CHAPTER SIX

<u>THICKENING STORIES THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION</u>

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary approach is a key characteristic of the seven-movement methodology used in this study. Qualitative research cannot ignore other disciplines, but must rather draw on the ever-growing, developing body of knowledge yielded by the various fields of investigation. Interdisciplinary investigation will help us to understand the contextualised experiences of the young homeless people in a more comprehensive way.

Specialists in various disciplines used to set firm boundaries for their theoretical frameworks and practical investigations. Trespass into the fields of other disciplines was frowned upon. This approach fits the paradigm of modernity, which sees realities as historically and traditionally given. The post-modern approach has changed in many disciplines. For example, "[h]istorians once claimed to proceed without theory, but they are now much more ambivalent about this point. Economists used to assert the neat boundaries of their discipline, but those boundaries seem less sharp today" (Hall 1999:16). The post-modern paradigm assumes a "transversal rationality", to use Calvin O' Schrag's term. This word suggests the interrelated meanings of lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting and converging without achieving coincidence (Schrag 1992:149). Van Huyssteen uses this concept of transversal rationality to argue for interdisciplinary theology. "True interdisciplinary reflection in theology will only be achieved in a postfoundationalist mode where the interdisciplinary conversation proceeds,… and where both the strong personal convictions so

typical of religious commitment, and the public voice of theology, are acknowledged in interdisciplinary conversation" (Van Huyssteen 1998:32). The seven movement methodology is also interdisciplinary, which suits the methodology's social constructionist approach and postfoundational base. According to Müller, postfoundational practical theology (2005:78):

- is locally contextual,
- is socially constructed,
- is directed by tradition,
- explores interdisciplinary meaning and
- points beyond the local.

Thus interdisciplinary investigation is essential for postfoundational narrative research. We cannot search the various dimensions of truth using the methods of only one discipline. Rather, assuming some degree of coherence we can search for truth in different disciplines in order to view all its possibilities.

6.2 INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION OF STORIES

Interdisciplinary investigation does not imply interpreting the words, phrases or experiences in the stories of the homeless youth and making deductions. Rather it involves dialogue between relevant aspects of the various disciplines and the particular experiences of the homeless youth. Any definition applied to a particular experience will produce error if the story teller interprets that experience differently. Interdisciplinary investigation must supplement the new meanings given by the story teller to his/her experiences, that is, must thicken the interpretation.

The postfoundationalist epistemology underlying the seven movement methodology assumes an approach to practical theology in which the expertise and approaches of different disciplines are used in active narrative conversations. In these conversations, the youth are helped to thicken their accounts of their personal experiences of their particular contexts, informed by their dominant discourses. This is a balanced approach to practical theological research.

6.2.1 Selecting other disciplines

How to select the disciplines with which to engage in the course of the narrative conversations is an important question. Philosophical factors may motivate the selection, according to the primary area of research. For example, research in one social science may suggest the choice of complementary social sciences. Then the nature of the data gathered will also suggest which disciplines would be relevant or useful. This study assumes a postfoundationalist epistemology, which understands knowledge as evolving through interactions. Thus an investigation of epistemology is relevant for this research. Also, the data is gathered in a particular social setting, that of the homeless youth of Pretoria. Therefore the engagement of sociology will yield a better understanding of the context and its meaning. Thirdly, since the story tellers are from different ethnic and tribal settings, dialogue with anthropology should help in understanding their belief systems. Fourthly, since this study investigates experiences of homelessness as unemployment, it will involve investigating the political factors involved in these situations. Thus political studies will inform this investigation. Fifthly, the telling and retelling of stories is a psychological exercise; the homeless youth create their stories and meanings through intra-psychic interrogation. Counselling has a direct link with the field of psychology, and so this field too must be involved. Lastly, the main aim of this study is to discover the impact of economic factors in the dominant discourses of the homeless youth. Thus it is necessary to balance the knowledge evolved from their subjective experiences with relevant economic

theories. All these interdisciplinary conversations function like the beautiful colours of a painting interacting together to give the picture clarity.

Besides this philosophical reason for involving many disciplines in my research, I am also motivated to use an interdisciplinary approach because of my evolving experience with the homeless youth. Through my gradual and patient interaction with the homeless community, I have been helped to discover the realities of their stories and the discourses that inform them, and the richness of these, I believe, can only be grasped through a wide-ranging research method. As I mentioned before, we once talked after a Bible class about the beauties of our homelands. The wonderful descriptions people gave included not only simple geographical sketches but details of culture, human interactions, attitudes and interpretations, political factors, economic conditions and so on. Through these narrations the homeless people were trying to create alternate worlds of reality in which to search for the history of their present difficult experiences. In listening to these stories I have to appreciate factors as varied as cultural stories, sociological interventions, psychological interactions in the community and the philosophical frameworks behind all of these. Using the insights of other relevant disciplines to supplement my theological approach gave me a much more complete insight into the realities the youth were trying to share. In this chapter therefore this interdisciplinary approach is described.

6.2.2 Philosophical investigation

If philosophy stays in the theoretical level it is not much use in narrative research. Theory must come down and be incarnated in real life experiences. The preoccupations in our understandings may negatively or positively influence the meaning-making process. "As contemporary philosophy detached itself through the 'linguistic turn' from substantive and metaphysical questions about what is essential and what is best, and turned to questions about meaning, truth and reference, a gulf opened up between current preoccupations and former

preoccupations" (Wilson 1998:33). This contemporary study, which investigates meaning and discourses using a narrative approach, exemplifies this shift of focus.

"[C]onstitutive of the values of philosophic practice is the organizational principle that empirical matters are for psychologists, sociologists, cultural theorists or economists and that the philosopher ought to be content with an examination of the intelligible or the rationality of other sciences" (Howie1998:118). This study, because practical, does not remain completely within the bounds of philosophy. Rather it seeks new areas of rationality in the knowledge shared by other disciplines. It may not be possible to investigate experiential knowledge in an empirical way. Thus philosophy is helpful in discovering new forms of knowledge and investigating the meaning-making process.

The traditional approach of philosophy to experiences and social realities is to look for a particular meaning in a given set of interactions. In the post-modern paradigm, the social constructionist approach searches for varied deeper meanings in experience and its articulation. Plato argued that analysis is interminable in principle, lacking completeness. By the very nature of things we cannot get to the core of any reality. We cannot hope by digging deep into language to get to the isolated meaning of an utterance, but only a succession of more or less meaningful translations. Searching for the different meanings in the same text is the post-modern philosophical approach. An interdisciplinary approach is part of this, since it supplements the meaning-making process with alternate interpretations and thickens the experience and its meanings. This approach is thus suited to narrative counselling and research.

