcher can gather these stories and tell and re-tell these stories his/her the co-researcher. The stories related by different people in the adoption triad will lead to colourful descriptions of the triad's story and every individual in the triad.

One cannot get to know another person by merely knowing a few facts such as their characteristics and career. It must fit into a life story before we will be able to see the uniqueness of the person. Practical theological anthropology has to do with a person's life story; a person with a past, a present, and a future. Therefore, practical theological anthropology is rather the narrative of a specific case, a real person or family and is not philosophical speculation about humankind in general (Müller 1996:23).

To have meaning, one must reconstruct one's life story so that it makes sense. This newfound meaning is always challenged by new situations and must be renegotiated from the core narrative and the self. The search for meaning can best be reached through working with stories.

When communicative actions are studied with a definitive narrative perspective, the approach is inclusive and refers to the total eco system within the communication process. The narrative is a perspective where we place cultural and individual experience in an understandable framework (Parè 1995:7). Narrative practical theology is therefore an ongoing hermeneutical process within the immediate storied context of ministry. The intention of that process is the transformation of the human story, both individual and corporate, in the ways that open the future of the story to creative possibilities (Gerkin 1986:59). Gerkin calls this the narrative hermeneutic theory (Gerkin 1986:59).

Müller defines practical theology as the systematic structural, hermeneutic process through which it is endeavoured to enlighten human actions that have relevance to stories in the Christian faith (Müller 1996:7). A hermeneutical pastoral process as one that brings people and stories together to bring the unknown horizons to the forefront and create new realities. This can be frightening, but also exciting as real communication demands that one moves beyond one's boundaries (Müller 1996:12).

A person cannot be captured in a single thesis but must be described in terms of a thesis and an anti-thesis. We are created to the likeness of God but are also the heirs of those whom were

banned from paradise (Winkler 1993:5). The adopted human is God's acceptance of the fallen man, which ties in with the reformation point of view that we are redeemed from our sins by the grace of God alone. A new life stems from gratitude as the Bible teaches us that we must forgive as God forgives us.

The acceptance of the neighbour cannot come from the formula of the transactional analyses, namely "you're OK, I'm OK". The formula according to Christian anthropology must be "you're not OK, but I accept you as if you are OK and through that your life becomes new" (Müller 1996:37). This anthropological point of view has implications for marriage and family therapy.

Narrative inquiry assumes the entering of the in-between landscape, the borderland, or the ecotone, where new mutations and hybrids can be create, and where new stories can be imagined. In this in-between land, the emphasis shifts from "what" questions to "who" questions. People around us become our primary concern and not so much the issues surrounding us (Müller 2015:5).

Ganzevoort describes the narrative as a discourse in which factual or fictional events are placed in an order, structured by content and sequence, so that a coherence of meaning can be seen" (Ganzevoort 1998:276). In the narrative the author tells a story to an audience, with a purpose. The author is however limited by social interactions. "Marginalised groups in society, for example, are assumed to speak the language of the dominant group" (Ganzevoort 1998:276). The voice and authorship are therefore important in the transcendent experiences of religion and crisis (Ganzevoort 1998:277).

The researcher agrees with Ganzevoort that the author presents the story in a way that is acceptable for him/her. The researcher found that some of the co-researchers moulded the story and even the truth to present them in a positive light. The audience is the person or people to whom the author is telling his/her story. The listener present is the primary audience, while all the significant others can be seen as the secondary audience (this will include God). The audience has a large influence over the author and the end result of the story and is forced to tell the story so that it is legitimate and plausible. The purpose of the story is to be significant, while the aim of the author is seeking to be accepted, affirmed, and loved (Ganzevoort 1998:277).

2.13 Exploring ‘nostalgia’ and ‘imagination’

In the adoption triad, the concepts of nostalgia and imagination must be understood and explored. “...the difficulties and challenges brought about by nostalgic language have to be explored” (Müller 2015:1).

People in the adoption triad can be seen as “victims” of the adoption trauma. Nostalgia plays an important role in their stories. Each person’s story is a revived version of their truth. Nostalgia “consists of a longing for a place that is missed but is actually a yearning for a different time” (Boym 2007:8).

In the adoption triad, nostalgia will also be in rebellion against the irreversibility of time. The romantic, nostalgic dream of “I long, therefore I am” is also significant here (Müller 2015:2). “When we try to interpret old and faraway concepts into current contexts and try to make sense out of past stories and find the meaning of it for today, we are actually trying to converge different horizons” (Müller 2015:3).

Müller describes the challenge as bringing multilayeredness, which includes nostalgic aspects, to the table (Müller 2015:3). An important aspect of this research is uncovering the “thick stories” in the adoption triad. “We need both the fantasies and the determining facts of the present” (Müller 2015:3).

It is important to reach beyond the thin, obvious story. Nostalgia might be very strong in the adopted person, because of his/her search for belonging. The stories may be revisited and revised until the various persons in the adoption triad can live with their reality. Here imagination will play a role because objective truth does not exist – all these stories have value. We must “go beyond the stories that are actually told...and to consider those that are untold, such as the missing characters (or role players), the alternative viewpoints” (Moletsane et al 2008:74-75).

This sentiment is very relevant in the adoption triad. Sometimes the untold stories reveal more than what is actually said. The question is why certain stories or characters are left out. The story is always valid to the narrator and should never be ignored or seen as unimportant. The people in the adoption triad might be very nostalgic and could reminisce about the past with rose-coloured glasses. They might thus romanticise current as well as past relationships.

Such people might also imagine how the relationship could have been better. The adoptee may imagine life where there was never an adoption. This might be either as the biological child of their adoptive parents or as the child who remained with their biological parents. The biological mother will often imagine a world where she did not relinquish custody of her child. The adoptive parents might also imagine a world in which they had biological children or that the adopted child was indeed their biological child. All topics will be explored in this research as moving from thin descriptions in the adoption triad's stories to a thick description is a necessary part of the research.

“...the task of the researcher is to assist the ‘co-researchers’ (research participants) to develop their own interpretations of their stories and to help them create alternative (life-enhancing or ‘preferred’) stories” (Dreyer 2014:50).

Playfulness is an attitude “that carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play” (Lugones 1987:180). The “play” with each other in joy and suffering makes it possible to bring our imaginings in present time and space. Research with integrity is intended to create this kind of “play” (Kearney 1988:218).

2.14 Eco-hermeneutic paradigm

The search for meaning is as the root of pastoral counselling. No person can, however, help someone else to find meaning in their life. The pastor can only facilitate the process of the search for meaning in life (Müller 1996:14).

In the eco-hermeneutic paradigm, the understanding is of the whole concept and the discovery of the meaning of that concept within various concepts. It is nothing but a lens with a wide angle that is used to incorporate the ecosystem into one's understanding, which is comparable to a “virtual reality” experience (Müller 1996:14).

For example, when a piano player is viewed from within a hermeneutical paradigm, one can analyse at the different aspects of the system. One can look at the piano and the pianist, the interaction between the two, and one could try to understand the act of playing the piano. When the action is seen from the eco-hermeneutical paradigm, the onlooker gets caught up in the experience of the piano recital (Keeney 1981:47).

Another example of the eco-hermeneutic approach is presented by Müller in the description of the Golden Gate National Park. What is the attraction? Is it the clean mountain air, the sand stone formations or the green mountain hills? It is combination of many factors. But to really experience the splendour of Golden Gate, you need to climb the mountains and take in the “wholeness” of involvement (Müller 1996:19-20).

Our lives are lived through stories. What we know about ourselves and others around us is through the working of our stories. To tell your story to one’s community gives meaning to one’s life. Our identity is also interwoven with stories. Personally, the researcher derives her identity from the stories she tells about herself and the stories she hears from others about herself. Each person has a core narrative about the basic concepts of life, such as marriage, money, sex, and so forth. From this core story, new stories are formed when confronted by new situations (Müller 1996:21-23).

An eco-hermeneutic paradigm leads to a model of narrative involvement. In this kind of pastoral work, it is about the whole of the story and total involvement in it. This places the pastoral work within the social constructionist frame of thought. The client and the pastor construct a shared reality, therefore the pastor is a co-player and constructor in the search for truth (Müller 1996:16).

2.15 The Living Human Document

Anton Boisen was the first to suggest the “study of living human documents”. This means that the depth experience of persons in the struggles of their mental and spiritual life demanded the same respect as the historic texts from which the foundations of our Judeo-Christian faith are drawn (Gerkin 1984:38).

Every person has integrity that calls for interpretation and understanding. They also have the right to speak on their own terms. “What was needed was an interpreter and a guide” (Gerkin 1984:39-40). To speak of a person as a living human document acknowledges the connection between life and language. We must understand how language connects the inner world to outer experiences as understanding the inner world of another is a task of interpretation (Gerkin 1984:39-40).

In this research study on the people in the adoption triad, the researcher took the understanding of their language and inner world very seriously as each person had a unique background. There have been a million experiences which each person interpreted according to their inner world. The co-researchers would construct a story that makes them feel comfortable.

The researcher had to be aware of my own history and background. Although the researcher shared a home language, Afrikaans, with all the co-researchers, it didn't necessarily mean that we would ascribe the same meaning to metaphors, phrases or even certain words. A "bridging" was necessary so that the researchers could derive the same meanings from the context. The researcher had to enter the co-researchers' language and world and vice versa. "...to know another means to enter that person's world in such a way that a merging of experienced reality can take place" (Gerkin 1984:43).

Each experience in our lives, how we perceive it, interpret it, and make it part of our narrative, changes us and will keep changing us. "...the crux of human spiritual suffering at the point of the connection between experience and idea, between the occurrence of events and a language of meaning for those events" (Gerkin 1984:53). But there is always hope. Except for one adoptee, all the co-researchers found their hope in God, which helped them to break through the "stuckness".

2.16 The Living Web

The term "living human web" was coined by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Miller-McLemore 2012a:26). This is an argument for the critical role of the wider political context and the relocation of pastoral care within communities where the minister is not its only agent. This three-dimensional net may be described as all-embracing, a metaphor of metaphors, it is interconnection itself, a web that links lightly, and it is a metaphor that opens many images (Keller 1986:137).

We see this approach more and more in South African churches where a shepherd and flock philosophy and practical application are replaced with a community philosophy where Church members are leaders. This approach has a direct effect on his/her role in the congregation. The pastor is no longer the only source of reliable theological information, nor does he/she set the ethical rule and standard.

In pastoral theology, we see a quest for a participatory, performative, and proactive kind of knowing that stays close to the ground, attends to human agony and ecstasy, and attempts to relieve suffering (Miller-McLemore 2012a:138). A member of the congregation cannot be seen in isolation. He/she is in the multilayered web of their family, friends, work, church, and so forth. A pastor can also not care for a sick congregant without acknowledging who the person is when healthy, where they come from, and how they envision their future.

Although the “web” is being used in different scenarios, Miller-McLemore intended it as a “political and theological idea about the responsibilities of the discipline in relationship to new understandings of culture, power, and the nature of selfhood in the divine.” She wants the disciplines of clinical pastoral education and pastoral theology to reclaim the field’s expertise on the living human document. Miller-McLemore’s conclusion is that the best metaphor to capture the subject is “the living document within the web” (Miller-McLemore 2012a:46-47).

2.17 Contemporary Feminist Theologians

The Western assumptions of objective and universal truths are challenged by feminist scholarship. “It proclaims the contextual, including gendered, quality of all knowing” (Miller-McLemore 2012b:121).

Traditions, practices and theologies of different religions can be studied from a feminist perspective. In the path of the development of the narrative perspective in therapy, the feminist family therapists draw the attention to how first and second-order systemic explanations and interventions are based on normative models of family functioning that assumed “separate-but-equal” power between men and women. We are also shaped by our society’s dominant discourses and need to consider other discourses that were not accepted as the dominant discourse.

An important question posed by feminist theologians is about the gender of God. The concept of mother earth, for example, existed long before the male God of the Old Testament. The male God figure represents images of authority, power and reprimand, whereas a female God represents fertility, kindness, and nurturing. Language is such a powerful tool in shaping people’s beliefs that feminist theologians believe it is of empirical importance to speak and write about a multi-gendered God.

Miller-McLemore opines that women advocate a maternal God imagery and language but say little about actual mothers and mothering. She points to the interesting question of whether there is something to learn about theology from the pivotal maternal life experience (Miller-McLemore 2012a:120). The researcher proposes that maternal knowing is not as an intrinsic norm or ideal but rather an unexpected avenue that will suggest the limits of current understandings and possibilities of alternative modes be explored (Miller-McLemore 2012a:120).

Many women have not been able to realise their creative dreams due to the intricate balance between work and family. It is, however, through the struggle of daily life that one becomes more knowledgeable and starts to think differently. For mothers, this leads to a different understanding and epistemology as caring for the young leads the mother to wisdom, physical caring, and patience.

Unfortunately, many people perceive feminists as having a sole focus on the rights of women and the right to choose abortion. This misconception creates an impression that all feminists are anti-child and anti-family. The reality is that feminists have contributed directly to the academic discourses of motherhood and the family and indirectly to the discourse of children (Miller-McLemore 2001:446).

During the 18th to mid-19th century, an important social economic change took place. Men moved away from earning a living within the family setting to the workplace, resulting in men having less immediate involvement with domestic life and the children. “In the matters of education and spiritual formation, children had fewer male role models readily available.” Until recently, the impact on children of working women therefore did not receive much attention (Miller-McLemore 2001:447).

A global trend was that in the last 50 years the percentage of married women in the workforce increased. According to The State of America’s Children Yearbook (1994), the percentage of married women in the workforce with children under six years old, rose from 10.8 percent to 59.6 percent in the United States (Fund 1994:76).

“Unfortunately, paternal involvement in child care and household chores has not increased proportionately” (Miller-McLemore 2001:447-448). Due to these and other factors, there have

been increasing duress in the last century on the care and religious formation of children (Miller-McLemore 2001:447-448).

On these issues of the care of children, feminists were rather silent. A major reason for this was how long they had to work to establish equal treatment for women in the workplace and at home. The heated debate about abortion also had theologians and women on different sides of the fence. Feminists were demonised as being anti-family and anti-children, while feminists were in a position where they had to stand up against the society and a theology that “has also tended to lump women and children together as subordinate to and dependent on men”. This is evident in the Bible as early as the Gospel of Matthew (Miller-McLemore 2001:448-451). “About five thousand men were fed, in addition to women and children” (Matthew 14:21).

The feminists dispute the religiously endorsed assumptions that the man is the head of the household and that a woman is only fulfilled when she has children, for that is her nature. Feminists have advocated for the redistribution of power in families, for the choice whether to have children or not, and for the choice to live alone. This has prompted strong resistance from certain religious groups and ethnic groups.

Religion in general has frequently equated the maintenance of distinct gender and childbearing roles in patriarchal families with the survival of a religious community (Miller-McLemore 2001:450-451). According to Jean Bethke Elshtain, one of the reasons for marriage is to provide a stable environment for children to grow up in (Elshtain 1982:447-448). Children need an attachment to specific committed adults as a “prerequisite for authentic human existence” (Elshtain 1982:447-448). She stresses the importance of parents to the life of the child, the life of the Church and community. Children need attachment to particular adults who keep the lines of parental moral supremacy clear (Miller-McLemore 2001:457).

Elshtain focuses on the heterosexual marriage with children and/or adopted children. This excludes the many forms of families that we find, such as homosexual couples with or without children, heterosexual couples without children, or a reconstituted family. She does voice, however, concerns for the “family group” and emphasises the responsibility of raising children (Elshtain 1982:447-448).

Ruether and Harrison see the Gospel as a social and political message of liberation from injustice, oppression, and destruction (Miller-McLemore 2001:458). These feminists focus our attention on the injustices in South Africa and the great divide in wealth, education, and class.

Contemporary feminists such as Mary Pellauer and Marie Fortune have raised questions about the connection between abuse, domestic violence, and patriarchal Christianity. They see children as extremely vulnerable and dependent on adults to shape their world. This view of children is in sharp contrast to some of the earlier Christian theologians who described children as inherently sinful and greedy. Most feminists' theologians believe that children might have evil thoughts, but that this is in direct correlation with the actions of the adults in their midst. Because of their incredible love for and trust in their parents, they need adult protection (Miller-McLemore 2001:462).

Children are considered gifts of God that promise enlightenment, delight, and bewilderment. Children have the capacity to create in those involved in their intimate care a charity towards other children and humanity at large. To care for all children thus becomes the key to the good Christian life (Miller-McLemore 2001:464).

Feminists also draw our attention to the fact that to not have children is not a catastrophe. In today's overpopulated world, people should carefully consider why they want children, which can sometimes be narcissistic. The researcher believes that not all people are meant to be parents and that not all people necessarily make good parents. The question about contraception and abortion also comes to the fore. While most religions and cultures accept contraception, abortion stays a topic of great divide. Again, one could come up with the argument that the world is already overpopulated and that another unwanted child might end up being a neglected or abused child.

Advances in science also leads to ethical questions about genetic manipulation. If you want to "order" an intelligent, athletic and/or artistic child, would that not then be incredibly narcissistic? We might then fail to see the child as a person in their own right and only see them as vicarious extensions of ourselves.

In the feminist perspective, the male-dominated psychological interpretation is replaced by the interpretations sensitive to the role of the mother and the experiences of the infant and toddler in

pre-oedipal development. The attachment to the mother and the transmutations of this attachment in relationship to transitional objects, such as the beloved blanket, fosters rich images of God and human attributes such as hope, creativity, and empathy. Early parenting of young children assumes a new importance in the formation of religious ideas (Miller-McLemore 2001:446).

The researcher agrees with the importance feminist theology place on parenting by the Church, the State, and the community. However, these institutions should not overstep the mark. The de facto involvement of the State as far as welfare is not necessarily always good or correct. Parents should still be the main caregivers of their children and the decision makers on important matters concerning their children. The ongoing abuse of children makes the responsibility of the State to advocate on behalf of and to protect children imperative. However, the involvement of the State is only an imperative where there is definite neglect, sexual, physical, verbal or emotional abuse. Decisions regarding the wellbeing of children should only be taken by competent people and with great discretion. In South Africa, this should include care to vulnerable families such as child-headed households.

Miller-McLemore draws our attention to the fact that religious commitment calls for serious engagement with public policies on abortion, welfare, childcare, poverty, healthcare benefits for families, and parental leaves and parental rights (Miller-McLemore 2001:469). An important aspect will be educating all relevant parties.

Parental responsibilities in households should also be shared equally, meaning there should be a departure from the paternal “head of the house” tradition. Children must also be taught not to just receive, but to perform chores and contribute to benefit the rest of the family.

Parents also have legitimate and inevitable needs in relation to children. Rather than striving for the unconditional love of children, parents must face the more complex challenge of recognising the inevitable intersection of their own interests in the nurturing of their children. Love must never be disinterested, unconditional or self-disregarding. “Jesus urged sacrificial action; he always connected this demand with the promise of reward in the kingdom to come, of which the present rewards of mutual love are already a partial taste” (Miller-McLemore 1994:164). Loving sacrifice is an impossible goal and denies a mother the realities of life. One might be a good mother and love one’s children, but at the same time not always like them (Miller-McLemore 1994:162-167).

Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Margaret Hebblethwaite and others celebrate bearing and raising children as a vibrant spiritual discipline. The reclamation of the importance of family and parenting also challenges a powerful stream of thought in Christian tradition that sees celibacy and the total devotion to God as the ideal (Miller-McLemore 2001:470-471). The researcher also views parenting as a holy calling and just as high in importance as a vow of celibacy or any other vocation.

Worldwide, women still earn less than men for performing the same jobs. The impoverishment of women has a direct impact on the quality of care that they can provide for their children. The social responsibility to uplift women falls not only on the State, Church and community, but on every single person. The physical and psychological wellbeing of parents also affects their ability to take care of their young. The accessibility of affordable healthcare for adults and children therefore cannot be overemphasised.

Restrictive cultural stories could be found in the narratives of the adoption triad. By being aware of these cultural stories, the researcher was able to reach a better understanding of the stories in the adoption triad. Restrictive cultural narrative stories are also formed by people who work or live together or have similar ethnic, racial, or religious backgrounds. They develop a shared understanding which is communicated to others in their group and constitutes their culture. It is noted that the females in a group often concede to and support the dominant discourse that men can dominate women, make the important decisions, and be in more leadership roles than women.

2.17.1 Positions of power and feminist theology

One of the principal discourses of feminist theology is that women have over many millenniums been socialised to be quiet. People have power in direct correlation to their ability to partake in the dominant discourse. We find that marginalised groups do not have power, their voices are not heard, and they are not part of the dominant discourse. Minority racial groups, groups without political power, children, senior citizens and women form part of these marginalised groups. The endeavour to give women their voice back, led to the development of feminist theology (Freedman & Combs 1996:38).

Even the original sin of Adam and Eve is based on gender bias. Protestant Orthodoxy held that the generic human condition was one of pride, of denying one's dependence on the love and grace of God, and the corresponding virtue was one of self-denial. To preach a doctrine of self-sacrifice to women is to exacerbate the distortion in their character imposed by male domination. Rather, virtue for women in such a situation is to cultivate positive self-esteem as an antidote to the demoralising effects of androcentric models of selfhood (Miller-McLemore 2012b:193).

During the Industrial period, labour demand caused more segregation between men and women. Men went out to "bring home the bacon", while women stayed at home to raise and nurture their children. This meant that men associated outside the house and became involved with law and politics. All positions of power such as clergy and healthcare were the domain of men. This resulted in men having all the political power as well as the vote, while women were left powerless. These social roles were perpetuated by men and women when raising children. Gender roles were thus learned in a prejudiced manner. An assertive male child will be complimented as being a leader, while an assertive girl child would be reprimanded for being belligerent.

In modern societies there is still hostility toward women to "keep them in their place". This attitude also engenders physical violence against defenceless groups such women, children, and the elderly. In mid-eastern societies, there are still shocking practices in place which undermine the freedom of women. Because these practices are so deeply rooted in the social structure, culture and religion, women permit this oppression.

Although industrialisation structured societies along certain lines, many families modify or resist this pattern. In some families, the women worked outside the house and in farming families the work relied on the contribution of all the family members (Osmer 2008:155). Women and minorities have for the most part remained consumers (Miller-McLemore 2012b:120).

Many Christian churches are still very patriarchal. Although many of the traditional churches in South Africa allow women as ministers, full-time posts in congregations are still mainly held by men. In the meetings, women's voices are not heard or, if heard, their views are very often overlooked. The influence of the dominant male pastor discourse and the unequal distribution of power is evident and may take many generations to be rectified.

Some men only hear their own opinion and feel it necessary to explain to the less informed, like women or children, what the “correct” view of the topic is. Some men tend to talk louder than women and will easily interrupt a woman or just talk louder, until she keeps quiet. In the workplace, some men will take credit for a woman’s idea. In this way the dominant patriarchal social discourse stays the same and women’s voices, together with other marginalised groups, remain unheard.

Francine Prose famously said that women are confident at age 11, confused by 16, and by that time, girls’ resistance has “gone underground” (Miller-McLemore 2012b:116). This shows that women respond to the dominant discourse in a culture that engenders the silence of women. As young girls grow up, they learn that their opinions are not regarded as important. With that in mind, the power of the dominant discourse in society and the Church was thus considered while researching the adoption triad.

The researcher opines that common distortions of Scripture interpretation remain. The subjection of femininity to masculinity that has led to the concept of superiority of masculinity and that masculinity is equal to rationality and even perfection. God as a woman is still not viewed as important. In Luke 13:34, we read the words of Jesus as He calls out to Jerusalem and says that He wanted to gather them just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Here we clearly see the image of God as a woman.

This ignorance trickles down to the culture of disgust in anything that is not powerful and rational. Anything that can be explained and anticipated is regarded as the ideal. Conversely, that which cannot be rationally explained is regarded as disappointing and even sinful.

2.18 The position of men

With feminism working towards and achieving some measure of equal social, political and work rights for women, many men are now not sure about their new role definition and place in society, at home, in the Church, and in the workplace. Men are struggling with these changes as traditional gender roles make way for more equitable role distribution. There are now benefits as well as stress in these newly defined family and relationship roles, which is exacerbated by unemployment and job insecurity (Neuger & Poling 1997:13-14). The stress related to job

security causes must never be underestimated. Men have traditionally based their identities on their work, the social status it gave them, and the economic power that comes with it.

Neuger and Poling note that the need for loving relationships as well as sustaining and creative work seem nearly universal among men (Neuger & Poling 1997:18-19). The changes in economic structures, gender equity, and racial equity affect personal and relational problems. Working-class men seem to struggle to survive and make a living, while being confronted with marital conflicts and fears about their own mortality and legacy. We see that “hard masculinity” is a way of survival for some men with little economic and social power (Neuger & Poling 1997:18-19).

Judy Orr suggests a model of “neighbour care”. The pastor, like a good neighbour, must be there for men in this time of turbulent change, transition, and crisis (Neuger & Poling 1997:19). Although Orr refers to pastoral care for working-class men, it may be a workable model for all pastoral interactions.

With their traditional male roles challenged, economic uncertainty and sometimes a lack of status, some men turn to violent behaviour to assert themselves. Poling examined the dynamics of pastoral care for men who want to stop being domineering and violent in their interpersonal relationships. He explores theological issues of salvation, confession and repentance, forgiveness, sin, evil, and sexuality. He also sees Jesus as a model of nonviolent authority (Neuger & Poling 1997:21).

In trying to uphold their masculine strength, many men’s health has been affected negatively and they have a shorter life expectancy than women. We know that things that portray masculinity like excessive drinking and smoking have serious associated health risks.

Many studies indicate men’s sense of isolation, their preoccupation with success and prestige, and their spiritual emptiness (Neuger & Poling 1997:228). Men are socialised to avoid anything that they perceive as feminine. That could also be the cause of many sexist remarks and even violence towards women and homosexuals. This view of what is supposedly feminine also causes many men to avoid counselling or therapy.

The clear recognition is that norms for masculinity will only change when (1) it is safe for men and men's self-esteem for the changes to happen and (2) there is a high level of consensus that these norms are harmful for all, including for men (Neuger & Poling 1997:233-235).

2.19 The work of Christian theology

In the 1950s and 1960s, theologians and religious scholars challenged a structure of theological knowing that restricted practical theology to pastoral situations. In the early 20th century, psychology demonstrated the value of close study of the living human document as a valid "text" for theological study (Miller-McLemore 2012b:1).

Just as branches, flowers, fruit and leaves fall to the ground where they renew the soil and roots, so does practical theology give back the whole rather than simply represent historical and philosophical theology's outcome, fruition, or application. It is living alongside thinking and reading that makes a theologian (Miller-McLemore 2012a:3). "Cosmic trees that allow traffic between the heavens and earth are found in religious symbolism with some frequency – think of Yggdrasil in Norse mythology or the cross of Christ" (Cobb 2005:114).

In the researcher's personal belief system, she identified closely with the Miller-McLemore description of the tree as a religious symbol. The tree also reverts to the trees in the Garden of Eden; the tree of good and evil, and the tree of life (Genesis 2). The researcher believes that we must choose between good and evil on a daily basis. By fighting or resisting evil, Christians may grow closer to God.

How we understand relationships shapes our engagement with other people. Imagination is intertwined in our relationships and in our lives. By being playful, the possibility is never ending, and our spectrum of knowledge grows. Being embedded in the possibilities is an acknowledgement of the difficulty of staying in relation, and how difficult it is to remain awake to the boulders and tensions of the stories and landscapes we live in (Caine & Steeves 2009:1).

Caine and Steeves explore the relational aspects of narrative inquiry and imagining, which is the space in-between the researcher and research participant. They consider the role of play in life as learning and researching. Consider the metaphor of a kite and a kite flyer: the string that connects the two "represents the interwoven relationality that is part of our lives and part of our

stories with our research participants, and it is a place where imagining and narrative inquiry intertwine” (Caine & Steeves 2009:2).

The people in the adoption triad also had to make sense of their realities. The stories were woven in such a way that they could live with their realities. The kite string is between the one person in the triad and the other. It can also be between the person and “I”. The kite string must have just enough tension to fly, “just the right tension to hold together a new story, from which to compose new stories of becoming on newly encountered landscapes” (Caine & Steeves 2009:4).

Play is important in this kite metaphor as it is the expression of imagination. In the safe space of play we can make sense of our world. We can draw from our history, our knowledge, and our imagination. We can change the direction of the wind and in doing so, where the kite flies to. We can compose new stories and change it until it is a good fit. The researcher found that people can even create a whole new truth for themselves in their stories. In these stories, they might look good and strong or maybe they are the victim. The financial position of the storyteller, whether they have a “voice”, whether they are male or female, and the dominant narrative in their society; all have an influence on the story and their ability to find a new story in a new landscape.

Any amount of pulling and tugging, the teasing and the releasing of tension, is a response to the wind, the strength, and vulnerability of the other. Much like kites, we move in relation to continually shifting stories to live by: our own and those of our participants (Caine & Steeves 2009:8). “It is in these in-between spaces or borderlands that we recognise that our necessity for interdependencies are not threatening, but rather are the spark for our creativity” (Caine & Steeves 2009:9).

The imagining opens the space for a new story; we can take the risk to live, to open our horizons for new stories and new outcomes. We can see that there are many stories to live by, but these are always influenced by the other people in our lives or in the case of research, by the researcher and the research process.

2.20 The art of hearing

Gerkin reviewed four themes when examining the art of hearing, namely: listening, responding, advocating, and hearing. When listening in order to hear, we open ourselves to the world of the

human inner affective self. One must also listen to a person's cultural interpretation as he/she uses their power to control and shape the world of the other (Gerkin 1991:402).

First, when listening, we must be intensely aware of our own "glasses" with which we view the world. Themes discussed earlier such as feminism and the pastoral care for men in a rapidly changing society will have an influence on what one the researcher hears. She must therefore always be aware of her theological background and personal believes. "And I listen for how those dominant modes of thought and being may help or hinder the other's full appropriation of the meaning of the gospel" (Gerkin 1991:402).

Second, to care for persons is always to respond to them. Therefore care is, by its nature, a responsive act (Gerkin 1991:402). Pastoral care is aware and listens to the people on the fringe of society; those who did not have the courage or strength to carry on. In South-Africa, we have many different cultures and with the rapid change in society, our cultures are dynamic. Pastoral care should not, as evidenced by the past, merely stand back and let the person in need attempt to find their own way. Care must also include attending to the issues of morality and value. Although pastoral care is still rooted in care of the individual, it opens itself to the wider arena of care and transformation of culture and prophetic ministry (Gerkin 1991:404).

Third, advocating means that our caring needs to go further than physical help or pastoring. If one really cares for marginalised groups in society, one should advocate on their behalf. One cannot read the verses of Matthew 13:13-17 without hearing the exhortation to greater activity on behalf of those who are not seen or heard, and those who cry out for understanding. According to Matthew, the hearts of the people to whom he speaks have grown dull; their ears and eyes have shut to the needs of certain of God's people (Gerkin 1991:405).

The fourth and final theme Gerkin examines, is the art is of hearing. First hearing must be differentiated from listening. Listening is to listen to people with the intent to really hear them. If we really listen, we can pastor and advocate for marginalised people. To hear, however, means that we must hear the voice of God as that voice speaks silently and mysteriously through all the other voices (Gerkin 1991:406).

In pastoral care, we often tend to operate in our capacity as pastors to "heal" people under duress as if we have a case of magic tools. We also draw on psychology and other disciplines, but if we

are not silent so that we can hear God's voice, we will not be able to hear Him. We can hear the voice of God in conversation, a sermon, our reading of the Bible, and in meditation.

2.21 The Ghost Kingdom

Betty Jean Lifton was born on 11 June 1926 in Staten Island, New York. She was the daughter of an unmarried couple and her 17-year-old mother gave her up to a foster home. Lifton was 2 years old when she was adopted by a Cincinnati couple, Oscar and Hilda Kirschner. They renamed her Betty Jean. She was seven years old before her adoptive mother, Hilda, told her that she was adopted. As many adoptive parents did in those days, she told Betty Jean that her parents had died.

Betty Jean explored the adoption stories that were told to children throughout her life. She was an advocate for open adoption information, especially when an adopted person started the search for his/her biological parents. In earlier years, adoption records were sealed and even the adoptee came up against the closed doors of the law and welfare system.

