

## CHAPTER ONE

### Epistemology: Theory, Model, and Method

#### 1.1 Research Motivation, Relevance and Objectives

An extensive literature review revealed that retreat; especially monastic retreat is a relatively new and a less researched phenomenon in the researcher's own tradition (Dutch Reformed). Retreat is generating growing interest amongst clergy and members of congregations. More and more people in South Africa and other countries retreat or pilgrimage occasionally from the hustle and bustle of the busy marketplace to the desert of holy places (monasteries, cathedrals, retreat centres etc.) to experience silence, solitude, regeneration, divine presence and spiritual formation.

As a researcher, I am drawn to monastic spirituality and monastic retreat. I have experienced it in various ways and conducted a few retreats. I am passionate about doing research on retreat as a communication action in practice. Some of the motivational factors for undertaking this particular research project are:

- the mind enriching potential of the research process,
- the possibility of the formulation of new insights,
- the challenging influence on current views and mindsets for example in the Dutch Reformed tradition regarding monastic retreat,
- the challenge of the research process in itself and
- the potential of the research journey to be a personal life enriching adventure that could also make a contribution to existing research or stimulate further research.

I was born and bred within the Dutch Reformed tradition. It shaped my faith story, theology, and spirituality into a more rational, social cultural value system and

disassociate mould. The emphasis was on dogma, revelation, systematic certainty and clear-cut definitions about God for example his actions, justification and sanctification. This *disassociate* atmosphere did not expose me to but rather in my experience desensitized me to the depth, darkness and mystery of God; the uncontrollable source and sustainer of life. After a short journey through and interest into the charismatic spirituality for a few years, I have been drawn during the past ten years more and more into the classical disciplines and *associative* spirituality of monasticism and mysticism. This latter part of my story sensitized me to the divine presence and mystery in a new and profound way. The associative way of experiencing Gods' presence was enhanced during the visits to the various monasteries and the monastic retreat-experiences. The relevance of monastic spirituality and monastic retreat for the Dutch Reformed tradition is part of the research gap I will address. Could Monasticism be a potential source for a way of retreat designed for Reformed Christians and a way or rule of life?

No one generation has all the answers. When it comes to nuclear and quantum physics humankind may know more than previous generations. However, when it comes to spirituality the roles may be reserved. By opening up ourselves to the heritage of the rich variety of spiritual wisdom of the past, we may be enriched in the process and blind spots of our generation of pilgrims exposed by the past generation of pilgrims. The blind spots in the story of one's own church tradition for example the Dutch Reformed, can be revealed by the spiritual stories of for example the monastic mystic tradition. The research could be part of an enriching journey and a basis or framework for the writing of a new story.

The motivation for the decision to focus on the three orders within monasticism for example Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize and reflecting on them is the following:

- The order of St. Benedict is the oldest order within Christian monasticism and Benedict wrote the first official written Rule of Life for a monastic order. My first experience of retreat was a private retreat in Rosettenville at an Anglican

Benedictine monastery of nuns, called the Order of the Holy Paraclete. It was the beginning of the more monastic and mystical chapter of my story. Being part of the Divine Office in the chapel with the nuns and other retreatants and the first exposure to the practical aspects of the rule of Benedict, stimulated and stirred something in the spirit and heart for learning and experiencing more of Gods' presence within a more monastic spirituality and narrative. I soon realised after this experience how many pilgrims in many parts of the world living outside monasteries, made the Rule of St. Benedict part of their everyday life as a way of life between regular retreats within a busy schedule and the full diaries of everyday life.

- The story of the Franciscan order began a few centuries after St. Benedict, with the frail figure and simple lifestyle of St. Francis of Assisi. He literally lived out the Gospel story of Jesus amongst the poorest of the poor which came like a fresh breeze and prism of new colours in a stuffy dark era of the Catholic tradition caught up in the deadlock of rigid religion, rational ritualism, monotonous monasticism, hedonistic hierarchy and indecent ideologies. The focus of the Franciscan way of life is simplicity, solitude, and silence, balanced with reaching out to the needy, love for Gods' creation and nature (eco friendly). With time it was captured in the Rule of St. Francis followed today by Christians worldwide outside monasteries as the Third or Tertiary order of St. Francis. His story attracted me also in a more romantic sense for he grew up in a rich well-known family and had a meeting with God whilst a teenager with a voice telling him to restore the house of God which he at first interpreted literally. His life story developed since then as the radical opposite of the materialistic, hedonistic, and religious way of life of his family, friends, and most of his church contemporaries.
  
- The Taizé story started much later in the late nineteen fifties and has over the years become a buzzword worldwide and in South Africa amongst Dutch Reformed pastors and parishioners. It is the only monastery and order where

an equal number of monks from the Protestant and Catholic tradition live in community by the rule or source of Taizé in one monastery. Hundreds of thousands of young people most of them under the age of twenty-two from all denominations visit the Taizé monastery each year for an ecumenical monastic type weekend or a weeklong retreat. Taizés' growing "success" or popularity as an associative spirituality with the focus on old Gospel story values in a postmodern world, to my mind was worth researching further.

The main objectives of this research are:

- To approach the research problem and the objectives of the research not as development of new or adapted theory but as an epistemological reflection on the investigation (the aim of the thesis) of the relevance of the monastic-mystic tradition for the Dutch Reformed church.
- To conduct a need-assessment process and empirical study regarding retreat by *listening* and establishing a *story* (or stories) about the need or hunger for a specific lived experience of God that is more monastic, meditative and silent. Is there a growing worldwide interest in spirituality and retreat in South Africa? If so, why and what are the needs especially amongst members of the researcher's own church tradition?
- To listen to the stories being told about the action of retreat and the experience of God in the monastic context of holy places (for example monasteries and retreat centers).
- To listen to and experience the stories of monastic retreat and pilgrimage within the Benedictine and Franciscan orders and Taizé comparing them in the process.

- To listen to the stories of spirituality regarding a lived experience of God and of holy places that fulfill spiritual needs and how these traditions experience and interpret and structure retreat.
- To establish what the comparisons between these stories and the story of the researcher's own tradition are. To learn from these contextual experiences in *narration* form in order to identify pointers for a retreat structure (*way of retreat*) and a *way of life* after or between retreats that could fit the needs and expectations of the researcher's own church tradition or the broader reformed church tradition in SA.