Sometimes philosophical theories can be more directly used in interpreting the stories of the young homeless people. For example, Joy's story of powerlessness can be interpreted using a philosophical understanding of power. Joy's father was a drunkard who tried to exert oppressive power over his family. Joy was not

allowed any power in his family and so was deprived of individual growth. This still affects him now, because though he wishes to start a business he fears that he will fail. He is terrified of trying something on his own. Now Foucault examines how power operates within everyday relations between people and institutions. In his theory "power [is] seen as something which has to be constantly performed rather than being achieved" (Mills 2003:35). The role of the individual in power is not that of oppressor or oppressed, but as player in a continuous relationship with others and with institutions. This role is constantly performed. We can see this in Joy's story; he does not remember his father's exerting power over him at certain specific points in his history, but rather as a continuous experience in his past. Now in the streets he lacks confidence, because these power relationships of the past still oppress him, though his father died years ago. Thus Foucault's theory of power throws light on the experience that Joy narrates. Joy now visualizes the people in the streets as similarly powerless, rather than as more powerful than him. This can be interpreted as his attempt to overcome this old power relation, by coming to a new understanding of his problem and entering into new relationships with the people around him.

Another useful philosophical theory is that of social responsibility. This approach argues that the community has a great impact on us, moulding our lives. In the community therefore my responsibility for other persons is important. "Therefore, I'm responsible and may not ensure that the other is responsible for me" (Rötzer 1995:59). In light of this theory, homelessness can be understood as the result of a breach of social responsibility, arising from irresponsible modes of living on the part of the homeless and the settled.

6.2.3 Sociological investigation

Sociology is the science of society. Society comprises a group of people with their own patterns of interrelatedness and interactions. Thus no characters in society can be excluded from sociology. As a border definition, "sociology is the scientific study of society, of groups, institutions, and organizations, and of the interrelationships among members of societies" (Stewart & Glynn 1981:9, 10). Sociological studies traditionally use empirical research methods, considering behavioural patterns and social experiences as empirical data. This approach does not consider the particular mindset of the researcher or the informant as relevant. "Social scientific approach… assumes the objectivity of social sciences research and hence pays no attention to the mindset of the researcher, nor to his or her insertion in a social setting" (Baum 2001:6). This approach totally neglects the emotions and mindset of the researcher. Sociological research tries to quantify the behaviour, mindset and responses of social characters. But because man is a social animal with feelings, characteristics, behaviour and thinking power we cannot negate these characteristics and count man as an empirical figure. "Max Weber pointed out that human action consists of behaviour plus the meaning of the actors assign to it" (Baum 2001:7). No sociological research should avoid human interactions and interpretations completely.

Thus a qualitative approach is needed in the sociological field. Such an approach conducted with a mind open to new realities is better for thickening our account of an experience in a specific context. In the narrative approach, the stories told are the data available for analysis. "The primary focus of a narrative approach is people's expressions of their experiences of life" (White 2006:1). Sometimes these expressions are thin and narrow. Through facilitative interaction we can help the teller move to thicker description, part of which is sociological investigation.

The post-modern sociological approach emphasizes the plurality of reality, instead of advocating the position that there is only one reality. "[S]ociological theory today, like the modern society it seeks to describe, is pluralistic. This fact complicates our task in explicating the value of the 'sociological perspective' for pastoral care, for there is not one, but several perspectives" (Furniss 1995:8, 9). Though such an approach complicates our task of researching human experiences, it opens up immense possibilities of meaning. By plurality is not meant other areas of knowledge but rather insights into the different dimensions of reality within the field of sociology. It affirms that social reality is multifaceted.

In my narrative approaches with the youth, we open up their experiences in story form using their own interpretations. By narrating their experiences, they are constructing stories and endowing these with meanings. This opens the way to new insights for me as facilitator into the meanings evolving in the interpretations of the story teller. "Narratives can be used by people to 'construct' reality for other people by providing representations of events beyond their own personal knowledge. People also individually and jointly compose 'scripts' and 'scenarios' to make narrative sense of projects that they plan to undertake in the future" (Hall 1999:90). However, the experiential nature of interpretation in the narrative approach means that we encounter the danger of reducing and simplifying the social reality. Overemphasizing the personal nature of the act of story telling can result in avoiding or neglecting the possibility of cultural dialogue. " A gap is thus created between culture-as-experience, between meanings absorbed from living, and the prospect of legitimately using that experience to sustain, enliven, and illumine the cultural dialogue" (Berger 1995:57). Care must be taken to moderate the role of personal experiences, by keeping in mind the social role of such experience, and seeing the narrative interaction as an opportunity to construct new social realities. Personal experiences are reconstructed in the telling and retelling of stories, and the thinking pattern of the teller changed and enabled to create new, alternate, hopeful stories. "Replacing experience as a basis for thinking are consciously constructed conceptual or statistical categories designed

in the first place as a means of comprehending the variability of complexity of events and experiences, and as a corrective or control on the inherent biases of any personal angle of vision" (Berger 1995:57,58). These biases are the dominant discourses which affect the tellers negatively in their outlooks and their present personal experiences. The facilitator cannot promote the reconstructing of values and understandings by dictating interpretations of existing stories, but rather by helping the tellers to think about these discourses in the creation of new stories.

Another danger in social interactions is the possibility of being deaf to inner discourses while listening to external discourses. Most inner discourses are those facets of the experiences which are taken-for-granted. Listening to such inner overlooked realities is part of narrative counselling. This occurs in a sociological framework. "The sociology of knowledge deals primary with the 'taken-for-granted' world of everyday life. …[I]t is the common knowledge – the shared understandings – of the adult population of a society" (Furniss 1995:17). By searching for and discovering this taken-for-granted knowledge the facilitator can help neutralise the dominant discourses and free the way for alternate stories of the experiences of the story teller. Drawing on their inner discourses people can formulate their attitudes to life and construct their life stories for the future.

Industrialization and its economic and social effects helped cause the mass migration of people to the cities. The process of urbanization involves movement both into and out of the cities. Higher and middle income families tended to move out of the cities to quieter places, since they could afford transport back into the city for work. Lower income families moved into the cities to find more options for their lives. These movements caused great difficulties in the management of cities, especially in the area of accommodation and job opportunities. These realities can be interpreted in several ways, according to various sociological theories, and these interpretations can inform the discourses of homelessness in

various ways. For example, Comte's positivistic approach can contribute a hopeful discourse, since he "saw society moving in a straight forward progression toward perfection" (Stewart & Glynn 1981:21). However, other social discourses suggest negative interpretations of the experiences of the homeless youth. Thus careful examination of the discourses in a persons' story is needed to facilitate the telling of more hopeful stories.

An example from our data is the discourse of powerlessness in the stories of Joy that negatively affect his physical and economic condition. Joy needs to re-tell the story of his past in light of the social discourses inherent in his experience and the telling of it.