The researcher was strongly influenced by the work of Betty Jean Lifton and the image of the adoptee living in a "ghost kingdom". All families have ghosts, but in the adoption triad there is a specific ghost kingdom due to the old closed adoption system.

Lifton introduced the ghost kingdom in which the adopted child keeps the lost birth mother, birth father, and the original part of the self (the eternal ghost baby who was not able to grow up). Lifton describes the ghost kingdom as an alternative place, located in one's psychic reality. We see that it is a portable home that adoptees carry inside them. She describes it as the "Land of What Might Have Been, the Land of the As if Dead" (Lifton 2002:208).

Adoptees may have the need to search for biological parents in their effort to form a sense of self. They might reach to the future by integrating the past and the present. It might be the adoptee's fate, but he/she is not doomed. In this situation, biological mothers are women who have lost their children, as if by death itself. The adoptive parents usually were not able to have their own children but they love and raise another person's child as their own (Lifton 2002:207-208).

In the ghost kingdom, we find these adopted children who will always live with their “ghost self”; the person they would have been, had they not been adopted. They are also in competition with the child their parents never had. In this competition, they are doomed to fail against the so-called phantom child. Some adoptive parents live with their inability to conceive as there is a lack of biological continuity. The adoptive parents might wonder what their own child would have been like, while the biological mother lives with the ghost of the child that she gave up for adoption. Even if she meets the child as an adult, there will always be a void. She was not there when the child reached different developmental milestones and the lost years can never be reclaimed.

Adoptees experience trauma throughout their lives. The first trauma is being separated from the biological mother. Sometimes the infant ends up in a foster home. The lucky ones are adopted within a few months, while others become part of the foster care system. They are usually placed in many different foster homes, each with its own unique set of rules. The child experiences loss every time he/she must leave one home and adapt to another. When the child eventually gets adopted, it is another trauma. Then the child experiences additional trauma when he/she realises that he/she is not biologically part of the family. Their biological parents abandoned them and they are not coming back, which leads to the feeling of being disconnected.

Inside every adopted person there is that relinquished baby. Adoptees carry that baby through life, and their developmental task is to become an adult who can comfort and hold that inner baby (Lifton 2002:209). The adoptee can love his adoptive family but can never love being adopted. As a young child, the adoptee learns to take the feelings of other people, especially that of his/her adoptive parents into consideration. He/she needs to be accepted by the new clan and will, therefore, abandon the child who lost his/her mother.

It is at this stage that the split in the self begins. The adoptee has an inner “abandoned baby” who was never acknowledged. There is the self that the world knows and there is the ghost baby. Lifton calls the self that the world knows the “Artificial Self” and the ghost baby the “Forbidden Self”. Neither the Artificial Self nor the Forbidden Self is completely true or false. The Artificial Self is most often a very dutiful and pleasant child. The adoptee does however carry anxiety throughout his/her dual life. The Artificial Self can act out, be a difficult and aggressive child and teenager or even act out as an adult. The adoptee can switch between the dutiful Artificial

Self and the difficult and aggressive Artificial Self during various stages of his/her life (Lifton 2002:210).

Chapter 3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FAMILY WITHIN CHURCH, STATE AND SOCIETY

3.1 The Hellenistic Context

It is important to consider the perceptions about children and family life through the ages. In the Hellenistic context, two contrasting views on children existed. The value of children was for the well-being and economic survival of their parents. The parents could also live after death through their children and heirs. Children were considered indispensable as they were used for economic, military and cultural purposes by the State (Wiedemann 1989:25-26).

On the other hand, childhood was considered a state to outgrow and children were considered fundamentally deficient and not fully “human”. Children occupied a low status in society and brutal practices toward children were allowed under Roman law. Fathers had almost absolute power over his children and could even put them to death. He could also decide whether to recognise a new-born and raise him/her, or to expose the baby (cast it out in a public place) (Gundry-Volf 2001:32-33).

The exposition of unwanted babies was a widespread belief (Wiedemann 1989:36). Exposed infants would die, unless they were picked up by strangers, in which case they might be raised as beggars (sometimes having been mutilated for this purpose), for profit as slaves or as prostitutes (Gundry-Volf 2001:33-34).

3.2 The Old Testament-Jewish context

In the Jewish context, it is evident that a higher value was attributed to children. Abraham was promised that his descendants would multiply. This was a gift of God, a sign of God’s blessing and a source of joy. Jews view life as sacred from birth and even at conception. Abortion, infanticide and exposition were unacceptable to them (Gundry-Volf 2001:35-36).

There are many testimonies to parental love and pleasure in children. Children are a divine sign of God’s blessing in accordance with the very blessing of the Creator upon humanity in primal history (Gundry-Volf 2001:35). Male children were circumcised and that was a symbol of being part of God’s covenant with Israel. Parents were expected to teach this to their children.

In Deuteronomy 6:7 God says that the commandments that He has given must be on their hearts. It must be impressed on their children, recited to them and talked about. On the other hand, children were also viewed as ignorant, capricious, and in need of discipline (Isaiah 3:4; 2 Kings 2:23-24). Children therefore fell short of what the ideal human being should be. To be compared, or worse, to be ruled by children, would be an incredible insult to an adult male Israelite.

The evidence in the Jewish context of the Old Testament is therefore twofold. On the one hand, children were highly regarded as children of the covenant. Children were loved and cherished and the Jewish parents, especially the father, were not nearly as cruel towards their children as compared to the Hellenistic and Roman context. On the other hand, children were also viewed as ignorant and in need of discipline. This context forms the basis of New Testament teaching on children.

3.3 Children in the New Testament

People brought children to Jesus so that he would bless them but the disciples scolded them. When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said: “Allow the children to come to me. Don’t forbid them, because God’s kingdom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn’t welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it” (Mark 10:13-16).

Jesus strictly warns his disciples not to prevent the children from coming to Him. Children must under no circumstances be excluded from the blessings of God. He then takes the children in His arms and blesses them and in doing so, teaches that the reign of God belongs to children.

Van Aarde argues that it is possible to consider these children, from a perspective of the social stratification of the first-century Herodian Palestine, as part of the lowest class, namely, the “expendables” (Van Aarde 2001:136). This makes the aforementioned teachings of Jesus even more profound.

Jesus taught that the primary beneficiaries of that reign were lowly and powerless people. In Luke 6:20-22, he calls the poor, the hungry, and those who weep the fortunate ones. The kingdom of God will be theirs; they can be happy when people hate them, reject or insult them, and condemn them. Children shared the social status of the hungry, the poor, and the suffering. It is Jesus who calls all of them “blessed” (Gundry-Volf 2001:38).

It is significant that Jesus said that whoever does not receive and welcome the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all. Nowhere in Jewish literature are children put forward as models for adults. Instead, comparison with children were treated as an insult in the Greco-Roman setting (Gundry-Volf 2001:39).

Then what did Jesus want to teach His disciples? Entering the reign of God “as a child” thus seems to involve both a certain status, an actual dependence on God and a corresponding quality, namely trust (Gundry-Volf 2001:40).

In Ephesians 6:4 we read that parents should not anger their children but should raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord. This means that parents should treat their children fairly and not as if they occupy the lowest tier in society. Children must not be treated like slaves and the poor because they are objects of God’s care and love. Matthew 18:6 also reads as a stern warning from Jesus to whoever treats a child harshly, for it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake. Children should rather be loved and protected.

Jesus makes a direct correlation between how one treats children and one’s greatness in the reign of God (Mark 9:33-37). Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all”. Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the disciples and embraced him. Then he said: “Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn’t actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me” (Mark 9:35-37).

Jesus also makes no distinction between the ways a man or a woman should treat children. Mark depicts Jesus, a man, taking a small child in His arms as an example to His male disciples (Gundry-Volf 2001:42, 44).

The first three verses of Ephesians chapter six depicts the responsibility of children; they should obey their parents and accept their guidance and discipline as if it were from God. This text is integral to teachings on family life. These kinds of teachings may also be found in Colossians. This was a patriarchal society, where children listened to their parents and the man was the head of the household. Fathers carried the religious responsibility of the household, as they would teach the children at home and later the boys would attend synagogue.

3.4 John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom provided academic as well as practical attention to the family and domestic life of his parishioners. The society in which he lived and preached was diverse and in flux. The pagan culture was in distress and decline and moral standards were deteriorating. The influence of the Christian Church grew and in 313 AD, Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which granted the Christian Church freedom of worship in the Empire. Theodosius I, who was the Roman emperor from 379 AD to 395 AD, established Christianity as the official religion of the State (Gurioan 2001:63). This led to many people adopting Christianity in name only. Belonging to the Church was a way to socialise and advance one's career, therefore many people had no real relationship with God.

Chrysostom was outraged by the eagerness of some Christian parents to propel their children into the secular professions, while neglecting their spiritual and moral formation. His understanding of parenthood was biblically inspired and grounded in the Trinitarian and Christological teaching of the Church. Parents are called upon to emulate God the Father's love for his Son, while children should love and obey their parents as the Son loves and obeys the Father through the Spirit. Thus, through love, parents and children participate in the triune Life of God. We see that the godly family is an image of the Church, in so much as all of its members rehearse the sanctified and redeemed life worthy of Christ that the Church continually offers to God in sacrifice (Gurioan 2001:64). Many modern churches still see the family as the "little church". Church life begins at home as people who attend church will live out what they have learned in their home life.

The doctrine of the *Imago Dei* is also important. Man was created according the image of God and this will also influence the parent-child relationship. Chrysostom posited that parents are responsible for restoring the *Imago Dei* in their children (Gurioan 2001:70). Although Chrysostom "claims that all human beings are made in the image of God, Chrysostom believes that original sin has brought about corruptibility and death and weakened the capacity to grow into God's likeness in virtue and loving communion". In agreement with the Greek patristic writers, Chrysostom interprets the fall as the cause of mortality (Gurioan 2001:67).

Chrysostom adds that parents will be punished by God if they do not instruct their child in godliness and that God will severely punish those who neglect their children, but honour and

praise those who care for them. Chrysostom viewed parents as having the most responsible and sacred position possible when their children's salvation is dependent on their upbringing. Though a parent may lead an otherwise virtuous life, if he/she neglects the needs of the child and fails to instruct the child in godliness, then that virtue does not count for much in the eyes of God (Gurioan 2001:71).

It is interesting that story-telling played an important role in catechism, even using pagan stories. Chrysostom believed in keeping the stories according to the child's ability to understand. Parents should also be an example to the children, as this is their calling. In this way, parents could be fellow workers with Christ in the garden of childhood (Gurioan 2001:77).

“We are God's co-workers, and you are God's field, God's building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Chrysostom's writings are still valuable today. He chastises parents for their obsession with educating their children for worldly success, while neglecting their faith, ethical and moral upbringing. He advises parents to carefully select the images and examples in life that reach their children's eyes and ears (Gurioan 2001:77).

The researcher opines the one should take this early writer and priest very seriously. Don't we worry too much our children will be accepted to a prestigious school? Then they can obtain several distinctions, so that they can be sent to an equally prestigious university. It is expected that they can build a successful career with this academic foundation, which is often the chief discussion among family and friends.

How often do parents discuss their children's faith and moral compass as eagerly with one another? How much of an effort do parent make to develop their children's religious and moral education? How many parents monitor what their children see and hear on the internet, social media and television? The researcher believes that we are God's co-workers in raising society's children, taking care of them, loving them with the love that Christ thought us and above all, leading them to Christ. The influence of the adoptees' parents' religious instruction was very apparent in this research study.

3.5 Augustine

Augustine's argument could be outlined as follows:

1. Even infants show tendencies that are sinful;
2. This is due to Adam's sin;
3. Baptism remedies these damnable tendencies and should be conferred as early as possible (Stortz 2001:79).

Augustine explained the goodness of nature created by God as well as the corruption of nature as a result of Adam's sin by arguing that creatures possess a good creation but a corrupt propagation (Stortz 2001:93).

Augustine's theology of childhood is found in these three thoughts:

- The status of the child;
- The nature of the human; and
- The ritual of baptism.

Augustine was convinced that from the moment of conception children were non-innocent. He believed that this was the first stage of childhood and the correct appraisal of it. When pressed on the tragic fate of the Holy Innocents (babies killed because they were part of the nation with which God had a covenant), he consigned them to eternal punishment (Stortz 2001:99).

Today we view the narcissism of young children lightly and believe that they will grow out of it. Augustine viewed it as the seeds of selfishness that he discovered in adults on a larger, more sinister scale. The researcher argues that children have a moral compass as taught by their parents and elders and gradually assume accountability for their actions.

The researcher disagrees with Augustine's understanding of "non-innocence". Augustine also had a deterministic outlook on human nature. Born of the progeny of Adam, mankind is doomed but baptising was the reforming, even in the life of a Christian (Stortz 2001:100).

Determinism is evident around the world and in the South African context. When one is born into privilege, one is almost pre-ordained to succeed in life. The world remains the privileged one's oyster. Besides education, these children are guaranteed the best possible childhood intervention, be it physiotherapy or occupational therapy in their developmental years, if needed.

They attend the most sought after private schools and then attend university, perhaps even overseas. Their family connections may also help to advance their career when enter the working world.

In modern society the gap between the rich and the poor keeps widening. A child raised in an informal settlement has less opportunities than a privileged child. This does not only pertain to material things. It may also include a mother and father who are unable help their child with school work because they are uneducated. Many parents also come home late as they have to work long hours or have make an arduous journey to work every day. As a result, household chores will then primarily become the children's responsibility.

The researcher believes that the government and society should not focus on racial differences, but rather on class differences. No child should be denied the opportunity to realise their full potential. Child government grants help somewhat to alleviate abject poverty, however this is not an infallible or lasting solution. Since survival of people living below the breadline is paramount, there is little chance that child grants will be used in the best interest of the child alone and not the family as a whole.

The fundamental of Christian faith is, through love, the injunction to charitable works. When Jesus teaches us of a loving and sharing society there is no discrimination and, within such a society, everyone should enjoy equal opportunity to reach their full potential. Jesus said that we must love, in the first place, the Lord with all our heart, with all our being, with all our mind and with all our strength. Second, we must love our neighbour as we do ourselves (Mark 12:30-31).

Jesus teaches that we should give to everyone who asks and not demand anything back from those who take them (Luke 6:30). If we want to be complete, we must sell what we own and give the money to the poor. Then we will have treasure in heaven (Matthew 19:21).

The fundamentals of charity are already evident in the Old Testament. "Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family?" (Isiah 58:7).

In Acts 4:32, the community of believers was one in heart and mind. None of them would say: "This is mine!" about any of their possessions, but instead held everything in common.

Furthermore, Paul writes to Timothy that he should tell his listeners to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others (1 Timothy 6:18).

Capitalism tends towards hierarchies with the dispossessed and poor stacked up at the bottom. This is where the biblical message as brought out in Christian teaching exhorts us to be charitable and to help others. Socialism, on the other hand, is plagued by the lack of incentive to perform and reach the limits of our capability. It disincentivises people who are totally reliant on the state to lift themselves up and become self-sufficient. This is often passed on from generation to generation, becoming endemic within families.

Poverty also leads to many social problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, prostitution, and unwanted pregnancies. The question often posed to society and especially to the Church is as follows: how do we minister to a world in pain? The researcher is particularly concerned with how we can better care for South African children. Because of extreme poverty, various health problems, lack of education and political instability, many children are orphaned or fall into the foster care system. Often, out of necessity, they are forced to become premature breadwinners for their households. Adoptions could make a difference in at least some of these children's lives. Adoptions often cross racial and cultural divides, and will present their own challenges.

Stortz warns against speaking for a population that cannot speak for themselves. The researcher agrees that parents should look through the eyes of a child and imagine how a child sees the world (Stortz 2001:101). Augustine pondered how people could build a more equal society where every child could reach their full potential. Questions regarding the living conditions of people, healthcare and schooling are relevant here.

It is however not only a child's education that is important. In some sections of our society and, increasingly in postmodern times, education and career planning of children takes precedence over religious understanding and guidance. To grow into well-balanced adults, children require their psychological welfare and religious education to be nurtured. This modern tendency leads to gaps in children's psychological development and, often, a lack of moral and social conscience. It might be precisely because we neglect this aspect of our children's education that there seems to be a noticeable decline in ethical behaviour in all other spheres.

3.6 Thomas Aquinas on childhood

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) has had a profound influence on Roman Catholic theology. In Aquinas' thoughts, two issues are reflected and persist in Christian thought today. The first one is the problem of original sin. Aquinas had a curious hybrid solution to this problem that grew out of the cross-pollination between his primary theological authority, Augustine, and his central philosophical authority, Aristotle (Traina 2001:105).

In the Augustinian model, infant victims of original sin are "non-innocent" only because they lack the physical strength to do harm. Infants are repulsed by holy and good things, they are selfish, and sinful. Christian maturity is their recuperation from the original sin through prayer and sacrament. In this way, through grace, they are healed and can produce devotion and virtue (Traina 2001:105).

The Aristotelian model more accurately resembles our contemporary developmental understanding of childhood: the child as pure, innocent, and as having uncultivated potential. Children are immature and simple-minded, but in their basic inclinations and desires they are not evil (Traina 2001:105-106).

Aquinas viewed mankind as twofold; they have an earthly life and a posthumous life of being with God. He also viewed childhood as a developing stage, however, he did not see all the stages or life cycles psychology is divided in today. Aquinas measured the process of human maturation largely by the capacity to reason, including the ability to make responsible choices. "Children lack this capacity. But they are not a separate, lower species" (Traina 2001:111).

Aquinas' phases of childhood are: *Infantia*, *Pueritia*, and *Adolescentia*. *Infantia* includes babies and young children and forms the most significant challenge in Aquinas' synthesis as he believed in the medieval confidence that babies are inherently incapable of sin.

Aquinas agrees with Augustine in that no one with original sin deserves salvation. He however also does not believe that anyone deserves condemnation when through no fault of their own, dies unbaptised but innocent of all actual sin. Consequently, Aquinas urged parents to arrange baptism for new-borns speedily. But what about infants who die unbaptised despite these measures? Aquinas states that, although children cannot commit actual sin, they are undeserving of salvation because they bear the stain of original sin. They are consigned to the *limbus*

puerorum (children's limbo) and therefore denied union with God. They are however spared spiritual, physical, and psychological pain in hell (Traina, 2001:114-115).

This is a very forced and bizarre solution to the different positions on the view that babies are incapable of sin and Augustine's view that no one with original sin deserves salvation. This led to the emphasis on baptising infants as soon as possible after birth. The parents of a baby that could not be baptised, despite their best endeavour, at least had the small comfort that the baby was at least in the children's limbo. This synthesis persisted in the Roman Catholic Church until the mid-20th century work of Karl Rahner (Traina 2001:115).

Aquinas writes almost nothing on the intellectual or psychological development of children in the *Infantia* stage. This might simply be because, as a monk, he had almost no experience with babies and young children. Children, except for orphans, only visited a monastery from the age of seven. The priest that baptised a baby had no obligation to stay in touch with the child, as baptism was not based on catechism.

The *Pueritia* phase begins with the start of rationality at about the age of seven. With reason comes the capacities for moral accountability, formal learning, virtue, sin, and consequently the need for the sacrament of penance. Children in this age group can desire and request baptism. They can also have devotion to and receive the Eucharist (Traina 2001:117).

Aquinas' development vision included a degree of self-determination. He was against arranged marriages and even went so far as to say that a secret marriage between children who have reached puberty is valid. He justified that it was children's right to decide about marriage or to enter the religious life. He reveals little more than that older children's minds, spirits, and bodies continue to grow and that allowances should be made for them (Traina 2001:118-119).

Children in the *Adolescentia* (puberty) phase were treated as adults in ecclesiastical and moral matters. Aquinas provides scant evidence of lenience with which medieval adolescents were normally penalised for infractions of civil law or ecclesiastical sexual codes. From Aquinas' stages we can primarily infer a sense of the soteriological, rational and legal status of the developing child (Traina 2001:120).

Aquinas relied on Aristotle's confident account of rational, proper family relationships. Humans generally love and wish the best for those closest to them. Aquinas considered the relationship

between children and parents as the most natural relationship possible. He even referred to the natural relationship in nature between adults and children. The adults give life to their young ones and then take care of them and teach them all that is needed to survive in nature. According to Aquinas, the responsibility towards one's parents is even greater than one's responsibility towards one's children. "Strictly speaking, we should love our parents more than we do our children, in recognition of their having given us life" (Traina 2001:121).

Children are expected to look to their parents for guidance and to have respect for their elders. Aquinas believed that children do not owe their parents an absolute or material obligation but rather that the social rights of children in relationship to their parents depended on their age. Aquinas allows children in the *Adolescentia* phase remarkable freedom, while children in *Infantia* or *Pueritia* are under the absolute power of their parents (Traina 2001:125-126).

Aquinas justifies social and familial hierarchies theologically, because they are part of the natural order created by God (Traina 2001:125). He developed a theological justification for a developmental model of childhood, which psychology would later build on.

Aquinas considered children bearers of actual (but not existential) innocence. He concludes that no one goes to hell who has not consciously, rationally chosen to do wrong when he/she could have done otherwise; such persons will not go to heaven or hell. This claim shows the persistence of the doctrine of limbo. His ideal was a family structure of a faithful, monogamous marriage with children. However, like many families today, 13th century families often fell short of this ideal (Traina 2001:132-133).

When scrutinising Aquinas' legacy, it is evident that he did not treat issues such as the needs and the treatment of children as paramount. Good child care placed limits on children's autonomy. Aquinas saw the fundamental potential for exploitation and he corrected this by absolving older children from absolute obedience to parents. "But he left young children vulnerable to their families' whims" (Traina 2001:131-133). Articulating and enforcing young children's legal rights in their families remain unfinished seven centuries later. Aquinas' thoughts on childhood contains raw materials for constructing protection for young children. We can use his developmental anthropology, a theory of justice and a doctrine of the *Imago Dei*. These elements can exert their full power in support of children's rights in our more individualistic, more democratic age (Traina 2001:131-133).

3.7 The Child in Luther's Theology

Martin Luther (1483-1546) defined the "believer" as simultaneously a saint and a sinner.

Although in God's sight we have been made wholly righteous by the grace of Christ, the sin that deformed our nature at the Fall continues to ensnare human beings (Strohl 2001:134).

Insofar as children occupied Luther's theological attention, it was primarily in terms of what they should become: mature, seasoned confessors of the evangelical faith and responsible members of family and community. In this endeavour, children depended upon care and commitment from adults to achieve this goal. The work of mothers and fathers was regarded as a most holy calling and obligation. Luther realised that it takes more than a family to raise a child and that the wider community and civil authority play a critical role in the formation of a child (Strohl 2001:134).

Luther considered the vocation of parenting as the most important role an adult would ever play. However, the love of God is always above everything else. Jesus said that those who love their father or mother and son or daughter more than they love Him are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). However, Paul reminds us of the authority of parents and insists that children should obey them. As for children, obey your parents in the Lord, because it is right. The commandment "Honour your father and mother" is the first one with a promise attached: "so that things will go well for you, and you will live for a long time in the land." (Ephesians 6:1-3).

The fact that the wider community plays such an important role in raising a child, means that even people who have no children of their own should be concerned about other people's children and care for them. That means not only teachers, ministers and welfare workers, but everyone in contact with children.

Society has become very fragmented; people do not even know their neighbours. Many families are also reduced to the nuclear family and people's contact with extended family have declined. The wider family is therefore not present to be able to guide the children or help the parents in raising them. In general, South African parents concentrate on their careers and children are often left home alone in the care of a domestic worker or an au pair. Our focus on materialism has a very high price, namely the wellbeing of our children. Luther's notion that the vocation of parenting is the most important of all vocations, is especially relevant today. If we do not raise our children and teach them about the Word of God or set a good example and instil moral

values in them, how will they come to know this? What would society be like if there were no moral and ethical guidelines? The all-important question is what will become of children's eternal souls.

While the medieval Church distinguished between secular and spiritual estates, Luther rejected this distinction immediately. He taught that certain states of life and occupations were not religiously superior or more spiritual. He insisted that one could honourably exercise your priesthood in a wide variety of socially productive vocations. Society is weaved together and everyone is born as someone's child (Strohl 2001:139).

Today the vocations in religious life no longer enjoy much standing. The Church is on the periphery, even for many Christians. We view some vocations as superior and more economically valued than others, but society needs people in all vocations. Why is a doctor paid much more than a welfare worker with a Master's degree? Why are teachers, people who are very influential in our children's formative years, dismissed as less important than lawyers?

Marriage is, for Luther, a vocation because it produces life. He opined that fathers and mothers should be priests, bishops and apostles to their children. For Luther parental responsibilities manifested in four crucial duties: 1) to provide the sacrament of baptism for infants; 2) to rear children in the true faith as they mature; 3) to attend to their education for vocations; and 4) to provide them with a suitable spouse in a timely fashion (Strohl 2001:140-141).

Luther opined that salvation occurs when baptism is received – if one recognises that what makes it salvation is the ongoing reorientation of human life that it affects. “Luther's emphasis on the daily return to baptism shows that the claim ‘I am baptised’ does not so much identify a specific event in time as describe a lifelong condition” (Strohl 2001:143).

Although a child's growth in faith must be left to God, the Church and the parents are responsible for planting and watering. Luther wrote his catechisms as aids for this cultivation of the life among the young, although catechism was important for all ages. The family was the locus of education. Parents should catechise their household dependents and their children. They should teach them their duties, join them in prayer and be the disciplinarians. Faith however, stays the work of God. Luther did not see the gospel as a carrot and a stick to drive the wayward creature; but just as a carrot (Strohl 2001:144-146).

Schooling was provided by the Church mainly for entering the Church or for the professions of law and medicine. Luther envisaged a much later role for civil authority in the welfare of children. He expected schools to be public, sustained by government supervision and support. It was important to Luther that the authorities should act in loco parentis (in the place of a parent) when the natural parents prevented able youngsters from pursuing an education. This is also evident today, as some families could employ private tutors, but that was not an option for orphans and children living in poverty (Strohl 2001:152-154).

Luther has had a strong influence on protestant theology. We also regard baptism as crucial and believe that a person should repent every day and turn back to the Lord as the relationship with God is still considered above all else. It is also important to note that when Paul speaks about the authority of parents over children and how parents should act towards their children, it demonstrates the importance of parenting (Ephesians 6:4).

According to Luther, parenthood is a holy vocation and the most important vocation man will ever have. He describes it as there being no neighbour closer than one's own children and no claim on society more pressing (Strohl 2001:158). As modern parents and believers, we need to take our vocation as parents much more seriously. It is indeed a holy calling. Many parents spoil their children materially but neglect the development of their faith and their moral values. To give your child money and leave him/her at the mall, is very often a sign of a parent's guilt. On the other hand, parents who can afford it spend an enormous amount of money in preparing their children for a vocation. Although Luther states how important it is to prepare your child for a career, that is much less important than their spiritual lives.

As a society and as extended families we should also play our role in the vocation of parenting. In South Africa, the disparity in people's income is immense. Poverty should, however, not prevent any child from reaching their full potential. This lays an enormous responsibility on the State, society and the Church. Although South Africa allocates an enormous amount of money in the budget for education, there does not seem to be much progress. There are at least government grants and loans for the students from a poorer background. With the demand of free education for all, government and tertiary institutions wrestle with the problem of how to fund such a free education system.

Shortage of school facilities, books not delivered timeously, and a shortage of well qualified, dedicated teachers present substantial difficulties in this regard. In some schools, neither the teachers nor the pupils attend school on a regular basis. If teachers and parents do not set an example of hard work and diligence, how can children be expected to develop responsible behaviour themselves? The State is in loco parentis in South Africa and children must go to school as it is the law. Due to a desperate shortage of welfare workers in the country, the caseloads are overwhelming. The question then begs how the State can implement and monitor school attendance and see to the general welfare of pupils. Again, the question arises why our society views certain professions so much more valuable than others? The most selfless professionals such as teachers, welfare workers, and nursing staff are very poorly remunerated; which explains why these trained professionals are often driven to either seek work in private organisations, abroad or even quit their chosen profession altogether. This is the state in government schools. Parents, who can afford it at all, send their children to private schools and therefore the amount of private schools grows by the day. This is a vote of distrust in the Government's ability to deliver good education to all. The nett result is that the class differential in South Africa keeps widening.

3.8 John Calvin

John Calvin (1509-1564) had the image of his "children" as the followers of the Reformed faith. He is not alone in viewing children as a metaphor for the religious life of adult Christians. The traditional and contemporary patterns of biblical interpretation follow the lead of Scripture (Pitkin 2001:161). In 1 Corinthians 13:11, we read that when the writer was a child, he used to speak and think like a child. But now that he has become a man, he has put an end to childish things. "Brothers and sisters, don't be like children in the way you think" (1 Corinthians 14:20).

In the 1500s, protestant preachers and educators did not use the doctrine of original sin to emphasise the sinful character of children or legitimate harsh treatment of them. Children were, however, subject to corporal punishment and catechists and preachers repeatedly reminded parents of their obligation to discipline their children. Calvin did not emphasise the presence of original sin, even in very young children, and had nothing to do with the harsh treatment of children (Pitkin 2001:163-164).

Calvin is clear that the younger the child, the less he/she manifests the effects of sin. Calvin, like Augustine, assumes a graduated guilt as one moves with age to greater accountability for acts of wrongdoing. Young children are corrupted by original sin, but when compared to older children and adults, they demonstrate a lack of malice that their elders ought to emulate. Calvin interprets 1 Corinthians 14:20 to say that adult believers ought to emulate children's natural simplicity, but not their lack of understanding. Lack of understanding is blameworthy in older children and adults, but apparently not in young children (Pitkin 2001:165-166).

Calvin wrote two catechisms and promoted school reforms in Geneva. Like most German catechisms, Calvin's catechisms were moderate and emphasised eternal bliss. He was personally involved in the implementation of public policies that had important implications for children (Pitkin 2001:162). At Calvin's request, the Geneva Consistory was formed – an ecclesiastical court made up of the members of the Company of Pastors and elders. This Company led to the successful enforcement of morality in Geneva. They made judgment in a wide variety of cases, from a civil dispute with one's neighbour, to divorce and labour cases. Calvin saw parental consent as one of the requisites for being married. Marriage was also no longer a sacrament, and it was now possible, although difficult, to divorce and remarry. The Geneva Consistory almost always attempted to reconcile the parties involved. At this stage, the question remains whether the children's ages played a role in these determinations (Pitkin 2001:174-176).

Calvin ascribes responsibility for caring for children to both the domestic and public spheres. We see that the primary obligation of parents, especially fathers, is to teach godliness. The duty of children is to submit to parents and, by extension, the duty of all people is to submit to their divinely ordained superiors. Calvin remarks on the duty of children to adhere to their parents' wishes when contracting marriage. In his sermons, Calvin stresses the need for both fathers and mothers to provide proper instruction to their children (Pitkin 2001:169-173).

Calvin established the office of 'teaching doctor' and brought the selection of teachers under control of the pastors. Primary schools and secondary colleges functioned as before; public, post-secondary lectures by pastors continued, and financial control of the schools remained with the magistrates. The doctoral office increased in role and importance in the 1550s. In 1559, Calvin succeeded in establishing a new academy, which consisted of a lower-level Latin school and an

upper-level institution of higher education, which became renowned throughout Europe (Pitkin 2001:180).

Calvin upheld the traditional practice of infant baptism and recognised the validity of baptism in the Roman Church. With Luther, he reduced the number of sacraments to two (baptism and Eucharist), understood as visible signs of God's word designed to aid human weakness. In contrast to Roman teaching, baptism signified the full remission of all sin. No further sacrament was needed for the remission of post-baptismal sin (Pitkin 2001:181). Despite this apparently enhanced status of baptism, Calvin did not believe that the sacrament was strictly necessary for salvation. Salvation rests on God's promise and not on the sacramental sign of the promise. Christian parents have the duty to baptise children according to God's command but should not worry about their fate should they die unbaptised (Pitkin 2001:182).