The research process is envisioned as a *narrative research journey* (pilgrimage), with *subjective involvement* of the researcher (as participant-insider as well as observer), where all the *co-researchers* are invited to travel together on the journey. The research will develop primarily in story form as an active process of *story development*, and *interpretation* and *reflection* where the researcher and the other co-researchers construct together a shared reality. The narrative research journey is envisioned to be an *epistemological reflection on the investigation in order to indicate the relevance of the Monastic tradition, (mystic traditions) for retreat within the Dutch Reformed tradition.*

Some of the research questions during this narrative journey are:

- Is monastic retreat a justifiable, commendable, or even essential way for some people to become more aware of the *presence of God*?
- Could it be a source of *regeneration, healing, or recommitment* for some? What are the therapeutic or pastoral care qualities of such a retreat?
- What are the similarities between retreat as a pilgrimage or ritual and the *rite of passage structure*?

- Why did so many Christians (especially the young people) flock to *Taize* since 1960 as pilgrims? Why are the numbers still growing today and what impact have these pilgrimages had on the people and in their communities after the retreat? If it is a “spiritual success story” then why and what can be learned from the process?
- Could there be specific *elements* or ingredients that when they are part of the Retreat, make it worthwhile or more effective as a doorway deeper into God? What is a meaningful *way of retreat*?
- Could the various rules of life of the three monastic orders (pre modern) provide insight and function as sources from which to write a *way of life* for Dutch Reformed Christians today (postmodern)?
- Is *ecumenism* a prerequisite ingredient for a meaningful retreat or not?
- How important are the *bible, meditation, contemplation, solitude and silence* during retreat, in what way and in what relation with one another?
- What is the effect of the “*holy place*”, the atmosphere where people retreat?
- What are the major differences between for example *Benedictine, Franciscan* and the *Taize* way of or approach to a way of retreat and a way of life? What are the similarities? What is the distinguishing features?
- Is *monastic retreat* very different from other ways of retreat and in what way?

- Retreat is relatively new in the *Dutch Reformed* tradition. Why is this and why the higher level of interest in retreat among pastors and parishioners? How could insights derived from the research investigation of the other traditions way of retreat be applied to the Dutch Reformed tradition?

## **1.2 Theory**

Theory functions within a specific paradigm or mental window through which a researcher views the world. It is the way the researcher look at things, at socialised reality, the philosophy behind the research and the way in which the hypothesis and model are described and the research question will be addressed. Theory should be able to explain relations between real phenomena and be verifiable empirically (Mouton & Mouton 1990:62, 145-150; see Kerlinger 1973:9; Pieterse 1993:50).

The research process in this dissertation develops within the postmodern paradigm as a predominantly postmodern discourse. A relevant question however is why the necessity or what practical viability does a meta, basis or practice theory framework has within such a postmodernistic discourse?

### **1.2.1 Paradigm Theory**

The history of Christian faith communities constituted itself in three paradigms: the premodern, the modern and postmodern (see Küng 1995:61). Paradigm as view of reality that determines or influences a researcher's approach to and premises regarding the research field, may be present unconsciously or consciously and comes before rules and theories of scientific research. Kuhn (1970:viii) defines paradigm as "universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners". This means in practice that the researcher do not approach the field of study in a neutral or objective stance but with a particular presupposition determined by a specific worldview, view of life or philosophical mindset (see Vorster 1999:101). Knowledge within such a specific paradigm will then function as a point of reference or as a problem-solving model in scientific research.

A paradigm shift occurs when the old paradigm cannot provide sufficient answers on new realities anymore. The challenge to the researcher is to start searching for and to develop new areas, finding new keys as instruments to develop a new reality. In the process a theoretical, research and research results revolution may take place (Vorster 1999:101-105). In theology, the modern paradigm did not replace the premodern paradigm immediately and the postmodern one will not immediately replace the modern, but they could co exist for some time (cf Bosch 1991:186). In research practice, the paradigm that provides better or more meaningful answers to new realities could in due course develop into the more dominant one. After the beginning phase (pre-paradigm period) of a specific paradigm's religious or theological reasoning structure, usually follows a normal phase (own closed knowledge system) in which there is stability and peace because most people function faithfully within the same paradigm. When a new structure of reasoning comes to the fore, the integrity of the predominant one could become suspect. This in turn may lead to counter measures by the dominant paradigm to try to vindicate itself. This period may become quite tense until the switch takes place or the moment or era of new insight starts to dawn on many. This creative moment or crossing over is not always sudden or in an explosive, shocking sense. It could also develop over time. The transition process is characterised by the following features:

- The followers of the new paradigm may understand the old one although not endorsing it anymore but the followers of the old paradigm usually find it much more difficult to understand the new one,
- the old paradigm camp may experience the new one as a threat and react in a more intolerant and reactionary way than the camp of the new paradigm, and

- this in turn could lead to a new conservatism and an exclusive mentality among the old paradigm against the new one,
- followed by a communicative-dissonance where the new one on rational grounds will not convince the old paradigm because their rational points of departure differ.

It is apparent from the abovementioned that it may be a very difficult task for the new paradigm to convince the old one that it has served its purpose. It is only with time and with constant progressive exposure to new insights about the new paradigm and the inherent failure of the old paradigm that a paradigm shift or conceptual transformation will take place (see Du Toit 2000:45-49).

Various social-science disciplines today agree that a major paradigm shift on a macro scale has been taking place since the nineteen sixties (Vorster 1999:103). Lamberth (1997:205) sums it up in this way: “in the years since the uprisings of the late 1960’s swept the cultures of Europe and America, the emergence of a radical new critique of modernity and the heralding of a corresponding transition into postmodernity have increasingly occupied the minds of many cultural critics, philosophers and theologians alike”

Barker (cf 1996: xv-xvii) divides the history of Western civilization into three periods of macro paradigms for example premodernity, modernity and postmodernity and identifies within each a dominant leitmotif regarding philosophy, politics, religion and culture.

#### **1.2.1.1 Premodernity**

Within the premodern paradigm, everything was perceived to be dominated and controlled by metaphysical forces and church and religion were highly valued. The focus was on basic things like food and survival with a more pessimistic view of man and culture. Patriarchal and

hierarchical systems structured society in definite patterns and dominance was achieved because of instrumental value. Dreyer (2002:924) describes the hierarchy as consisting of men with less or more status with no place for women, slaves, and children within this system. Society for example under Roman Rule was organized according to the rules of patronage in which patron-client relationships, with top to bottom relationships rather than democracy characterized civil government (see Riggs 2003:11-13). No division between the world of God and the world of people was perceived. The development of science and technology was seen as unimportant in the pre-scientific paradigm. In Christian faith communities, God and faith issues were not questioned. The omnipresence of God and mystical experiences were perceived as self-evident (Vorster 1999:103). The world was viewed as being flat and humankind as being influenced by the interaction between God (the good, angels) and Evil (the bad, anti-godly, satanic forces) with people seen as the battlefield between good and evil. God in the Old Testament was viewed as the cause of all things and events, of good and bad and in the new Testament there is a movement to opposition between God and evil as main adversary of God (see Du Toit 2000:14-23). A growing obsession developed with avoiding hell and going to heaven that became part of Christianity with corresponding efforts of rites of purification and appeasing an “angry” God (cf Ozment 1980:190-222). Although a bygone era, Christians should still take the premodern era into account, as the bible is a product from this paradigm (see Du Toit 2000:13-61).