Similarly, sociology can throw light on Joseph's story, which describes how the conditions of life on the streets leave no room for thinking and acting in better ways. Joseph is basically using the discourses of life in an urban setting, in which our actions are determined by authoritative institutions using the strategies of power. Thus Joseph feels that he lacks the quality time and space he needs to work out a better plan for his life. His concept of time and space is restricted, following a modernist framework of set boundaries. What he needs is a more post-modern sociological understanding, a more fluid concept of social time and space. "Our neat and orderly classifications notwithstanding, the world presents itself not in pure black and white but, rather, in ambiguous shades of gray, with mental twilight zones and intermediate essences" (Zeruavel 2001:141). Without such an understanding Joseph sees time and space negatively, as restrictions to his moving forward to a better understanding of his experience. Thus he cannot create a new hopeful story about future plans.

6.2.4 Anthropological investigation

In anthropology, socio-cultural inquiry is unavoidable. Culture and its discourses are the main areas of investigation for anthropological studies. Investigating and

analysing the social behaviour and cultural impact of social phenomena add new dimensions to our understanding of the self in a cultural setting. As with sociology, anthropology is also undergoing a reframing in the context of postmodernity. Post-modern anthropology is an inquiry into alternative constructions of reality. "[B]eyond basic distinctions, the cultural significance of inquiry makes conceptual constructions inevitable, and any sociohistorical ontology amounts to a one-sided accentuation that throws into relief certain aspects of a phenomenon" (Hall 1999:49). Thus possible investigations of meaning constructions are almost infinite.

Such construction of meaning occurs in the dynamic interaction of discourses about homelessness and its economic impacts, and these constructions are the focus of this study. Anthropological investigation of the stories of the homeless youth involves dissecting these discourses while maintaining sensitivity to the multiple coherences between these discourses.

An example from our data is Michael's story. As mentioned above, cultural artefacts operate in his stories, and these artefacts suggest approaches to interpreting the cultural truths inherent in the stories. Though he is a Christian, Michael believes that the spirit of his dead father disturbs him and his family. His family believes in ancestor worship, which is part of traditional African culture. Thus tension exists between this tradition and Christian belief in Michael's story. Also, Michael believes that his uncle killed his three sisters by taking them for traditional healing by a *sangoma* rather than for western medical treatment. In this part of his story he believes that traditional culture is fraudulent, yet its dominant discourses still control him. He is not able to objectively deal with these cultural discourses. As facilitator I did not try to force him to rethink his position, but rather focussed on helping him to understand the cultural discourses involved in his stories. He links his economic deprivation with his cultural helplessness. The narrative intervention helped him to formulate a new story saturated with

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economic possibilities and a better discursive relation with these cultural discourses.

Gender roles also feature prominently in cultural anthropological investigations of the stories of homelessness. The gender roles of male and female in a family are socially constructed. Modernity constructs these gender roles different to traditional roles. "The institution of parenthood splits up into a clash between motherhood and fatherhood, and children with their naturally intense bonding ability become the only partners who do not leave" (Beck 1992:109). These tensions can be seen in the stories of Sam, a widower. He shares his frustration at losing his partner. He used to have clear concepts of male and female gender roles, but the death of his wife forced him into a sort of gender confusion. He finds himself having to play the role of mother as well as the role of father. This has been really hard for him. Before his wife's death Sam was very irresponsible; he was a drunkard who wasted money and was not interested in religious matters. But now he has had to become a responsible mother and father. He tries to earn money for his children and to care for them when he goes home. Sam feels that bathing and caring for small children is the duty of a mother, but now he has to do it. This is why he felt hurt when one of his friends commented that "You are good with children!" Sam's response, "If your wife dies, you will also be good with children" reveals the effect of the gender discourse in his experience of hurt. He knows that his response was curt, but he responded to express his pain. Narrative therapy helped him become aware of this pain and its source in gender role confusion. In his alternate stories he takes full responsibility for his children and decides to work for their future.

6.2.5 Psychological investigation

"Without the understanding of human psychology, it is difficult to understand human activities and inter-relations. Similarly, without the knowledge of social relations, processes and phenomena, many of the secrets of human psychology

remain unknown" (Vatsyayan1986:41). This shows the interrelatedness of psychology and sociology. They are not contradictory but complimentary. This means that all social relations and experiences can be understood psychologically, and that all psychological behaviour involves some kind of social experience. One particular branch of psychology deals with the interrelatedness of psychology and sociology. "Social psychology studies the relationship between the individual and society and focuses on attitude-formation and the 'social self' " (Furniss 1995:8). When the homeless youth tell stories about their experiences, they are interpreting those stories both psychologically and socially. The economic deprivation they are experiencing and the harsh life they are undergoing have psychological repercussions, often expressed in particular behavioural patterns. All these levels can be better understood using psychological theories.

A common feature in the stories of the homeless youth, already discussed above, is a mistaken understanding of independence. Some of the young people left home to be independent, and now regret this decision. In psychological terms, internalized norms and social expectations manifested in them as feelings of strong pressure to achieve self sufficiency and separation from the family. Such separations are supposed to promote the development of the person and his/her autonomy. However, in realistic social terms, "there are some social obstacles that have to be overcome if independence is to be achieved: lack of jobs, lack of apartment, a bleak outlook as regards advancement to a position in which self-sufficiency will in fact be possible – all this may inhibit the completion of the developmental task" (Reykowski 1988:56). Social and psychological factors have to be understood together.

An example from our data is Salin's story. He stresses survival in the midst of hardships. He has experienced harassment, mockery and physical assault from other homeless people, yet he is not ready to condemn everybody on the street. He longs to leave the streets, yet feels that homelessness is his inescapable fate.

Salin thus shows the effects of a negative discourse of survival. Survival for him was a mental adjustment he had to make to help him face his problems. He believed he was powerless to prevent suffering, so concentrated on surviving. Through narrative therapy Salin moved towards a different understanding of survival. He now hopes for the help of others in his survival, and has decided to share what he gets and help others to share. The result is that he views the streets as a better and more beautiful place, in which if street people are ready to envision their experiences in fruitful ways they can effectively participate in change. Salin's experience dramatises how the telling of alternate stories gives homeless people a new attitude towards their experiences and rearranges their psychological conditions.

6.2.6 Economic investigation

The various reasons for young people's being homeless, including poverty, joblessness, family problems and different life struggles, can be interpreted as the malfunctioning of the social system. "Homelessness, at its most elementary level, is caused by a series of adverse events. These include eviction, loss of job, discharge from an institution, personal crises (such as divorce or domestic violence) and withdrawal of financial support" (Dear & Wolch 1987:197). According to Dear, about half of the people who are currently homeless are victims of adverse economic circumstances. This is the case for the young people investigated in this study.