It is apparent that children were not a major theme in Calvin's theology, but he did care immensely for their physical, psychological, social, and intellectual wellbeing. His two catechisms were also written to teach the Word of God to children and adults. Calvin was instrumental in the implementation of public policies that had important implications for children and also promoted school reforms in Geneva; he even called for a separate school for girls.

We should also care for the wellbeing of our children. Protestantism has been used to justify harsh treatment of children, however, it is important to notice that Calvin had no part in this interpretation of scripture. Calvin had a major influence on the Church and government of his time. Although the Church does not have the same influence on government and society as it did in 1500 to 1570, we can still and should influence decisions. The Church's voice must be heard, especially if it concerns the wellbeing of our children

If we look at the role that the Geneva Consistory played in applying rules and laws of morality in all spheres of civil and criminal cases, the question arises as to whether morality can be enforced by legislation. With the increase in divorces, we need to question the negative influence that this has on children. Calvin also subscribed to the concept that the parents of the parties to a marriage must consent before that marriage could legally take place. Today, parental consent is only necessary for the marriage of underage people. As a Christian, the researcher thinks that parental consent (although not a legally requirement) is important for a marriage. The marriage is not only a union of two people, but also of two families. In this new union, both families' faith,

value systems, preferences, and traditions will play a part. Parents need to be able to advise the next generation on the suitability of a spouse.

Calvin emphasised the father's role in the religious upbringing of children, but also advocated that fathers and mothers must teach their children about the word and love of God. Calvin laid the foundation for our understanding of the sacrament of baptism. He believed baptism to be the sign of our salvation that rests on God's promise and not on the sacramental sign of the promise. An interesting question arises: if it is not known whether an adopted child has been baptised, should he/she be baptised again?

3.9 Karl Barth

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is known for his view that humans live from the free grace of God alone. Barth stresses that children are bearers of a promise of grace by God's will to make them, and all humanity, covenant partners in Jesus Christ (Werpehowski 2001:389). Barth felt strongly that children should not be identified with an inherited strain of original sin. He rejects hereditary transmission of sin as an "extremely unfortunate and mistaken" doctrine that would rule out a human agent's responsibility for the evil he/she does or becomes (Werpehowski 2001:390-391).

Barth strongly rejected the concept of original sin. As a voluntary and responsible man, each person is responsible for their own corruption and sin and stands guilty before God. But the sin of humanity is really known as it has already been set aside by divine mercy in Christ and is thus part of our past, not our future. Being of sinful humanity is now once and for all put to death in Christ, yet absurdly "lives" (Barth, Torrance & Bromiley 1961:501-503). The public worship as a community is not only of baptism and community, but also of prayer (Barth, 1958:706).

According to Barth, the beginning of Christian life is marked by baptism.

When we look at Barth's opinion of the discipline of children, two things are apparent. First, he sees humans as covenant partners of God and covenant partners with others. Barth takes us being male and female as normatively unavoidable, so is the sequence of generations as one exists as the child of one's biological parents. Second, Barth wanted to clarify the divine commandment that children honour their mother and father. In Proverbs 2:1-6 the writer states that his son must accept his words and his commands. Then he will understand the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and

understanding. Parental authority is a divine appointed spiritual mission to carry and mediate a promise of grace to one's children (Werpehowski 2001:394-395).

We have to do with the command of God when a young man knows that he is called to honour his parents for the sake of God and to His glory, to let himself be taught and guided by his parents to be the child of God. Only when we put the matter in this way does the commandment emerge in its true state, independent of all natural impulses and social conversations (Barth et al 1961:251-252).

The call to "elder" children covers a range of situations. It is the responsibility of biological parents as well as that of childless couples. The biological parents should not isolate themselves from others who can also instruct their children. As far as adoptive mothers and fathers are concerned, the responsibility is just as great as for the biological parents. They are often unfairly stigmatised as not being their children's "real parents". This stigma is possible because of a presumption that biological connection establishes an intrinsic importance independent of a required mission to help make our children real children of God (Werpehowski 2001:396).

During the researcher's interviews, the adoptive parents related situations where they were often dismissed as not being the "real parents" of their children. One adoptive mother was even told by her son-in-law that she was not her daughter's "real mother", which caused her intense pain.

It is important that parents do not dominate their children. Children are not their property, subjects, servants or even pupils, but their apprentices, who are entrusted and subordinated to them in order for them to lead them into the correct way of life (Barth et al 1961:243). What does it mean for a child to honour his mother and his father? Independent of the child's age, the goal remains "willingly to learn the freedom of obedience to God" (Werpehowski 2001:397).

Barth writes in connection to parental success that:

1. Parents may "give their children the opportunity to encounter the God who is present, operative and revealed in Jesus Christ, to know him and to learn to love and fear Him" (Barth et al 1961:284).

2. Parents should teach children how to pray. They need to learn that we are dependent on God for all that life gives. It is important to give thanks and praise to the Lord (Barth et al 1961:88).

Barth's theology stresses the divine calling of parents to teach their children the Word of God, how to pray, and how to lead a God-fearing life. When Barth states that children should be disciplined, he in no way means harsh punishment. He sees a vertical relationship between the parent and God and a horizontal relationship between the parents and their child. He expands the terms "mother" and "father" to elders. This would then be any adult that answers to the divine calling of parenting. Here Barth also includes adoptive parents. He does not believe that the biological parents are exclusively the "real parents", simply because they have a biological connection to the child. He sees human existence as only by the grace of God. In raising our children, we must not start to congratulate ourselves when we have success; that is only by the grace of God.

Barth does not believe that an infant could be lost to the Kingdom if not baptised. He sees children as beginners who should grow in their independence from their parents and their elders. They should grow in faith and the understanding of God's Word as they grow up. He also sees them as individuals, as adults, but they still need to mature. Children are released from any pressure to conform to ideals besides those given by God. The children can then also be free to feel joy, which includes joy in one's accomplishments and achievements. We are thankful for our joys and celebrate it in community with others (Werpehowski 2001:403).

The concept of raising children through harsh punishment is still common in South African society, although corporal punishment is now against the law. The administrator of a children's home confirmed to that they still take in many abuse children. Barth's theology opposes this kind of physical discipline. He sees the vocation of parenting as a calling and the children as being together with their elders, in a relationship with God, and with each other. Elders, including the State, Church and society, should see to all the needs of children, whether physical, psychological, religious or educational.

3.10 The development of welfare in North America

3.10.1 The 19th century

The welfare of a community has always been important but also problematic. The Puritan family had a unique way of providing for the community's needs. The families had to provide not only for themselves but also for the needs of the community. Courts sought families who would provide homes for single men and women, house orphan children, provide correction for the criminal, care for the sick or disabled, and oversee the affairs of the financially destitute. This interaction between family and environment led to the idea of the family as a "little church". The father was the instructor and presented the Church and State; he presented a direct relation to God, mediated by scripture (Browning et al 2000:76-77).

Today it is inconceivable to house criminals as part of one's social duty. One will not easily find a family that would house the sick or disabled in their community. As a rule, families do not even take care of their own kin who are sick, old or disabled. The modern nuclear family often has two parents that must work outside the home just to make ends meet. Nevertheless, there are still families who adopt or foster children.

3.10.2 The slaveholding families

Welfare was not organised in slaveholding families; it consisted of slaveholding women taking care of the sick, the aged, and the orphans in their plantation as part of their extended family. Slave families created unique family practices. They often delayed permanent commitments until after the birth of a first child and they married outside their own kin. Their marriages were recognised only through religious ceremonies. They often declared the marriage before Christian slave ministers and their owners with accompanying marital festivities. Change of marital stability was maximised for slaves who married in young adulthood with their age close to that of their masters. Under these circumstances slave marriages usually endured for a lifetime – even without the recognition of the law. However, if a slave owner died or became heavily indebted; his estate was sold or divided among his creditors or heirs. Creditors and heirs often felt few obligations to keep slave families together, which led to instability for slave families (Browning et al 2000:78-79). This instability led to much heartache and children had no security in such a situation. The only "protection" that a slave family had was a stable slaveholding family with

some degree of “compassion”. All their social and welfare needs were dependent on the slaveholder’s family.

3.10.3 The Native-American matrilineal family

In Native-American families, the dynamics of kin altruism and kin investments worked out differently than they do in patrilineal family systems. Children lived with their fathers, but other blood-related males such as maternal uncles and grandfathers were often their first source of help. Because property was handed down through the mother’s lineage, women had economic power (Browning et al 2000:80). Native-American families took care of their communities’ social needs through the family, while extended family would take care of children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled.

3.10.4 The Enlightenment

The New Englanders of the 18th century were reading the avant-garde theories of the Enlightenment in which patriarchy was under attack. The ideologies of individual dignity and democracy interacted with socioeconomic trends to further influence the shape of families. Women were fused into the political and legal identities of their husbands or fathers before the Revolutionary War. However, women of the northern and middle colonies began to create legal and political identities for themselves, partly because of economic shifts that occurred during the Revolutionary War. The growth of a philosophy of republicanism and the economic contributions of mothers and wives went hand in hand, which stimulated a new interest in women’s education. If mothers were to be capable of educating their sons for the republic, they would need education themselves. This first occurred at home and later at women’s academies (Browning et al 2000:80-82).

3.10.5 Industrialisation and Evangelical religion

Industrialisation contributed to the restructuring of agricultural families of European descent. Fathers became wage earners outside the home and as a result, parenting styles changed. The father used to be considered the primary custodian and disciplinarian who ruled by guilt and the manipulation of consequences. Now, the stay-at-home mother ruled by shame and the withdrawal of emotional support. The economic relations also changed. The boys no longer learned a trade by doing adult tasks alongside their fathers. The concept of “boyhood” developed

s they were considered boys until they were educated and taught a trade. Housekeeping was also identified as a woman's task during this time (Browning et al 2000:84-85).

This new family's function in relation to the community changed. With adult males absent from the home, families were no longer able to take in prisoners, orphans, the elderly, and the sick. But the community still had its social problems and needs. While gender roles diverged and family privacy increased, the first era of women's associations developed. These associations cared for the needs of persons outside the immediate nuclear family. They created and funded the first institutions for the care of persons who required more care than it was thought families could deliver. Middle-class women provided charitable services and evangelised among poorer groups (Browning et al 2000:85).

Roman Catholic religious orders provided arenas for public domesticity in teaching or caring for the sick. Roman Catholics created religious space less through seeing or hearing the Word and more for attending mass and taking part in sacramental life (Browning et al 2000:86-87). Roman Catholics were very involved in caring for the less fortunate in their communities. The orders institutionalised the care of the sick, the elderly, and orphans.

3.10.6 Moving West

Scandinavians immigrated to North America. Single men were the early immigrants who then returned to their families with information about conditions in the upper Midwest. Scandinavians gathered together for the trip over sea and land and whole families, along with other families in their community frequently emigrated. Minnesota and Wisconsin, the States in which Scandinavians settled around the turn of the 20th century, developed ambitious, government-sponsored family support programmes, as did Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Wisconsin has been proactively developing programmes and policies designed to lead the emerging phase of welfare reform in the United States. This is still true today (Browning et al 2000:94-95). Scandinavian immigrants handled their social problems by this formal development of programmes and policies that ensure they could care for the elderly, sick, poor, and orphaned in a highly organised way.

3.10.7 The Welfare State

The Welfare State was formed after the civil war produced new conditions that required creative answers. A quarter of the male population had been maimed or died. Not only were many children orphaned and mothers widowed, a significant portion of the younger female population could not depend on marriage. The first federal social security legislation provided for those who had risked their lives or died in the service of their country. This included soldiers on the battlefield and mothers on the birthing bed. Single women became involved in public mothering, much like the settlement house movement (Browning et al 2000:95-96).

3.11 Adoption in South Africa

Adoption used to be a private matter between the adoptive and biological parents, and occurred predominantly within a family. These agreements however provided no security to the people in the adoption triad. When the Adoption of Children Act 25 of 1923 came into effect, adoption was for the first time legally regulated in South Africa. South African legislation was modelled according to the New Zealand adoption legislation. Roman law had an influence on New Zealand legislation and indirectly on the South African adoption legislation (Ferreira 2007:1-9).

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 improved unwed biological fathers' rights. These fathers can now apply for joint custody with the mother. If the mother wants to give the child up for adoption, the unwed biological father can apply to adopt his child. Various religious organisations established many schools, homes for expectant mothers, and children's homes. This involvement is becoming increasingly difficult in the light of diminishing financial support, increasing costs, and inadequate grants from the State.

3.12 Love and Christian Family Theory

Different models of love existed in the 19th century. Most notably, the subtle ways in which patriarchy exploited appeals to sacrificial love. At the one extreme, some Christians have identified love with self-sacrifice on behalf of the other person. Love has been associated with the Greek word *agape*. In this view, love becomes largely duty, commitment, and fidelity without thought of return from the other. On the other hand, love is identified with the fulfilment of the individual who loves. To love another is to feel enrichment, elation, passion, and even pleasure. This form of love is associated with the Greek word *eros* (Browning et al 2000:101).

Another view in the middle of these two extremes defines love as mutuality or “equal regard”. Love as equal regard, includes elements of *eros* and sacrificial self-giving, although it subordinates both to equal concern for other and self. Love as equal regard was central to the meaning of *agape* as this word was used in the New Testament (Browning et al 2000:101).

Many South African churches stand in the protestant Christian tradition where Luther, Calvin, and Barth were strong influencers. South African had a very patriarchal society strongly influenced by the Church. The work of contemporary feminists worldwide brought a change in the relationships between men and women. The necessity for women to work outside the home also changed the positions of power in relationships. The researcher believes that equal love or mutuality is imperative in all societies.

Browning et al (2000:271) describe mutuality as treating both oneself and others with equal seriousness. Browning’s survey shows that current North American culture values the language of mutuality more than the language of sacrificial love common to previous generations (Browning et al 2000:271). Ideals such as mutuality may guide human prosperity, but it can also be dangerous. Ideals can be crush with moralistic harshness. Authentic Christianity has the capacity to project commanding ideals and point toward perfection but admit that sin leads us to fall short of that which is expected. “The secular mind that does not understand the language of forgiveness and grace is far more likely to fall into moralistic and condemning attitudes than a truly Christian sensibility. Mutuality is an interpretation of Jesus’s Great Commandment” (Browning et al 2000:272-273).

“And the second is like it: You must love your neighbour as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:39). In other words, you also must love yourself. You should love your neighbour because God loves your neighbour. This means that one should will the good for the other as earnestly as one does for oneself (Browning et al 2000:273-275).

An important aspect of mutuality is equal regard. This is a discourse where all speak, listen, attempt to see from the other’s perspective, empathise, test to determine if we understand correctly, remain open to correction, support each other through this process, and stay committed to the covenant of dialogue (Browning et al 2000:275).

“Love as equal regard is not something that one individual expresses unilaterally toward another. It is something that people create together” (Browning et al 2000:276). It is created through successive attempts to communicate needs and desires, to empathise with, to listen and understand, to hold and accept, and then to live their mutual agreements. Love and justice are intersubjective (Browning et al 2000:276). The real challenge is to be able to put aside any preconceived notions, stereotypes, and any other hindrances that may impair the dialogue.

Love as mutuality is learning to express respect for the life history or narrative of the other’s self. To love the other as oneself means to regard and empathise with the narrative identity of the other just as one regards and empathises with one’s own narrative (Browning et al 2000:282). People have different images of God. Therefore, every married couple should participate in an emphatic but critical dialogue about the images of the divine in the narrative that each partner identifies with at that stage of their relationship.

The spirituality of marriage can be enriched by a God-image that depicts God as so concerned to enjoy friendship with humans that God is willing to suffer and endure to maintain those relations. God’s love becomes a model for a marital commitment that endures the pain of hard times but endures for the joy of mutuality (Browning et al 2000:290). Only in the work of Jesus Christ on Earth can we see what real forgiving love is. In a marriage where there is mutuality, there must be total acceptance and forgiveness.

Churches must retrieve their marriage and family traditions, even though they must do so critically. Churches should not just promote getting married and staying married; they should themselves be sensitive to inequalities, power distortions, convoluted communications, and failures in intersubjective characteristic of families since the beginning of human history. Churches should proclaim a critical family culture guided by the ethics of equal regard (Browning et al 2000:307).

Browning et al (2000:308-309) found that home-based worship is crucial for the transmission of faith and family traditions. There should be continuity between the gathered ecclesia and the church at home. Parental authority is a dialogue between parents’ own covenant with God and the Church’s covenant; God has a covenant with both Church and family. Parental authority should evolve from a dialogue with a church that itself is dedicated to an appreciative yet critical inquiry into its traditions. Churches must join with other churches to create a new critical

marriage and family culture. This guideline follows the vision of the Church as the primary carrier of the interplay between mutual and sacrificial love needed to humanise our natural inclinations (Browning et al., 2000:308-309).

To join with other churches on important subjects means potentially sacrificing ways of understanding. There might be fears that a specific Church group will be misdirected and will succumb to a perverted scriptural interpretation. Furthermore, there might be a sense that “our way of understanding Scripture” is superior and that “we do not need other people’s lesser contributions”. To overcome these prejudices, churches need to trust each other. To breach these differences, dialogue and exposure to each other should be the first step. We should focus on the goal to love God above all and to love our neighbour.

Christians can respect the differentiation of Church and State and still believe that God has implicit covenants with the State that Christians should help fulfil. Churches should not permit public institutions to become isolated from the positive cultures and energies and specific religio-cultural traditions. Part of this dialogue between family, local church, and public school should result in developing new educational approaches to family life and marriage; approaches that have continuity with, but may not be identical to, the basic values of churches and families (Browning et al 2000:310-311).

Most of the South African population are Christian. This however does not prevent citizens from being directly or indirectly part of the looting and pillaging of the country’s resources. The culture of entitlement takes precedence over any ethics or regard to what Scripture teaches us. Some Church groups even condone this behaviour by supporting leaders who have made themselves guilty of these actions. Confirmation of Christian belief has become a dichotomy of what is confessed with the mouth and the heart does not necessarily need to be confirmed in action. What people believe and proclaim on Sunday are often not what they live during the week. Some Christians have become so used to this ethical dichotomy, that they are living comfortably with it. Such a divide is promulgated by political populism. It has become very difficult to find common ground between State and Church. To address this challenge, the Church should declare that it will not support any loveless action by Church or State leaders.

Churches have retreated from sex, marriage and family education, while secular courses have taken their place. “Churches should take the lead in preparing youth for a critical familism”

(Browning et al 2000:313). Many churches do not provide adequate marriage preparation for engaged couples or youth and teenagers (Browning et al 2000:313).

In South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church is in the midst of a legal dispute regarding a decision made about scriptural interpretation of same sex marriage. Church leaders are finding it difficult to address the discrepancy between interpretations of scripture that are sometimes vastly different between various generations and to keep congregants of a certain denomination together. The Church should keep on reflecting and discussing this important topic with a specific focus on what we as Christians must contribute that will enhance mutually beneficial relationships filled with love.

One of the major sources of strain on families is the tensions between family needs and the demands of paid work. Mothers have joined fathers in the workforce, the average workweek has been extended, parents spend less time with their children, and marital couples spend less time with each other. It takes time and energy to create an equal-regard family with parents guiding children into an ever-deepening dialogue with them and their religious traditions. “If local churches are serious about helping families develop the communication patterns needed to fulfil their covenants of equal regard, they should challenge families to work less and balance employment and family life better” (Browning et al 2000:316-317).

Divorce is a reality that churches should address. Churches should take a conservative attitude toward divorce. Browning et al (2000:318-319) recommend four strategies that the local Church can use to address the reality of divorce. First, prevention is better than cure. The best prevention is extensive marital preparation and early Church-based and school-based education for marriage and family. Second, Church-based marriage counselling should have a bias to preserve marriages. Third, churches should however minister to, love and sustain the divorced. Fourth, it is important that churches also join the national discussion about divorce laws (Browning et al 2000:318-319).

In the modern Christian family, there is a high premium on the commitments and communicative skills needed to make families cohere. Much of the cultural and educational reconstruction must begin with them. This means acknowledging how Christian love functioned throughout its history to counter what Browning et al (2000:106) refer to as the male problematic, namely the tendency of men to drift away from families. They also speak of a female problematic, which is

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the tendency of females under some conditions to suppress their own needs and raise their children without paternal participation. This sometimes takes place under great stress and at a great cost. “Understanding these problematics and the desires that motivate them shows why *eros* should be fundamental part of an adequate definition of Christian love” (Browning et al 2000:106).

The male problematic is apparent in all the cultures in South African society. The most well-known example is of the divorced father who does not see his children regularly. There can be many reasons for this and it is not always due to a lack of interest in his children. Sometimes the mother may make it difficult for the children to visit their father or for him to visit them. It may also be due to logistical difficulties, but sometimes it is due to a lack of attachment to the children. Many unwed mothers raise their children alone, while some fathers are simply not interested in caring for their children. Other unwed fathers found that as they had no paternal rights before the establishment of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, they were excluded from the children’s lives. These aforementioned situations all lead to the so-called female problematic.

The growing absence of fathers from their families and the lives of their children, must be urgently addressed, especially in South Africa. It has become second nature for some unwed fathers to have more than one child out of wedlock and not take responsibility for them. The Church should play a strong leadership role in guiding the community to re-evaluate such behaviour. The Church and the community should stress the valuable contribution that fathers could make to their children’s lives.

The Church can serve as an organisation that is there to guide and support individuals, families, and communities to grow in respectful, loving relationships. There should also be understanding for the different stages of relationships. The Church should lead their members to grow in the understanding of the absolute wonder that God is showing Himself uniquely through every individual. It is through loving relationships that we can discover more of the abundance of God’s love.

3.13 The Church and family today

Building on the analogical-familial theology of Stephen Post (1994), Balswick and Balswick base their theology on relationality within the Holy Trinity and the descriptions of God in

relationships that are found throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament. In marriage, man and woman become one and yet remain two distinct individuals. As children come into the family they are part of the family unit but remain unique individuals. The process of maintaining a separate identity and uniqueness, while remaining connected in belonging, relationship and unity, is called differentiation (Balswick & Balswick 2014:3-4).

“Then God said ‘Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth’. God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Uniqueness and unity are concurrently described as the relational aspects of the Godhead (Balswick & Balswick 2014:4). A family contains separate yet unique individuals. It traditionally begins with the marriage of two separate individuals. According to the marriage vows, these two persons are now one. It is important that they remain separate and unique in their oneness. As children are added to the family, each child is also a unique individual with their own character traits, including strengths and weaknesses.

The relational process involves embracing a person’s uniqueness while also forming unity. We look at God in relationship to the covenant with Israel as the focus in the development of a theology of the family. God loves unconditionally; He is the one that established the covenant with Israel. In the same manner, the family is the place where a person is loved unconditionally (Balswick & Balswick 2014:5-6). Balswick and Balswick build on this concept of the covenant.

In their theology of family relationships, there are four non-linear but sequential stages, namely: covenant, grace, empowerment, and intimacy (Balswick & Balswick 2014:7). The family is the safe space where every individual can be himself/herself. However, a family must remain a unity, otherwise it is just people living together and not sharing in God’s gift of life. The starting point of a family relationship is unconditional love and leads to a covenant commitment. The covenant commitment is demonstrated supremely by God to the creation. His commitment stands, even if mankind does not respond to the covenant. God’s commitment is unconditional, but only if the nation receives and responds to the covenant, will they receive the blessings of the covenant. The covenant extends from generation to generation. Only by receiving this unconditional love of God can we love others unconditionally. Balswick and Balswick make a

distinction between unilateral commitment and bilateral commitment. The unconditional love of parents towards their infant is an example of a unilateral commitment, while marriage is an example of a mature bilateral commitment (Balswick & Balswick 2014:8-11).

The unconditional love of God is grace; it is undeserved favour. If the family life is based on the covenant, there will be forgiveness and grace. In such a family, the members act responsibly out of consideration and love for each other. Christ's death and resurrection for mankind was through the grace of God for mankind. God's act of forgiveness and love is the basis of human forgiveness and love. This is the ideal, but humans tends to fall short of that (Balswick & Balswick 2014:12-13). If the parents set an example of covenant love, their children can follow. Parents have the privilege to not only teach their children about love, but to live by example.

There can sometimes evolve a power struggle within families. This can occur between husband and wife, between the children, or between the parents and children. This struggle can intensify during the children's adolescence. Balswick and Balswick opine that to empower each other is much more desirable than a power struggle (Balswick & Balswick 2014:14-16). Empowerment is the attempt to help another person recognise their strengths and abilities and help them reach their potential. We can see empowerment of humankind in the work of Christ. Jesus did not use power to control others; He used power to uplift, serve, encourage and enable others. The Holy Spirit empowers us to empower other people through love as exemplified by Jesus. An empowered family will take delight in each member being all that they can be and serving God by being all that God wants them to be. Jesus is an example of how an empowered person has authority. Parents do not have to be afraid of losing power by empowering their children as they will retain personal power in the process of empowering their children. A parent's authority is internally, rather than externally controlled. The children can internalise this internal control in their personhood (Balswick & Balswick 2014:14-16).

Empowered children and teenagers will have an internal locus of control. They will be able to make their parents' value system their own and act in a responsible way. Parents must trust their empowerment of their children and that their children will make responsible choices. If a child makes the wrong choice, they must always be able to count on the safety net of their parental home.

Adam and Eve only hid from God after they sinned. Before that, they were naked before one another and unashamed. They had true intimacy as a result of knowing the other person and being known. When a family lives in the covenant of God and experiences love, grace and empowerment, they will be able to trust one another. They will communicate without fear and express themselves with confidence (Balswick & Balswick 2014:16-17). There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). It is possible for there to be true intimacy in a marriage and family. This brings us full circle to the unconditional love that is the cornerstone of the family in covenant with God.

Families can be seen as a biosocial system in terms of simple feedback, cybernetic control, morphogenesis, and reorientation. Simple feedback is direct feedback, such as giving a child candy to reward desired behaviour. In cybernetic control, deviances from the family rules are controlled by acting to maintain the *status quo*. Morphogenesis is a system capable of generating and creating other ways of responding to a situation, which occurs when old methods no longer work. In reorientation, the goal of the family is changed. This is a rare occurrence where the entire family changes their way of behaving and thinking. An example of such a change is if an entire family accepts a new faith (Balswick & Balswick 2014:25-28).

Families will use these different kinds of control when needed. If a family with adolescents are stuck in a simple feedback system, they can experience problems. In cybernetic control, the control can in some cases be too rigid. For instance, the children might have had to be home at 20:00 when they were younger, but by the time they are older than 16, they might experience this rule as too rigid. Most families can work in a morphogenesis system and come up with creative solutions to problems.

Balswick and Balswick work with an interactive model where social, biological, genetic, and neurological factors will have an influence on the family. Families also have developmental tasks and the individuals in the family will go through different stages in life, for example puberty. Families move from one stage to the next when a major transition takes place (Balswick & Balswick 2014:32).

Being separate persons, every individual has different social interactions. Although they might share a genetic make-up, they will still differ vastly. These differences can also be biological, as is the case with male and female members of the family. One only has to compare the

differences between siblings to come to the obvious conclusion that each person is unique. Family members will also have different talents and abilities. Neurologically, there is a significant difference in development between an infant, a toddler, a child, an adolescent, and an adult. As families, we should understand our differences but remain unified.

In their integration of development theories, Balswick and Balswick emphasise the importance of cohesion in families. This refers to the emotional closeness in families. Families should have a healthy degree of separateness, but still a strong sense of belonging. They should support each other but not be intrusive. Strong families are adaptable and have good communication skills. There should also be agreement about each person's role in the family (Balswick & Balswick 2014:31-42).

In strong families the roles are clearly defined. It is not that important how the household tasks and work outside the house are allocated. It is imperative that where both the partners work long hours, the household chore be divided fairly. Children should also know their roles and how they contribute to the family. It is important that children also have chores as this will help them develop a sense of responsibility and make them feel part of the family unit and dynamic. All family members must therefore work towards a common goal and be part of a team.

Marriage is a union between husband and wife. If they make God the centre of their marriage, there will be a threefold cord. In a marriage, intimacy is a deep level of knowing and being known through listening, understanding, sharing, and caring. Intimacy builds on grace, commitment, and empowerment (Balswick & Balswick 2014:55).

Children will only be able to experience intimacy in the family if there is intimacy in the marriage. Although the term "marriage" is used, it is important to note that a family can consist not only of a father, a mother and a couple of children. People can be partners in heterosexual or homosexual relationships. Children could be biological, adopted or foster children. In South Africa, we are faced with the reality of many child-headed households.

People should differentiate themselves from their family of origin before they enter into marriage. They should also be adaptable to the changes needed in a marriage (Balswick & Balswick 2014:76-78). "Then God said, 'Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so

that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth' ” (Genesis 1:26).

It is indeed the relationality between distinct human beings (male and female) that reflects the *Imago Dei* (Balswick & Balswick 2014:80). Man and woman are made in the image of God. This entrusts us with the calling to care for the Earth and all the creatures on it. Being created in the image of God also means to live a life where you are always moving closer to the example of Jesus' life.

In a traditional Christian marriage, two people decide to be together in oneness of meaning, commitment and service, but they maintain their individual personhoods. Like a dance, marriage can be defined as two people moving together rhythmically while they hold on and let go, embrace and release each other. This dance is dynamic as time and circumstances change (Balswick & Balswick 2014:81-82).

Marriage used to be a social institution of lifelong commitment. In the 1960s, this notion was challenged and it was discarded for romantic, individual happiness, and self-fulfilment. The solution between these two opposites is found in a biblical perspective as humans were created by God in the context of relationship.

“With the rib taken from the human, the LORD God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being. The human said, ‘This one finally is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She will be called woman because from a man she was taken’ ” (Genesis 2:22-23). This is an image of interdependency. “Marriage is not only a commitment to the institution but also a commitment to the relationship” (Balswick & Balswick 2014:89-90).

Partners in a marriage should be adaptable to circumstances. The determining of roles in the marriage are important, but it cannot be a rigid role determination. In parenting, both the parents should be involved. If we look at authority in a Christian marriage, both partners submit to Jesus Christ as their Lord and to each other. The message of Ephesians 5 is mutual submissiveness. In the New Testament, empowerment is described as building each other up in the Christian faith. That is serving and loving other and helping each other to mature spiritually (Balswick & Balswick 2014:91-105).

Only empowered partners can truly empower their children. Partners who submit to God will be able to teach their children in the biblical ways. To empower one's children, it is best to have them face the consequences of their behaviour in a firm, consistent and loving manner. With mutual respect, there will be firmness but not domination. The word "disciple" refers to one who accepted certain values and ideas, and guides and teaches others to accept them. "Discipline" is a related word that may describe how parents can teach their children by word and deed (Balswick & Balswick 2014:108-111).

Intimacy is essential in a family. This means total trust between family members. Emotions such as love must be openly expressed to reach a deeper level of intimacy, yet this is only the case in very few families. The importance of expressing love for each other cannot be overemphasised. When love is expressed and there is no reciprocal expression of love, the emotional closeness in the relationship will become stagnant. Love can be expressed verbally as well as nonverbally. Verbal communication is more direct and clearer, whereas nonverbal communication can be misinterpreted. Although sending your loved one a dozen red roses is a wonderful gesture, words of love are also important (Balswick & Balswick 2014:242-245).

In Jesus's word to Peter in John 21, we see a picture of the intimacy that is desirable in all relationships, but especially in a family. It is a model of the communication and expression of love people should emulate. In this pericope, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. Previously, Peter denied Jesus three times and through love Jesus gives Peter the chance to reaffirm his love three times. Then, Peter changed from an intimidated coward during Christ's crucifixion to a fearless witness after His ascension. When struggling to find intimacy, we need to know that we can change by expressing love (Balswick & Balswick 2014:250). 1 John 4:18-19 teaches that there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. We can love because God loved us first.

Looking at the American family, it is argued that the post-industrial ideal of a family should be egalitarian. In this family, a husband and wife will both participate equally in childcare, paid work, and other domestic responsibilities. A critical marriage and familism culture would have equality between wife and husband and there will be a commitment to communication, reflection, and openness. Families also shape their environments, just as they are shaped by their

environments. American society is undergoing a revolution in its image of ideal marital and family love (Browning et al 2000:1-20).