#### **1.2.1.2 Modernity**

A paradigm shift towards a new era began during the Renaissance with the gradual questioning of the dominance of the metaphysical. With time came the dominance of reason as the basis of human existence. The essence of modernity according to Riggs (2003:29) lies in the claim that all ideas are open for public criticism because of human experience and

reason and that no claim is believed simply because some authority claims it to be true. The emphasis is on the notion that people are free to think critically, on self-determination with no acknowledgement of inherent external authority over human beings. It was the coming of age of people and the start of the scientific and technological era with the process of liberation from the old premodern view of the world. Big political and social structures were developed and the early feudalism with its different classes was rejected (Vorster 1999:104). Cognitive instrumental rationality (cf Habermas 1984) became the driving force of modernity and everything else, not rationally controllable or justified, excluded from discourse. According to Ackerman (2001:22) thinkers (scientists) schooled within the “Enlightenment” paradigm developed a bias against tradition with the exclusive enshrinement of reason.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century an unending optimism was taking place in the inter-disciplinary science networks of Europe regarding the intellectual and technological capabilities of the new paradigm (Du Toit 2000:24). The so-called “enlightenment” paradigm strived to improve the human condition through the natural sciences, the human arts, and politics. A unprecedented optimism about the intellectual and technological capabilities of this “scientific” era together with a conviction that people (or rather *scientists*) can explain, interpret and even control past, present and future. However, when looking back the legacy of horrific world wars, genocides, Western individualism, ecological rape and growing consumerism, began to put a question mark to the success of the optimism and so called newfound freedom promised by the paradigm. By the end of the eighteenth century a feeling of pessimism was paramount and by the end of the nineteenth century a mentality came to the fore what Van Peursen (1995:9-10) refers to as “sadder and wiser” with growing scepticism and feelings of irony. Another feature of modernity was the conviction that “reasonable” answers

to nearly all the questions being asked could be provided and that fundamental truth does exist which are knowable (Riggs 2003:29). This quest for freedom and focus on the human and natural sciences, also had its effect on Christianity and its subsequent process of demythologizing. The fact that the world was not flat thanks to Galilean insights, Descartes popular phrase that because I think therefore I am, deconstruction by Kant, evolution of Darwin, Einstein's relativity of matter and energy, Feuerbach and Nietzsche's questioning of God as such; all contributed to a new secularism and radical new criticism of the bible (cf Du Toit 2000:24-30; see Venter 2004:438).

Other characteristics of modernity are objectivism; a permanent a-historical framework with a need for "absolute knowledge" with a foundational truth. The approach to knowledge therefore was viewing it as a set of building blocks systematically built, brick by brick on a firm philosophical base according to a rigorous methodology. There was a craving for certainty; in empiricism, it meant an appeal to indubitable sense experiences and in rationalism an appeal to indubitable propositions. The focus on certainty left no room for doubt and ambiguity. An intellectual dualism developed where thought processes were sharply separated from the body, emotions, and the natural world. Radical individualism is another characteristic with the negation of tradition and a tendency to start all over for oneself (cf Stiver 2001:5-10). However, the critique against "absolute knowledge" is not paramount to relativation in the sense that anything goes. In his book, *Introduction to philosophical hermeneutics* (with a foreword by Hans-Georg Gadamer), Jean Grondin (1994:141) states: "that the universality of understanding differently is not the same as historical relativation and that it need not demolish the whole notion of truth". Each person that tries to understand is simultaneously trying to find something true where truth refers to a meaningful account that corresponds to things. People understand differently in their unique

way by bringing the truth to language and applying it to their situation or inner conversations. The fact that people understand differently need not lead to the conclusion that truth is relative in the sense that anything is acceptable or as acceptance of everything as equally justified and equally valuable.

### **1.2.1.3 Postmodernity**

The disillusionment after two world wars, with the process of destruction during world war two defying the optimistic ideal of objectivism and pure reason, the growing realisation about the impact of psychological, ideological and even metaphysical components in the whole scenario, created a spirit of realism and questions about the abilities of people to create a better world (see Du Toit 2000:50-52). At the end of the nineteenth century, the atmosphere became more and more pessimistic. Questions were being asked about the power and promises of reason, science, technology, and the superstructures it created over time. The liberation struggle that began in the nineteen sixties, started to ask questions about being in a world in which social, political and economic forces within a modern paradigm produced brutality and ideologies of power and exploitation (cf Vorster 1999:99-119). In an expanding postmodernistic era, thought became more ideological-critical with plurality and inclusiveness being acknowledged as part of life. It reflects a hermeneutics of suspicion approach that in a deconstructive sense denaturalizes and demystifies practices of dominion. All hidden ideological interests, both in the bible and those of exegetes became suspect and distrusted. All people are viewed as important and approached as co subjects (cf Dreyer 2002:926-928). The postmodern thought structure developed over time into the postmodern paradigm. Postmodernism was much more evolutionary in its conception than modernism and is still evolving in its aspiration to provide an alternative approach to reality that could yield a significantly new and improved way of understanding the

world (Vorster 1999:104-105; see Riggs 2003:31). Van Aarde (1995:13-24) describes it as a moderate and not a dramatic macro paradigm shift because of the continuity between modernity and postmodernity. The rationality of the modern era broadened in postmodernism to accommodate the affective and pragmatic together with the cognitive-rational. Postmodernity accommodates the different dimensions of individual, subjective experience as well as the marginalized view of what is *scientific*. “Wij zijn meer dan ooit aangewezen op intersubjectiviteit binnen werkvormen, waarin mensen, vanuit een gedeeld engagement, in hun handelen werkelijk subject kunnen worden van hun eigen ervaring” (Heitink 1993:151). Postmodern pilgrims have a need not only to experience God cognitively but also in an affective way. According to Leonard Sweet (2000:27) the personal subjective world and its experiences have become the ultimate truth for postmodern individuals.

Postmodernism is a complex and multi faceted paradigm. It is a portable or container concept to enter with a repertoire of ideas about characteristics of the world. It has a strong critique of the traditional paradigm rather than reconstructing a new one although an outline of a new distinctive paradigm can partially be discerned. I agree with Stiver (2001:5) who sets postmodernism in a framework of the broad movement within post-structuralism thought for example Jacques Derrida (1998) *Of Grammatology*, Michel Foucault (1994) *The Birth of a Clinic*, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Paul Ricoeur (1981) *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*, Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001) *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus*, neopragmatist Richard Rorty (1991) *Objectivity, Relativation and Truth*, the Yale post liberal school of theology's Hans Frei (1974) *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics* and George Lindbeck (1984) *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.