Economic factors have great impact in social processes. Almost all human interactions are now based on money, markets and financial transactions. The rich people in society have their own economic transactions; the poor people have their own economic desperations. Multinational companies use all sectors of society and make profit out of all situations. In the globalized economy, market needs control macro-economic decisions and the needs of the poor are sacrificed. Transnational corporations and international financial institutions

control the world market and through that the world economy. "Market-mediated development is a system that excludes the so-called poor, or less endowed, the property-less or any one without exchange entitlements from participating in the market. Therefore they who have the purchasing power decide the pattern of production" (Oommen 2000:54). Technological change in modern society has massively shrunk the world, enabling as never before the converging of all nations into one giant world supermarket and bank. Because of this shrinking, the world economy is controlled by the agents of the globalization. The decisions of such agents have great effects in villages as well as in the urban centres of the different countries of the world.

In post-apartheid South Africa, globalization is interacting with the after-effects of the apartheid regime to worsen the socio-economic conditions of the poor. The number of people forced onto the streets is ever-increasing. "While globalization has increased opportunities for economic growth and development in some areas, there has been an increase in the disparities, and inequalities experienced especially in Africa" (Henriot 2000:67). This is visible on the streets of Pretoria, and can be detected in the stories of the homeless youth of Pretoria. All of them suffer from some kind or other of economic adversity or deprivation. They all agree that it is because of their negative economic conditions that they are on the streets. Joy attributes his powerlessness to the financial exigencies of his situation. He believes that money is power and that without money he is powerless. Through externalizing this belief in conversation realizes that he is not powerless, but that belief in powerlessness is his problem. Thus he deals with his problem by forging a new relationship with the problem. When he deals with his problem he is dealing with his inner economic discourses. He was brought up in an economically poor family. He was powerless in the family because he had no money and no access to the resources of the family. So he developed some negative discourses about money. His attitude to money and power has not totally changed, yet he at least now sees possibility in his getting a job and so gaining the money (and so the power) he needs to survive. This example shows

that narrative therapy does not always lead to completely new stories, but sometimes rather to identifying new dimensions of existing stories, and creating a new relationship with existing inner discourses.

Michael's story, which seems to revolve around cultural issues, also in fact involves economic realities. He thinks he was not able to tackle the problems caused by cultural discourses in his family because of his economic poverty. He had to leave home because of his family's poverty. If he gets a job his family will be helped financially. But he knows that the improvement of his financial position will not completely free his family from various negative practices of his tribe and culture. However, economic freedom would help. Through the narrative journey with a facilitator, he has gained confidence that by enhancing his economic conditions he can help his family by visiting them more often, and so by his constant care encourage them to turn away from the traditional practices which harm them. He believes in an alternate story of his life which alters its cultural discourses by adapting its economic elements.

6.3   BALANCING OTHER DISCIPLINES WITH THEOLOGY

The knowledge gained through other social sciences is discursively interrelated with theological knowledge in this study. Completely unifying this knowledge is not necessary, since the different approaches reveal different dimensions of the same experiences. Since this study is in the field of practical theology, such multi-faceted knowledge is appropriate. As Edward Wilson points out, "Consilience points to an integration, literally a 'jumping together' of knowledge by the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines to create a common ground work of explanation" (Van Huyssteen 1999:236). The disciplines chosen for this study are closely associated with the field of theology, which was itself constructed through the centuries in various and different social settings.

Understanding God and God's work begins with philosophical enquiry, since it is a form of metaphysics. Since various theologies are formulated in particular societies, research into the dynamics of societies is essential. Similarly, since people develop theology, anthropology supports theological findings and helps to form new theological positions. Since the contexts of biblical and other sacred writings are always political, understanding politics and its science will enlighten theology. Theological interactions require human participation, and so psychology is necessary study. Any theological position depends partly on the economic status of the particular community that formulates it. Liberation theologies, theology of the poor and dalit theologies are examples of theologies that make explicit this relationship. Thus theology is arguably intrinsically interdisciplinary.

All these disciplines are also directly related to the experiences of the homeless people in Pretoria. Though they may not be philosophers in the technical sense, they each have their own ever-evolving philosophies of life, which were formed from their life experiences. Sociology is relevant in their influence on their social setting and the influence of social conditions on their status. The homeless youth have their own particular tribal, racial and religious frameworks, which have anthropological implications. Political decisions play an important role in the betterment or deterioration of the condition of homeless youth, so a dialogue between political science and theology in relation to their experiences is relevant. Their stories are directed by their psychological conditions and mental condition. The anger, grief, laziness, powerlessness and all the other feelings that appear in their stories reflect their psychological condition. Finally, economic factors are clearly important, since the defining characteristic of their suffering is their poverty. They are desperately poor, homeless and alienated. Their economic deprivation pushed them on to the streets. Even their God talk revolves around their expectations that God provide something real and concrete to better their economic condition.

6.3.1 Philosophy and theology

Philosophy and theology are intimately involves. Philosophy involves various fields, including the study of how we try to find meaning in given realities, how we define the human self and the community and its interactions. Christian theology was based on the Jewish and pagan philosophies of the beginning of the first century, engaged in interactive discourse with Hellenist philosophies, and has interacted with philosophy ever since.

In modernist philosophy, the text and its meaning were given. In the postmodernist paradigm, texts find new meanings as they are read and re-read. Despite dangers such as a tendency to relativism, these post-modern approaches have proven very fruitful for philosophical investigation. "Theology has frequently sought to borrow from elsewhere a fundamental account of society or history, and then to see what theological insight will cohere with it" (Milbank 2001:380). Theological interpretations are ever being renewed on the basis of developing and ever shifting philosophical concepts.

Philosophy can be applied to discourses to uncover new ideas about society and its functioning. The discourses of homelessness have philosophical implications in the God experiences of the homeless youth. With or without their being aware of it, these discourses force their thinking into a rut of desperateness and distress. Through developing such discourses they affirm that there is no alternative for their life stories. However, listening to the Bible classes held at the Street Centre helps them to link their discourses and stories with their God experiences. The theological insights I share are subjective, directly linked to my own context and discourses. But through discussion and interaction the young people take these theological insights beyond the boundaries of my context and make interpretations of their own. Thus they are able to formulate their stories of God experience. As mentioned above, one of the story tellers views his father as a powerful man who oppressed him and did not allow him individual freedom.

Because of this, this young man understands God as an oppressive master who does not give him freedom to grow. It is not easy to understand God in a different way. However, through my Bible classes and later discussions this young man discovered another theological discourse about God. He came to understand God as a caring and providing parent through the insights he gained from the stories and experiences shared by other members of the community in the discussion sessions.