Browning et al. constructed a theology of family love that makes equal regard or mutuality central and then makes self-sacrificial love an essential but subordinate moment of love that is mainly in the service of equal regard. This love entails more than respect for the other person; it wills the good for the other. "...love as equal regard is reversible; it accords to the self the same regards it accords to the other" (Browning et al 2000:20-23).

Four social science explanations are provided for the family in crisis:

- Our changing cultural values, especially the increase in individualism;
- Changing economic patterns'
- Psychological causes such as poor socialisation of the family; and
- Patriarchy.

The interaction of these four factors has produced the postmodern context for family formation and maintenance. Browning et al. posit that there is a fourfold democratisation of marriage and families, namely: the democratisation of intimacy, work, value formation and parenting (Browning et al 2000:50).

As Christians, we search for a resolution of the family crisis in our faith. If we look at the trend affecting American families, divorce is an important factor. More than half of new marriages will end in divorce. There is a correlation between the creation of an underclass and single parenthood, whether due to a tragedy, such as the early death of the father, divorce or out-of-wedlock births. The female-headed households suffer financial loss. On average, the children of single parents do not do as well on almost all indices of child wellbeing: physical and psychological health, performance in school, entry into the job market, family formation, and marital stability. These children are sometimes also faced with an absent father, which correlates with poverty for both mothers and their children (Browning et al 2000:52-68).

Mothers enter the labour market more with nearly 60% of women working in 1990. American companies have been increasing workloads of employees, reducing staff, and extending working

hours. Both mothers and fathers now work in the labour market, but the take-home pay has decreased. All these factors lead to parents spending less time with their children (Browning et al 2000:54-55).

There has been a rise in individualism where parents focus on themselves and their nuclear family – there is little obligation towards the extended family. This individualism also contributes to the nuclear family having little support from the extended family and the community. People started to make decisions about their children and spouses in the same way they make decisions about their jobs, cars, education, and financial investments – that is, what brings them individual satisfaction (Browning et al 2000:58-62).

South Africa society is very fragmented, however, one can still say that family is important across all South African cultures. It was only 30 years ago that most people were members of the main stream churches. Not all members, however, were active in their congregations. Some members attended church sermons and functions regularly but did not apply Jesus' teachings to their day-to-day lives. Many people saw their church membership as mainly a networking opportunity. It was deemed important to state your membership of a church on your curriculum vitae.

Within just a few years, this situation changed. Mainstream churches are losing congregants. To be in a church is not held that important anymore. Many people are non-churchgoing or agnostic. Some of them point at Christians and say that they do not want to be hypocrites like them. Although these claims can easily be dismissed as excuses, the Church should take these claims very seriously. To grow the Church, we need to listen to criticism from outside. If you discuss the Ten Commandments, most non-churchgoers will agree with the content whole-heartedly. They usually also live with a strong moral compass and raise their children with love, empathy, and a clear knowledge of what is right and wrong. Furthermore, many such people will acknowledge God, the Creator, but perhaps not Jesus Christ.

Agnostics, on the other hand, hold that the essential nature of things, such as God, are unknown or unproven and therefore they are sceptical about the existence of God. This does not mean that they are necessarily bad people. Agnostics most often have a strong value system, are contributing members of society, and raise their children with a strong moral compass. The

Church can therefore not fall back on the stance that to be a good citizen and parent, you need to believe in Jesus Christ or attend church.

Chapter 4 THE HISTORY OF ADOPTION

We find examples of adoptions through the millennia. One of the most well-known stories is that of the baby Moses in Egypt. He was found in a basket in the Nile River and adopted by the mighty Pharaoh's daughter. Although many adoptive can relate to the Pharaoh's daughter, the interesting result of the story of Moses is that he chose his biological family over his adoptive family. In the biblical story of Samuel, his mother, Hannah, promised him to the service of God if she fell pregnant. She takes Samuel to the Priest Eli (probably at the age of 12) to work in the service of God. Samuel then becomes Eli's adopted child.

In the New Testament, we read very little about Joseph, the father of Jesus. It seems almost as if Jesus grew up without a father figure. This would have meant trouble for Jesus. Being without social identity, he would not have been called a child of Abraham or God's child. He would have had no access to the temple, thereby also no access to the court in the temple. Here, forgiveness of sin could be facilitated by mediators, but this was denied to him. He would also not have been given a daughter for marriage (Van Aarde 2001:4). Although it appears that Jesus was fatherless, He is the Son of God. Through Him we are all the adopted children of God.

For many decades, Japanese captains of industry have also adopted. The businessman will identify a young businessman with the ability to take over his business as adult adoptions are legal in Japan. The idea is that the adult adoptee inherits the business. These adoptions can take place even if the businessman has children of his own. The adoption is about the succession of leadership in the company and ultimately about the survival of the company.

Historically, people have always taken care of family members' children where needed. Until the 19th century, there were no formal adoptions, just an informal arrangement between the parties concerned. Due to social stigma and religious beliefs, babies born out of wedlock were not welcomed into the family circle. These children ended up in foundling homes provided by the State. The conditions were appalling and those who survived were exploited as cheap labour when they were older. Some were placed on "orphan trains" and transported to the countryside where farmers and their wives would choose healthy-looking children and adopt them to use as field hands (Rosenberg 1992:9).

Adoptions were formally arranged from the 1940s. These adoptions became known as closed adoptions. Birth records were rewritten as if the child had been born to the adoptive parents. The files were sealed by the court and the information would only be released in the case of a life-threatening situation, such as a medical emergency. This meant that the adoptee could never obtain the information about their biological parents and the parents could never trace a child that had been given up for adoption. The reasoning behind this policy was to protect adopted children from the knowledge of their “immoral” conception and reflected a shift from viewing illegitimate children as being tainted by “bad blood” to conceptualising them with a clean slate. The unwed mother’s secret was also protected so that she could go on to live an upstanding life. The turn came in 1955 with an American national conference on adoption sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America. The orientation then shifted to the “best interests of the child” (Rosenberg 1992:9-10).

The “best interest of the child” is also the motto of the CMR and other welfare organisations in South Africa. The welfare worker and magistrate are usually the people who decide what is in the best interest of the child. In South Africa, the adoption option of a closed or open adoption is negotiated with the biological mother and the adoptive parents. A closed adoption policy gives the security of anonymity to the biological parents, the adoptive parents gain a child, and the child gains a home. Although the biological parents are then unable to trace an adopted child and contact him, the adoptee can later obtain the information through the welfare organisation that handled the adoption. The welfare worker then contacts the biological parents to enquire if they would want a reunion; both parties must agree before a reunion is arranged.

Criticism of closed adoption practices began in the 1960s. Many members of the adoption triad began to question the value of confidentiality. Lifton was a strong advocate for open adoptions. There are now different levels of open adoptions. In some cases, the adoptee and biological parents will write letters to each other with the welfare worker as the intermediary. With all the parties concerned in agreement, a meeting could be arranged when the adoptee comes of age. The 100% open adoption, where the adoptee knows from a young age who his/her biological parents are can have psychological implications, such as difficulty disciplining the child. With such an adoption it becomes advisable that everyone in the adoption triad receives counselling as needed.

With the change in societal norms, women feel less stigmatised about having a baby out of wedlock. More women keep their babies, and contraception and abortion also lead to fewer adoptions. Through the awareness created by writers like Lifton, loss and grieving became popular topics, therefore adoption is not viewed as the perfect solution anymore. Although adoption meets real needs, it simultaneously denies deeply held wishes. Adoptive parents wish they could have borne the children they are raising. Children wish that the parents who bore and who raised them could be one and the same. Birth parents wish the circumstances might have been such that they could have raised the child they bore (Rosenberg, 1992:13).

4.1 In the best interest of the child

The term “in the best interest of the child” is frequently used by social workers when giving a recommendation to the court. The question is, however, what exactly is in the best interest of the child?

When a child must be removed from his or her parents for his/her own safety, an urgent court order is issued. The child is often placed in a secret location known only to the welfare worker and the adoption agency. When considering adoption, the welfare worker can place the child with the prospective adoptive couple before the biological parents have signed the adoption papers. In the 60 days in which the parents can reconsider their decision and change their minds, the child is most often in the care of the prospective adoptive parents.

In closed adoptions, the child severs his ties with the biological family, his/her name is changed, and his/her previous identity is essentially left behind. It is a fallacy that adoption can provide continuity. The loss of the adoptees’ roots cannot be replaced by the adoptive family (Mass 2018:2-6). While this was the case with all the families the researcher interviewed, it is no longer the case in South Africa. Nowadays, open adoptions are the preferred option. A meeting is held with both the biological parents and the adoptive parents present. A decision is then made whether the adoption must be open or closed. There are different degrees of openness in open adoptions; it can range from a letter or a photo from the biological parents or regular physical contact between the adoptee and the biological parents. An adoption within a family is of course always an open adoption.

When a child is removed from his/her parents' custody, an application is sometimes made to have the child adopted without the biological parents' consent. Sometimes we find that the biological parents are demonised, condemned, and the grounds given for the application of the adoption is most often that the biological parents are unable to raise their child. Mass (2018) provides examples where the case presented by the State to have the adoption legalised, is in fact prejudiced against the biological parents and the facts are not always presented impartially, and some facts might even be omitted. Whether and how often this still happens in South Africa would be an interesting topic for further research.

In the many cases of closed adoptions, the hurt or even damage done by severing all a child's connections with his/her biological family is ignored. In the cases where a child's adoption is done without the consent of the parents, the adoption agency speaks for the child. Children under the age of 12 do not usually bear witness to their relationship with their parents in court. Mass (2018:5) concludes that adoption is not a solution to the loss of the bond with the child's biological family.

The researcher opines that the argument for open adoption is very strong. Not only does the child keep contact with his/her biological family and genealogy, it is also less stressful for the biological mothers and fathers. The welfare workers all agreed that the biological mothers and fathers had less fears about the future of their child and feel more in control of the situation. This is also a very positive outcome for unwed biological fathers since the Children's Act 38 of 2005 came into effect.

In discussions with various social workers, it was affirmed that infants already bond with their mothers in utero. The placement of the infant with other caregivers is traumatic for the child and the older the child at the age of adoption, the more traumatised the child is following an adoption. South Africa has made great strides in viewing the child as an individual with an opinion. Children of 10 years and older must sign permission to be adopted; a scenario which most often occurs when a stepparent wants to adopt the child.

4.2 The adoptee

The adoptee lives through many traumas in his/her life. The original separation from the biological mother is the initial trauma or the primal wound. The adoptee is affected by the initial

act of separation from the biological parents and the expectation of connection to the adoptive parents. The child is forced to accept decisions made for him/her. The adoptee must then take on the culture and family values of the adoptive family in order to acquire a sense of belonging, irrespective of how false the reality is. To belong to a clan is part of the survival of the infant or child. To fit in with one's clan is a basic, core requirement for survival.

It is in this false reality that the split in the adoptee's psyche takes place. There is the apparent reality seen on the surface; the happily adopted individual. Then there is the so-called ghost kingdom in which many adoptees exist. Here they fantasise about their biological family in a safe space and without offending the adoptive family. In this safe space the adoptee can associate with his/her kin, even if only imaginary.

"...adoption is a journey that everyone wants to go smoothly. Its paths are paved with romantic fantasies of perfect families and perfect children who, having somehow found each other somewhere along the way, are believed to live happily ever after" (Lifton 2002:207). In reality, adoption is faced by many obstacles. The researcher will endeavour to share these obstacles, trials, and triumphs that the people in the adoption triad have experienced.

4.3 Permanence for children

One of the most lasting relationships in life is that between a parent and a child. Children form a permanent part of family life, even when grown up and with children of their own. When placing children in substitute homes, the aim is for permanency, yet foster homes can never provide this permanency. This is an important factor in the development of the formal adoption process.

In 1854, Charles Loring Brace and his colleagues at the Children's Aid Society launched the first programme for the placement of children in substitute homes. Forty-six New York street children were transported to Michigan and placed in farm homes. The same agency placed 51 000 children in the Midwest in the next 75 years. The underlying reasons for this practice were clear: this programme was developed to protect the cities from gangs of unattached youth that would otherwise grow into a "class of paupers and criminals". As to the selection of homes, the romanticising of the agrarian life as opposed to the evils of the city was clear. Devoted placement workers used agricultural terms and spoke of "transplanting" children in "good soil" (Hartman 1979:18).

These children were an economic asset, not a liability. Concern about what was happening to these children was mounting by the 1880s. There were often reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation suffered by these children. The Catholic Church also objected because many children placed were of Catholic heritage while the farm homes they were sent in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana were those of Protestant families (Hartman 1979:19).

This growing concern about what was happening to children in foster care or who were adopted led to foster home investigations. Charles W. Birtwell, the “outdoor worker” to the Boston Children’s Aid Society in 1886, took the lead in developing formal studies, including office interviews, home visits, and investigation of references. Families were “investigated” and the notion of “matching” began to appear. An effort was made to find a child for a family that was as close as possible to the child the couple might have had “biologically”. The idea of family building as a service to childless couples became entrenched in adoption practice. The psychological orientation in investigating and approving adoptive homes culminated in the 1950s with the use of the Rorschach test as a tool in adoption home studies (Hartman 1979:19-20).

In his study of adopted applicants, Henry Maas discovered that The Child Welfare League of America was quite successful in instructing social workers to accept a particular image of an adoptive family. The model adoptive couple, as discovered in the Maas study, was in their mid-30s, white, Protestant, middle-class, active churchgoers, and high school graduates. They were childless, unable to have children, in good health, and wanted an infant. They were described as having a stable marriage, and reportedly happy childhoods. This normative image also transcended the individual needs of different children (Hartman 1979:21).

In the late seventies, the emphasis shifted from the family to the child in need. A 1978 “Policy Statement on Adoption” developed by the New York City Department of Social Services requested that agencies “eliminate from their policy statements and adoption information strict and arbitrary criteria for judging characteristics of adoptive families” (Hartman 1979:23).

Modern adoption programmes focus on finding a permanent home for children. Welfare workers started using the phrase “hard to place children”. This included children with handicaps, psychological needs, as well as older children. The term “hard to place” is questionable, as it places the problem and responsibility with the child. The adoption system has tended to define adoption and adoptive homes in a way that excludes all but a select few, based on specific

criteria such as youth, freedom from handicaps or physical impairment, and so forth. In South Africa, most adoptions are that of black infants.

The primary concern of adoption programmes is now to find adoptive homes for the thousands of children waiting in “temporary” care who are available for adoption (Hartman 1979:11-24). Triseliotis notes that there is a decrease in the number of children made available for adoption, due to changing social attitudes towards unwed parenthood. A decade ago, a “hard to place” child was one over the age of 12 months, whilst now it would usually be a teenager or a severely handicapped child. Several studies have shown that older children with “poor” histories and disruption in their lives can settle well in adoptive and foster homes and cope satisfactorily in adult life (Triseliotis 1980:5). “Foster children appear to be more at risk in terms of stability and continuity” (Triseliotis 1980:19).

Jerri Sueck describes her life story in her autobiography *Letters my mother never read*. At the age of eight, Sueck lost her mother in a fire that gutted their mobile home. She describes the lack of stability and continuity as the children got passed from one home to another. It starts with her and her siblings being fostered grudgingly by their step-grandmother. There, Sueck and her three brothers were neglected and abused. They were forced to sleep in a coal cellar in the freezing winter nights of Scranton, Pennsylvania. They were also made to stay outside from the time they got up until nine o’clock in the evening. They received only a sandwich for lunch. The authorities did not come to the rescue of the children, even when her eldest sibling was caught stealing food and explained to the police that his sister and brothers were hungry. No investigation was opened; the police left after only issuing a warning to the grandmother. “When the police leave, Grandma Resuba begins screaming that this is proof that we are no good...I think this is my first experience of really hating. It was though we were non-existent, nonessential, and disposable” (Sueck 2007:49).

After two years in her step-grandmother’s custody, their stepfather dropped them off at an orphanage on Christmas Eve. Here begins the ongoing ordeal of being placed in various foster homes and then being rejected and sent back to the orphanage. Sueck’s autobiography demonstrates how maladjusted foster and orphaned children can become. The oft-repeated tragedy is that Sueck and her siblings were also separated.

According to Hartman, one should question who the primary beneficiary of the service should be. There was an important shift in that the adoption was no longer seen as a primary service for childless couples, but as a dedication to find families for children who need them (Hartman 1979:13).

Adoptions impose a heavy burden of responsibility social workers, for the decisions taken are frequently irrevocable. In the planning of placement, various factors are important. Inevitably, there will be problems for any child who is utterly unlike his/her parents. But, when genuine concern leads to real affection, people can love a child unconditionally. Other factors when planning placement include intelligence, personality, temperament, and the age of the child (Rowe 1966:200-204).

In South Africa, cross-cultural adoptions are both more common and less frowned upon than in the past. Cross cultural adoptions, however, bring their own set of complications to the adoption triad. The young child may not be aware of the differences between him/her and his/her adoptive parents. As a teenager, this can become a major problem in the child's life as physical attributes and culture may differ significantly. It is advisable that the adoptive parents inform the child of his/her biological family's religious beliefs, background, and culture.

4.4 Giving background information

A child's background and genes can never be changed. Some attributes of a person are due to heredity, while others are due to nurturing. In terms of nurture, adoptive parents can have a formative influence on a child. The child will then be more likely to share the same values, however, the child's inherited nature will not change. By giving the prospective adoptive parents as much information on the child's background as possible, the adoptive parents may be better equipped to take care of the child. It can also help them to decide as to whether to adopt a specific child. Prospective parents should also be informed of any known genetic disorders, such as heart disease or mental disorders, such as schizophrenia. It is also important to inform the prospective parents of any known physical or mental handicaps. This will help the adoptive parents to be better parents and answer some of the growing child's questions. Children might want to know where certain aspects of their physical or character traits came from.

Information about the child's own life history is essential to adoptive parents; it is a component in their decision to make the child part of their family. They will also need this information in order to handle problems which may arise after placement and to understand their child's attitudes and reactions (Rowe 1966:220).

4.5 The adoption trauma

The adoptive parents might be confronted with a child with adaptive problems and intensely negative feelings and behaviours. They might find this puzzling, especially if the child was adopted at a young age. One of the many traumas an adoptee may be faced with is foetal trauma. There are many developmental milestones for children that occur prior to birth. A child begins to feel and learn in the womb. According to social scientists who study infant attachment, bonding between mother and baby begins in utero, as the mother and child experience each other's being. Nobody knows for certain what the effect of that experience is, but it is commonly believed that the prenatal environment of a happy, relaxed, well-cared-for mother is more conducive to birthing a healthy baby than that of a stressed, depressed mother who receives poor medical care (Rosenberg 1992:92).

The unborn child may possibly be affected by the environmental factors of his mother. A stressful environment where there is constant fighting or an abusive partner will lead to a stressed baby. Smoking, drug use, and the consumption of alcohol can lead to physical deformities and a lower intellect. A problematic birth environment can therefore lead to developmental problems in the child.

Adoptees have a wide range of pre-adoption experiences. The initial factor is often the physical and emotional separation from their mothers at birth. Some infants undergo multiple placements, from the hospital on to one or more foster homes, before they attain their (final) adoptive home. "Each of these moves can exacerbate an already prenatally stressed and natally traumatised child" (Rosenberg 1992:93). As a result, the adoptee may experience a so-called primal wound that just won't heal.

4.6 To adopt or foster, or not

Many factors affect the decision to adopt. Although most governments encourage adoption and most adoptive parents report good experiences, the number of adoptions is decreasing. The

reasons for this include the increasing availability of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs); fewer younger children available to adopt; the stigma still attached to adoption and its status as “second best”, with adoptive parents having to contend with the stigma of infertility and the expectation that the child might have emotional, developmental and behavioural difficulties and the unfamiliarity of adoption; its perceived difficulty; and the length of time it takes (Smeeton & Ward 2017:218).

For heterosexual couples, parenthood was expected and viewed as a typical progression of life after marriage. The decision-making process was often reported as simple; that the couples expected to have children was a given (Mellish et al 2014:215). Some parents described that their openness to adoption was informed by their previous experience of adoption, for example, having adoptive relatives within their own family or having seen friends go through the process. For a few, their experiences with adopted children were one of the chief factors which prompted them to adopt or foster (Mellish et al 2014).

Mellish et al (2014:217) found that both heterosexuals and lesbians, but not gay fathers, stated that they had originally had concerns about having older children who were more likely to have emotional and/or behavioural problems due to their pre-adoption experiences. This had initially contributed to alternative routes to parenthood seeming more attractive than adoption. A key motivation for moving on from fertility treatment was to put an end to the emotional rollercoaster of multiple cycles of treatment failing or because parents did not wish to continue attempting to have biological children after experiencing miscarriages or infant deaths. Heterosexual and lesbian parents who encountered fertility problems stated that they had to decide what would ultimately offer them the best chance of becoming a parent. Their age was an important catalyst in their decision to adopt as they were aware that conception was increasingly unlikely, they faced age limits as potential adopters and, for some, personal concerns about age (Mellish et al 2014:218).

In this study, the families all had their own experiences with infertility. Two of the couples had also experienced the loss of a son. Another couple emphasised the importance of dealing with the loss of not being able to have their own children, before beginning the process of adoption. It is imperative for welfare workers to counsel prospective adoptive couples about their reasons for adoption before choosing to adopt.

4.7 The adoptee's or foster child's viewpoint

For a child who has been removed from his/her home by a welfare organisation and placed in foster care, home is no longer a place of security. It might be a place of fear, of abuse or uncertainty. "This uncertainty is a wound he carries for a long time" (Berry 2018).

Foster children are, as a rule, more traumatised than adopted children, especially if the child was not fostered as an infant. Even with the adoption of an infant, the possibility of trauma through losing his/her birth mother exists. This causes extreme attachment issues. Older children are usually fostered prior to possibly being adopted later; these children experience multiple traumas as a result of being placed in several foster homes.

The first piece of autobiographical data for most adopted children is that they were a mistake, unwanted, and thus "not meant to be". Adoptees often feel that their very being caused the problem; one that was solved by expulsion. Other facts surrounding their conception may also impact on the way adoptees feel about themselves. It may matter to them whether they were born out of a loving relationship, a casual relationship, or a relationship of violence. It may matter whether their parents were married to each other or not, or married to other people. It may matter whether they perceive their birth parents to have been irresponsible regarding birth control, victims of a real accident, or simply unable to care for them. These facts surrounding conception tend to contribute to a primal sense of self (Rosenberg 1992:91).

This is usually the starting point of many adoptees' fantasies. The stories that they build in their minds may be closely related to the truth or not at all. They may build the "other me"; the "ghost me". Most often, these stories are never shared out of fear of being rejected by their adoptive families as well. They will try their best not to upset their adoptive families with their fantasies about their biological families.

One of the basic facts of an adoptee's life is, as for all people, the reality of their biological roots. Earlier on, children's minds were viewed as *tabula rasa*, for whose development parents bore full responsibility. Studies since the mid-1960s indicate that there are significant genetic factors that affect human development. These studies suggest that genetics play a significant role in intelligence, certain major mental illnesses, antisocial disorders, attention deficit disorders, and substance abuse (Rosenberg 1992:91).

It is sometimes almost impossible to determine which characteristics are due to nature or nurture. Many adoptees receive very little information about their biological background. This total lack of coming from somewhere and belonging in some biological family is one of the reasons that many adoptees search for their biological parents. Adoptees may have these haunting questions about which of their attributes are inherited and which are a result upbringing. Most people cannot pinpoint every aspect of their lives as either nature or nurture. For the adoptee, the question about genetic heritage is conceivably even more vital.

From the adoptee's point of view, there are advantages as well as disadvantages to adoption. One point of deep satisfaction repeatedly mentioned was the fact that the adoptees were very much wanted by their adoptive parents. They believe that they had been individually chosen, as opposed to children born to their own parents who would just accept whatever offspring come their way. The "chosen baby" story is a reoccurring one, but one most used by adoptive parents is based on a book written by Valentina Wasson, *The Chosen Baby*. The bases of the various chosen baby stories are that there is a loving, but childless couple. Jesus decided that they should not have a child of their own, so that when a baby becomes available, they would be prepared to give this baby a home and all their love. The stories only differ about who the agent was; either the minister, the lawyer, or the social worker (Heim 1983:9-17).

There are serious shortcomings in the chosen baby story. A central character, the woman who gave birth to the baby, is omitted from the story. Is God in the background busy keeping the adoptive parents sterile, so that they could be available to adopt the baby? Another question that arises is why God didn't help the biological parents to be able to keep the baby (Lifton 1979:35). This story, however, gives the young child assurance that he/she is wanted and loved. As teenagers and adults, they may become more sceptical of the story and the details of the selection process.

Some adoptees claim that the chance of fantasising about their origins is an advantage. Some would imagine that they are the illegitimate child of a famous family. Other adoptees imagined living in an institution and dreaded it. Heim quotes a client named George Sycamore, who said that some adoptees are allowed to be more essentially themselves than are biological offspring – as though the latter are moulded in accordance with the expectations of their family who, with hindsight, know all about them in advance (Heim 1983:11-12).

One of the disadvantages of being adopted is the lack of familial medical information. From the interviews in this study, the researcher became aware of the uncertainty of the adoptees about the development of their character traits. They wondered whether their biological parents also had a temper or a great sense of humour. They also speculate about physical resemblances. One of the other reoccurring stories is that adoptive parents stress how grateful the adoptee must be for being adopted. Comments such as “what would have become of you if we did not take you”, were common. The adoptive parents are seen as their saviours.

Heim quotes a letter he received from an adoptee, Mrs. Mary Fir. She wrote that her upbringing was punctuated by frequent comments like: “Where would you have been if I hadn’t taken you in, when your own mother didn’t want you?” At an early age, Mrs. Fir needed to become mature enough to dissemble and smile gratefully while cringing inwardly, because she didn’t want to hurt her parents. “Yet it was not acceptable for me to ask bluntly just where I would have been, and why, I had to recognise their vulnerability, whilst hiding mine” (Heim 1983:27-28). These two stories are very common in adoption narratives; the “chosen baby” story and/or the “saviour parents”.

Edith Maple wrote that she could think of no advantages of adoption, other than that she was not brought up in a home. Her letter to Heim gives a negative picture of adoption as she had a rigid and repressive upbringing followed by an unsuccessful first marriage. “The second marriage sounds very satisfactory but evidently, Mrs. Maple’s relations with her adoptive parents remain formal and distant” (Heim 1983:31).

Conversely, Geoff Ebony describes his adoptive parents as worthy of a Nobel Prize, if there were such an award for adoptive parents. Ebony was very happy and content with his relationship with his parents. However, he does note a peculiar phenomenon. Strangers would approach him saying that he “must be Harold Ebony’s son”, even though he shared no physical characteristics with his adoptive father. He developed a theory to explain the fact that people saw a likeness between himself and his adoptive father where no such likeness could exist. “It is that the mannerisms of speech and movement, even modes of thinking, are just as powerful as recognition signals as that of physical resemblance. I must have absorbed a great many of my father’s behavioural characteristics. I had indeed become like him. In more than a legal or an emotional sense, I was his son” (Heim 1983:33). It is clear from these accounts that most of the

adoptees who replied had mixed feelings about their families in their early life. Furthermore, Heim opines that adoptees resemble most people brought up by their biological parents (Heim 1983:33).

4.8 The view of adoptive parents

It is distressing when a couple finds that they are unable to bear a child. It is thus important that a couple grieves before they consider adoption. The adoptive parents also suffer from the social perception that bloodline is the normal way one has children because this is considered an unbreakable bond; “blood is thicker than water” is still a strongly held belief among many.

The pain of dealing with reproductive problems can arouse underlying issues. Individuals and couples with fertility issues may confuse reproduction with sexual adequacy and the competency to parent. This also reflects in social attitudes, since the phrase ‘barren woman’ still carries with it the image of a spinsterish, non-maternal woman. An infertile man may feel that he is less potent, less manly, and thus incapable of being a father.

The decision to adopt is one of the most important decisions in the lives of adoptive parents. As with natural parenting, adoption imposes a heavy burden of responsibility, as the decision is irrevocable. For the sake of their relationship with their adopted child or children, it is of cardinal importance that their ghost baby – the one they never had – is laid to rest. No adoptee can compete successfully with a so-called ghost baby.

Adoptive parents’ experience of a successful adoption varies widely. Some adoptees chose a different lifestyle to that of their parents. Although this happens to biological parents and their own children, the adoptive parents may experience this as rejection of everything they stand for.

Several contributors of letters to Heim found that differences in lifestyle have caused regrets. Some decades ago, this would have been described as differences in social classes; it used to be considered as important to “match for class” as it was to match for appearance. However, the emphasis on social class has changed over the years. In the realm of adoption, since class is expressed largely by voice, accent, taste and other conventions, it is generally regarded as an environmental rather than a genetic factor. It is likely that traits that are not purely physical, such as tone of voice, are due to a combination and interaction between nature and nurture (Heim, 1983:55).

Welfare societies try to match the adoptee with the adoptive parents. Since differences in gender are the most basic of all, the placement of a boy or a girl child merits careful thought. There has been a tendency for adoptive parents to ask for girls more than for boys. “This may be because girls are thought to be easier to manage, to remain close to home longer and to be more affectionate” (Rowe 1966:200).

Most parents enjoy having children who resemble them, and adoptive parents are no exception. A squat child may look and feel out of place in a very tall family, but looking like one’s parents is not as important as fitting into the family. If one looks at intelligence, it seems that both nature and nurture are at work. Environment plays an important role in determining a child’s intellectual attainment but it cannot create an ability that is not there. Disappointments over scholastic problems can be a serious threat to family happiness and children’s wellbeing. Adoptive parents are apt to be ambitious for those they adopt. They need to prove themselves as successful parents and to have the child achieve at school is one way to do this. Some adopted children, believing they were specially chosen, feel they must reward their parents and live up to their expectations. “The exceptionally able child placed with very limited adoptive parents can feel alien to them and deprived of opportunity” (Rowe 1966:202).

Matching for personality and temperament is important when placing older children, however, it is much more difficult with infants. Nurturing plays such a large part in shaping a child’s personality that adoptive parents end up shaping their adopted child’s personality to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, genetic factors do influence temperament and personality, so the more extreme situations need to be considered. It is probably unwise to place the child of very creative, artistic, Bohemian parents with staid, conventional parents (Rowe 1966:203).

The kind of home in which adoptees are likely to thrive is one where there is harmony between husband and wife, a family with more than one child, adopted and/or biological, and the preparedness to steer a middle course between rigid regimentation and over-indulgence (Heim 1983:83). Adoptive and foster parents enter their journey with hope. They see it as a calling and are filled with passion, energy, and excitement. These parents want to change the life of a vulnerable child that came from a difficult place (Berry 2018).

One must never lose sight of the fact that the adoptee has suffered a trauma. Even the infant has experienced the trauma of losing a mother, which can cause attachment problems. Older children

end up in the welfare system in either children's homes or foster homes; some are adopted later. These older children thus experience multiple traumas.

Some parents and children are thrown around by the foster care system. Many adoptive or foster parents say that they were not prepared for the way trauma manifested in their adopted children. Behavioural problems might include bedwetting, food hoarding, night terrors, outbursts, extreme aggression, and many other problems. Certain children may also have special needs, such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). The parents may feel overwhelmed by these special needs; they also do not always receive support from family, friends, and the community that they so desperately need. Foster care and adoption can thus be very taxing on a marriage (Berry 2018). Often, one just needs a friend to listen and understand, without judgement. We see the friends of Job doing this in Job 2:11. When they heard about the disaster their friend was faced with, each of his three friends came to console and comfort him.

All the adoptive and foster parents said that it was only their belief in Jesus Christ that helped them through these hard times. In the Bible, God gave us the command to love our neighbours. We are not supposed to walk life's path alone, especially not the adoption and foster care path. Adoptive and foster care parents keep hope through the love of God, but also through the love and support of others.

The parents experience losing hope when their beloved child pushes them away. Some even lose the dream they had for the relationship with their children. In fact, Mike Berry cites that you can either scream towards heaven or stop fixating about how it could have been different. He says that there is hope in accepting the situation as it is (Berry 2018).