Rather than perceiving postmodernism as a label for an object or human condition or as something easily definable, it may be linked to a set of ideas about the world and people's relationship with the world. Glen Ward ([1997] 2003:15) defines postmodernity in terms of signalling "deaths" or "ends":

- The end of history relating to the scepticism of postmodernists about progress and the debates about the way history is written and the lack of unity or direction of events.
- The end of humanity because new technologies are moving humankind into a post-human stage and the questioning of humankind as a historical and social invention.
- The death of real as the abandonment of the pursuit for absolute truth with its preference for the apparent, superficial and temporary and the view that reality is increasingly constructed by signs.

Some of the characteristics of postmodernity are the following (see Vorster 1999:112-114; Stiver 2000:10-22, cf Van Peursen 1995:10-11):

- It functions within a non-fundamental epistemology with an embodied and holistic conception of the self and the world in which experience is integrally embodied and social.
- The epistemological approach is holistic with the emphasis on the way in which concepts are embedded in traditions and practices.
- Different dimensions of rationality are acknowledged as well as practical and expressive dimensions of life that also constitute meaning and truth.
- A hermeneutical turn was made to a view of knowledge that is embedded in hermeneutical acts of judgement that cannot conclusively be demonstrated or proven.

- A linguistic realization dawned that knowledge is always mediated through language for example that language is much more than primarily reference to or descriptive in nature but also figurative (metaphors and narratives) not only as ornamental additions but fundamentally cognitive.
- Arguments usually proceed in a dialogical way, are always local and timely, never certain but have warrant and backing with consensus worked out by dialogue and conversation and not by knockdown arguments.
- A developing social, psychological, and spiritual pluralism with growing scepticism and a relativistic attitude where reality tends to dissolve in the individual experience.
- A tendency towards a simplicity of premodernity for example the accentuation of simple values, humanness and in religion warm and intimate worship, flexibility, meaningful traditions, authenticity and a spiritual experience. This could explain in part the growing number of pilgrimages to *premodern monasteries* of for example Taize and Santiago de Compostela.

The epistemology and status about claims of truth were being criticised with the emergence of the postmodern science philosophy. In an effort to determine the status of claims about truth of scientific findings and verdicts, more focus was placed on the subject, the person and the pre-questions or prolegomena, on feelings, faith and spirituality (Cartledge 2003:132; cf 1.4.2). The decisive role and impact of pre-suppositions in a researcher's mind during scientific discourse and scientific results as well as in the investigation of things are acknowledged (see Vorster 1999:105-106). The subjective experience in the interpretation of data and knowledge makes it impossible to formulate absolute and objective truths, "final" conclusions or pure truth and therefore more than one possible truth about the same matter is indeed possible. There is a suspicion of people

who want to provide final answers as well as of hierarchy and dominance and value judgements. Postmodernism tend rather towards asking questions within a more relativistic and subjective approach with multiple and multi-faceted angles on truth (see Venter 2004:438). The modernistic idea that there is only one truth or absolute universal truth that may be known by a rational subject is replaced by the idea of a variety of repressed discourses and different perspectives on truth (cf Dreyer 2002:930). Concepts as *right and wrong* are replaced by *valid and valid*. Fundamentalism where only one code of ethical rules is described as a rule or framework for persons is rejected. Pure logic and knowledge is viewed as an illusion and the researcher or observer's experience plays a crucial role in the development of knowledge. Each person's approach to reality is influenced by their presuppositions, background, and faith and cannot experience absolute or complete truth. Truth is therefore relative and more than one conclusion about something can be valid. Interpretation and the underlying psychological processes that direct it ought to be acknowledged. Authority structures are suspect and may be symptomatic of underlying uncertainties.

The focus is on pluralistic experience rather than a single authoritative voice and the historic Christian tradition may be used as a toolbox, accepting some but not all of the worldview for the job at hand. The role and rights of the individual ask for a more pragmatic attitude that is more open for alternatives. Each individual in a world where the old, allegedly comprehensive charts no longer command confidence is constantly compiling his or her own collage of symbols and practices in the light of what coheres with their own changing experiences in the journey through life. It results in a radical and personal form of spirituality. There is also a shift from the cerebral to the intuitive, from the analytical tot the immediate, form the literal to the analogical, and a movement to inter-subjectivity or to inter-textuality where people want to participate rather than merely observe. The focus shifted from not just *what* people might

know, but to *who* knows and in *what context* someone knows (Van Peursen 1995:14-20; see Du Toit 1999:105-106). A relevant question is whether relativisation, a pick-and-mix attitude towards values and beliefs, and a fragmented rationality are unavoidable by products of postmodernism thinking. Universal ideals, values and purposes are indeed becoming extinct within such a paradigm but I agree with Van Peursen (1995:34-35) that it need not imply a complete break with rationality but rather a different way of reasoning. It is a type of reasoning and philosophy that initially may look fragmented and incoherent, but showing a unique consistency that flows from the specific, the concrete, local knowledge, incidents not focusing on the general and long-term story and principles. This is more consistent with a view of life shared by many that prefer shorter more intense news clips than long general news reviews, a close up snapshot rather than a family photo and power phrases becoming more popular than long speeches. Physics changed from a Newtonian view of the world or mechanical certainty, to the mystery found in the expanding universe and “the inner dance of the atom” (Ackerman 2001:23). Relativity, uncertainty, and new discoveries questioned the myth of scientific certainty and objectivity. There developed awareness and a place for spirituality as well as an attraction to the archaic and mystical codes of perception and to inductive as well as abductive ways of reasoning. Sweet (2000:28) writes about “postmodern pilgrims in the twenty first century with first century (premodern) passion”. With postmodernity comes renewed interest in the metaphysical, not as a static universality, highest certainty, meta-narrative, a foundation of everything behind the surface of occurrences or higher hidden reality. Rather as an appreciation of the individual’s life and relationship within the cosmos as spiritual within a holistic view of reality and the role of unending energy in the macro and micro cosmos (see Van Peursen 1995:21; cf Du Toit 2004:55-56). In premodernity, faith in the dependence on the metaphysical controlled people’s lives. In modernity reason, science,

technology, and macro-social systems were dominant. In postmodernity human experience becomes more prominent (see Vorster 1999:106). It is the experience of especially the present, the incidental, and the local against general universal values. People view reality differently and from different angles and therefore with different conclusions and experiences of God or the Source or the Metaphysical are possible and all are equally valid. Metaphysical truisms cannot be denied because they are *necessarily* presupposed by any conceivable activity. Charles Hartshorne (1962:285) explains it in the following way:

Metaphysics we may now define as the search for necessary and categorical truth-necessary in that, unlike empirical truths or facts, it excludes no positive possibility, and thus imposes no restriction upon the process of actualization, and categorical in that (unlike mathematics interpreted as deduction from unasserted postulates) it applies positively to any actuality.