Theology is innovative in promoting God experiences. The philosopher Levinas explains his God experience: "How does God occur to me? I don't deduce him from causality or from the first ground of being, from the origin of being, but from the look of the other. I come closer to the other, so that his face takes on meaning for me. What's meaningful in the face is the command to responsibility" (Rötzer 1995:61). This is the practical side of theology. Some forms of social philosophy emphasise social responsibility, and this philosophy comes close to theology in the issue of homelessness and the social responsibility. Jesus reinterprets the Mosaic law and teaches, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44). This is relevant for the homeless people, and is reflected in the need to "come closer to the other, so that his face takes on meaning for me". This is the process of empathetic listening, facilitating the other to tell a story and interpret it. These interpretations help the story teller and the facilitator to discover new meanings in the stories and their discourses.

6.3.2 Sociology and theology

Urbanization opens up possibilities for creating new contextual theologies. Social changes directly or indirectly affect existing social theories, which sometimes give way to new theories. Social changes in the village context will affect the equilibrium in the urban settings and vice versa. New cities form as a result of the rapid movement of people from their villages, for whatever reason. In these new cities face-to-face personal interactions are controlled by personal motives of

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profit and cash contracts. This meant that traditional beliefs and practices were changed also, including the structure of the church and its theological constructs. "Industrialization and urbanization were accompanied by a new sociological phenomenon, known as secularization, in which churches lost members and influence to other social forces, influences and actors" (Northcott 2000:156). In light of these phenomena churches have to formulate new theological outlooks and standpoints. "[P]olitical theology tends to leave behind ethics and political theory altogether, by locating its reflections in the space of a narrative of salvation that is really the story of an 'economic providence' " (Milbank 2001:245). Postmodernity and its constructs become relevant when society undergoes such transitions, and reality is being reconstructed. In the context of this study, such transition is happening in the lives of the homeless people, and so new theologies must be constructed for their context. Useful theories here are the theology of poverty and the theology of liberation.

Sociology finds various reasons for homelessness such as eviction, joblessness, personal crises, domestic violence and family dysfunction. Theology supports all these reasons and adds theological interpretations for homelessness. For example, the economic irresponsibility of the rich and the lack of self worth of the poor can both be traced to a lack of commitment to God, to the ignoring of God in personal and family life. In sociology, the disengagement of social systems and supporting institutions is partly responsible for homelessness. A theological exploration of this would go back to the Old Testament, which describes caring for the community not only as a social responsibility, but also as a theological commitment. For example, one commandment reads, "At the end of every three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your produce in the same year, and lay it up within your towns; and Levite…and the sojourner, the fatherless and the widows, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled…" (Dt. 14:28-29). As one of the young people pointed out, to say that "God will provide everything" does not mean he will do so by magic, but rather through the theological commitment and social responsibility of human beings to each other.

In the day-to-day experiences of the homeless youth, new theological outlooks transformatively influence their understanding when they try to respond to such theology creatively. "The attempt to understand and respond to contemporary human issues from a theological perspective is likely to affect people's views of themselves and the world, however infinitesimally. This represents a kind of transformation or change" (Woodward & Pattison 2000:10). I saw this happen at the Street Centre. In the Bible classes the homeless people responded creatively, sharing their theological positions in their particular contexts of background and life experience. The search for human dignity is inherent in all human beings, though adverse social and economic conditions may place them in indecent situations and even make them lose their human dignity. The struggle to reclaim this dignity is visible in all the stories of the homeless youth. Joseph's story, for example, reveals his conception of human dignity. He often feels desperate in the streets. He longs to return home to his loving sisters and family, but chooses to continue living in homelessness to help his family financially. He complains that human dignity is not valued on the streets.

The work of the Street Centre aims to give homeless people back their dignity. But classes, coffee and interaction can only improve people's consciousness of their dignity. This dignity will only be fully respected and grasped when they get jobs, improve their economic conditions and are able to deconstruct their dominant discourses. Our discussions and narrative interactions helped them along this path.

6.3.3 Anthropology and theology

Theology can be understood as the experiences of persons and communities with God, recorded in texts with their own cultural background. "The word culture is derived from the Latin root *cultura* or *cultus* (to inhabit, to cultivate, or to honour). Anthropologists use the term to refer to the universal human capacity to classify experiences, and to encode and communicate them symbolically"

(Culture 2006). The bible includes such symbolic communications of cultural experience, and these have to be interpreted according to biblical history. The cultural experiences of Abraham in the Old Testament, for example, are very different from those of St Paul in the New Testament.

Changes in culture are reflected in theology.

> Culture is the interpretative and coping mechanism of society. It is the way in which people understand themselves, their world, as well as the proper way of interaction with one another and with the world they live in. Theology is a second-order activity that reflects on the meaning of revelation for a specific cultural situation. Any fundamental change in culture therefore necessarily leads to further theological reflection. (Rossouw 1995:75)

In the context of South Africa, cultural changes are visible in different expressions of life. Each tribe has its cultural artefacts and, roots and legacies. In post-apartheid South Africa, tribal customs and practices are changing drastically, despite efforts to protect them. The impact of political and economic transformations on cultural systems is not negligible. Oppression in South Africa led to the cultural and economic slavery of the majority of the population, and the transition to freedom has opened opportunities for reviving cultural values. Indigenous cultural systems define the self understanding and way of interaction in the community of many South Africans. Homeless people, who are now separated from their cultures, enter the subculture of the streets. Thus the theological outlooks of homeless people bear the imprint of all these cultures.

Culture must not curtail human freedom for development, but must open up the possibility of freedom in different areas of life. This is not the case in Michael's experience; his cultural discourses intimidate him, keep him from economic sustainability and affect his family negatively. He suffers the tension between traditional culture and new theological insights. Here Michael's life in the city actually is an advantage, because on the streets, among other cultures and

subcultures he is exposed to more ideas than he ever encountered in his village home. The search for an urban theology always includes the intermingling of culture, society and economic factors. Michael sees the artefacts of different cultural traditions in the street, and enters into a dialogue with these as he deals with the experience of homelessness in his particular context.

This experience is one of economic and social deprivation, which gives homeless people a particular understanding of society, God and their destiny. Michael now realizes that his cultural traditions are negatively affecting his family and his personal life. Because of such traditional beliefs he lost three sisters and fears to lose his other sisters or his mother. He does not know how to constructively face this problem. Narrative interventions lead him to new insights and understandings about his role and functioning in society as a transformative factor. Further than this, his exposure to other people from various cultures gave him more possibilities of retelling his story. It helped him to view his life apart from the discourses of culture, homelessness, joblessness and economic deprivation. Here I understood that the narrative journey is not an end in itself, but rather the path to new discoveries. The interpretations of the homeless youth do not arise only through the narrative counselling sessions, but also through their interaction with others in the Bible classes, in the discussions afterwards, and in the community through people's openness to each other. By searching the theological insights in their stories and listening to the economic factors in their discourses I also engage in the process of creating new understandings about the realities of life.