4.9 The view of the biological parents

Placing a child for adoption is a traumatic event. Some of the biological mothers experience feelings of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and intense grief. Many feel rejected and isolated, and perceive themselves negatively. They are vulnerable to the perception that they have of how other people perceive them (Harrington 2018:1). This study found that biological fathers also experience the same loss and trauma. The feelings of depression, anxiety and grief can last a life time. However, it is possible that people who placed a child for adoption might

have had a better personal outcome than the people who chose to keep their babies (Harrington 2018:43).

In addition, Harrington (2018:125-126) refers to three myths about biological mothers:

- First, biological mothers belong on a pedestal. In her research, Harrington found that four of the seven participants said that their counsellors had this attitude.
- Second, biological mothers should feel good or even happy about their decision to relinquish a child. This denies the grief that the mother experiences after relinquishing her child and even after a reunion.
- Third, adoption is “all unicorns and rainbows”. This myth states that adoption is the best outcome for all concerned. Again, this myth completely denies the biological mother’s loss and grief. None of the birth mothers in Harrington’s study felt like heroes because they gave their children up for adoption (Harrington 2018:125-126).

The importance of information to the expectant mother cannot be overemphasised. She is about to make one of the biggest decisions of her life; she must choose between terminating the pregnancy, keeping her baby, or relinquishing custody. When the biological mother relinquishes her baby, there is perceived shame and secrecy. The lack of information and support increases the biological mother’s feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability, and powerlessness (Clemens 2017:iv).

In a study conducted by Clemens (2017:142-151), she describes the theme of envisioning future possible selves as important to her participants. The biological mothers in her study had self-reflection and thought about different possible futures for themselves. This response was found immediately at the discovery of an unintended pregnancy and during the years that followed. The one possible future that they considered was the possibility of parenting the child. Important factors that the mothers took into consideration were their financial position and stability, support structure, including the support of the biological father, emotional stability, and the prospective future that she sees for her child. When the mothers decided on adoption, the mothers consulted with other biological mothers and specialists. After their decision was final, the mother could start to visualise the new possible selves (Clemens 2017:142-151).

The biological mother is often forced to live a double life. On the advice of experts, she lives as if the adoption never happened. Many times, she will never talk about the most traumatic experience of her life. She will only acknowledge the children she had who were not adopted and will never mention the child that she gave up for adoption. Superficially, she is happy and well adjusted, but she knows that she is a fraud (Lifton 1984:19).

It is important that the biological mother grieves the loss of her child. Grieving rituals such as those followed in the South African black cultures or the Jewish culture are useful references. Denial of the loss will not lead to a happy, well-adjusted individual. Many biological parents embark on a lifelong search. They will always wonder if a child of approximately the same age and gender of the child they lost might be theirs. They will look for their own features in children they see. One woman recalls standing outside the gates of local school when her child would have gone to the first grade. She regularly watched the school children in the hope of recognising her child that had been adopted.

Biological parents often feel angry with themselves and will blame themselves, their family, and the welfare worker involved in the case. They might blame parents or other family members for the lack of support they felt they needed. They feel that they might have made another choice if they had had more options.

Some people report that they were never the same after such a loss. The biological parents may need years to overcome their guilt. Biological parents develop their own ways of mourning. One biological mother secretly gave herself the same time and space she had observed in her family's Jewish tradition of mourning. She stayed home for seven days, doing little else but thinking about her relinquished son. She said goodbye to him in many ways. Over time, her grief began to give way to thoughts of him in his happy adoptive home. She planned to light candles for him on his birthday, the relinquishment day, or other moments that were significant to her (Rosenberg 1992:35-36).

The mourning process continues far beyond the adoption, throughout the lifetime in different ways and with varying intensity (Rosenberg 1992:35-36). Relinquishing parents report imagining their child in daily life as well as at their different developmental milestones. Birthdays can be particularly mournful as parents imagine their child in good circumstances, but far away.

The biological parents have a ghost baby that they will never get to hold. Even when a reunion takes place, the ghost baby remains. The adult adoptee is a reminder of all the years that have been lost. A mother or father might think of the school plays, the rugby games, and the loving care for a sick child – and know that what was lost can never be regained. Some women have never even shared their secret of the relinquished baby, even with their husbands. They may also have other children. This fraudulent existence can lead to the fear of being exposed. The biological parent, who leads a double and secret life, might not be open for a reunion. The birth parents might also expect disapproval and rejection from other people, which might never even happen. Biological parents need to separate the past from the present and recognise regretted acts of the past as ones to learn from. “This forgiving of oneself and others allows new relationships and experiences to be unencumbered...” This struggle allows for relief (Rosenberg 1992:40).

4.10 The adoption play

The adoption play demands that the adoptee lives a double life. Cut off from the knowledge of their origin, they go emotionally underground. Superficially, it looks as if they accept their life with their parents, family, and friends, but they are also part of an underworld full of personal demons they can share with nobody. In the meantime, the adoptive parents also live a double life (Lifton 1984:18).

Many couples struggle with infertility for many years until they decide to adopt. To acknowledge one’s infertility is a painful process, yet they must now live as if adoption was the best option. Most adoptive parents use the well-known chosen baby story to explain adoption to their young adopted child. This story does not explain why God did not give the adoptive parents a child of their own or why the biological parents were not able to keep their baby. The adoptive parents will have to deal with their experience of loss in not having a biological child of their own.

Adoptive parents often withhold crucial information (which the child need to develop into a balanced adult) about the biological parents. The adoptive parents play the double role of the saviour and the withholder. This, in turn, estranges them from the children they so desperately want to keep close (Lifton 1984:19).

Part of the adoption play is to live “as if”. It is expected from the adoptees to live as if their biological parents are dead – if not literally, figuratively. There is a veil between the adoptee’s

present and past. This veil attempts to make the adoptee that what he/she was not previously, namely the blood relation of the adoptive parents. Some cultures even have ceremonies in which the biological parents give the child to the adoptive parents (Lifton 1984:27-28).

The adoption play usually starts with the chosen baby story. These stories might have elements of the truth, but we cannot describe them as the truth. These stories are the start of the change in the adoptee's reality. The undertone of these stories is that the adoptee has been rejected twice. First, they were rejected by their biological parents and then by their adoptive parents. They feel as if they are a consolation prize because they are not the adoptive parents' biological child. It is also a common strategy of adoptive parents to wed the fictional biological parents and then to let them die.

Lifton describes a woman who was told that her mother died while giving birth to her. As a result, during both her own pregnancies, she was terrified of dying during labour. When she found out that her biological mother was still alive, she was furious with her adoptive parents. People do not easily outgrow their chosen baby stories (Lifton 1984:41).

4.11 The adoptee as mythological hero

People often fantasise that they had different parents. The child hereby places distance between himself/herself and his/her parents, to become his/her own person. This is known as a search for "the self". For the adoptee, this is however not a fantasy; there are really two other parents. Just by fantasising, the adoptee feels that he/she is betraying the adoptive parents. Therefore, the fantasy goes underground and becomes a secret and private fantasy, riddled with guilt. Adoptees dream of their parents as being rich and famous, but also as being the scum of the earth; possibly thieves and prostitutes. Adoptees live in a world of fantasy, which might make them look absent-minded. It explains the dreaminess and fluctuating thoughts, as well as the short attention span and low levels of concentration sometimes found with adoptees (Lifton 1984:43). It is a dream world in which the adoptee can escape reality.

The adoptees' childhood fantasies are like primitive sketches of the human form with arms and legs stretched out, much like the sketches of young children. They lack the necessary detail and have little to do with reality as these children never had the live models of their biological parents (Lifton 1984:44).

The adoptee's fantasy can never be reconciled with reality. He/she is therefore pushed into a double existence; one that is shared with the adoptive family and a secret one, like a lost Atlantis. In this ghost world, the adoptee fantasises about the other possibilities that could have been had the child stayed with his/her biological parents. There is also the possibility of another outcome had the adoptee been given to another pair of parents. Then there is the ghost baby against whom the adoptee competes. The child that the adoptive parents could have had, had they been fertile, or even more significantly, the child of the adoptive parents who had died. The adoptee doomed to replace the baby of the adoptive parents who had died, grows up hand in hand with that ghost baby. If the baby had a name, it can take on enormous proportions if the adoptive parents fantasise about what could have been. The dead baby is the perfect one, the other one who would have accomplished what the adopted one could never do (Lifton 1984:49-51).

The other possibility – the double self – remains infantile. It is the baby that was left behind. If the adoptee goes back in time to search for him/her, he/she is still there, frozen in time, at the same age that he/she was left to begin the adoptee's new life (Lifton 1984:50). For most adoptees, this would be as an infant, but some adoptions happen when the children are older. Foster children are also typically sent to their new homes at an older age. The fantasies of children who were older at the age of adoption are less frequent. This might be because they know and remember their biological parents, however, the experience of loss seems to be more intense among these adoptees.

4.12 The adoptee as an adult

Some adopted adults feel that they move outside the main stream of human existence. In her interviews, Lifton found that irrelevant of their social standing or professional success, adoptees see themselves as timid and shy, loners, afraid of conflict, eager to please, submissive, but filled with inner anger. They also describe a lifelong depression. They talk about the feeling of guilt towards their adoptive parents, fear of being rejected by their friends or partner, and the inability to free them from a dominating adoptive mother. It is as if every adoptee carries within him/her the "murdered self"; the one who was born within another family group, with all the genetic influences, who must not be recognised. Being pushed out of the natural flow of generation continuity is as if one is pushed out of nature itself. The adoptee becomes a powerless being with no say in their lives. They are chess pieces being moved around by other people. The

feeling of emptiness seems to influence their ability to love and be loved. Many adopted women feel negative about men, because they think that their biological fathers abandoned their biological mothers and were the cause of their adoptions (Lifton 1984:81-82). This is however not the experience of all adoptees. Many grew up in loving families and are at peace with themselves and their backgrounds.

4.13 The search

Many adoptees start to search for their biological parents, especially their biological mother, to find the biological connection that they never had. They search for a genetic home and people like themselves; the hope is to find the other part of the double self. To be reunited can be a healthy and spiritual experience. It allows the adoptee to forgive the biological mother and, if he is in the picture, the father. It also gives the biological parents the chance to address their guilt over the adoption. This might be a religious experience: to forgive as God has forgiven us and to accept forgiveness for our sins. This does however take time. Therapy might be needed to work through all the feelings and to relinquish the ghost kingdom. The researcher was readily available to refer the co-researchers to a pastor or psychologist if they needed to work through any specific issues.

Other adoptees search and find their biological parents, without experiencing a spiritual reunion or catharsis. There are also those adoptees who chose not to search for their biological parents. In one of the case studies in this research, the adoptive parents gladly had interviews with the researcher, but did not want their adopted children to be contacted as they feared they might become upset. The question is, why would their adopted children be upset? It might be interesting to conduct a further study on adoptees who chose not to search for their biological parents.

The stories will be presented as follows:

- 5.1 The mad, sad baby
- 5.2 The adoptive parents
- 5.3 The biological parents

- 5.4 The experience of keeping the baby
- 5.5 The experience of loss
- 5.6 The specific pastoral experiences of the presence of God

Chapter 5 THE STORIES

In the following case studies, four family groups were interviewed. One family group had a foster child, while the other four family groups had adopted children. The parents had to learn to fight for their children and for their relationships with their children. Every individual in the adoption triad has had their own trauma to deal with. The researcher first reviewed these stories from the perspective of the adopted child.

5.1 The mad, sad baby

5.1.1 Sanrie's story

Sanrie (28) was adopted by Kobus and Sarie when she was only a few days old. She has a 20-year-old brother who was also adopted as a baby. Sanrie knew that she had been adopted since she was a young child. Her friends also knew she was adopted. Her adopted status is as normal for Sanrie as being born a female.

Sanrie contacted her biological mother, Madrileen, through the welfare worker when she was 16 years old and they corresponded for a while. In these letters, Sanrie asked Madrileen questions, such as where she got her curly, dark hair from and whether other family members also bit their nails. When Sanrie was 18 years old, she arranged a meeting at which her adoptive mother, biological mother, and the welfare worker were present. She enjoyed the meeting and found the interaction with her biological mother positive. They still maintain a good relationship. Sanrie states that Madrileen is a good friend but will never replace her adoptive mother. Sanrie is on a first name basis with Madrileen, but sees her adoptive mother as her only mother. Sanrie's adoptive father, Kobus, also met Madrileen later on. Sanrie felt that privileged that the relations between her various parents were positive.

Sanrie does not want to meet her biological father at this stage. She had heard some unflattering comments on his character from people who knew him. She heard that he was obsessive-compulsive and stalked her biological mother after their relationship failed. Sanrie feels that to meet her father now, would just be an impediment to her life. Sanrie completed her studies and was working towards her PhD. She was recently married.

5.1.2 Riaan's story

Riaan (29) was adopted by Mariaan and Sam when he was an infant. He has known that he was adopted since as far back as he can remember. Riaan's adoptive mother always had contact with his biological mother as she regularly wrote letters to his biological mother about Riaan's wellbeing.

Before Riaan's confirmation at his church, his adoptive mother contacted his biological family and invited them to attend the ceremony. They met his biological mother, Joyce, her husband, his half-sister, Tanya, and his maternal grandparents.

A special day was when he, together with his adoptive parents and his biological mother, attended the 50-year anniversary for the house for unwed mothers at a local church. It was the same house where Joyce stayed when she was pregnant with Riaan. At the ceremony, Joyce made a heartfelt speech in front of all the people who attended and it brought everyone involved even closer.

Riaan does not know whether the fact that he knew that he was adopted was positive or negative. He understands cognitively that he was adopted and it does not bother him at all. However, he does not know whether there are subconscious feelings he is unaware of.

Things that make him wonder about his true feelings, for instance, is the fact that he rejected his mother when she wanted to sing him the song "naantjie poo" as a young child. He told her to go away and said that he wanted to sleep. Little actions such as these make him wonder about his real feelings.

Riaan refers to both sets of parents as his mother and father. It was exciting to meet his biological mother, Joyce, her sisters, brother, his grandparents, and cousins. Whenever he goes to the town where his grandparents live, he visits them.

Riaan says that he enjoyed school, however, he had some difficulties with romantic relationships. He sees himself as a knight in shining armour and thinks that could have been the problem.

He felt different from the rest of the children; he felt special. He even bragged that he was one of the first adoptions where there was a good match in the characteristics of the adoptive parents and the adoptee. Riaan says that he looks so much like his adoptive father, curly hair and all, that if he did not know about his adoption, he would never have thought that he was not his adoptive parents' child.

Riaan feels grateful for the choice that his biological parents made. His biological mother, Joyce, fell pregnant very young. Although his biological father, Johan, was prepared to marry Joyce, the whole family (Joyce and her parents, and Johan and his parents) decided that an adoption was a better idea. Riaan thinks that a forced marriage would have ended up in an unhappy family life. He reckons that his life would never have been as good if he had not been adopted by Mariaan and Sam. Riaan acknowledges that his relationship with both set of parents could be better, but feels that telling his story helped him to gain more clarity about his relationship with both sets of parents.

5.1.3 Sumari's story

Sumari's (43) story is one of sexual abuse and neglect. "There are indicators that sexual abuse may lead to identity questions, a decrease in religious engagement and impaired overall functioning, but also spiritual growth" (Ganzevoort 2014:1).

Sumari grew up in a normal family home. She had a very good relationship with her father and relates that he was a very good story teller. The children could listen to his stories for hours, but this changed when her father passed away when she was 10 years old.

Her mother became an alcoholic and showed the children no love. She remarried and Sumari's stepfather subsequently raped her from a very young age. She was made to believe that it was her fault as she was told by both adults that she was an expert at seducing men. On one occasion, her mother even sat on the bed while she was being raped. She remembers her stepfather touching her under the blankets, while her mother was simultaneously doing something to him under the blankets. Sumari can still recall certain smells and the colour of her rapist's underwear. She could remember the smell of his toothpaste and the patterns on his rings; she remembers hearing a song about the love of Jesus while he kissed her in his car. At that time, Sumari did not

believe that there was such a thing as a good God. She says she did not lose her faith in God, she gave it up consciously, when yet another “believer” and so-called preacher kissed her.

Her mother and stepfather would both drink heavily on Fridays. Sumari’s stepfather would abuse her mother; and her mother would run away with the children in her drunken state every Friday night. She insisted on taking the baby with her and Sumari ensured that they got wherever they were going safely every time.

Sumari felt guilty and ashamed because she felt she was the problem. She became the scapegoat for her mother’s wrongdoings. She was also accused of lying and never listening to anything her mother said. She was called “that type of girl, a slut, easy, cheap”. Her mother would complain to her grandmother about what a terrible child she was and that not even the welfare would take her if her mother gave her to them for free. She would then say that they should contact the welfare on Monday and tell them to come and get her; her suitcases would be packed and waiting on the driveway. This left Sumari with massive insecurities.

Sumari’s mother described her as a dark horse and the devil’s child. She was always swimming upstream. At the age of 15, she started resisting her stepfather’s advances, which led to him throwing her out of the house. Sumari’s mother packed up her belongings in two plastic bags and dropped her two blocks away from the house. When Sumari pleaded to come back, the answer was a definitive “no”, after which she went to live with her older sister.

Sumari then went on to describe one of the biggest miracles of her life. The following December holiday, Sumari got a job at the local Christian bookshop. Her sister and her sister’s family were planning their annual holidays and they did not want Sumari to stay in their house on her own. She was stressed. A kind-hearted old lady called Sarah got to know Sumari in the bookstore. She offered Sumari a home and she stayed there for a few months. She has fond memories of this time. On 31 December 1990, Sarah asked Sumari if she would like parents. Sumari was happy to go along with the idea. Sarah made a few phone calls and confirmed that Sumari’s new parents would arrive at 09:00 on 1 January 1991.

At exactly 09:00, her new parents, Pierre and Ronel, arrived. Sumari says she had never seen such dignified people. The man was a gentle version of Sean Connery and his tall, attractive wife immediately hugged her. The man asked if she liked music and she told him that she adored

Phantom of the Opera. He gave a nod. They went by a place where they picked up their son, who was a paraplegic. They visited many people that day. Everyone was kind, and no one swore or fought. Finally, at around 18:00 they went home. Sumari was shown her room, which had two beds covered in red sheets that smelled like sunshine. Then, at that moment, the music of Phantom of the Opera filled the house in welcome. That night was the first night that Sumari can remember ever feeling safe in her own room. She slept like a baby.

Sumari and her adoptive brother grew close and loved each other dearly. Jan could only open and close his left arm to a limited degree, but he would nevertheless hug her tight. “No one ever wanted to hug me or have me close”, Sumari said. These people, who were now her mother and father, showed Sumari for the first time in her life that people could really love one another, and that marriage could be a fairy-tale come true.

Pierre and Ronel immediately started the legal process to adopt Sumari but found out that a child of 16 could no longer be adopted. However, Sumari’s mother signed the papers for legal guardianship with no sign of sorrow or remorse.

Sumari completed matric and studied psychology for two years. She later married Jean and they had three children together before they divorced. Jean was violent and Sumari said that her only mistake was to stay with him for so many years.

5.1.4 Jana’s story

Jana (45) was adopted by Jeff and Rose when she was just over three years old. Jeff and Rose were given very little information about Jana’s parents. They knew that they were unmarried white Afrikaners. She was Jeff and Rose’s only child. Jana is glad that she was adopted.

Jana got married at the age of 20. When she met her husband, Brian, he assured her that he would support her if she ever wanted to search for her biological parents. Jana did not want to start a search at that stage. Later she became curious about her birth mother. When she was 23, she got the details that were available from her adoptive mother. After a bit of a search she contacted Esmé. Jeff and Rose never gave an indication that they would be upset if Jana searched for her mother, but she was still afraid of hurting them. Jana wondered if she was mature enough to handle meeting her biological mother. “I was still so angry that I said some very hurtful things to her.” Today, 20 years on, she has closure in her relationship and her feelings toward Esmé.

Only as an adult could she understand and conclude that a biological mother may have to choose what she believes is in the best interest of her child.

Esmé told her what she knew about Jana's biological father, Frans, whom she also met. Jana opined that he was a kind man and did not know that she was adopted until it was too late to do anything about it. He was an unwed father and thus had no rights at that time. It frustrates Jana that she still does not know the real reason she was relinquished by her mother. Esmé said that she could not afford to raise Jana. However, Jana discovered that her maternal grandmother was wealthy, therefore her biological mother's story is confusing.

Jana always wanted to be accepted and to prove her worthiness. She excelled academically in school and at university, completing three degrees. Jana's parents are both professional people. Although they never indicated that she needed to achieve academically, they were extremely proud of her distinctions in matric and her Cum Laude degrees. She still sets high standards for herself.

Jana loves her adoptive parents, however, this was not always the case. Jana had intense conflict with her adoptive mother between the ages of 13 and 16. In hindsight, she feels that this was born out of her anger at her biological mother and the fact that she was given up for adoption. She projected these feelings onto her adoptive mother. Jana feels regret for the years she wasted in her relationship with her adoptive mother; she also feels intensely ashamed of her behaviour. After the age of 16, Jana enjoyed a good relationship with her adoptive parents.

Jana finds it a strange reality that she is drawn towards the wrong crowds. She had an extra-marital affair when she was 28, through associating with the wrong crowd. Her husband, Brian, was devastated when he learned about the affair. Through prayer and marriage counselling, they managed to work through these difficulties and Jana feels that they are now happy despite her indiscretion.

5.2 The adoptive parents

When a family decides to adopt or foster a child, life as they know it will change forever. Mike Berry, father to eight adopted or foster children, said that he had to accept that his life might never be normal again. Only then could he start to find beauty, hope, and joy in the situation. He

further states that we cling to the idea that God will answer all our prayers and refers to God's response in Job 38 (Berry 2018).

“Who is this darkening counsel with words lacking knowledge? Prepare yourself like a man; I will interrogate you, and you will respond to me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me if you know. Who stretched a measuring tape on it? On what were its footings sunk; who laid its cornerstone, While the morning stars sang in unison and all the divine beings shouted?” (Job 38:2-7).

“If you care for children who have suffered extreme trauma in their lives and you are so tired that you just want to quit...God is inviting you to trust Him” (Berry 2018).

The following are the stories of the adoptive parents.

5.2.1 Sanrie's adoptive parents

Kobus and Sarie adopted two children, of which Sanrie was the eldest. They struggled with infertility for seven years and Sarie had to come to terms with not being able to have children the natural way. They applied for adoption through the CMR. They went through the rigorous selection process and intensive preparation for their role as adoptive parents. They spoke with the highest esteem of the welfare organisation and the welfare worker who worked with them. Kobus and Sarie were selected as possible adoptive parents at the end of August.

Sarie was so convinced that she would soon have a little girl that she immediately started buying baby clothes. Kobus was not aware of this; the only thing he knew was that they had bought a baby's cot. Sarie washed all the baby clothes on 13 September s she believed her daughter would join them shortly. On 15 September, at exactly the time that Sanrie was born, Sarie had a vision that her daughter had been born and that morning she told Kobus that their daughter had been born. She was convinced it was the Lord preparing her for the child's arrival. She phoned the welfare worker at 08:00, even the prospective parents are not allowed to phone the welfare workers. Marie, the welfare worker, had been in meetings the entire morning. When Sarie finally reached Marie, Marie asked her what the call was about. Sarie said she was inquiring about the availability of a baby, and Marie replied she was looking at their baby that very moment. Sarie was so overwhelmed that a co-worker had to phone Kobus to give him the good news. Kobus fetched Sarie at her office and they drove to Marie's office. Marie commented that they would

have nothing for the baby, while Sarie did not understand why, as they already had everything they needed.

Three years later, Kobus and Sarie adopted again. This time it was a little boy named Marius. The night before the Marius was born, Sarie had a dream that she had given birth to a son.

When the welfare worker told them that there was a little boy available for adoption; they went with Sanrie and her (adoptive) paternal grandfather to collect their new-born son. They took some baby clothes with them. Grandpa and Sanrie went through and dressed her new brother in the welfare worker's office and then took him to Kobus and Sarie. This created a strong bond between Sanrie, grandfather, and Marius.

Sarie has fond memories of both adoptions. She remembers every detail and sees them as defining moments in her life. When she thinks about her adopted children, she thinks of them as her own children. She feels like the Pharaoh's daughter who found Moses in the Nile and raised him. But the difference from the Moses story is that she has the wonderful assurance, from Sanrie, that their children will never abandon them for other parents. Sarie is very comfortable with the fact that Sanrie has a relationship with Madrileen, her biological mother.

Sarie came across many misperceptions and judgements surrounding adoption. People used to say that one cannot take such a risk, because one does not know "what you are getting". Sarie agrees that one never knows what one will get, even in the case of biological child. She did not feel threatened by the questions she was bombarded with throughout her life. Adoptions were commonplace in their family. Kobus's brother and cousin also adopted children. There were almost as many adopted grandchildren in the family as there were biological grandchildren. Sarie opined that this gave the family the ability to be frank and open about adoption. Sarie believed that one gets out of a child exactly what one put in, yet it is still by God's grace that they had two children who have made them very proud.

5.2.2 Riaan's adoptive parents

Sam and Mariaan also walked a long path with infertility. They did not want to admit that they would probably never have children of their own and it was a huge blow to Sam's manhood. Mariaan's longing for a child was described as an almost physical pain. Both remembered this time as a great strain on their marriage and they decided on adoption when their infertility

treatment finally failed. They believed that it was God's plan to give someone's unplanned baby a home and a solution for the mother. They also had an overwhelming desire to have children.

They went to the CMR to enquire about adoption and soon learnt that not everybody was eligible for adoption. Their family situation, finances, and support structures would be scrutinised. They had to see counsellors and attend group sessions. Mariaan found it was as invasive of their privacy as the fertility treatment had been. When the couple qualified for adoption, their family shared in their joy.

They received their infant son, Riaan, and their first days with him were wonderful. He was the answer to many tears and prayers. He was exactly the *bulletjie* (bull calf) about which Mariaan and Sam had dreamed.

But Riaan did not thrive and lagged at all his developmental stages. For Mariaan, it felt like a Pandora's Box. Every time they visited a doctor, a new problem was diagnosed. Mariaan was very upset and just wished her son could have a normal, happy childhood without any suffering. Later, Riaan had learning difficulties and developmental problems at school. Sam and Mariaan did all that they could to help him. It was difficult obtaining the necessary professional help and they kept on searching for a breakthrough.

Even as an adult, writing is still difficult for Riaan. He had to use a computer to do his schoolwork as a child. The remedial teachers did not help at all; they were unsupportive and kept insisting that Riaan needed to attend a special school. Mariaan refused to send Riaan to a special school and today he has a matric certificate, which he obtained in a normal high school. This was very difficult for Riaan, but he persevered. According to his IQ test score, he should have fared better in school, but by this time, everyone was physically and mentally exhausted. Later, Mariaan realised that Riaan suffered from depression due to this constant battle at school.

Riaan began to stutter in the fifth grade. Fortunately, his parents heard of the McGuire programme, which helped him immensely. One becomes a lifelong member of this expensive programme, but they award bursaries to students.

It is as if fate worked against Riaan and left its scars. He is a lovely soul; a gallant and loving person. Sam and Mariaan were proud of him, felt that he had a good upbringing, and they loved him as much as if he were their own child.

Sam and Mariaan felt that they had a good relationship with Riaan. Riaan had slight Asperger's tendencies, although the psychologist said that these were minimal and that he was rather like a professor who lives on his own planet. Mariaan opined that this was due to the difficulties he experienced at school, his stutter, and the cruelty of other children.

Mariaan wanted Riaan to study further, but Sam was afraid that the pressure could send him over the edge and that Riaan might commit suicide. Riaan could not apply for a driver's licence due to his medical problems. He therefore still lived with his parents and could only go out if they dropped him off and pick him up again.

Riaan worked for his father. He was kind and patient and helped everybody in the office, especially with their computer problems. He did have a temper but also did not stay angry for long. Riaan was naïve and believed in the basic goodness of people.

Sam was a very social person and often joked with Riaan. As a result, Riaan became even more withdrawn. Both parents were worried about the feelings Riaan never shared. Sam and Mariaan lost their other adopted son in a motorcycle accident a few months before the researcher conducted the interview with them.

Mariaan contacted the social worker to invite his biological parents and grandparents to his confirmation in his church. It turned out to be a wonderful family feast and they loved Riaan's biological mother's family. Their family met Joyce and her whole family. She was a very nice lady who was married, with one child. They attended the 50th anniversary of the home for unwed mothers where Joyce had stayed. Joyce gave a speech on behalf of mothers who relinquished their children. Mariaan related that it was a moment that brought them all together. They visited Riaan's biological family from time to time and saw Riaan's biological grandparents regularly. When he visited his grandparents, Riaan ran out to greet them like a care-free child.

5.2.3 Sumari's adoptive parents

Pierre and Ronel had one child, Jan. The family was in a car accident when Jan was seven years old. Ronel broke her back and Jan had three skull fractures. Due to brain damage, Jan could no longer talk and was left a paraplegic. Ronel recovered from her injuries but could not have any more children, yet the couple longed for more children. They took in a girl from the children's

home during some of the school holidays. After the girl ran away from the children's home with a man, the couple lost contact with her.

Sarah, Pierre's cousin, fostered Sumari for a few months. When visiting Sarah, Pierre and Ronel enquired about the teenager living with Sarah. When they were told about Sumari's situation, they immediately felt a calling to take care of Sumari. Sarah then spoke to Sumari to enquire if she wanted to be adopted. On 1 January 1991, Sumari came home with Pierre and Ronel.

Ronel found it difficult to adopt a teenage girl. A year after the adoption, their son Jan died. This was a very traumatic time in the family's life. Ronel was upset that her son had died but that Sumari was still there. She admitted that there was no logic to her thought processes at that time. Ronel said that she was not nice to Sumari, who subsequently left home and moved in with her boyfriend's family. Sumari later married her boyfriend.

Sumari had two sons. When the eldest child was three and the younger one was a year old, Ronel visited Sumari. They reconciled during this visit and from there on, Pierre and Ronel were there for Sumari her three children. They gave and received love and support. With the youngest grandchild still only 11 years old at the time of this study, they had the privilege to arrange her birthday parties, take her on outings, and have her over for weekends. The boys were grown men and has less contact with their grandparents less.

Pierre and Ronel believed that their life story with Sumari was the Lord's will. They also believed that had it not been for the accident and the tragedy with their son, Jan, they would never have been receptive to being Sumari's foster parents. They also would have missed out on being grandparents. They saw themselves not as Sumari's saviours, but as humble instruments in God's hands. They felt blessed to have this family.

5.2.4 Jana's adoptive parents

Jeff and Rose adopted Jana when she was almost three years old. By this time, it was clear that they would never have children of their own. Jeff and Rose had to work through the feelings of sadness and the mourning process. Rose said: "we longed for a child of our own". They knew that adopting Jana would be a very important decision that would impact their family life.

After Jeff and Rose took Jana home, she cried incessantly. As soon as they thought Jana was old enough to understand, they told her that she was adopted. Jeff and Rose saw that Jana was very intelligent and made her own deductions about her situation at the age of five.

As expected, it was a difficult period for the newly formed family. Jeff was away from home for long periods of time due to his work, so raising Jana was mainly Rose's responsibility. It was clear that raising Jana was not going to be an easy task. Even as a young child, Jana was angry and felt rejected. She was tense and uncertain; Rose cannot recall Jana ever smiling as child.

Rose kept a diary in which she noted every day's events. Most days, Jana had Rose in tears. She felt ill-equipped to deal with a cheeky, angry little girl. Rose believed in raising her child according to biblical principles. Jana seemed to interpret the rules of the house as hateful and aimed only at her. Jana would yell at Rose, saying that she would never raise her own children in this way. At her wits' end, Rose would sometimes smack Jana with her hand. Many times, she thought that if this was her own child she would give her a "decent hiding". Rose referred to Proverbs 20:30, which states that blows and bruises remove evil and that beatings cleanse the inner parts. She also referred to Proverbs 23:13-14, which advises parents to instruct children and not to withhold the rod.