These claims or metaphysical truisms then cannot be denied because they are necessarily presupposed by any conceivable activity that for him led to the idea of God. Critical reflection on human experience could then lead people to theism. I agree with Riggs (see 2003:144-146) that such metaphysical assertions could build a potential bridge between Christianity and postmodern culture as well as between postmodern Christianity that seeks plurality and more traditional Christianity that seeks universal assertions. The starting point could be the reflection on the encounter people had with Jesus (God represented) which suggested a divine reality that was personal.

### **1.2.2 Theory of science**

Empirical reality is encountered in this research dissertation in an inductive, deductive and especially in an abductive reasoning way. Deduction and induction are more typical of positivism where knowledge is

only “true knowledge” when it builds on both the positive criteria of rationality and empiricism (Van der Ven 2000:56-57). Abductive reasoning is a non-positivistic approach and new way to construe reality (cf Pierce 1957:236-237). The three processes are, for example combined in the drawing of conclusions from the observations of others and of those of the researcher for example an abductive process; from the conclusions, hypothetic forecasts are deducted and tested in an inductive way (cf Van der Ven 1998:108).

### **1.2.2.1 Deductive Argumentation**

Philosophers like Wisdom (1952) regarded the discovery of new ideas as mere chance, guess, insight, or some mental jump of the scientist. He (1952:49) writes:

There is no rational machinery for passing from observational premises to an inductive generalization but that hypothesis is attained by some mental jump. The function of observations is not to lead then to a hypothesis but to test it by means of a hypothetical-deductive system where the hypothesis is expressed in a particular statement, and a conclusion is deduced and tested by experience.

Deductive argumentation works from a fixed empirical point seen as valid. The focus is on the positivistic ideal of true knowledge with an idealistic and optimistic view of people and society as good. In nineteenth-century logical positivism the focus was not so much on fixed scientific laws but on the premise that science can only make a contribution when it produces valid claims (laws), which can be verified by empirical data (see Swingewood 2000:11). The goal of deductive reasoning is to prove the final truth of a hypothesis or set of rules in order to confirm the final truth. In practice, it means that one decision follows another according to a pre-

programmed plan (Mouton & Marais 1990:32). It is applied in the form of a specific argumentative structure containing two premises and a conclusion. The first premise is a general statement, which includes the conjecture to be tested. The second premise serves as a description of the case at hand and the conclusion represents the application of the general statement to the case at hand. Van der Ven (1993:116) warns against naïve deductive logic stressing that the researcher cannot arrive at general conclusions from specific instances. However, by verification and falsification the validity of the application supported by argument may be tested empirically. Verification asks whether the deductive conclusion, arrived at via argumentation, is observable also in the real world based on all possible empirical instances. In contrast Ricoeurs' emphasis on the legitimate character of interpretation is postmodern in the sense that objectivity no longer has the meaning of verification but takes a postmodernistic holistic nature of understanding turn that involves evidence, arguments, and conclusions that are probable but not proofs (Stiver 2003:61). Falsification asks whether it does apply in a single instance.

The argumentation that deduction follows is that if all premises are true, then the conclusion must be true too. Deductive inferences or deduction involve drawing conclusions from premises (other statements) that necessarily follows from such premises. The conclusions are then already contained (explicitly or implicitly) in the premises. The most common forms of deductive reasoning are deriving hypotheses from theories and models and when the meaning of a concept is clarified through the deductive derivation of its constitutive meanings. The use of the phrase “following this”, “on the basis of he aforementioned,” “hence”, “thus”, “therefore”, “this leads to” are an indication of deductive inferences being made. Research done in this way will be a clear conceptual framework (model, typology, and theory) that leads the conceptualisation, operational and data

collection process rigidly, and analysing and deducing from the data a conclusion or truth. It is suitable for the testing of hypotheses and explanatory studies. The disadvantage being that no room is provided for the uniqueness of phenomena without scientific laws or universal principles. The goal of the researcher is to objectively observe and analyse the object. From the data the researcher in a casual way works deductively reaching a “conclusion” or “truth.” Deductive and inductive reasoning are science-theory applied within a modernistic paradigm. Deductive reasoning requires coming to conclusions based on knowledge available and requires proof of the basic premise and of the process followed in reaching the conclusion.

#### **1.2.2.2 Inductive Generalisation**

The proposing of a new hypothesis need not be a mere guess or mental jump instead, there could be a logical relation between and movement from observations to the new hypothesis. The logic involved here is the logic of inductive inference which Reichenbach (1938:383) puts it as follows: “There is an inductive relation from the known facts to the new theory...we shall never have a definite proof of the theory; the so-called confirmation consists of the demonstration of some facts which confer a higher probability upon the theory, for example, which allow rather simple inductive inference to the theory”.

In a general sense, induction refers to the observation, directed by a reflection of phenomena in the empirical reality. It includes the discovery and naming of classes of phenomena, patterns in it, and the uncovering of comparative correlative and causal relationships between them. Inductive argumentation originated in place of the objectivistic ideal and a model forms the starting point for research. Although a more subjective process, the objects of research done in this way still will not become co subjects in the research journey in a critical epistemology of participation or reflection

as in abductive reasoning and the way in which my research journey evolves (cf Swingewood 2000:203-208). Hypothesis is set in the beginning and determines the outcome. In practice, induction should be followed by deduction. In the inductive phase, the focus is on selected individual cases that exhibit certain patterns seeking to identify such regularities within another population. Deduction occurs between induction and testing (which is done on a different set of empirical information) in which the general occurrence of such regularities is conceptualised by means of theories, conjectures, and hypotheses. Before these conjectures and hypotheses may be applied concretely, they must be stated in the form of general knowledge and shaped into established theological theories, which are then adapted, modified and restructured. Then they could be declared hypothetically by deduction applicable to other concrete cases and the application tested for validity (Van der Ven 1993:115-116; see Swingewood 2000:119-22; cf Dreyer 2002:921-922). Inductive reasoning goes beyond the information that exists, takes what is observed or known about one situation and applies or generalise it to other situations. The researcher should be aware of the danger of over-generalisation, missing the individual differences in particular cases and assuming that relationships between events are stronger than they really are. Inductive reasoning according to Collins (1999:71) does not so much require proof of its conclusions but rather clarity.