6.3.4 Psychology and theology

Christian theology is the rational reflection of the Christian tradition, and its dialogue with psychology focuses particularly on human nature. One key issue is whether one discipline should dominate, or whether they should both enter a dialogue as free-standing and relatively autonomous disciplines. How far should

such a dialogue go? Sometimes people speak of moving beyond dialogue towards 'integration'. If this means that both disciplines lose their distinct identities in some kind of merger, this is neither possible nor desirable. It is only through a sustained period of fruitful dialogue between two distinct and separate disciplines such as theology and psychology that significant mutual influence can be achieved. When considering the relationship between two disciplines such as theology and psychology, it is important to remember how diverse both are. In fact, it is often helpful to get beyond the question of theology 'versus' psychology, and rather focus on three dialogues:

a) General issues about human nature,
b) The nature of human religiousness and,
c) The concerns of systematic theology.

These dialogues arise from mainstream scientific psychology's investigation of human functioning, and include evolutionary psychology, brain processes, learning and development, cognition and consciousness. Though there has been a growing amount of research activity in the psychology of religion, there has so far been surprisingly little dialogue between theology and the psychology of religion.

"Theology and psychology can be seen, in some ways, as offering complementary perspectives on reality, even though psychology is concerned with only a fragment of the broader reality that is the scope of theology" (Watts 2002:8). Theology should be articulated by individuals or communities within their particular experience and context. "Insofar as theology makes statements about human nature and its fulfillment, about proper and improper human motivation, about ways in which the human spirit can develop properly and improperly, then a part of theology seems to *be* a kind of psychology, and one formally similar to 'personality theory'" (Roberts 1997:10).

Since the core content of theology deals with God and his actions it cannot avoid addressing human functioning in the community and our search for meaning. The meaning-making process is a challenge for psychology, since it requires understanding all the dimensions of the psyche and its deliberations. Thus the psyche is not simply the mind, but can also be viewed as behaviour and behavioural patterns. Theology is also a meaning-making process based on God and his works. All human behaviour is thus somehow related to theological convictions. Even if persons are not aware of any theological implications for their actions, these actions reveal their relationship to God (whether this is negative, positive or neutral). All the theological interpretations in the Bible are based on the experiences of persons or communities in their particular contexts. The relationship between the practical theology and practical psychology is especially visible here.

An example of the relationship of psychology and theology can be seen in Andre's story. Andre believes that God will provide him with everything he needs. He does not want to take much effort to make his life better. He bases this theology on his individual interpretations of the biblical teaching of providence. He understands this to mean that God will provide everything without human efforts. Therefore, when he attended a Bible class about God's providence, Andre was confused. He gained a new awareness of his role in and responsibility for making his life better. He explored his confusion in the discussion after the class. This discussion created new understandings about God's providence not only in Andre but also in other members of the community too. Later in one-on-one narrative interaction he tried to restructure his concept of God's providence in a different way. From this new understanding of his involvement in the betterment of his life, he made some plans for his future.

Such psychological healing and attitude shifts are needed by those who operate within a religious framework and those who think outside such a framework. Jesus' healing approach was integrated, concentrating on persons without losing

the integration of the community. "The kingdom of God is not primarily a religious culture but a power that liberates and frees persons within their existing culture to experience the 'human' culture that belongs by right of God's creation to each person. Jesus called for the integration of the entire self and pointed to the healing and purifying power of the inner life directed outward toward others and toward God" (Anderson 2001:234). Such integration requires that persons find their inner selves so that they can achieve integration into society. Their psychological deliberations help them gain an integrative approach to theology. The stories of the homeless youth are saturated with their theological convictions and understandings. Through the Bible classes, interpretations, discussions and interactions, they are helped to redefine these convictions about God and themselves. Thus a positive and transformative relationship between psychology and theology clearly operates here. The complementarity of these two disciplines helps the young people construct new social and economic realities.

Also, retelling their stories in the course of social interaction with new theological understandings helps the young homeless people to cultivate faith and hope. "The community, as the source of a person's moral dignity, provides that moral worth through concrete actions of social inclusion" (Anderson 2001:244). This can be seen in the story of Salin, who through narrative interaction intervention came to a decision to interact with his community in a new and better way. He decided to make the street a place where he can help others. Thus in resolving to build a better community, he affirms his faith in the transformation of society.

6.3.5 Economics and theology

Economic deprivation robs the homeless of hope. But tracing the economic factors operating in the dominant discourses of the homeless youth helps them see that their discourses can be reformulated within a dynamic of hope, so that helplessness can be overcome. Economists commonly speak of the 'means of production' namely land, labour and capital. All economic theories and realities

are related to or based on these means of production. Many biblical narratives show the effects of the exploitation of these means of production by a single section of the population. For example, the economic context of the gospels is life in first-century Palestine, which can be examined on macro and micro economic levels. On a macro economic level, problems included "the general tensions in the first-century economy of the Roman empire …. On a *micro economic* level, there existed the tension between the desire for economic self-sufficiency or independence and the necessity for some type of interdependence" (Oakman 1986:147). These tensions affected the real life situations of the middle and lower income people, who struggled with debt and day-to-day survival.

In this context Jesus' teachings and responses were revolutionary, challenging the existing economic order and offering hope to the poor. Jesus' theology of love and sharing is thus better understood against the economic context of his time. He proclaimed not a theoretical framework for theology but a theology relevant and necessary for the practical life of the common people, especially for the poor. His first speech at the synagogue in Nazareth proclaims this: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (Lk. 4:18). The practical implications of this theology terrified those in power, and caused them in the end to kill Jesus. Mary, the mother of Jesus, also proclaims an end to economic disparity and a shift in societal power structures in her famous Magnificat: "He has brought down the powerful from the thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Lk. 1:52-53).

In light of these biblical affirmations and theological proclamations, the church must always keep its mission practical, in imitation of that of Jesus. "The Church is not a charitable society of people who have a certain amount to spare for others. It is a community of people who are always holding out their hands. Each one lives from the love given through Christ. Grace is the foundation of the community" (Boerma 1979:61). The Emmaus story is a good example of the right

approach to strangers and enemies (Lk. 24: 13-33). It is when Jesus breaks the bread that the disciples recognise him. "This is not a ritualistic meal, but the 'real meal' Jesus shared with lost ones, the little ones, and the forgotten ones of this world" (Sanders & Campbell 2000:35). This is the real meaning of communion with Jesus and living in the community of Jesus, a meaning not often practiced in the world today.

The policies and practices of globalization have turned the experience of love and sharing in the Christian community upside down. Ours is a profit-oriented market economy controlled by multinational organization and their market strategies. There is no question of concern for the poor. The rich control all the means of production and distribution. "The recent spate of partial mergers, joint licensing, co-operative ventures, and subcontracting is seen as a sign of new forms of multinational organization in which transnational business alliances and hyper-differentiation of functions allow greater flexibility in product development, production, and dispersal" (Stackhouse & Browning 2001:40). More and more markets are controlled by these multinational companies, who can fix the prices of their products and make them unobtainable for the poor. Thus the poor become poorer and the rich richer.