Jeff and Rose found it difficult to build a close relationship with Jana as she avoided physical contact. Many times, Rose would walk to Jana's room to give her a hug, but Jana's body language would clearly say: "leave me alone". Sometimes it seemed as if Jana hated Rose. However, Jana was not only aggressive towards Rose; she managed to infuriate other people as well. Various people would relate to Rose how Jana would act out and upset them. Jana's friends would tell Rose how they feared Jana when she became angry. "Tannie, ons is bang vir haar oë as sy kwaad word." (Auntie, we are scared of her eyes when she gets angry).

In high school, the headmaster called Jeff and Rose in to discuss Jana's behaviour. He mentioned that she was extremely wilful and cheeky; her prefect badge was taken away. Rose cannot remember what the incident was about, but it had something to do with the fact that Jana refused to be told what to do. She was in boarding school and the headmaster said that the kids could not go home on a specific weekend. Jana disobeyed him and went home anyway. When the headmaster called Jana in over her disobedience, she baited him and he became so furious that he took his spectacles off and threw them on the floor.

Out of desperation, Jeff and Rose decided to take Jana to a psychologist. At first, she did not want to go. She said that nothing was wrong with her and that she did not need a psychologist. Rose convinced Jana to see the psychologist, but found the report disappointing. Rose thought that Jana manipulated all the tests. It was confirmed that Jana had a very high IQ but she did not perform according to her ability. Rose thought Jana's poor academic performance was due to a poor self-image caused by her biological parents' perceived rejection.

The psychologist told Jeff and Rose to keep Jana busy every moment of the day, as she became frustrated when bored and then acted out. The psychologist also suggested placing her in a school for highly intelligent children. Jana was then accepted into a school for gifted children run by the University of Pretoria.

After discussing the matter at length, Jeff and Rose decided to place Jana in a rural boarding school, close enough so that she could come home over the weekends. Other people were surprised by this decision. Jeff and Rose decided that it would be better for Jana to socialise with other children, to make friends, and to learn to obey rules.

Jeff and Rose opined that they could not have made a better decision. Jana soon became used to life at boarding school. She had friends, went on school outings, attended camps, and came home over weekends. The school camps were especially good for Jana. She found the Lord and started writing beautiful letters to Jeff and Rose. Jana started to appreciate her adoptive home. One of these letters read:

Liewe Pappa en Mamma. Dit het my lank gevat om te leer dat die Here met alles 'n doel en 'n plan het, ons ten goede. Moekie, dankie, dankie vir alles wat Mamma vir my uit suiwer liefde doen. Ek weet Mamma skuif Moekie se studies eenkant om aan my aandag te gee. Mams verdien baie beter en sagter behandeling. Op 'n lomp manier wil ek net aan julle sê, ek is jammer...rêrig jammer dat ek so ondankbaar was. Ek weet hoe lief Pappa en Mamma my het.

Dear Daddy and Mommy, it took me a long time to realise that God has a purpose with everything. He always wants the best for us. Thank you, thank you mommy for everything that you sacrifice for me. I know that you took time out from your studies to give me attention. You deserve much better and softer treatment. In my way, I just want to say that I am very sorry that I have been so ungrateful. I know how much Daddy and Mommy loves me.

Jana lived with her parents while studying and Rose said that the last two years of Jana's school career and her graduate studies were wonderful.

Then Jana secretly started to search for her birth mother. It came as a shock to Jeff and Rose when Jana's biological mother arrived at her graduation ceremony with her family. Rose opined that Jana's biological family took over at the occasion and announced that they were the "real family". Since that time, they were always present when there was a celebration, such as the christening their grandchildren. This hurt Jeff and Rose deeply; especially the fact that Jana did not trust them enough let them be part of the search for Jana's biological mother. They felt that they sacrificed everything, just for somebody else to come and claim their daughter. They resolved their issues with Jana and forgave her for the manner in which the events unfolded, however, they still feel uncomfortable in the company of Jana's biological mother.

Rose said: "As Jana got older and more mature, our relationship kept improving. We could not have asked for a better daughter". Rose mentioned that the one good thing that came out of the adoption was that she became very dependent on God. She had to stay on her knees and ask for direction. Her relationship with God reached a new, much deeper level.

Today, they are not only mother and daughter, but very good friends. Jana's adoptive father also shared in this new and wonderful chapter in the family's life. The whole nuclear family also moved closer to God. Like Jana said: "Die Here het met alles 'n doel". (God has a purpose with everything.)

Rose thought that her own childhood might have played a role in how she raised Jana. "I had a lot more empathy for her than I would otherwise have." Rose's mother passed away when she was five years old and the children were brought up by their father until he remarried. Rose's stepmother did not take to the children and made them sleep outside in a warehouse. As a result, Rose learned to stand up for herself, because nobody else would.

5.2.5 Adoptive parent couple

Braam and Irene had two adopted children; a boy and a girl. They did not want their children to be interviewed for reasons stated later in this account. The researcher did however include their story as it highlighted how fulfilling adoption can be.

Both Irene and Braam went through mourning the fact that they would never be able to conceive biological children. They saw this period of mourning of what could have been as an essential part of the preparation process for adoption.

A good friend of theirs persuaded them to opt for adoption. They provided the CMR with their details and went through the stringent selection procedure. It was the most wonderful experience to receive their first child after a three-year waiting period. When they received their second child, it was another miracle. It was a huge adaptation to sleep less and take on all the other responsibilities that go with raising an infant. The couple said that it was tough, but it was never a negative experience.

Both children developed well; physically, emotional, and mentally. Their school careers were normal until the end of fifth grade (for their son) and third grade (for their daughter). After serious consideration, the children were sent to a boarding school in Bloemfontein. Braam and Irene felt that it offered both children a better academic career than what the rural schools could offer. This change was radical for the children. They went from an Afrikaans school to an English medium school. They prepared the children for the initial loss in their performance at school and the loss of their friends. At this time, Braam had to go to Bloemfontein once a week for business. He brought the children home every weekend, therefore they saw their children regularly.

Both children performed well at primary school. In high school, their son excelled in sports and academics. Their daughter started off well in high school but over time her results started to decline. They then discovered that she had suffered serious hearing loss. After receiving a hearing aid, her marks improved. Both the children went to Damelin College and later attended university, where they both completed their degrees.

Braam and Irene's have a good relationship with both their children. Neither child was interested in meeting their biological parents. Braam and Irene said that they would help their children to locate their biological parents if they so desired. They felt that this was a process and that the lives of their children or the biological parents should not be disrupted unnecessarily.

Braam and Irene were grateful that they received both their children as infants, before there was any possible psychological trauma caused by moving from one foster home to another. To raise

any child requires adjustment and commitment. Braam and Irene were very grateful that there had never been any conflict in the way that they raised their children and that the biological parents were never involved.

Braam and Irene did not want their children to be interviewed for the purposes of this study. They were always open with the children about the adoption and their children are comfortable with the fact that they were adopted. They whole-heartedly accept Braam and Irene as their parents. Likewise, Braam and Irene see the children as their own, their heirs; they bear the family name and are fully integrated with their extended family. Thus, they do not want to upset their children in any way or cause them unnecessary hurt.

5.3 The biological parents

For the biological parents, surrendering a child is a traumatic event. For some parents, it remains the most traumatic event in their lives. The following are the stories of the biological parents.

5.3.1 Sanrie's biological mother

Madrileen fell pregnant during the December vacation before her matric year. She participated in many of the school activities and was head girl at her school. She managed to hide her pregnancy until the end of her term. Madrileen was in total denial and lived as if she was not pregnant. One night during her midyear exams, she had to wake her parents because she was going into labour. Her mother was by her side when the baby was born.

Her mother initially thought that they should keep the baby, but the following day she told Madrileen she felt it would be better to give the baby up for adoption. Madrileen agreed that she was not able to raise a child. It felt as if she was not connected to this person who had just given birth and readily gave the baby up for adoption. As she grew older, she realised that this was a protection mechanism.

Madrileen wrote her year-end exams and passed with three distinctions. She went to university the following year and completed a degree in occupational therapy in the prescribed four years. Madrileen experienced the baby's first birthday as a very sad occasion; she did not want to talk to anyone and just wanted to be alone. The following birthdays were less painful.

Sanrie started writing letters to Madrileen when she was 16 years old. She asked Madrileen why she was given up for adoption. She also asked about her biological parent's health and any possible hereditary diseases. She wanted to know from where she got her dark, curly hair. Madrileen answered every question as accurately and comprehensively as she could.

Madrileen was grateful that Sanrie made contact. They had a very good relationship and Madrileen's two sons loved their sister. It also means the world to Madrileen's mother to have contact with her granddaughter. Madrileen's husband, Marco, knew she had an illegitimate child from the day they met each other and had no problem when Sanrie contacted them. Sanrie had no interest in meeting her biological father.

5.3.2 Riaan's biological mother

Joyce was 21 when she fell pregnant with Riaan. She dated his father, Johan, for a little while when she fell pregnant with his child. Johan and his parents came to see Joyce and her parents to discuss the future. Johan said: "I suppose we have to get married". Joyce was so angry with this back-handed proposal that she refused to have anything further to do with Johan. This left Joyce and her parents to make the decision regarding the future of the baby. They decided that the best thing to do was for Joyce to resign from her job and was sent to a home for unwed mothers in Pretoria. Coming from a small town, it was of the utmost importance to Joyce's parents that the news did not spread around town. Joyce had already left her parents' home and was working in Pretoria; her absence was therefore not a problem. Joyce also had a younger sister who was still at school at that stage. Joyce's parents wanted to protect her younger sister from malicious comments.

Feeling that she did not have much of a choice, Joyce resigned and went to the home for unwed mothers. Over the years, she wondered how her life and that of the baby would have turned out if she had not resigned and had kept her baby. She feels very guilty for giving up Riaan. If she had not resigned, she might have been able to keep her baby, but she probably would have lost her job when it became apparent that she was pregnant. Back then, there were no stringent labour laws to protect female employees and there was also no such thing as a paid maternity leave. Joyce would not easily have been able to keep and raise a child.

Joyce met her future husband only three months after she relinquished her baby. She and Conrad had a very happy marriage and she knew that he would have accepted Riaan as his own child. Joyce believes that God just had another plan for her and Riaan.

Joyce has positive memories of the home for unwed mothers. She stayed there with others in the same predicament, so she even made a few friends. The home provided the women with good counsellors and medical care. The welfare worker did not place any pressure on Joyce to give her baby up for adoption, which she Joyce appreciated.

When Riaan's adoptive mother, Mariaan, contacted her to invite the biological family to Riaan's confirmation, she was very excited. Meeting Riaan was one of the most wonderful moments of Joyce's life. It was even more special because her parents were also there. It was a sacred moment to see Riaan confirm his belief in God. "We were privileged to share in this moment".

5.3.3 Sumari's biological mother

Sumari's biological mother, Cathy, passed away before the interview phase of this study commenced. Her mother did not intervene when her husband and stepson were violent towards Sumari. She also did nothing about the molestation and allowed it to continue for three years. On the contrary, she was on occasion present during the molestation. Sumari noted that even when faced with signing over guardianship, her mother showed no remorse.

My mother...my mother...my mother, I should try to say something about her and I am trying to find the words that do not include, fuck, and shit, and fucking shit. My mother; I asked myself these days if she ever loved me...I do not remember my mother using the words, "I love you", or maybe those words are put into such a far corner in my mind that I just can't recall them. Neither did she show love or tenderness in any way.

Sumari felt humiliated in her relationship with her mother.

From as early as she can remember, Sumari and her little sister were in a crèche at her mother's office. They had breakfast, lunch, and at times, dinner there. Her mother was in a senior position and was a very hard worker. The one good memory Sumari had of her mother was when she took time off work to take them swimming. Since her mother's work was very important to her, this was special. On that day, it was just her mother, Sumari, and her sister.

It was the best day I have ever spent with my mom. There were bees around our heads, we tumbled and dived and laughed and had no care in the world. We were just kids, that one day...my mom was tanning her other important asset, her body. But it was such fun and I can still smell the water and taste the can of Fanta we shared. I can remember the dressing room's cold cement floor and the excitement I felt knowing she especially fetched us from crèche and brought us there. That was the first and only day that I can recall that I felt important to her. Years later they had that pool closed and I felt as though a part of me, a treasure, if you will, lay at the bottom of the now cemented piece of ground.

Sumari said that her mother humiliated her and told her that she was worthless. Her mother, from when she was very little, told her that she would ensure that the welfare would come to fetch her, but that they probably would not want her either. Her mother later became an alcoholic.

5.3.4 Sumari's biological father

Sumari remembers growing up with a funny, loving, story-telling, pranking, drunken father who loved her and her sister. He was a wonderful man and used to tell them wonderful stories. Even today, Sumari can recall those stories. At the drop of a hat, he would start making up the most amazing tales and some of those stories continued for months on end.

He had one story in particular that amused me for a long time. In my dad's leg there were two holes and I asked what had happened. He started to tell me and my little sister, who would fight each night about who's bed my dad would be sitting on to tell his story, but when he started this story he amused and amazed us with scary lions, storming elephants, lizards hiding in small places, wars and things too wonderful for words. Yet he built this story each night as he went along. I don't think he ever had a chance to finish that story...

Sumari's dad also built a jungle on their porch and brought home two chameleons and two bush babies that thrived in their man-made jungle. He would wake the girls at midnight and have a feast by candlelight. They would get special gifts like "droë wors", biltong, and six cans of cream and six cans of condensed milk. "That was the love and heart of my father. He died when I was ten..."

5.3.5 Jana's biological father

Jana's biological father, Frans, thinks that losing Jana was the biggest tragedy of his life. Frans did have contact with Jana when she was small, but as an unwed father he had no rights. The decision to give Jana up was that of her biological mother, Esmé. She did not contact Frans or let him know of her decision to relinquish Jana. When Frans found out, it was too late to intervene. His feelings and opinion about the adoption were not taken into consideration.

Jana contacted Frans when she was 24 and they have since built a strong relationship. Despite his present wife's opposition, he bought a house, a car, and expensive jewellery for Jana. "I often thought about Jana. Now that I found her again, I feel that I need to spoil her a bit."

Jana's father married a much younger woman and they have two sons. Jana does not have a close relationship with the boys, perhaps because of the age difference. Jana has a strained relationship with Frans' wife. "I think she is jealous of any attention that my father pays me. I also think that she treats him very badly. They are always having words."

5.3.6 Jana's biological mother

Jana's biological mother, Esmé, describes losing Jana as the most traumatic event of her life. "I simply did not have the money take care of her." Esmé's sister and brother blame her for relinquishing the child. They felt that they could have raised Jana even if Esmé was not able to do so. Esmé's mother felt even more strongly about the adoption of her oldest grandchild. She never forgave Esmé, even after the family reconnected with Jana. Esmé says that she could never resolve this issue with her mother. "It is like the elephant in the room that nobody talks about."

Esmé married again and had two daughters. Her husband, Ben, knew about Jana since the beginning of their relationship and he was filled with joy when Jana contacted them. They only told their girls about their half-sister when Jana planned her first visit with them.

5.3.7 Jana's biological maternal grandmother

Joy, Jana's maternal grandmother, says that Jana was her first grandchild. She became a grandmother at 43. Joy loved her granddaughter intensely. Joy also experienced trauma as a young child as her mother passed away shortly after her birth. Joy and her older brother were

given up to their paternal grandparents. Joy loved them very much and has only good things to say about them.

Joy's father remarried and had two more sons. Although she was very happy with her grandparents, she could never understand why her father never took her and her brother home with him; she felt rejected. Joy knew how a child feels when a parent lets them down and she understood the impact it had on a child's self-image. Years later, Joy still struggled with the fact that Esmé "abandoned" Jana.

How can you cause your child such pain? I don't believe her story that she did not have the money to raise Jana for a moment. I am a woman of independent means and would have gladly paid for any costs. She did not ask. But what does she do? She goes and signs the adoption papers. She did it without even consulting me or her brother and sister. If it is such a burden to raise your own child, anyone of us would have done so gladly. We are not a poor; backward family and I find the whole adoption a disgrace. It is wonderful to have Jana back in our lives. This however does not make up for all the missing years.

"Nooit is 'n lang tyd, maar ek sal Esmé nooit vergewe nie." (Never is a long time, but I will never forgive Esmé.)

5.3.8 Michael: a biological father

Although this research is primarily about the adoption triad, the researcher was alarmed and distressed by the emotional trauma that many biological fathers experience. This topic has not been addressed in any of the literature the researcher reviewed. Considering this, the researcher decided to include the narrative of Michael.

Michael was an unwed biological father. His girlfriend, Dawn, fell pregnant with Michael's son when he was 18 years old. The relationship between the two families was very strained from the beginning. At first, Dawn denied that it was Michael's child. Later she said that it was indeed Michael's child and that he should pay maintenance. Dawn and her parents refused Michael and his parents any access to the child, even though Michael paid regular maintenance. Michael saw his son only twice in two years and then it was only for a short time in the presence of Dawn and her parents. In 2004, Michael lost his job and subsequently committed suicide. In this sad

account of a father who had no paternal rights, the researcher was unable to interview Michael, but she did have access to Michael's father and his sister after his death.

5.3.8.1 Michael's father

Michael's father, Jo, related that he and his wife went to talk to Dawn and her parents as soon as they became aware of the pregnancy. This was meant to be a discussion about how the two families could work together to make the best of these circumstances. The conversation ended up in harsh words, with Dawn screaming at them. From there on, the relationship soured further. Michael and his family were not allowed at the hospital when Dawn gave birth. As a young man, Michael did not earn much, but he did pay maintenance. They went to court more than once because of demands for an increase in maintenance; Jo felt that they demanded an unrealistic amount of maintenance. Michael was holding down two jobs to keep up with paying the maintenance. Jo felt that his son had absolutely no rights as an unwed father, but he dutifully paid maintenance. Michael almost never saw his son. "He was like a milk cow, just useful to keep around to pay the maintenance."

On 30 June 2004, on his birthday, Michael hanged himself. Michael went to work that morning, just to be fired. Jo opined that Michael felt that his only purpose in life was to keep on paying maintenance in the hope that he might see his son. When he lost his job, he must have felt that he could not even contribute to provide for his son anymore and he presumably felt like a complete failure. Jo felt that Dawn and her family could just as well have tied the knot in the rope themselves. Dawn's family attended the funeral, but Jo felt this was two-faced and heartless.

Jo could see the strain building up in his son. After each court appearance, Michael felt more disillusioned and hopeless. Many times, arrangements were made for Michael to see his child. When Michael arrived on time at the agreed meeting place, Dawn and his son were just not there. Jo said that Michael suffered from subjective units of distress (SUDs).

Jo opined that a societal problem exists in that people (society and the courts) believe that a father's only role is to provide financially for his children. In 2002 to 2004, it was an unheard of concept that a father could really be interested in his children, love them, and want to share in their lives. Jo believes that such opinions may have improved since then.

Jo had very little contact with his grandson. Although Dawn and her family did not restrict access to the child after Michael's death, Jo could not face seeing Michael's son as there were too many bad and painful memories. The boy's resemblance to Michael and certain mannerisms is heart-breaking for Jo. Dawn and her family made a complete turnaround in their attitude after Michael's suicide, but Jo was left feeling that it was all too little and far too late.

5.3.8.2 Michael's sister

My brother was a happy person or that is what he led everyone to believe. I'm going to try and explain how not being able to be part of his son's life made him make the choices he did. Yes, this might not have been the only reason, but I believe it had a large part in it.

Michael was 18 when he got his girlfriend at that time pregnant. He never knew she was pregnant as she never told him. When he finally found out, he was man enough to stand up to his responsibility, however, it was denied that he was the unborn child's father. But with some simple math we all knew he was. Michael was still prepared to stand by the girl and help raise this child. He was still denied being part of his life. Well, in May 2002, a little boy was born, and Michael was not given the opportunity to be part of this experience. Months passed since the little boy was born and he was never allowed to be a part of his son's life.

But then came the day when things weren't so rosy, and Michael was then informed that the child was in fact his son and they expected maintenance. It is amazing how, when they needed that, he was good enough to take on the title of father.

Michael was a proud person and he took on his responsibilities. With the help of our parents, Michael was able to pay the maintenance that was claimed. Still though, he was not given the right to be part of his son's life; all he was good for was the money he had to pay every month and woe and betide if he didn't pay it! He was summoned to court and threatened with jail time. He did everything he could to keep up the maintenance payments. Michael did try, he really did. Unfortunately, he didn't have the highest paying job; he worked as a manager at a pizza joint. He then decided that he needed to earn more so that he could take care of his responsibilities. So, he started working as a sales rep for a vacuum cleaner company. There he was earning commission. The problem with this was he had to make sales to earn the commission. Michael really struggled.

I do believe this was Michael's breaking point. Yes, there were other factors that came into play, but not being able to be part of your child's life, must be one of the most difficult things for anyone. Naturally, a few years have now passed and somehow Michael and the mother of his son where able to make amends. Michael now shared a small part in his son's life.

I think Michael wanted to give the world to his little boy. Unfortunately, it was not that easy. Michael was lodging with us at this stage, as he could not afford his own place. This made it hard for him. I had just had a baby girl whom he adored, and I think that living with us where this new little person was a part of our lives, reminded him of what he was missing out on and what he might never have. He really did try to be part of his son's life. However, the stress of work, and then not being able to pay his child support or being able to give his son everything broke him. So, he took his life in the hope of not letting down his son any further.

I do believe that if he was given the chance to be a dad to his little boy from the start and that if the pressure placed on him was less, he might still be with us today, but hey, how would I know? He would surely have made one hell of a dad.

5.4 Interpreting the narratives

5.4.1 The experience of keeping the baby

5.4.1.1 Sanrie

Sanrie felt very secure in her relationship with her adoptive parents. "They will always be there for me," said Sanrie. Since she was a young girl, Sanrie was told of the miraculous way in which God gave her to her parents. This story of being the "chosen baby" made her feel very secure about her adoption. "I believe that my mother was called to be my mother, in the same way that the Egyptian princess was chosen to raise Moses. For me she will always be my only mother. God chose both my adoptive parents for me."

Sanrie never had issues regarding her adoption and knew about her adoption as far back as she could remember. All her friends and family knew that she was adopted, yet she was always amused whenever a new friend voiced their sympathy about her being adopted. As a child, she felt more special than other children who were raised by their biological parents. "My mother knew of my birth in such a miraculous way, that I know God has chosen me to be their child. I

will never doubt that,” said Sanrie. She stated that her adoptive parents would always be her only parents as they have always loved and supported her. They also provided her the opportunity to study at the University of Pretoria. “My adoptive mother, Sarie, has this inner strength. She was the one that contacted the welfare worker when I wanted to have contact with Madrileen. She never felt threatened by Madrileen and has on occasion invited her for tea. My mother is my role model. If I can just have her calmness and strength of character.”

The day that she and her grandfather went to collect her brother, Marius, and handed him to her parents, was also a fond memory for Sanrie. She recalled all the times the story had been told and retold. “I do not think that I really remember it. It is more like a family legend.” Sanrie continued to have a special bond with her paternal grandfather.

She felt very protective towards her brother, Marius. He had also contacted his biological mother, but the relationship was strained because she lied to him on many occasions. Sanrie felt intensely disturbed by the way Marius’ biological mother upset her brother and this made her appreciate Madrileen’s openness even more.

Sanrie felt quite close to Madrileen, especially since they share an academic interest. Madrileen is a practicing occupational therapist and Sanrie was completing her doctorate in speech therapy at the time of this study. Sanrie also respected her biological mother for the fact that Madrileen completed her schooling and university career without missing or failing a single year. “She must have a lot of determination and ambition,” said Sanrie. Sanrie believed that her interest in a scientific line of study came from Madrileen. “I suppose that is the ‘nature’ part of my being, the nurturing comes from my adoptive parents.” Sanrie enjoyed visiting Madrileen for a cup of tea or a braai at her house. “Sometimes us girls just go to the mall and have a ball.” Although she had a relationship with her biological mother, she opined that they would never be more than just friends. “She will never be my mother, but I am glad to have met her.”

Sanrie felt that the Lord led her to contact Madrileen when she was only 16 years old. “It helped me to find myself and to get to know myself a bit better. Things like where I got my physical characteristics from and whether there are hereditary illnesses I need to be aware of are important to me. I feel that I know myself well and am quite happy in my adoptive family. It is also good to know Madrileen and her family.”

“Madrileen’s mother, I call her Nana, is a wonderful woman. I visit her many times and then we have high tea. She will always have something to eat like scones. She is a wonderful grandmother and I am privileged to know her. She told me how she mourned her first grandchild and always prayed for me. I get really emotional when I talk about her,” said Sanrie.

Madrileen told Sanrie some disturbing stories about her biological father. According to Madrileen, he stalked her in her first year of university and wanted to know what happened to the baby, while Madrileen wanted nothing to do with him. He only left her alone when Madrileen began a relationship with Marco and he threatened him. Madrileen described her biological father as obsessive-compulsive. Although Sanrie does feel some empathy for her unknown father, she does not want to contact him at all. She said that she “was just not up to” meeting the other 50 percent of her biological family. “From what Madrileen told me, he sounds obsessive-compulsive and even dangerous. I do not want to complicate my life.” She felt secure in the knowledge that it was impossible for him to contact her. Nobody will provide him with her contact details, nor does he know her name.

Sanrie was a confident and self-assured young lady who did not wish to be any different to the person she is today. “I owe everything to my parents,” she said. Sanrie also had a very good relationship with her brother, Marius, whom Kobus and Sarie adopted as a baby.

5.4.1.2 Riaan

Riaan felt that his relationship with his adoptive parents could be better. He liked the fact that his physical appearance resembled that of his adoptive father. He grew up with a younger adoptive brother, whom he loved, but his brother passed away a few months before this study was concluded.

Riaan was curious about his biological mother and they met when he was 16 years old; he accepted Joyce immediately. At the time of this study, it had been 10 years since they met and they were still working on their relationship. Riaan felt proud to be Joyce’s son. He also met her husband and their daughter, his half-sister, Tanya (24), and he was fond of all of them. Riaan felt very protective of Tanya as her older brother. He also met Joyce’s two sisters, her brother and their families as well as his maternal grandparents. They were all overwhelmed at the meetings and accepted him as a part of their family.

At the age of 28, Riaan still lived with his adoptive parents. Since meeting his biological parents, Riaan had found peace. He led a healthy lifestyle and believed in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity. He attended church regularly and envisioned himself as working for God and having a relationship with God.

5.4.1.3 Sumari

Sumari felt guilty about the lack of attachment she had to her adoptive parents and opined that this was probably due to her already having been 15 years old when she moved in with them. “I was already formed and scarred. These nightmares will never go away. I just want to hold and protect my children.” It was also not a formal adoption, as Sumari was already over the “legal” age for adoption, however, legal guardianship was in place. Sumari never took her adoptive parents’ surname but considers them her mother and father.

Although her adoptive parents did love her, Sumari never felt part of the adoptive family. Uncles, aunts, and cousins kept her at a distance and she could clearly feel that they perceived her as a person with a tainted background. She felt that she was robbed of both her biological as well as adoptive families. She felt deeply rejected by her biological family, however, did keep in contact with her biological siblings. They had a good relationship, but her siblings have since passed away. Sumari communicated that she felt completely alone in this world. Sumari associated with the “mad, sad baby”.

I feel so locked in myself. Sometimes I just want to throw things. I can also not handle it when there is any form of intimacy in a movie or on television. When I am not working, I am in my bedroom reading books. I do not even open the curtains. I wish I could just vanish from this earth. I got divorced when Cindy was three years old. There is a new man in my life, but our relationship is so complicated. It is on again and off again. I don’t want to be alone but find myself pushing people away. My two adult sons are very critical of me. They say that I want to be unhappy.

5.4.1.4 Jana

Jana sometimes felt very lonely and could associate with the “sad baby”. She often wondered about the person she would have been, had she grown up with her biological mother. Jana also wished that her adoptive parents were also her biological parents. She had a very good

relationship with her adoptive parents, but similar to any relationship, Jana sometimes got annoyed with little things her parents did. This is however not very serious. Jana wrote the following story:

An adoption tale

I can feel the sun on the outer layer of my skin. It is harsh. Then the life-giving rain starts to fall. It soaks me, drench my whole being. Slowly life happens. First it is just the little beginning of a root. Then it is the formation of leaves. I can hear my mother's voice. Sometimes from far away I hear my father's voice. I feel safe and loved. So, I grow, millimetre by millimetre every day. I break through the hard-outer crust and break into life. I feel the warm nourishing ground. I am alive, I am alive! This is the defining moment of my life. I am born. I am a tree.

I remember my mother's laugh, her voice and her crying. I remember soothing music. But now I am here. I am part of your world. I can hear my mother and father's voices clearly now. There is a mixture of other voices. I can hear my uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins. I know that I belong here, I am happy. I am safe. I will grow into a strong apple tree and bear lots of fruit. I am sure I will have my own seedlings one day.

Mother Why are you so drunk? You cannot even walk on a straight line.

Father It is the devil in the bottle.

Mother And why do you walk so late in the night? Is there another woman!?

They shout and shout. I hate it when mother and father fights like that. The ground gets drier and there are more stones. I can feel my roots getting weaker. But the seasons come and go. Now it is autumn. I feel the leaves of my family and me, as it falls to the ground. The ground gets a wonderful, warm layer of leaves. With time the leaves will become part of the ground and will nurture us. In winter we all take a rest. When the spring and the God given rain come, we will awaken and grow. We will bear fruit and multiply. We are the same, we are family. I am so excited. I look at my parents and know that I belong. We look the same; I am sure that we are the same. I look at the storms that my parents weather and know that I am going to be just as strong.

But then there comes another storm. It is a strange storm. Everyone fights. I see my mother falls. This strong, upright tree just falls. My grandmother keeps on fighting. She wants to keep me in the family. But without my mother, she does not have the strength. She does not know where to turn to. I feel a bitterly icy cold wind. It goes right through my roots and leaves. Then I am torn away. My father and I come to a new field. The ground is different. It feels sandier. I long for the rich, black ground of my home. I cry for my mother. What happened to her? Is she dead? Or is she alive? Maybe she just doesn't love me anymore. My father is the only voice that I hear now. He tells me that the new ground is also good. Good apple tree girls transplant well in sandy ground. He is my only hope. Maybe I can become a strong apple tree like him.

One day the farmer comes. He cuts right through my trunk. He leaves my roots in the sandy grass, there where my father stands. I hear my father's calls for me. I want to go back, but the farmer has me in a firm grip. Slowly the calls become fainter, until I do not hear it anymore.

I am disorientated, I am alone. I do not hear the voices of my father, my mother, my uncles, aunts and cousins. It is so cold. The farmer takes me to another farm. It is warmer here and more humid. It feels as if I cannot breathe. I do not like it here. I do not have my roots. I cannot quench my thirst.

The farmer transplants me on new roots. I want to yell. But I am an apple tree and these roots are peach roots. I will never survive!

But I do. Slowly my trunk grows on the new roots. I try to look like a peach tree. That is a total failure. I try to act as a peach tree. That goes a bit better. I know, to survive I need to be a peach tree. Here are many new peach trees. Some tells me they are my mother and father. I am so glad to have a new mother and father. Some say they are brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins. I am glad about every one of them. Sometimes strangers will say you do not look like your peach father and mother. I then just try to look more like a peach tree. I grow up, not doing a too bad job at being a peach tree.

The small peach trees yell at me. They say that I am not really a peach tree. They spit at me. I feel so alone. I would like to be friends with the little peach trees. Then I find one little peach tree. Her trunk is skew, but I do not care. She is kind to me. She does not judge me. She seems not to notice that I am an apple tree.

But I wonder. Would I not have been a better apple tree? Would I not have been stronger with strong apple roots? Then one day I feel uneasy. I notice worms at my roots. My lovely, strong, borrowed roots are eaten away. My peach tree father tells me of a magic potion. The wizard can get me some. I run to the wizard but encountered a troll. The troll tries to offer me poison. The poison shows me that I am not good enough. That I must die with my bad, borrowed roots. I am neither a good apple nor a good peach tree.

I hear the wizard calls. His magic potion cannot give me back my old roots. I cannot become a really strong apple tree because I have peach tree roots. I cannot become a strong peach tree because I have apple tree branches and leaves.