Inductive reasoning involves applying references from specific observations (such as a sample of cases) to a theoretical population. The researcher uses statistical inference and generalises from a sample to the target population. Research begins not with an explicit conceptual framework but with common hypotheses or presumptions that lead the research process although less structure than in deductive approach. Through processes of inductive generalisation, data is analysed and interpreted and ends in a systematic explanation of a conceptual

framework for example a model or typology (Mouton & Marais 1990:32). This approach is suitable in hypothesis generating studies with an exploring goal. The supporting premise provides only gradual (from less to more) support for the conclusion, if all the premises are true, the conclusion is probably true but not necessarily true. Another form of inductive reference is retroductive reasoning that uses inferences from observations or data to construct or infer an explanation of such observations. Hypotheses are created to provide plausible accounts and explanations of observed events and data. The shortcoming of inductive reasoning according to Van der Ven (1990:133) is a predetermined outcome and a view of knowledge as only true when it is based upon positivistic criteria of empiricism and rationality. This in turn makes it impossible for the “object” of research to become co subject. Distance is kept between researchers and researched and distance between researcher and the cultural or religious traditions that shaped the researcher.

In qualitative methodology, both deductive and inductive processes may be combined in that during the course of the investigative process the researcher encounters the empirical phenomena twice (Pieterse 1993:189). During the induction phase, the researcher emerges out of the empirical material and after deduction goes back into it and in this latter phase examines new data material. By combining during the research the two approaches, the dangers of objectivism, positivism and empiricism may be avoided. Deductive approaches that start from the text and inductive approaches that start from the actual cultural context could be complimentary to each other.

### **1.2.2.3 Abductive Reasoning**

According to Habermas (1984:397) social science will lose its freedom when it is bonded to predetermined categories, model or norms. Social science has no objective data to work with as the data is already arranged

within the context of institutionalised social structures. Therefore, dynamic interaction between premise or approach and results should be the goal that in turn could develop both or change or correct it. Interaction and inter-narrativity is viewed according to Curt (1994:235) as: “social practices which are productive of experience and which construct realities in which we live”. Abductive reasoning then does not become a strict logical argumentation to discover useful hypotheses, and the starting point is not existing knowledge. Knowledge is regarded as *relative* and all signs in actions of language viewed as *symbols*. It brings in experience for example worldview, as metaphor it generates new possibilities of understanding, transforms conventional perspectives by challenging it and providing new ways to construct reality, and is an epistemological approach that is part of the postmodernistic paradigm. Abductive reasoning or retroduction involves a process of back-and-forth movement of suggestion checking in which a dynamic reciprocating between premise and outcome may take place (Dreyer 2003:923). The logic in this way of knowing is neither exclusively inductive (from material to hypothesis) nor deductive (from model to material) but includes both in a procedure called abduction. Mouton (see 2001:118-119) describes “retroductive reasoning” or “inference to the best explanation” as another form of inductive inference in which inferences from observations or data are used to construct or infer an explanation of such observations. In practice it means that the researcher reflectively think up an explanation or hypothesis that would explain the observed events. This is done on the basis of the observations made, and the perceived trends and patterns in the observations.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the nineteenth century thinker avoided the danger of empirical one-sidedness in both the deductive and inductive approaches in positivistic epistemology. His non-positivistic approach is called abductive reasoning (Peirce 1957:236-237). Something novel is

associated with something conventional in order to transform conventional practices in a metaphor. Abductive argumentation, according to the New Testament theologian Brawley (2003:605-608), “would begin with a shock, a challenge or a disorientation breaking the frames of conventional thinking and confronting people with a new way to construe reality.” The development from one sign to another in communication can be described as a language action. During this process of communication and symbolic reference, ideas are being transferred because symbols receive meaning while becoming new symbols in the process. Usually it entails an infinite referral process. Signs, imbedded in a bigger network of relations, will refer meaning because the sign as object produces an interpreting or meaningful idea. In the process as meaning is attached to words and ideas or concepts, the development from one sign to another becomes a necessity. Meaning develops as the interpretation of a sign from one network of signs to a sign in another network. The implication of all this being that final interpretation is not possible and that a sign as object can never provide the same meaning for everyone under all circumstances (cf Peirce 1932:136-138, 152-153). According to Fann (1970:4) Peirce insisted upon that the birth of new ideas could never be cleared up satisfactorily by sociological, historical and psychological investigations alone but that philosophers should also conduct logical, conceptual investigation of discovery. Scientists then do not start with hypotheses but start from data and Peirce’s theory of abductive reasoning is concerned with reasoning which starts from the data and then moves towards hypotheses. In explicative inference (analytic or deductive) the conclusion follows from the premises necessarily. In ampliative inference (abductive and inductive), the conclusion does not follow from the premises with necessity. The conclusion amplifies rather than explicates what is stated in the premises.

Abductive reasoning is a means to interrogate and explore or scrutinise theories but not to formulate theories. Although it implies inference like induction, it is more concerned with explanation rather than with a process of description. In *inductive* reasoning, the idea is to move from the sample to the whole. In *abductive* reasoning, there is movement from the whole to an interpretation or explanation. The abductive process is an active and reflexive process (Curt 1994:88). It is active as it assumes that knowledge cannot be derived canonically as with induction and deduction but only in a reconstructive sense by way of interpretations, understandings, and explanations. The “practical craft” (Curt 1994:232) of abductive reasoning explores the possibility of knowledge in a retroductive, reconstructive way that describes the steps that led to the result, giving reasons for adopting a hypothesis. If deduction includes statistical ratios, induction the operation that induces an assent to a proposition already put forward then abductive reasoning covers all the operations by which theories and conceptions are engendered (see Tomas 1957:237-245). It views theological discourse as interaction and as inter narrative consisting of all kinds of statements (not only those of scientists and professionals) which reconstruct the reality of for example spirituality. The nature of the discourse as social constructed practice of persons in the cultural context as well as culture in the persons is approached by way of understandings, interpretations, and explanations. The preliminary product could be in typical postmodernistic sense in-conclusive rather than conclusive (Fann 1970:17-18; cf Dreyer 2003a:328). Abductive reasoning is more concerned with the reasons for adopting a hypothesis and with the development of new ideas. Therefore, deductive reasoning explicates and proves that something must be, inductive reasoning evaluates and shows that something is actually operative, and abductive reasoning merely suggests that something may be or may be not (Fann 1970:51).