The homeless people on the streets of Pretoria are the victims of such economic globalization. All of them suffer economic marginalization. Their stories clearly reveal their economic needs. Lack of jobs, family and home trap them in discourses of helplessness. They think that nobody is there to help them. This is particularly obvious in John's story. For John, being homeless is being helpless. If you have a home, relatives, work and money many people are there to help you in different ways. When you are homeless and weak nobody is there to help you. John wants to search for alternatives for his life, and narrative intervention helped him believe in other options. He now plans to go to Centurion in search of a job there.

Like John, all homeless people want to change their life situations for the better. They do not want to be the slaves of their homeless experiences, and dream of a liberation experience. Their hope for work, for rejoining their families, for being better persons to each other on the streets reflect their attempt to regain a sense of dignity and honour. "The hope of a better future maintains a sense of honor and of self-justification. Against a background in which suffering is generally thought to be deserved, the disprivileged maintain their innocence by a strong conviction that their particular sufferings are the result of injustice and will soon be rectified" (Mealand 1980:42). John's story has a happy ending; he managed to go to Centurion and find a job. Creating an alternate story of his life helped him to realise this alternative. He rewrote his discourse about helplessness as hopelessness, and found that there are people to help you even in dire economic straits.

6.4 UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS IN LIGHT OF VARIOUS DISCIPLINES

The stories I heard at the Street Centre all reflect an ongoing stream of experiences or an array of experiences. These experiences are told, heard, understood and interpreted on the basis of discourses about homelessness and related themes. The experience of moving with the homeless youth through their stories is an experience of their homelessness. According to Derrida, all "experience is a traversing, a journey, a course, a way" (Rötzer 1995:54). To gain a rich and accurate picture of their experiences we have to draw on many different disciplines to explore the context and its meanings. The aim is not to interpret their experiences in the light of such disciplines but to better understand and thicken their stories. Many different reasons can explain the homeless situation of these young people, including personal, family

6.4.1 Personal reasons

Many personal reasons lie behind the young people's homelessness and their understanding of homelessness. Their discourses about their situation are varied, formed by their past experiences and their interaction with the society. "Knowledge does not simply happen or magically come to a person, but must be constructively assembled" (Bausor 1988:29). Their individual knowledge influenced them negatively in the past and helped drive them to the streets. Similarly, their personal attitudes now keep them on the streets. Some of them have been homeless and unemployed for years, and according to one of the young men, this is partly their own fault. They do not want to work, since they can find food from NGOs and charities, and sleep in government night shelters. This lazy attitude becomes their dominant discourse of homelessness. Not all homeless people are like this, however, since many long to escape their situation. These varying attitudes can be seen in the stories the young people tell. "The meaning that a person makes out of the people, places, and events encountered in life is most clearly heard in the story that the person tells about himself or herself" (Walsh 1992:1).

This does not mean that homeless people are solely responsible for their plight. The homeless are the poorest of the poor. If society fails to care for the poorest of the poor through proper economic policies, housing schemes and social welfare activities, then society is responsible for homelessness. This neglect is aggravated by society's own discourses, which characterise homeless people as hopeless drug addicts, mentally disordered people or people careless about their lives. It is true that some people become homeless because of their addiction to drugs, but also those others become drug addicts because they are homeless. "Homeless people are not, for the most part, people disabled by drugs, mental disease, or physical affliction but rather are people negatively affected by socio-economic trends and forces. The homeless are not deficient and defective; they are resilient and resourceful" (Timmer, Eitzan & Talley 1994:6).

Family relationships are also involved in homelessness. Some people are forced by poverty and their inability to support their families to leave home in search of employment. Poverty also prompts some to leave in a bid for independence. Others are left homeless when they lose their parents. Sometimes conflict in the family causes a person to leave home, as in the case of one of the story tellers, who now regrets his part in the conflict but cannot make it right because his estranged mother has since died, leaving him to unsatisfied hope and irreparable guilt.

Thus there are many personal reasons behind the reality of homelessness. These reasons care clearly reflected in the subgroups of the population that have been identified as having a particularly high risk of becoming homeless, including:

> those persons burdened with personal vulnerabilities such as mental disability, post traumatic stress syndrome associated with war service or victimization(especially domestic violence), chemical dependency, or health problems; those lacking sufficient social supports to tide them over potentially protracted periods of crisis (for example, people raised in foster homes, but also unattached people generally); and those least able to obtain jobs that pay enough to purchase housing (single women with young children, unskilled workers, women in general, and people of color) or to qualify for welfare support (single able-bodied persons, particularly men). The net result tends to be a homeless population that is disproportionately young, male, disabled and people of color. (Wolch & Dear 2005:160)

One of the personal characteristics that most significantly increase the risk of homelessness is substance abuse. Many of the homeless youth in Pretoria not only are addicted to substances themselves, but also act as agents for drug trafficking and illegal alcohol sale. Drug use and unprotected sex in an unstable and uncontrolled context makes these homeless youth vulnerable to

cardiovascular and neurological damage, HIV/AIDS and associated complications.

6.4.2 Family reasons

All homeless people originally belonged to families, which they left for various reasons, to their economic disadvantage. "Poverty, unemployment and homelessness are the experience of families of various different types" (Walrond-Skinner 1993:52). Even if the direct reason for a person's flight from home is unemployment or conflict, the background reason is usually economic poverty. If they had the money most of the homeless youth would return to their homes. Homelessness is directly related to family and community in various ways. Family problems, poverty and unemployment in the community, crime in their neighbourhoods, cultural beliefs and attitudes in the family are all possible reasons for homelessness, several of which are often present in any individual case of homelessness.

Some of the homeless youth are from families disrupted by marital problems. Some of the most prevalent effects of this instability are low self-esteem, inadequate or unhealthy separation from parents, and lack of awareness and understanding of gender and personality differences. All these have a negative impact on the children of these families, distorting their understanding of family, self-worth, God and society, and dehumanize them in their future interactions.

Many of the youth on the streets of Pretoria have their own family reasons for being homeless. Their attitudes and approaches to their situations reflect their family background, and simultaneously their dominant discourses affect their assumptions about their self worth and their family experiences. Theology provides a reason for the importance of family: "[f]amily is the context of primary relations responsible for the image of God. This is an intrinsic moral responsibility, with moral character determined by quality of life grounded in the

core social paradigm" (Anderson 2001:261). When parents fail to be good care givers for their children, this has a profoundly negative effect on the children's personalities and attitudes.