Still the wizard gives me some of his magic potion. I feel the wind lifting me. I see the whole world beneath me. I see our farm. Then I see the farm where my apple tree father lives. At last I see the apple tree farm where my mother, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins live. I am flying. I now know that I am a special kind of apple tree. My fruit will always be apples. But they are bigger and sweeter, because I have strong peach tree roots. I do not long to have apple tree roots anymore. I am too old to be transplanted again.

Sometimes I wonder if the farmer knew what he was doing. Does he know of the many times I tried to be a good peach tree?

The wizard introduces me to a ghost apple tree. It is me! It is the me that never was. I can see that I am different. I am different from the ghost apple tree. I will never know exactly how the ghost apple tree would have developed if it was not taken away to the peach orchard and grafted on a peach root. The wizard shows me the ghost mother and ghost father, ghost uncles and aunts, ghost cousins. I will never really know them. I did not grow up with them.

The wizard sends me back to the peach orchard. I go back to my play mate. We learn how to spell and do our maths. We play and laugh and cry. Life is good. Then my parents send me to church. My peach friend is also there. Here we learn about the farmer. That he really wants the best for us. That he knew in advance the best place for each of us. I feel at peace and believe in the love of the farmer.

I am a young apple tree now – or is that a peach tree? I want straight branches. I am going to straighten my branches. I get a warm iron to do this. Then my branches burn and some brake off.

I look even less than a peach tree. I am just trying to fit in. What to do? My peach tree father tells me that we all belong together. We complement each other. Yes, we are different, but together we can be strong. He tells me that he understands how difficult it is for an apple tree to be a peach tree. Then he tells me something that I never thought about. He says that it is also difficult for him and mom. They also had to adapt to raising a little apple tree. But they couldn't have loved me more, even if I was a peach tree. Together we will grow strong in this orchard.

I hear that my apple tree father took his bicycle and rode to heaven. I am sad. I can remember a little bit about him. I decide to go and search for my apple tree family. I find them. Our roots get intertwined. I see that I do not know this family. They are like trees in a ghost kingdom. I need to get away. I withdraw and untangle my roots again. The apple tree aunt spits at me. I flee away to the peach tree orchard.

Where will my home be? I am a strong apple tree with peach tree roots. I look for another apple tree, or must I search for peach tree partner. I feel very confused. Where will I find a partner? Somebody who can walk with me through life?

5.5 The stories about the experience of loss for people in the adoption triad

5.5.1 The experience of loss

No person goes through life without experiencing some kind of loss, whether a financial loss, work-related or emotional. A financial loss will create its own emotional trauma. An emotional loss cuts very deep and affects one's whole being as it is very painful. An emotional loss can have a tangible cause, such the death of a loved one or the breakdown of relationships. The breakdown of relationships can cause people immense pain that can last for years. Such a breakdown of relationships can be due to your own or other people's actions and in most cases, the individual has no control over the situation. The question it then begs, how does one deal with such a loss?

According to Ganzevoort (1996:16-17), the perceived result of a loss is as important as the facts of the situation. The amount of adaptation necessary, the importance of the event, the duration of the influence, and the predictability of the event is influenced by the individual's perception (Ganzevoort 1996:16-17).

Individuals will experience every loss differently from a previous loss. A loss that might seem like a comparable loss, such as the loss of a spouse, will be experienced differently by various individuals. It also seems that some people are better able to cope with loss others.

The loss alone is clearly not sufficient to understand why people handle traumatic events differently. How an individual experiences events, interprets, analyses and feels about it, is of utmost importance. Each person has a life story, which entails not only the facts of their life, but the way they interpret and order it. Loss means that one must change one's life story. In the case of the loss of a spouse, part of the pain is that our life story must be changed from a combined story, to a single one. The question is then, who am I without the other person? Can my story continue without my spouse? (Ganzevoort 1996:18-19).

Ganzevoort distinguishes between three layers of crisis. The first layer is the crisis itself, the second layer is the psychological crisis, and the third layer the existential crisis (Ganzevoort 1996:24-25). Not all people will experience psychological or existential crises when a trauma occurs. A psychological crisis will cause symptoms of depression, loss/gain of appetite, loss/gain of weight or other symptoms associated with acute stress. An existential crisis occurs when the trauma causes the person to ask who they are and where they are going. In the midst of an existential crisis, one's story becomes stagnant and nonsensical. An existential crisis doesn't have to follow a specific event. Not all psychological crises lead to existential crises and not all existential crises lead to psychological crises. An existential crisis can be part of an adoptee's story.

There are three crisis signals in a traumatic event. The first is emotional instability. One will be alternating between being very sad, angry, disappointed, hopeless, and happy. The second crisis signal is the disturbance of relationships and actions. In a crisis, people tend to become more withdrawn. People also feel as if the people in their environment do not understand them. The third signal comprises the questions about the meaning of life, the meaning of the event and why it happened (Ganzevoort 1996:30-32).

The initial reaction to a crisis will be disbelief and denial that the event is occurring. This disbelief prevents the person from completely collapsing. After some time, the horrific reality of the event starts to sink in. Then comes the element of protest; "this cannot be" or "this might not be". This is a difficult phase for the religious person, as they might think that it is wrong to

question the Lord or to be angry at the Almighty. Lastly, one realises that the traumatic event indeed occurred. The person then starts to seek an answer to regain equilibrium. It is the search of a new story with which one can journey further. In some cases, people never resolve the crisis, which leads to depression and helplessness. Their loss is not measurable by time and the notions that the traumatic event occurred long ago, has no bearing on the depressed individual as they feel lost and cannot imagine a future (Ganzevoort 1996:33-35).

One could say that acceptance of the traumatic event occurs when one realises that that what was, is gone. No amount of wailing or pleading with God can change it. It is as if the person gives up the fight against the facts and their own disbelief. Some people might find a scapegoat to blame for the trauma. Even if one has someone to blame, it does not make coping with the trauma any easier. Perhaps it is logic that brings one to the realisation that nothing can be done to change the traumatic event and that one needs to move on.

Not many things place fragile human life into focus as does a crisis. People become very aware of the difference between human existence and the coming kingdom of God. A crisis is not only the event that occurred, but also the story with which one describes one's life. The human being is an answering and story-telling being. We are not delivered to the events as victims, but we also have the responsibility to react to the facts; in this we have free will. People are able to utilise all their resources, ranging from personal skills and help from the community. Personal skills will contribute to the creativity necessary to construct a new story out of the chaos of the crisis. The "body of Christ" refers to the bond between the members of the Church, but also to our relationship with God. This double bond, that the believer has his/her part of his/her central resources. The person's experience of God in their time of crisis can lead them to believe in God's continuous grace or quite the opposite, perceive God as not helping them. The inability to see God's grace can be experienced as His judgement. This interpretation of judgement can be confirmed by further experiences and a larger narrative of judgement is formed. The processing of a crisis lies in the rewriting of the narrative in such a manner that hope becomes apparent (Ganzevoort 1996:39-43). The experience of loss for every party in the adoption triad became evident during the interviews.

5.5.2 The mad, sad baby

According to Lifton, the adoptee lives in a ghost kingdom in which he/she lost his/her mother and father. The adoptee might have many fantasies about who the ghost biological parents might have been. From some of the narratives, the acute experience of loss was clear. There was also unresolved anger towards the biological parents. It seemed that the anger was primarily directed at the biological mother rather than the biological father. The adoptees live with this mad, sad ghost baby for the rest of their lives and for some, it is only a regret that circumstances were not different. Other adopted “babies”, however, held a grudge against their biological parents. Part of the adoptees’ narrative was to learn how to sooth the mad, sad babies inside of them.

Another adopted daughter, Sanrie, knew she was adopted as an infant since she was old enough to understand. All her friends knew about her adoption and she felt that it was a normal part of life. Sanrie opined that she had a “sad baby” to comfort as far as she wished it was different. Sanrie’s wish was that her adoptive parents could have been her biological parents, although she does not nurture this so-called mad baby.

She enjoyed contacting and meeting Madrileen, her biological mother. They maintained a good relationship and were on a first name basis. Sanrie stated that Madrileen was a good friend but would never replace her mother as she sees her adoptive mother as her only mother.

Riaan was adopted as a baby and was told that about his adoption as a toddler. He felt that his life turned out rather well. He does not consider his academic and other problems as related to with his adoption. He does not nurture a mad, sad baby, but he would have loved to have been his adoptive parents, Sam and Mariaan’s biological son. He believed the “chosen baby” story to be his own. “My parents prayed for me and God chose them to be my parents.”

Sumari built her life around her children. Her two sons were adults and her daughter still in grade 6 at the time of this study. She was very aware of the fact that children eventually leave home when they grow older. This thought made Sumari feel even more lonely and isolated.

I asked God today if He still remembered me. I also long to know that the life I lead up to now was not all just the work of some impartial survival of the fittest, evolutionary selection process. There must be more, please let there be more. Some meaning, at least. I also told Him that I am on my knees before Him as beggar and sinner and that I desire...my desire is not even to be

saved, but if He really can be that forgiving, (but if He is, please), my desire is for clarity. Knowing which way to go, what is the road that will bring me to myself? ...and this is how I see my life, myself right now: I fight for dignity as I imagine it; respect as I understand it; love as I hope for it.

“I love, I need, I care, I think, I plan, I am. I absolutely believe in the sanctity of marriage. I have accepted my body, I figured out who should be blamed and forgiven, and it is not me (of course I needed a little help from my friends). I have a lot of work to still do, but I do not perceive myself as evil anymore,” said Sumari.

The young, helpless Sumari will never understand why her life could not have been different. Sumari said that she now knew that she needed comfort her mad, sad baby. Yet she felt like a butterfly with colourful wings, attempting to break free from the cocoon in which she was being formed.

Jana also saw a mad, sad and helpless baby in herself. “Although I have a friendly relationship with my biological mother, my adoptive mother will always be my only mother. I do not think I will deep down ever forgive my biological mother for giving me away.” Jana did not understand how Esmé could have a relationship with her and act as if the adoption as trivial. She moved to a new town and, there, people at work and even her friends, did not know that Jana was adopted. She seemed to live in complete denial.

I did not feel comfortable asking about my biological mother. I did not want to hurt my adoptive parents’ feelings. This lack of biological continuity and not knowing where I come from and how those people are, made me feel invisible. Being an adoptee, I experienced that people will refer to you as an adoptee, even when you are 40 years old; you will always stay the adopted child. I found that Lifton’s work set me free.

5.5.3 The adoptive family

The adoptive families all had the experience of having to face their own infertility. One of the couples stressed how important it was to go through the mourning of their infertility before they were ready to become adoptive parents.

The adoptive parents related that they struggled with infertility for a long time. Some of them were also ashamed of their inability to have biological children as they experienced society and their families as expecting them to have children. They were also bombarded with invasive questions about their adoptive children or lack of biological children.

The adoptive mothers had an intense yearning for children of their own; it was described as an almost physical pain. One mother described how she sometimes had to come home from shopping, because she saw a cute baby or toddler and became extremely upset. The adoptive mothers related that they could not really share these feelings with family members or friends. When they did share these feelings, there had been no real understanding of the pain they were experiencing. The adoptive mothers also did not share their pain fully with their husbands. They did not want to make an issue out of the situation and were also aware that it might be insulting to their husbands' sense of manhood.

The adoptive fathers felt inferior to other men who seemed to be able to procreate easily. They resented casual remarks about when they were planning to start a family and felt helpless regarding their wives yearning for a child.

The adoptive mothers and fathers found the infertility journey extremely lonely. They did not share all their feelings with their partners. One couple went for counselling before they were able to let go of the dream of having biological children. They had to visualise themselves as adoptive parents and needed to learn how to deal with family, friends, and society in general regarding the adoption.

Except for one couple, the adoptive parents did not feel as if they had a ghost baby. Pierre and Ronel loved Sumari very much. They had their difficulties in their relationship with Sumari, as she was already 15 years old when she came to live with them. Today they have a good relationship and were very supportive grandparents to their grandchildren.

Pierre and Ronel experienced the ghost baby after they lost their son in tragic circumstances shortly after their adopted daughter came into their lives. Ronel said that they buried their son, Jan, twice. The first time was after the accident when he was left with physical disabilities and brain damage, and again when he died. Pierre and Ronel felt that they would always have Jan, the ghost baby, who never grew up. "We never saw Sumari as a replacement child in Jan's

place.” Ronel said that it was extremely difficult for her to see her adopted daughter being young and happy, while her son had just been buried. She said that she was quite nasty toward her daughter in this grieving stage. They both said that they would always wonder what their son would have been like if he grew older. Would he have had children? What would his career choice have been? To these questions they will never have an answer.

5.5.4 The biological family

Except for one mother, the biological mothers experienced the loss of their children as a traumatic event. For some of the biological mothers, it was a turning point in their lives. They related that the event of the adoption left them with permanent psychological scars.

The biological parents had feelings of guilt that stayed with them even after reuniting with their children. They also had recurring thoughts such as: is my child safe? Is he/she happy, warm, and loved? They were also worried about the sense of rejection that their child might have experienced and whether the adoptive parents understood and had compassion with that.

Madrileen did not feel that she carries a ghost baby with her. She found Lifton’s ghost kingdom a foreign concept and did not see herself as living in such a ghost kingdom. Madrileen mourned her relinquished baby’s first birthday but found that the pain and experience of loss decreased with time. She opined that her psyche protected her against the trauma; the entire pregnancy and birth were vague memories and she felt as if it had happened to another person.

Madrileen found it difficult when Sanrie started to communicate with her through letters. The two years of correspondence helped to prepare her for the meeting with Sanrie and Sarie and she developed a good friendship with her daughter. At first, she did not want her friends or her sons to know that Sanrie was her daughter. She eventually told her sons that they have a half-sister, as they were old enough to understand.

Joyce experienced the loss of her baby as the most traumatic event in her life and carried the ghost baby with her for years. She had difficulty forgiving her parents for not really helping her when she needed them the most. “They were more concerned about their image and the so-called family name,” remarked Joyce. When Joyce met Riaan, she was saddened by the fact that he felt lost. Joyce did not think that she would have been able to do a better job than Sam and Mariaan in raising Riaan as they did all that they could to help him. “He is a young man whom I met, but I

do not really feel about him as I feel about my daughter, Tanya. Those bonding years were lost forever. It does make me sad. I suppose I will always nurture the lost baby.”

We know very little about Sumari’s biological mother, as the only information available was via Sumari. Extreme neglect and sexual molestation was an unfortunate thread in this story. It seems that Sumari received very little maternal love from her biological mother.

Esmé, Jana’s mother, created her own narrative with which she could live. All her friends over the last 20 years still did not know that her eldest daughter was adopted. Her narrative was that all three of her daughters were the children of her late husband. She did feel the existence of the ghost baby and realised that she could never regain the years lost with her child. Esmé also felt very guilty about giving Jana up for adoption.

An unknown biological father was mentioned, however, Sanrie was not interested in meeting him. Although the researcher could not interview him, there seems to be a sad story of a man that will probably never know his child.

Sumari’s biological father, on the other hand, died when she was young. The narrative provided by Sumari was that of a very loving and fun-loving father. The tragedy of Sumari’s neglectful childhood started when her father passed away.

Jana’s father, Frans, was also one of the biological fathers who was a so-called victim of the law before unwed fathers were given rights in 2005. He was devastated when he lost Jana and knew that although they have a good relationship today, they would never be able to get the lost years back. He tried very hard to make it up to Jana, especially in a financial sense.

The story of Michael was narrated by his father and sister. Michael was another unwed biological father who was prevented from seeing his son, Hein, although an adoption was not the cause. It seemed that the stress and anguish of not being able to see his son was too much for Michael to handle and he committed suicide. Hein’s mother, Dawn, therefore did not receive the maintenance she wanted and his son lost his father.

5.6 The specific pastoral experiences of the presence of God

A person's concept of God is what he/she has been taught about God in catechism, church sermons, and at home. In general, this is based on what a person learns about God through cognitive means and is closely linked to a person's theology (Hoffman 2008).

However, a person does also have a God image, which develops parallel with the God concept. The God image develops through what a person experiences. Children would develop their God image to a large extent according to the relationship they have with their primary caregivers (Hoffman 2008).

“The child's attachment style emerges from their early relationships with their parents.” If the parents are attuned to their children's needs, they will most likely develop secure attachment. Otherwise the child will probably develop insecure attachment (Hoffman et al 2018).

Ganzevoort defines crisis “as a disturbance of meaning due to the appraisal of events as too demanding and resources as too limited and visible in symptoms of the disruption of psychological equilibrium as significant in relation to the sacred” (Ganzevoort 1998:260). “...the process of coping encompasses five dimensions: event, event appraisal, resource appraisal, coping activities and coping outcome” (Ganzevoort 1998:263).

The experience of loss was evident in the interviews with all the families. Except for one adoptee, all the other people in the adoption triad said that God carried them through the sadness and for some, feelings of loneliness. The following are some extracts from the families.

5.6.1 The adoptee

Sanrie opined that being adopted had an influence on her relationship with God. She knew that she was adopted since a very young age and she also knew why she was adopted. She always felt that God was in control and that He would provide. Right through her school career, university and in the work environment, she trusted in the Lord. She had certainty in her faith, because the Lord has always known what He plans for her and she must just believe and trust in the Lord. Although this is the way that every Christian should feel, Sanrie felt that her relationship with God had become even stronger and closer since she was adopted.

Riaan felt anchored in his relationship with God and never felt unsafe in God's hands. He viewed his adoption as part of God's master plan. Riaan came to the realisation that he needed to comfort the sad baby inside him. He sometimes wondered who he would have been, had he grown up with his biological mother. He did not feel angry or that he has a mad baby. Riaan grew in his relationship with God.

Due to the history of abuse and molestation in Sumari's childhood, she did not trust that God really loved her. She believed in God, but did not consider herself a Christian. Her adoptive parents were church-going Christians and a good example of the Christian faith. Sumari used to attend to the local Dutch Reformed church, but no longer attends church. Her relationship with God was distant and she became very angry at God for not protecting her against her abusers. She could not associate with God as a loving God. Sumari's experience of loss was much more intense than that of the other adoptees. She did wonder about the person she would have been, had these traumatic events not taken place, especially if her father had not died. She knew that her life could have turned out very badly if she had not through God's miraculous intervention found her adoptive parents.

Jana found God at a Christian school camp in high school as she began to appreciate all the things that her adoptive parents did for her. She considered herself a very religious person and experienced a personal relationship with God, such that she turns to Him whenever she needed to make a decision. She believed that God has a purpose with everything, especially the way her life turned out. He walked with her every step of the way.

5.6.2 The adoptive parents

Kobus and Sarie walked a path with God in their adoptions. Sarie miraculously knew that Sanrie was on the way, as was the case when Marius was adopted. Kobus and Sarie knew that God walked with them from their infertility crisis up until their children became adults. Sarie saw God as her Father that will always help and protect her. The children were whole-heartedly accepted by the extended family. Sarie related to Moses story as they were sent to their children and the children to them. They were the parents chosen by God to raise God's children and she therefore saw her children as more special than other children.

Sam and Mariaan always prayed as a couple for their marriage and their infertility issues. They prayed and cried and prayed again when Mariaan had difficulty conceiving. Mariaan experienced the deepest possible grief every time she menstruated, but she continued to pray.

They were devastated when they stood on the edge of in vitro fertilisation and the doctor phoned to say that it will no longer work. They were furious with the medical profession and their three-month “trial run” which was forced on them. If they had done the in vitro fertilisation immediately, it could have worked.

When they calmed down, they realised that they would never have a biological child of their own. The question about why this happened lingered in the back of their minds, but they accepted that it was the Lord’s will. Adoption was the next logical step. That this was God’s will was apparent when they saw Riaan for the first time.

Later they wanted to adopt a little girl. When the welfare worker phoned to say that they had a little boy for the couple, Mariaan immediately knew that that was God’s will. Their second son was also a gift from the Lord. They felt that although events do not always unfold in the way one expects it to, God knows best. Sam and Mariaan were in mourning at the time of this study, as they lost their other son in a motorcycle accident. They felt God’s helping hand even more in this time and they considered the Lord as their only comfort.

Sumari’s parents were deeply religious. Pierre and Ronel’s faith were tested after they had a car accident which left their son disabled. Ronel said it was extremely difficult to take care of her son and that when he passed away, it was like the second time they buried him; the first time being the accident.

Ronel’s relationship with Sumari remained complicated. Ronel knew that she could never have helped this extremely scared and traumatised girl that God gave them, if God did not help her. They still experienced some difficulties in their relationship. “Sumari is so hurt that she is afraid of any contact. It is difficult to really know her, what she thinks and how she feels.” Ronel prayed that Sumari would also find her Lord. Despite their example, Sumari was not a member of any congregation. She does however allow Pierre and Ronel to take her children to church when the children visit them.

Jeff and Rose were members of the Dutch Reformed church and have been for many years. Rose was very involved in the congregation; she sang in the choir, was active in the Bible study group and was a youth leader. Rose was more involved with Jana's upbringing than Jeff. She prayed every day and cried every night for years, because she found it so difficult to raise Jana. She described her relationship with God as one of total dependence. The Lord was her strength and the light in her life. Rose and Jana had a breakthrough in their relationship when Jana began to believe in Jesus Christ.

5.6.3 The biological mother

Sanrie's mother, Madrileen, grew up in a God-fearing house. Although her parents were shocked when she fell pregnant, they were always there for her. The decision to give Sanrie up for adoption was made by the nuclear family. Madrileen felt that God carried her through this difficult time in her life. She still remembered the entire pregnancy and confinement as if it were a dream. She believed it was God who gave her the strength to carry on, complete her degree, and start a successful practice. Madrileen was an active member of a congregation and raised her children to love God.

Joyce grew up in a very conservative Christian home. After school, she went to university and moved from a small town to a big city. She rebelled against anything her parents and society expected of her. She started smoking and did everything she thought she had missed out on. Soon after, she fell pregnant and her entire life collapsed. Her dreams of enjoying her young life were shattered. The dream of someday meeting her future husband and having a romantic wedding was gone. The dream of then starting a family together was also shattered. She felt that she lost everything; her self-respect, her job, her part-time studies, and worst of all, she felt embarrassed and felt that she failed God.

Joyce learned to pray. God showed her that she was forgiven and that she was safe in his hand. She learned that she was precious to God. "Through all these ordeals God was always there to pick me up and carry me through the hard times. He made the hard times bearable and made the happy times –unforgettable. Change what you can change, accept what you can't, then, relax and let God drive".

Joyce wrote an Afrikaans poem:

Ek gaan slaap in die aand met God in my kop,
In die oggend staan ek saam met Hom op
In die dag stap Hy saam sonder om te kla
Waar ek nie kan loop, sal Hy my dra.

I fall asleep with God on my mind
In the morning I awake with Him
Daily He walks with me uncomplaining
Where I cannot walk He will carry me

Al my vrese en behoeftes ken Hy so goed
As ek val, en nie wil opstaan, gee Hy my moed
As ek bly is en lag, jubel Hy saam met my
As ek hartseer en bevange is, troos Hy my

All my fears and needs he knows so well
Where I fall and will not get up he gives me courage
Where I am happy and laugh He rejoices with me
In heartache and fear He comforts me

Deur al die seisoene - in winter tot somer
In die dag en die nag - al is ek 'n dromer
Gee Hy die pas aan wat ek moet loop
Al voel ek soms ook heeltemal gestroop

Through the seasons in winter to summer
In day and night – even though I am a dreamer
He sets the beat by which I must walk
Even if I feel totally stripped

Hy is die alfa, die omega, die spil waarom alles draai
In die donker, sal Hy my na die lig toe laat draai
Hy beskerm ons en vou ons toe in Sy hande
Hy vra nie jou taal, God bly groot in alle lande

He is the Alpha and the Omega the hub around which
everything turns
In the dark He will turn me to the light
He protects us and folds us in His hands
He asks not your language, God remains large in all
countries

Ons vra en ons smee vir hulp en vir raad
Vir vrede en gesondheid en ook die regte maat
Maar gesels ons met God in voorspoed en geluk
Of is Hy net die noodlyn wat ons so gerieflik pluk?

We ask and beg for help and advice
For peace and help and also the right companion
But do we talk to God in prosperity and happiness
Or is he only the lifeline that we so conveniently grasp

Leef voluit elke dag wat God aan jou gee
Bly op jou knieë waar Hy jou krag kan gee
Leef so jou drome vir almal om te sien
Wie jy is, en watter God jy dien.

Live fully each day that God gives to you
Stay on your knees where He can give you strength
Live your dreams for all to see
Who you are and what God you serve

Jana's mother, Esmé, said that the day she realised that she was going to lose her only child was a nightmare. She was a precious little girl of only three years old. "When we had Jana, Frans and

I were too young to know what we are getting into. As an unwed mother I had to cope. I had no plan to marry Frans. At first, I tried to work and look after Jana.”

“I felt lonely and knew that things can’t go on like this. I took my little girl and move to be closer to my parents. Meanwhile I’ve been able to find a job and someone to take care of her during the time I was working. I still felt that I could not cope and contacted a welfare worker. It was surprisingly easy to give her up for adoption. The real implication only dawned on me much later. When she turned to the age that she had to go to school, I went to a school close-by to stand watching the little ones going to school for the first time. I cried so much that another lady came to me and said I must remember that my child will get home that afternoon! Little did she know!

It took years before I could talk about this and then only with God. I would always ask him to take care of my little girl. I will tell Him that she is growing up and that I can’t be part of her life. But I trusted God that He will be there for her. That she would be in his arms and that He will protect her like an eagle flying underneath her and stop her with His wings when she falls.

Today...after more than 40 years I still feel the, pain the devastation of the loss. People don’t understand. But losing a child in life, knowing that this child is alive, and you have no part of it. I think it’s worse than death itself.

5.6.4 The biological father

The biological fathers felt that they had nobody to speak to. People did not understand that they could feel intense loss as a result not being able to see their children grow up and share in their children’s lives.

Frans found his strength in his relationship with God. He believed that he would one day be reunited with his child. Frans questioned God’s will with the loss of his daughter for many years. After they were reunited, his relationship with God improved, although he still could not understand why he had to lose Jana in the first place.

Michael’s family said that he was a Christian and confirmed his faith in the Dutch Reformed church. It seems that he went into a very deep depression before he committed suicide. His

family did not realise how severe his depression was and at that point, his faith brought him no hope.

Chapter 6 CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTION

6.1 Concerns

Rejection is a theme that appears in some of the stories. Did some of the adoptees have a chance to express and share their experience of rejection with their adoptive parents? Some, who feel they were just “given away” must have found it difficult to even broach the subject. One of the adoptees described herself as “dutiful and loving”, however, this fear of rejection is exacerbated by a deep feeling of compulsion to “please and not upset”.

Some of the adoptees seemed to find it difficult to make their own decisions and had a deep-seated urge to constantly please to earn their place in society. A contributory factor to this feeling might also be the fact that, quite coincidentally, all the co-researchers were either the eldest or only child.

One co-researcher had the need to constantly look for hidden feelings; as if feeling good was not enough. He felt that relationships with both sets of parents “could be better”. This is quite normal for many young adults where relationships with parents and families, biological or adopted, are not always problem-free. Having two sets of parents can be tricky; a good analogy is that of one’s “own family” as opposed to one’s in-laws. Where an adoptee calls both sets of parents’ mother and father, boundaries become blurred and complicates relationships even further.

In some stories, the biological father was idealised. Conversely, some of the adoptive and biological mothers were demonised. Most of the biological mothers could not cope with life after the birth of the child they relinquished. One of the stories is a problem-saturated story with a supposedly good ending. The stories have elements of magic and make-believe as the adoptee told her story like a fairy-tale with vivid descriptions.

Her experience of being neglected by her mother but loved by her father was, after her father’s death, replaced by experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Her story is consistent with stories of survivors of abuse in general and sexual abuse in particular. She strongly experienced feelings of guilt and shame. The experience of sexual abuse was still very much in the foreground. This was indicated by her vivid recollection of the abuse in respect of what she

saw, smelled, heard, and felt. She suffered trauma after trauma, culminating in her being thrown out of the house.

She consciously rejected the idea of a good God after she was also molested by a “preacher of God’s word”. This could be her first attempt at breaking out of “helpless victim” mode. She took control by rejecting instead of being rejected. Protecting and taking care of her younger sister when left alone by her mother shows a burden of responsibility and maturity for one so young.

Despite her experiences of extreme abuse, she remained open to positive experiences. She stayed with a kind stranger and subsequently, her foster parents. The way she describes her entry into this “adoption” has the makings of a fairy-tale. The description was as vivid as her descriptions of the sexual abuse; it may also have been her first experience of physical affection without sexual undertones after the death of her father.

The failure of her marriage due to violence is indicative of this adoptee’s history of extreme abuse. Again, it would appear that she somehow took control and ended the marriage. One can reflect on what made this possible, despite the history of extreme abuse. Might it have been her first 10 years with her own father when she experienced love and affection followed by the “fairy-tale” adoption that gave her enough courage?

The researcher believes that there were no coincidences in the way each adoption story occurred and that the right people found each other through the adoptions. The adoptees were also able to experience the love between their adoptive parents as well as the love of their adoptive siblings. The preparation for one of these adoptions was swift; the biological mother here seemed to be minimally involved and ill-prepared. The two biological mothers in the home for unwed mothers were counselled but received no emotional support or counselling after the adoptions; they were involved only in the administrative process.

With two adoptive families, the fathers did not participate much in the interviews and seemed disconnected to some extent with the day-to-day upbringing of their children. In these cases, the adoptive mothers took on most of the responsibility and some subsequently found it a challenge to raise their children. One might question the patriarchal nature of society. These fathers seemed to think that their role was primarily to provide financial support for the family.

Anger was the prominent emotion among some of the adoptees. The researcher opines that anger can be linked to hurt and perhaps fear. There were also feelings of abandonment; of not being involved in decisions, and that they were expected to be grateful for being adopted.

Some adoptive mothers were, to some degree, insecure about their relationship with their child. They could, and did, make firm decisions and some difficult choices. This was coupled with a rigid, literal biblical interpretation of child rearing. This anchor in faith allowed them to find meaning in their lives.

One adoptee displayed difficult behaviour at home and at school. The intervention of the psychologist was a disappointment. The researcher wonders how much the adoptee was engaged prior to seeing the psychologist and to what extent was the expectation that her behaviour would simply be “fixed”.

One couple’s decision to send their adopted child to a rural boarding school was a turning point in the adoptee’s life. It could have been divine intervention. The researcher was curious as to how this co-researcher experienced her being “sent” to a rural boarding school and what circumstances allowed her to find some peace. It might have been that the distance between her and her adoptive mother helped to stop the continual power struggle between them. The rural boarding school might have also have allowed her to escape from being labelled an angry child and having to constantly reaffirm her worth.

Something that struck a chord with the researcher in the letter from one of the adoptees and in another adoptee’s fable about her adoption, is that both narratives thank the adoptive parents for their love but do not mention the adoptee’s love for their adoptive parents.

Some of the biological mothers still feel sad, powerless and, during the adoption process, were denied enough time and attention to hear their voice. One of the biological mothers also must live with the resentment and disappointment of her extended family and siblings.

For some of the adoptees, being adopted made their lives more difficult and challenging than it would have been if their adoptive parents were, in fact, their biological parents. Being adopted brought feelings of resentment, having to earn their place and, to some degree, a sense of rejection.

An overwhelming theme in some of the narratives was the child who was lonely with feelings of grief that were never noticed or acknowledged. Some of the adoptees still carry a fear of rejection coupled with a strong need for acceptance. Lifton's (2002) notion of the ghost baby is apparent here. As teenagers, this manifested in the form of anger and resentment.

One couple was challenged when their child presented with developmental problems as it was very upsetting to see their child suffering. They consulted professionals and rode the rollercoaster of hope and despair. They were very proud of the fact that their child earned his matric certificate at a normal high school. The mother described herself and her child as exhausted at the end of this trial and she had some regrets when discussing her child's struggle with depression.

All the adoptive parents, especially the mothers, did their utmost to nurture their children in every way possible. This was hard work for some and may have put some strain on some of the relationships. One mother operated on her own instincts and proved professionals with a "doomsday" prognosis wrong.