### **1.2.3 Meta, Basis, Praxis Theory, and Postmodernism**

The discussion on paradigm theory showed how Western society has moved beyond the modern view dominated by scientific progress and absolute truth claims, to postmodernity as well as the correlating move in science-theory from deductive and inductive to abductive reasoning. Although there is in a postmodern discourse a suspicion towards grand theories of meaning and truth and in the words of Carthledge (2003:249) “a pick-and-mix attitude towards beliefs and values,” there still is room for theory in such a discourse. Theory evolves from an understanding that language and knowledge are thoroughly conditioned by historical contexts and are inter-subjective and not a matter of true assertions about an objective reality out there (cf Riggs 2003:79, 111). Such an approach asks for a dynamic reciprocal and interactive interplay between theory and findings or results in an abductive way. Context theory is not described and viewed as a set of mental constructs that exist independently from their embodiment in the physical, psychological and social structures of life (Anderson 2001:21). Observation, theory, hypothesis, and model could be part of the research journey in a postmodern discourse as long as the researcher stays aware of what is happening and of what he/she is busy doing. It further means that no specific predetermined established categories and norm-models will be chosen also taking into account that in social sciences there are no objective data available and that all data are already arranged in one or other way within the context of institutionalized social structures (cf Habermas 1984:397).

This asks for a self-awareness on behalf of myself as the researcher for example regarding own presuppositions, interests and concerns that may influence the research process and outcome. During this abductive reasoning process hypotheses may be adapted, the data in turn be subjected to hypothesis, and working back and forth between the researcher and researched, also being flexible and adaptable where the

data requires it, rewriting where necessary chapters while doing research and during the process formulating findings rather than final conclusions. A *critical-realist* epistemology approach will be followed which views knowledge as limited and partial. As a relational epistemology (not a detached approach), it functions in a person-centred way within a narrative-laden environment (see Wright 1993:32-46; cf Cartledge 2003:17, 26- 27, 44-45). Thought processes during the epistemological reflection on the action of retreat will be ideological-critical, deconstructive and inclusive while striving towards authentic communication with respect for the interactive input of others as co-researchers. People, concepts, and truths are viewed next to one another on the same level and in constant dialogue with each other to enhance subject-subject communication (Dreyer 2002:930).

The recommendations for or articulation of further research questions will not be imposed within postmodern narrative theory and model. Rather a new story may develop from the interaction between the Jesus-narrative, stories of the research subjects, researchers' own story, and those reading the research paper in a creative way. Within the specific Christian faith communities being part of this research process, the gospel values of Jesus Christ may be what is best for them but Christianity could also be experienced as an open narrative that may or may not break through other narratives (De Pater 1996:201). The aim will be to create the space and atmosphere for co-researchers to tell their stories and "unstories" and listening with respect and attention to it. People's interpretation of reality and the meaning they make of it are socially constructed according to narrative theory with the capacity to shift meanings and change the options available into a new reality or story (Neuger 2001:86-87).

### **1.3 Meta theory**

Meta theory as mental window within which researchers works is the scientific point of departure that practical theology shares with other disciplines. The epistemological reflection will take place within the communicative-theoretical paradigm based upon the science philosophical positions of Gadamer (1991) *Truth and Method*, Ricoeur (1995) *Figuring the sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*) and Habermas (1993) *Na-Metafysisch Denken*.

Firet (1987:260) describes the communicative-theoretical paradigm as follows:

Centraal staat in deze omschrijving het werkwoord handelen; het bijvoeglijk naamwoord communicatief kwalificeert het handelen nader. De woorden in de dienst van het evangelie geven niet alleen het specifieke aandachtsveld van de praktische theologie aan, ze duiden ook het normerende en kritische element in de matrix aan; wat er ten aanzien van communicatief handelen ook te vernemen en te zeggen valt, vanuit de vraag of het strookt met de dienst van het evangelie moet bezien worden of het een bestanddeel van een praktisch-theologische theorie kan worden.

The focus is on the inter-subjectivity of the actions of people within a concrete empirical ecumenical setting. Communicative actions in the living world are viewed as taking place in a subject-subject relationship, on equal footing and with the freedom to create a living world where there is consensus on norms or a shared understanding within a domination free situation. In such an action scientific approach, reality is grounded in an action of communication and part of the fundamental search for meaning and the unlocking of meaning. The scientific theoretical perspective of a hermeneutic or interpretative paradigm that focuses on shared meaning through dialogue within a social context and with a broad understanding of

rationality can provide the opportunity to gather adequate practical knowledge with adequate rationality during the research process (cf Pieterse 1996:11, 132, 143, 151, 152).

I recognize and will make use of the significance of Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy as a postmodern philosophical resource for this research dissertation. The relevance of his focus on praxis, appropriation, experience, application, ideological critique and political philosophy as well as his approach and response to the challenge of pluralism is acknowledged. As a postmodern stance that points away from a pristine, universal, clear cut source of theology apart from interpretation and interpretive communities as well as the emphasis on the significance of texts, Ricoeur's work provides a distinctive postmodern resource for theological reflection (see Stiver 2001:30-31). However, the discourse will not focus primarily on any one foundational support.

### **1.3.1 Hans-Georg Gadamer: Understanding and Self-Understanding**

Heidegger's 1962 work, *Being and Time* contains the provocative insight about human beings or *Dasein* as ontologically and irreducibly hermeneutical, and took hermeneutics from a theory of interpretation in general to being the key to understanding human beings (I am and I am with the others). His insights were taken further by his student Gadamer (cf Stiver 2001:38; Collins & Selina 2001:63). Experience in many ways is unavoidably and inherently hermeneutical and not just one of the various possible behaviours of the subject but the mode of being of *Dasein* itself (Gadamer 1991:xxx). People (and my retreat story) are a kind of story or project that is being written over time and this story is continually being written and revised in the light of experience.

Gadamer took the basic paradigm of interpreting a text and extended it to the universality of hermeneutics. He provides a perspective on the hermeneutical meeting with and experience of historical texts as a way to further understanding and self-understanding. His approach starts with an insider perspective where the researcher is a subject that tries to understand a text and the person behind it from within and where text, horizon, and context are interwoven (Vos 1996:14). The hermeneutical approach has important implications for social sciences as all understanding is seen as a form of communication within historic-situated contexts (Dreyer 2003:315). Gadamer (1982:5-7) emphasizes that understanding emerges through dialogue within a wider context of the historical in which this dialogue occurs. He also underlines the shortcomings of the positivistic method for social sciences and therefore the need for a hermeneutic approach. His main objection against the positivistic inductive and deductive methods was the distance it created between researcher and study object for example keeping a distance from the religious or cultural traditions that shaped the researcher. Therefore, it is not possible to find truth in the tradition through inductive methods with its ideal of objectivism trying to put a distance between the researcher and study objects, or distancing self from cultural and religious contexts and influences. Knowledge and truth are more than scientific testing of knowledge via testing but also part of human experience that may be found in philosophy, art and literature or the deposit of the communication expressions of people. Interpretation of for example art is not something observed at a distance, as scientists saw themselves doing with regard to the physical world. Rather, there is interaction between text and interpreter and the meaning of a text will go beyond its author and interpreter. That is why understanding is not merely a productive but a reproductive activity as well (see Gadamer 1982:101-110).