This effect of course interacts with that of the wider community. The family is one factor in the socio-economic discourses that shape people's interpretations of their selves and their experiences. In some cases, even though a person has a loving family in which he/she is well cared for and formed, that person has to leave the family because of poverty. Then economic deprivation can cause them to form negative discourses about their status, and their sense of self-worth, originally positively formed in the family, becomes damaged and their opportunities for development lessened. These young people can forget their early training and become involved in socially deviant behaviour.

6.4.3 Possible interactions between disciplines

An interdisciplinary approach will help me as social activist, social reformer, counsellor and narrative theorist in the various dimensions of social and personal intervention. One of the main reasons leading the people to homelessness and joblessness is their economic poverty. This can lead to extensive drug and alcohol abuse. All of this lessens the chance for economic growth and social upliftment in the South African community. Preventive measures should be taken to ensure the positive growth of young people economically, morally and socially. "There should be a concrete investment in South African youth through *inter alia* a) the facilitation of youth participation in preventive programs, and b) the continual and detailed monitoring of alcohol, tobacco and other drug practices/ attitudes of young people, as well as the extent of alcohol-, tobacco- and other drug-related problems among them"(Rocha-Silva & Erasmus 1996:91). Other possible interventions are narrative counselling, deconstructive interviewing, group discussions and interactive classes, programmes to equip and help the homeless to hunt for jobs, and creative economic empowerment plans focussing

on the youth. Rather than simply condemning them for their homelessness, we must strive to listen to the youth and journey with them through their experiences. That will equip them to find new possibilities in life and lead us to new discoveries about human experiences.

6.4.4 Economic theories in dialogue

Economic activities are directly related to the life experiences and psychology behind these activities, so the theory goes. Economic theorists create stylized models of the economic behaviour of individuals and the psychological impact of such behaviour. This approach is called psychological economics. My approach is similar, but I focus specifically on the impact of economic factors on the life experiences and discourses of young homeless people. In this project it is helpful to analyze the relation between the economic behaviour of individuals and the psychological intentions behind this behaviour. "Neoclassical economics is often thought to need an infusion of social psychology. There are two reasons for this. One is that economics should be able to recognize the social interaction between individual decision-makers; the other is that economics should recognize that the nature of an individual's utility function is essentially psychological" (Boland 1988:163). These psychological emphases prove that a positive change is possible for the economic order of society and the economic behaviour of individuals.

Globalization and its economic policies can limit an individual's economic behaviour, while seeming to offer wide alternatives. "The truth seems to be that many existing economic systems in the world provide entrapment, not opportunity; they ensure dependency, not autonomy; and they celebrate the status quo, not innovative and liberating change" (King & Woodyard 1999:31). This economic scenario inhibits social movements that try to eradicate the phenomenon of homelessness. Therefore such social movements and organisations should have both a local expression and a global vision. If the local

workers are totally unaware of the wider social changes happening in the world and their effects on homelessness, these workers will be ineffective in dealing with the local problems of homelessness. Similarly, if economists trying to understand and explain economic institutions and economic interactions ignore local social factors, they will only see human problems in relation to economic factors, and their findings will be distorted by the absence of psychological and theological factors. Thus dialogue between economic theories and the social reality of homelessness is needed for a better understanding of the discourses of homelessness and the finding of alternate experiences. Some theorists argue that globalization is a mortal threat to development and economic equality. Bello even argues for a process of 'deglobalization' to restore to the prominence of local economies over the global market (2004:109). Such macro solutions are beyond the control of most of us, including the homeless youth. Practically, therefore, dialogue between economic and other theories is our only hope for new alternate economic experiences. The minute detail of economic theory may not be relevant for the homeless youth, but their actions influence the economic reality of South Africa. "While lay people may not possess formal knowledge on the functions of the economy, they do reason about economic phenomena in daily decision-making regarding their finances" (Bastounis, Leiser & Roland-Levy 2002).

6.4.5 Interdisciplinary approach leads to hope

Thus an interdisciplinary approach enables a clearer understanding of homelessness and its discourses. The experiences of the homeless youth in Pretoria are diverse, as are their cultural backgrounds. A narrative approach helps them to develop new life goals, different from their old hopeless goals. "Human beings develop personal goals based on their (socially mediated) view of who they are ontologically and ethically, their own narrative, as well as their understanding of their capacities and potential" (Johnson 1997:152). Thus the homeless youth have to understand themselves, their stories and their situation if

they are to achieve liberation. Narrative intervention using an interdisciplinary approach can give them a new hopeful understanding of their future.

6.5 MY POSITION

I am a pastor from India, trained at an Indian university in a modern theological framework. My earlier theological position was totally grounded on a systematic theological approach, based on historical-critical interpretation of biblical realities. My approach tended to forget that "[s]ystematic theology needs a biblical theology which is historical-critical without any restrictions and, at the same time, devotional-interpretative, taking account of the fact that it deals with matters of ultimate concern" (Tillich 1988:36). Later I came to realize that the theology of ultimate concerns should be practical in nature, should deal with the life realities of the poor. Through interdisciplinary interactions with the particular contexts of poor and marginalized people, I experienced a shift in my theological position to a more praxis-oriented theology. Various liberation theologies gave me further insights and helped form my new theological position.

These interdisciplinary interactions included my conversations with the homeless youth at the Pretoria Street Centre. My involvement with them was inspired not simply by a desire to achieve social intervention, or theoretical inquiry or biblical education. Rather my three years of work with the homeless youth was inspired by an urge to make friends with them, and this friendship opened my theology to a world of new possibilities.

The homeless are human beings with a full complement of assumptions, concepts and discourses. "We are not denying, by any means, that the poor are part of an exploited social class, of a marginalized race, of a discriminated culture, of a gender not sufficiently appreciated. This expressions aims to make us realize that there is a world of the poor, and that the commitment to it means entering this world" (Gutiérrez 1997:72). The development of my theological

understanding towards this position in relation with the homeless youth and their stories will be explained in the final chapter.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter described how our understanding of the experiences of the homeless youth in Pretoria can be thickened through an interdisciplinary approach. Such interrogation led to the discovery of certain factors in relation with different disciplines:

1. The disciplines of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, economics and psychology are not contradictory in a study such as this but rather complementary. Each discipline has something to share to enrich its own perspectives and those of the other disciplines.
2. An interdisciplinary approach gives new insights, awareness and convictions about particular human life experiences, not limiting the meaning of these experiences but opens up new meanings.
3. Using each discipline in dialogue with theology gives a more vivid and thicker description of the stories of the homeless youth. Though the homeless youth may not be aware of the theological implications of their interpretations, these implications are always there and can be accessed through the insights of other disciplines.
4. Such an approach also opens our eyes to the economic factors involved in the dominant discourses of these young people. Economic factors in their discourses of homelessness are inseparably intertwined with other cultural, social, philosophical and psychological factors.
5. The reformulation of concepts like survival, power and dignity through a philosophical approach allows deeper insight into discourses in the stories of the homeless youth which were not obvious before.