Raising a child takes immense effort. Adoptive mothers sometimes inadvertently communicate this effort to their children who, already burdened with a sense of guilt, feel even more pressured to prove their worth. This may make it difficult for them to be entirely open with their adoptive parents and might also explain one of the adoptees' "people-pleasing" behaviour.

The relationship between one of the mothers and her adopted child seemed to be enmeshed. The narrative indicated that the child's suffering was the mother's suffering; "by this time they were both physically and mentally exhausted...". This points to the additional difficulties that parents encounter when their children have handicaps or impediments to their developmental growth. This becomes even more relevant with adoptive parents and adds another facet to the relationship between the various individuals.

Some parents struggle to "let go" and allow their children to become fully independent. This is the case for many parents and the researcher encountered this with adoptive parents as well. One child (29) still stays at home and is cared for by his parents; another (43) is constantly monitored and admonished by her parents in just about every aspect of her life. Both these children have expressed the sense that they want to be independent and live their own lives.

There is some contradiction in one of the stories when the adoptee is described as patient, but also that he has a temper. This adoptee never mentioned any of his medical issues and said that he enjoyed school. He presented himself as a well-adapted person, while his mother's version was contradictory. She described him as a person with serious problems which inhibited him from becoming a fully-functioning adult. When referring to issues with romantic relationships, he described himself as "a knight in shining armour".

One family was in mourning due to the death of their other adopted son, which certainly would have influenced their narrative. No information was given as to what extent to which their recent personal tragedy affected their narrative. The adoptee did not even mention the death of his brother. The researcher wondered what it meant when it was related that when visiting his grandparents, the adoptee "gallops like a happy child towards them". Could it be that he felt free of family pressure and was only able to be himself with them? Did he feel pressure from his adoptive parents, especially his mother? It would have been interesting to have heard more of the adoptive fathers' voices in the conversations.

In another story, the adoptee did not mention that her brother died only a year after the adoption or how her adoptive mother's attitude changed towards her after this. The adoptive mother described her change in attitude and resentment towards her adopted child as illogical. Even though it was illogical, it can be seen in some ways as part of a complicated mourning process; even an adopted child could not fill the void of not being able to have any more children after the accident. Previous attempts to foster a child over the holidays were unsuccessful. It was a fairy-tale for the adoptee, but not for her adoptive mother. The adoptee left this home on unhappy terms and moved in with her boyfriend.

The fairy-tale did, however, have a happy ending as she and her adoptive parents reconciled and became a support system for one another. After further conversation, it became evident that the adoptee's independence was difficult for her adoptive family. Her extended family relationships do however appear to be mutually beneficial and enjoyable.

Despite the fact that there were problems in the adoptive families, they managed to make sense of their life stories and no longer saw the stories as saturated with problems, but rather as meaningful stories with challenges that were overcome. It seems that to be an adopted or foster

child makes a difference and influences relationships, especially with regard to extended family members.

Two of the biological mothers' stories read like horror stories from the previous century. These mothers talked of permanent scars and that they are still heart-broken about relinquishing custody of their children. No interpersonal healing could take place. It is amazing that these biological mothers kept a relationship with their parents going and that the family lived with the "big secret". Despite the deep wounds of rejection and "make believe" suffered by these mothers, they still managed to build a healthy family that could incorporate a "lost" child. They felt that they could at long last be a mother to their "lost" child. It would be interesting to investigate the special qualities these biological mothers needed to survive and thrive despite the rejection and family secret that was kept without any acknowledgement of their pain.

Similar to the stories of the biological mothers, the biological fathers' stories were also horror stories exacerbated by the fact that prior to the Children's Act 38 of 2005, unmarried fathers had no rights at all. They were non-entities in these stories.

Reunions do not wind back the clock and replace lost years, nor does it create a happily ever after fairy-tale ending. One biological father managed to build a successful family with his present wife and children. He would have liked his wife to be more involved with his long-lost child. This was perhaps an unnatural expectation as there was no actual relationship between his child and his current wife. In step-relationships, the only attainable expectation would be a respectful relationship. A loving relationship would be a bonus, but not a prerequisite. He found it very difficult to have to give up his paternal role and was ill-prepared for the adoption of his daughter. Is he now attempting to compensate for the adoption at the risk of his current marriage?

One adoptee's biological father died when she was young. Again, we do not hear the voice of her father, but rather the adoptee's memory of her father. She idolised her father and their lives together. In this fairy-tale, we hear about the fantasy world of stories told by her father and the stories were made real in the jungle built on their porch. We see the father through the rose-coloured glasses of a child, which was also softened by time. The question then begs whether this adoptee ever faced and coped with her father's death or the reality of who her father was. The description of a "pranking, drunken father..." is somewhat puzzling.

In this story, rejection remains the main theme. Theories about survivors of severe sexual abuse emphasise the feeling of isolation and rejection, including self-rejection based on feelings of guilt and shame (Burke-Draucker & Martsolf 2006; Lötter 2004; Troskie & Lötter 2012).

Although in earlier accounts of interviews with this adoptee her life is portrayed as a fairy-tale in some stages, it clearly has not had a happy ending yet. Her life was still stuck in deep loneliness and all the extended biological family members with whom she had a good relationship have died.

One of the biological mothers used dissociation to cope with the trauma of her unwanted pregnancy, yet she continued to make a success of her professional and family life. It would be interesting to learn more about her inner strengths. The fact that she was not rejected by her parents and although the pregnancy was a subject to be avoided, growing up in a healthy, loving family might have contributed to her success story. This story illustrates that disaster is not always imminent and difficulties do not always stand in the way of people thriving.

Two of the biological mothers were already in their twenties and working away from home when they fell pregnant, however, they did not seem to have much of a voice in the decision about their pregnancies and first-born children as the families' honour was considered paramount. They described their stay at the home for unwed mothers as positive, especially the counselling they received. Afterwards, however, they pondered other possibilities, but still were able to continue their lives and build happy marriages. All the adoptees were very special to their biological parents. The adoptive parents considered the involvement of the grandparents and extended families very meaningful. There was also an indication of spiritual roots with the birth family as a grandmother honoured her first grandchild whom she always prayed for.

Contact with their birth families provided closure to three of the adoptees. Three of the stories are successes; there were no regrets, only appreciation for how their lives unfolded. One adoptee consciously chose not "to complicate her life" and to keep her biological father out of her life because of what she heard from her mother. One might sympathise with this unknown man.

By and large there are healthy boundaries between the members of the reconstructed extended families. The contact with birth parents seems to have clarified physical roots without obstructing roots from the adoptive family. Most (not all) of the adoptees feel that their relationships post-reunion have not been compromised.

These successful adoption stories of amazing people defied the negativity of some adoption stories and theories. For example, one adoptee appeared to have a relaxed relationship with his birth family and the contact helped him to find peace. Difficulties in relationships with parents are quite normal as strained relationships between parents and grown-up children are not uncommon.

For most of the biological mothers, the adoptions were the most traumatic event of their lives, with the exception of Sumari's biological mother. It appeared that she never cared for or loved her daughter.

The researcher believes that through the development of awareness, empathy, and compassion most co-researchers would be able to find meaning in their life and find the courage to use their qualities to the benefit of their families and communities.

6.2 The experience of loss

6.2.1 The adopted children

The adopted children experienced loss in the sense that they wondered how they would have been if they were not adopted. They were also curious about their biological families. All the adoptees, except Sumari, believed in the "chosen baby" story. They felt that they were miraculously given to their parents by God. This made them feel secure and more special than other children. They all considered their adoptive mother and father as their only mother and father, while two of the adoptees see their adoptive mothers as their role models. One adoptee saw her academic interest as the nature part that her biological mother played. All the adoptees saw their value and belief systems as due to the nurturing they received from their adoptive parents. Two of the adoptees saw themselves as happy people who were also happy in their adoptive families.

Riaan opined that his relationship with both his adoptive as well as his biological family could have been better. He was totally accepted within his biological family which made him feel very special. The meetings were, however, overwhelming and very emotional but he found some peace since he met his biological family.

Sumari felt a lack of attachment to her adoptive parents. She never felt part of the larger adoptive family or even really felt welcome. She felt deeply rejected by her biological family and had an overall negative view of them. She had an intense sense of loss and anger towards her biological mother. She felt that she needed to nurture a lost, hurt, and sad ghost baby. She felt lonely and isolated. Sumari experienced loss in both her relationship with her biological family as well as her adoptive family.

Two adoptees who were adopted as older children mentioned their anger towards their biological mothers. They experienced a deep-rooted feeling of rejection and a loss of the one relationship that should have provided them with love and security. Even after one of the adoptees met her biological mother, her feelings of rejection did not dissipate.

One of the adoptees met her biological mother and was very pleased with the decision to meet her. While she did not resent her biological father, she did not want to meet him out of fear that it would complicate her life. None of the other adoptees expressed any anger towards their biological fathers.

One adoptee grew up with the imperative to keep her adoption secret as she thought it was something to be ashamed of. The other adoptees were quite open about their adoptions and held no similar sense of shame.

The physical and psychological background of the adopted child will have an influence how he/she experiences loss. Some of the adoptees felt that they resembled their adoptive parents and that made them feel part of the family. Conversely, one of the adoptees could only see the differences between herself and her adoptive family, and therefore never felt that she belonged.

When contemplating a reunion with the biological parents, the adoptees had to deal with the fear of being rejected for a second time. Deep-rooted feelings of worthlessness surfaced even more strongly for one adoptee.

Except for Sumari, the adoptees came to the realisation that their biological mothers had limited choices regarding the adoption. They all experienced love and a sense of security in their adoptive homes. They do, however, wonder in which ways they would have been different if they had grown up with their biological parents. They learned to listen to their biological parents' stories without prejudice. Except for Sumari, they all stated that they needed to become

more mature in order to really hear the stories and to have some empathy with their biological parents.

The adoptees enjoyed having new brothers, sisters, and extended families. One biological father's wife felt threatened by the adoptee and the attention that he lavished on her. Most of the adoptees felt that to search for their biological parents was the right thing to do. The two siblings of the adoptive couple who never searched felt that it would just have disrupted their lives and hurt their adoptive parents. One adoptee felt that the search was a mistake and that the hurt of her adoptive parents was not worth what she gained in the new relationships.

The adoptees all agreed that it is better to know that one was adopted as soon as one can comprehend the concept. Two adoptees expressed a wish that their adoptive parents were also their biological parents.

Three of the adopted children were at ease with their station in life. They had good relationships with their adoptive parents as well as their biological parents. They also saw God's hand in their search and the journey that followed. They were extremely glad to find their biological parents, but also that they gained an extended family, such as brothers, sisters, grandparents, and cousins. One adoptee voiced the fear that she might one day marry her brother, because she did not know her biological family.

With regard to two co-researchers, the researcher detected none of the anguish described in Lifton's ghost kingdom (Lifton 2002). The other two adoptees, however, had all the classic qualities which Lifton described; one even described herself as depressed.

6.2.2 Adoptive parents

All the parents of adopted children wrestled with infertility for many years. The mothers described their longing for a child of their own as a physical pain and that they had an overwhelming wish to have children. They were also ashamed of their inability to have children. One couple found it quite interesting that they had to mourn the loss of children that they never had. They felt that this mourning process was very important to complete before considering adoption. All the couples experienced some strain in their marriage when the infertility problems became apparent. The men experienced infertility as a blow to their manhood. The adoptive fathers and mothers felt lonely in their infertility journey and felt that they could not even share

their pain fully with their spouse. Each one was afraid to hurt or upset their partner. Sometimes the couples also had to deal with rude questions such as: “when are you going to start a family?” The adoptive parents had to deal with the loss of their families’ biological continuation. One family had to deal with the death of their only biological son and another family has lost their adopted son.

The adoptive parents went through the trauma of visiting various infertility specialists. They experienced the infertility treatment as an invasion of their privacy. One couple went for counselling and came to the conclusion that they wanted to adopt a baby. The other couples worked through these difficulties in their own time. The CMR has very strict regulations and requirements for prospective adoption parents. Some of the adoptive parents experienced the scrutiny of their finances and their personal lives just as intrusive as the infertility treatments.

One set of adoptive parents did experience the children’s search as a rejection of them as parents and had to work through these feelings of insecurity. They described their journey with God to come to terms with the whole new family their children discovered.

The adoptive parents had to deal with uncomfortable questions from outsiders and people who stood critical or judged adoptions. People are still very ignorant about adoptions. These parents also had to deal with questions from their children.

This research shows that the age of adoption is important in determining the success of an adoption. It seems that the younger the child, the more successful the adoption will be. This finding could be the subject for further research.

The adoptees did wonder how they would have turned out if they had not been adopted. This research shows that an adoption in a family is always a tragedy for at least some of the co-researchers in the adoption triad. Although the adoptive parents has the joy of raising their adopted children, some of the relationships were riddled with difficulties. Infant adoptions were more successful as the adoptions that involved older children were problematic. Even Jana, who was adopted at the age of three, had a problematic adoption, although the family is happy today. Sumari’s adoption still presented many problems and there was tension in the relationship with her adoptive mother who, even at this stage, was perceived as domineering.

6.2.3 Biological mothers

All the mothers, except one, had an extreme sense of loss and despair. For most of the biological mothers, the adoptions were the most traumatic event of their lives. The only exception was Sumari's biological mother. It appears that she never cared for or loved Sumari.

One of the biological mothers had a deep-rooted fear that she would never be able to have another baby. She thought God would punish her in this way for relinquishing her firstborn. However, when her second child was born these fears disappeared. Another mother was afraid that she would never love another child in the way she loved her first child. When her other children were born, she found that this fear was unfounded.

The biological mothers experienced the loss of their babies as a religious journey. They stated that they were very angry at God, themselves, their parents and society. They had to work through these difficult feelings with little support and some without any support. In time, they learned to walk a path with the Lord. They said that they would never really understand why they had to relinquish their babies. Why could it not have been different? The one biological mother threw herself whole heartedly in welfare work and especially worked with teenage girls. She felt as if she was doing for these children that what she could never give her own child.

Some mothers described their pregnancies as a shock to their families. The emphasis was on the shame on their family name. One mother was left to cope with the traumatic event entirely on her own. The pregnancy was kept secret and she was sent to a home for unwed mothers; she had no choice in the matter. This increased her feelings of isolation. Even the mothers who had support from their families mentioned that they felt isolated and lonely. None of the mothers received any postnatal counselling. The mothers who were in a home for unwed mothers did receive counselling while they were still in the home but not thereafter; these counsellors were very sympathetic. In some of the families there was also no recognition of their pain and loss. One mother described that she still experiences that pain and that the event was more painful than death itself.

All the mothers were devastated. They experienced a lack of connectivity and that there was no protection for them. The mothers described feeling anger and resentment towards everybody.

The mothers in the home for unwed mothers did agree with the adoption plan at the time but felt differently many years later.

One mother said that labour was surreal. She did not feel connected to the person who gave birth to and gave the baby up for adoption. Although all the children's birthdays brought back memories of sadness and loss, the babies' first birthdays were the worst. Most of the mothers wondered how life would have been like if they had never given up their children for adoption. The biological mothers describe that they had the support of their husbands which made the reunions easier.

6.2.4 The biological fathers

The biological father that responded described the time of the adoption and thereafter as an extremely difficult time in his life. He mentioned his parents' disappointment and that to disappoint his parents was the worst thing that he could do. The adoption was a heavy burden on his conscience and he was prevented from seeing the biological mother of his child.

Similarly, Michael as an unwed father was also prevented from access to both his son and his girlfriend. The experience of loss was exacerbated by the fact that the biological fathers had no say in their children's future or upbringing. Fathers' rights have only become enforceable by law since the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

When the one father started to search for his child, he received no help from anyone, let alone the adoption agencies. He had no rights to gain information about the baby. He described that he felt a void after the adoption and he was determined to find his baby. When he eventually made contact, he loved his child from the first moment he saw her. Although catching up is very special, he was saddened by the fact that he missed seeing his child grow up and realised that he could never get those years back. This left him with deep-seated feelings of loss. He experienced the loss of his child and the loss of shared years as very sad.

Michael also experienced the loss of his child as very sad. In his case, the child was not given up for adoption, but he was simply denied the opportunity to spend time with his son and to build a relationship with him, which eventually contributed to his suicide.

6.3 The stories of hope

The researcher clearly saw God's hand in some of the inspiring stories of families who found each other. All the couples saw God's hand in their adoptions. They saw themselves as instruments in God's hand and that this was God's plan for an untimely baby. One of the adoptive mothers had a deep religious experience at about the time that her adopted children were born. She honestly believed that her children were more special than other children because God chose them for each other. The adoptions were considered miracles in her life. She did not see herself and her husband as the children's saviours, but rather as being very privileged people chosen by God to raise their two adopted children. She saw herself as the princess in the Moses story.

This mother raised their children with the "chosen baby" story, because that is her belief. The children from this family were well-adjusted young adults. They did not live in the ghost kingdom as described by Lifton (2002) and were also devout Christians. They never questioned God's love or that He was the creator of the world and that Jesus Christ was their saviour. They attributed their solid anchor in their belief system to their parents. This adoptive father was also very involved with his children. These parents never felt rejected when their children started to search as they were part of the process of searching and met both their adopted children's biological parents.

The couples enjoyed the process of preparing for their babies' homecoming. One mother had everything that was needed and more for the new baby, even before the welfare worker let them know that there was a baby available. The first days of having their babies at home were like a second honeymoon.

The inclusion of the adopted children in the extended family was very important. Except for one adoptee, all the adopted children were loved by their grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. The love and acceptance of the families gave the children security. The family members described their love for the children as if they were biologically part of the family. The families also shared the joy of the adoption with the parents.

A ray of hope might be that in the current Children's Act 38 of 2005 gives children a voice and "in the best interest of the child" is the guideline used when making decisions. This is good in

theory; and will hopefully work in practice. The Children's Act also gives biological fathers the same rights as biological mothers. In practice, this will mean that if the mother wants to have the child adopted, the father could apply for full custody, and if granted, raise his own child. Where the unwed mother keeps her baby, the father would probably be granted joint custody.

The stories from the adoptive parents' perspective mostly read like fairy-tales. Their recollections are as vivid as the recollections of most of the birth parents. They may also have been better prepared than some of the birth parents. Being adoptive parents was not strange to many of them; it was just a fact of life and an alternate way of becoming parents. The adoptive parents all looked back on their parenting journey with pride and satisfaction. The adoptive parents seemed to recount their stories openly. They talked about difficulties encountered; about the struggle with infertility and the screening processes that invade one's privacy and threaten the normality of life for a young couple. They saw themselves as a tool in the hands of God to give an unwanted or untimely baby a home as well as a solution to the birth mother. These children were viewed as an answer to their prayers.

There were two very positive outcomes and two stories with a reasonable outcome. Sanrie's has a positive outcome as she appeared to be mature and in control of her life. Riaan also had a positive outcome. It illustrates the fact that there can be different narratives on how to handle adoption; for instance, the adoptive mother keeping the biological mother informed of the wellbeing of her biological child. It is significant that as part of the confirmation as a rite of passage into adulthood, Riaan met his biological family.

More than one of the adoptees in this research felt they are more special than are children connected to their parents on a purely biological basis. There were indications that they were proud of any physical similarities between them and their adoptive parents.

The researcher inferred the following from the four adoptees:

1. Sanrie was adopted as an infant and knew that she was adopted since she can remember. She saw her adoption as completely normal and natural. She never experienced her adoption as a crisis. Sanrie's resources included her close relationship with her adoptive family and her level-headed approach to life. Sanrie and her adoptive mother met her biological mother together. Sanrie had a good friendship relationship with her biological mother, however, she had no

interest in meeting her biological father. Sanrie was a well-balanced young woman who was grounded in her faith in God.

2. Riaan wondered how he might have turned out had he not been adopted. He felt curious and excited to meet his biological mother and father. His coping skills were to a large extent due to the support of his adoptive mother and father and feeling secure in this relationship. After meeting his biological mother, Riaan wanted to meet the whole family. He adored his maternal, biological grandmother and grandfather. Riaan felt that the adoption was the best decision his parents could have made for him and recognised God's hand in his adoption.

3. Sumari was adopted as a teenager. Since the death of her father, she experienced life as threatening. Her adoption was a rescue action from her previously abusive circumstances. Sumari felt helpless and depressed as an adult. She lacked the necessary social support or the strong personality that she felt was required to break free from her depression and "stuckness". She isolated herself from family and only had a few friends, which hinders adequate interaction with other people. She had little faith in God and saw a bleak future ahead. This impacted her own children to a large degree. She felt dominated and overwhelmed by her adoptive parents and struggled to break free from them.

4. Jana was adopted as a young child. She felt ambivalent about the adoption; she was grateful for the adoption but did wonder if she would have been a much different person had she been raised by her biological parents. Consequently, she felt guilty and disloyal for harbouring such feelings. Jana had a strong personality and could be quite stubborn, although she felt that these personality traits gave her the ability to cope with the fact that she was adopted. Jana felt extremely negative about her biological mother. Even after meeting her, Jana still felt that her excuses for giving her up for adoption were very weak. Jana had a good relationship with all the members of her family, both adopted and biological. She is anchored in her faith.

Except for one the adoptees, all had hope and felt much grounded in their faith. They believed that God has a path in mind for every person. Some of the adult adoptees saw the ghost baby in themselves and three of the adult adoptees also related to the "chosen baby" story.

The adoptive father saw God's hand in the adoption and all the relationships he was in. One adoptive couple went for an intensive course on how to raise children. The course was written

from a Christian perspective. They tried their best to raise their children according to God's commandments and this couple and their two adult children are still devout Christians. Churches and welfare organisations should consider presenting more courses on how to raise children. This could be invaluable for adoptive parents as well as parents who raise their biological children.

Kobus walked the path of adoption with his wife, Sarie. He opined that God prepared him for the children they adopted. He also saw God's hand in giving him wisdom while raising their children. Kobus had hope for the future and believed that their relationship with their adult children would continue to grow.

Sarie had a deep religious experience at the time her adopted children were born. She honestly believed that her children were more special than other children because God chose them for each other; she saw the adoptions as miracles. She did not see herself and her husband as the children's saviours, but rather as being very privileged people chosen by God to raise their two adopted children. She did, however, see herself in the Moses story.

Sarie, Mariaan, and Rose raised their children with the "chosen baby" story, because that is what they believed. Sarie's children were well adjusted young adults who did not live in the ghost kingdom as described by Lifton. They were also devout Christians. They never questioned God's love or that He was the creator of the world and that Jesus Christ was their saviour. They attributed their solid anchor in their faith to their parents. Most of the adoptive fathers were also very involved with their children. They had much hope for their future and the future of their children as they knew that they and their children were safe in God's hand.

Mariaan and Sam were also devout Christians who raised their two sons according to biblical principles. After the death of Riaan's younger brother, their only source of hope was their belief in Jesus Christ as their saviour.

Sumari's story is a nightmare of abuse and molestation. She was not religious as she opined that she could not believe in a God that did nothing to protect her against her abusers. She did, however, believe in a higher being that created everything. She felt that after the creation, God did nothing for anybody. "You are all alone out there. Nobody will hear your cries or give a damn." Sumari said that she was very depressed and could not find the right cocktail of

medication to alleviate her depression. She had little hope for the future and did not believe that her scars would ever heal. Her only anchor in life was her three children. She raised them to make their own choices and decide for themselves whether they want to be religious.

Rose said that she and Jeff had grown in their faith while raising Jana. It was a joyous time when Jana started to believe in God and they finally felt that they did something right. Rose had been on her knees during the time Jana lived with them and her relationship with God grew during these difficult times. Rose was very dependent on her belief in God and believed that He was involved in the smallest details of everyone's lives. She would pray for a parking space and the Lord would provide one. Jeff and Rose believed in the strength of their relationship with Jana and saw a wonderful future full of hope ahead for them as a family.

Frans did not see God's work when his daughter was adopted without his consent. Frans became aware of God after Jana started to visit him and thought that it was only through God's grace that Jana turned out the way she did. Frans was very hopeful and expected good things in the future. "I do not think that God will paint on a road to show me the direction. I have to go in and decide what the correct course will be in every situation."

6.4 Conclusion

There is a strong theme of rejection in these stories. Some of the adoptees felt rejected by their biological parents, or the biological parents in turn felt rejected by their own families or society. This was apparent before a reunion where both the adoptees and their biological parents experienced the fear of rejection. In some cases, these fears were negated and did not have an influence on the rest of the narratives, in other cases, it did.

The trauma of the biological mothers and their intense experience of loss was apparent, but also expected. The dismissal of unwed biological fathers' rights and their feelings of loss, especially before the Children's Act 38 of 2005 came into effect, must be considered when conducting research and counselling biological fathers.

The "angst" of the people in the adoption triad was evident. The researcher opines that adoption myths of fairy-tales with happily-ever-after-endings were not helping. They only serve to deny the people in the adoption triad the acknowledgement of their true feelings.

In a couple of the adoption narratives, the “chosen baby” story was presented as the truth. This narrative could be hurtful for some adoptees, by not acknowledging their loss. Severing biological ties was more traumatic for some adoptees than for others.

Some co-researchers in the adoption triad found Lifton’s concept of the ghost kingdom vital to their narratives, while other families could not relate to the ghost kingdom at all. The researcher emailed Lifton’s (2002) article on the ghost kingdom to all the co-researchers. One adoptive mother was grateful for the information and she said that it helped her to understand her adopted son better.

In all the adoption triads, even the successful ones, the co-researchers experienced a sense of loss. The researcher believes that counsellors should be more informed on how to deal with people in the adoption triad, as only one adoptive couple went for a course on how to raise a child. This preparation is very important, especially when older children are adopted. Continued research on how to support and counsel adoptive parents is also important.

Two colleagues from other disciplines contributed their views and concerns regarding this study. The researcher reflected on the research and considered the comments of Ms Bertje Deflo, an experienced social worker at Famsa, and Dr Frans Redelinghuys, an industrial psychologist, and attempted to incorporate it.

It was evident that every story was unique and very personal to each co-researcher’s (sometimes traumatic) journey regarding their losses suffered. One should therefore approach these accounts with the appropriate diligence and care. Nevertheless, the researcher would like to draw attention to the following topics in reflection.

Learning experiences gained through failures as well as successes are of great importance in the telling of the stories. In a pastoral therapeutic sense, one would expect the utilisation of spirituality of meaning and of hope, undergirded by the Christ event. Although the research aim was not therapy, it was important to acknowledge how most people in the triad gathered the strength from their faith to handle different changes in life.

It is apparent that the co-researchers in these narratives have suffered trauma. One of these survivors is still battling to overcome a history of abuse and trauma.

In the work of Lifton (1979), the researcher identified a relationship with the narrative approach as she researched different adoption stories and built her theory on those. However, there seems to be an element of determinism in her description of the development of an adoptee. According to Lifton (1979), people who were adopted primarily see themselves and are viewed by society as an adoptee whose development is also primarily prescribed by their “adoptee status”. The adoptee status is a label that casts a shadow and therefore hampers the development of the child. The researcher strongly disagrees that this is the case of all or most adoptions. This research shows that some adoptees are well adjusted and happy adults.

The ghost baby is the person that the adoptee would have been if he/she had not been adopted. The adopted adolescent’s search for identity would be an interesting topic for further research. How does one become another person with a different name – no history – only the ghost self? The researcher found the importance of biological continuity quite relevant.

One must consider that a person’s narrative changes over time. Each person in the adoption triad also views the adoption, what led up to the adoption, and the result and consequences of the adoption differently. It was evident that each co-researcher had, over time, crafted a narrative with which he/she could believe in. The main themes that came to the fore in this research was the experience of loss and hope.

6.5 Reflection

All the adoption triads, even the successful ones, had a sense of loss experienced by the co-researchers. Counsellors should be more informed and prepared when dealing with people in an adoption triad. Only one adoptive couple attended a course on how to raise a child and this preparation is very important, especially regarding the adoption of older children or when cultural differences exist. Research on how to support and counsel adoptive parents effectively is necessary.

Although this research was not intended as therapy, it is important to recognise how most people in the triad found the strength to handle different challenges in life, from the perspective of their faith. The researcher had to guard against not sliding into a therapist’s role, keeping in mind that the purpose of the interview was to gain knowledge through research and not therapy.

Lifton's (2002) theory could also be normalising what people involved in a "life story of adoption" experience and therefore it can be liberating. The ghost kingdom is an interesting metaphor; families with an adoption story do not only have "ghosts" but also have a "ghost kingdom".

The researcher questions Lifton's concept of a ghost baby who was unable to grow up and is ever-present. Is he/she a character marked or doomed by fate? The researcher found the adoptee's experience of being "doomed to fail" against this phantom child or the "ideal" child interesting, although the researcher did not find this to be the case for all the co-researchers in this study. In a way, this holds true for everybody who has suffered a loss in their life. The researcher believes that the "ghost self" could also be due to divorce, death of a parent, or any similar displacement trauma.

Considering that one's narrative changes over time, a longitudinal narrative study could be a possible topic for future research. In any further research, the possibility of using audio visual recordings would be beneficial. One could also expand this research by speaking to the extended family, such as uncles and aunts. The researcher interviewed one adoptee's maternal biological grandmother and it was valuable to see the adoption from her point of view. Unfortunately, some of the people in some of the adoption triads had passed away, so their narratives could only be related by the adoptee and in the case of the biological father who had passed away, his father and sister. This would probably not be the narrative that the deceased would tell.

The adoptive fathers were present in the interviews, but the mothers took the lead. The researcher conducted separate interviews with only one biological father and two adoptive fathers. The fact that the researcher was unable to interview all the fathers might have indicated a possible lack of attachment or perhaps that men are often more guarded about their feelings in general. It would be interesting to do extended research on fathers in the adoption triad.

An important contribution of the research was to expose the myth of the adoption story as a fairy-tale with a good outcome for all concerned. As stated earlier in this research, statistics show that a higher percentage of adoptees seek psychological treatment and counselling. Their feelings of loss are hugely underestimated and society in general is quite dismissive of their feelings. Similar dismissive attitudes are also experienced by some biological and adoptive parents; that a biological mother is "placed on a pedestal" for her selfless choice on behalf of her child by the

therapist or counsellor is an indication that her deep experience of loss is misunderstood or ignored.

There appears to be a gap in the research regarding the biological fathers' feeling of loss. In the families in this research, the unwed biological fathers had no rights and therefore never got to know their biological children. One father was briefly mentioned by the adoptee and was described to her by others in an unflattering light. He will most likely never have the opportunity to meet this biological child. Thus, the trauma experienced by the men is dismissed or totally ignored. There is much scope for research with biological fathers, especially if the adoptions took place before the acceptance of the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

Times have changed. It is socially acceptable for men to have feelings about and be involved with their children, and they have the same rights as the mothers regarding their children. The idea of the man as purely an income provider and the woman as solely responsible for child-rearing has evolved; fathers are now acknowledged and able to have a vested interest in their children.

The "angst" of the people in the adoption triad was clear. Some of the adoptees and biological mothers were afraid of rejection, judgement, and that they would be perceived as inadequate by the other party. In one of the adoption triads, the adoptive parents felt rejected by their child when she searched and found her biological mother. This complicated the adoptee's relationship with her adoptive parents. There is room for more research about this angst experienced before and after the reunion. Counsellors should focus on preparing the family members for reunions and the adjustment of the different family groups to the new narrative.

The loss and outcomes experienced by the two families where a sibling died could be researched further. Due to the scope of this study, this aspect was not fully investigated. A longitudinal study of adoption triads may also be worthwhile. It would be interesting to conduct research about adoption triads with more than four families. Research in connection with the adoptees' search for identity and their self-worth is important. Little research exists about the fathers in the adoption triad. The question also still begs how society's narrative about adoption influences the people in the adoption triad.

Being an adoptee myself, the researcher had much empathy with her co-researchers. It was therefore also important that the researcher did not let her preconceptions play a role in the research. If one “looks” for a desired outcome from a fact, one shall certainly “find” it. Like the famous and oft-repeated double slit experiment in quantum physics, the very act of observation influences the outcome and inevitably changes the narrative, even if only marginally so. While the subjective aspect of research can never be completely avoided, it helps to be aware of the “coloured lenses” through which one views the co-researchers’ stories.

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