Gadamer (1982:269) argues that people are formed by tradition that provides presuppositions (which cannot be escaped) that make understanding possible. Tradition offers questions to ask and a foothold to grasp new ideas. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias in order for the text to present itself in all its *otherness* (uniqueness) and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore meanings. People are historical beings who have become conscious of being effectuated by history, and the ontological point is that we cannot avoid the tradition's influence, nor should we strive to do it (Gadamer 1982:300-307). This could be interpreted that he is either uncritical of tradition always favouring it or that either past or present could be favoured keeping in mind that tradition enables both.

Insights within tradition itself are important and can only be discovered through understanding, through interpretation. Understanding is part of people's existence in the world, part of the tradition and appropriation of it. Knowledge and truth are much more than knowledge acquired through method but are also locked into human experience. For Gadamer (1982:xii):

Scientific research is concerned to seek that experience of truth that transcends the sphere of control of scientific method wherever it is to be found, and to enquire into its legitimacy. Hence, the human sciences are joined with modes of experience, which lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.

To acquire knowledge in social sciences, symmetrical interaction between equal participants in communication is necessary with openness to all the different insights and communication, neither manipulative nor regarding one's own viewpoints and communication as better or more important. Thus, understanding has a communicative, dialogical nature and not just another method but always acquired within a tradition, in Gadamer's (1982:230) words: "Understanding is the original character of the being of human life itself." He also affirms the linguistic nature of understanding and the realization that knowledge comes in linguistic form. Gadamer's (1982:378) phrase "being that can be understood is language," emphasizes that human beings and philosophy and theology are irreducibly hermeneutical. Language connects history and the present and truth is discovered by an authentic meeting with the past where present and past are in dialogue in an equal relationship. Language then is the way in which experience is expressed and also the carrier or vehicle of truth (cf Vos 1996:18). Science and knowledge ought to be in an ongoing communication process of discussion about the reality or life worlds that people experience.

Interpretation cannot be done from a distance but as interaction between text or action of retreat and interpreter. There is an ontological relationship between language and reality, between text and interpreter. The text or monastic traditions are not entities wholly within the interpreter's or researcher's control but involve a creative rendering of the text, a process he calls "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 1982:306). Gadamer moved away from an author centred hermeneutics to focusing on the text where the text has a subject matter (*die Sache*) that must be interpreted. The fusion of horizons is not so much between the author and the reader but between the subject matter and the reader. It is a process of understanding in which the interpreter connects his/her horizon of assumptions, culture, and traditions to the horizon of the text in a creative synthesis of for example

researcher and researched. It does not result in an even match between the ancient and modern horizon or that the current horizon floods the ancient one of the text. It is a process of understanding as an ongoing merging (fusion) of the contemporary and the horizon of the tradition and never final. Therefore it is not possible to discover what a text meant via exegesis, afterwards asking what does it mean which is the task of the hermeneutic. It involves a creative interplay from the beginning. Application then is not added after the second stage of hermeneutics but from the discerning of the text-stage all the suppositions and assumptions are involved (Gadamer 1982:307-311). These preconceptions can productively be used in the hermeneutical to-and-fro movement and may be influenced by the tradition or by others. Understanding is never a closed constant final entity but a continuous fusion of the unique present and the horizon of tradition that produces a new bigger horizon. Because hermeneutics is the understanding of the same tradition within a specific situation and always new, it is always also application. Stiver (2001:47-48) describes the interplay of horizons, that cannot be isolated, as an *expanding horizon*. The horizon of the interpreter or reader is expanded in the encounter with another and understands the other horizon through his/hers. A variety of results are possible during this dynamic process. The claims of the text may be rejected but the interpreters' horizon still enlarged in the process. The claims of the text may be accepted, which result in a refiguration of your horizon as interpreter. Alternatively, the claims of the text may be appropriated in a new creative way, modifying the text. However, to be grasped by the ancient text, a synthesis is always involved. There is a relative distinction between the meaning of the text and the appropriation of it. Understanding is always dialogical and involves a back and forth movement between two horizons that are never distinguishable completely (see Gadamer 1982:267, 278, 297-306).

Another outstanding theme in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic is the claim that understanding itself is a form of practical reasoning and practical knowledge what Aristotle called wisdom or phronesis. Gadamer writes (1982:289), "If we relate Aristotle's description of the ethical phenomenon and especially of the virtue of moral knowledge to our investigation, we find that Aristotle's analysis is in fact a kind of model of the problems of hermeneutics." The hermeneutic process aimed at the understanding of a classical text is thus like a moral conversation and concern for application is present from the beginning. Application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co determines it as a whole from the beginning and an essential moment of the hermeneutical experience. Understanding, interpretation, and application are not distinct but intimately related. This proposes a way beyond objectivism and relativation to knowledge based on phronetic or ethical-critical considered judgements. This will not necessarily convince everyone and cannot be fully justified by method. All knowledge then is rooted in practical judgement even natural sciences in their presuppositions. Lyotard (1984:xxiv) refers to "many different language games-a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to institutions-local determinism." Therefore, "exact" sciences will therefore only be "exact" in as far as they are containers of knowledge protected in an artificial way by certain assumptions that in themselves may be considered suspect. In Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, concern with practice guides the hermeneutic process from the beginning; breaking through the theory to practice (text to application) model (see Bernstein 1983:38,174; Stiver 2001:42-43). The practical nature of the hermeneutical process is also accentuated by Gadamer's theory of effective history (cf Gadamer 1982:273-274, 337-341). Events of the past shape present historical consciousness and there is a fusion of the whole of the past with the present. When classic texts of the past are interpreted for example religious texts, these texts are already part of the reader even

before interpretation because the cultural heritage shapes the fore-concepts and prejudices and the practical questions brought to the interpretation process.

Gadamer (1982:5-7) placed rationality within a dialogical model with the emphasis on understanding that rests on the symmetrical relationship in interaction within a historical situation. Existence in the world as well as understanding is dialogical in nature. The practical application of insights that flow from understanding is the result then of a communication process, that presupposes rational consensus (Pieterse 1993:85). The *shortcomings* of his theory is that he is not critical enough of tradition to expose ideologies and power issues in the tradition and that the researcher's presuppositions including myths and narratives do not receive adequate attention (Dreyer 2003a:316). His approach also tends to absolutism of language and tradition (Vos 1996:19). However, *to his credit* he points out that each faith community finds itself within a specific tradition history and should expose itself critically to a tradition that is experienced through texts. Everyone that hears or reads these texts has a life situation in relation to the text or a context or horizon that should be considered with a possibility that the horizon of understanding could shift or enlarge and a fusion of horizons between text and reader may emerge. This consideration is relevant regarding the Benedictine, Franciscan, Taize and Dutch Reformed communities and their texts as well as the researcher's horizon and dialogue with these texts and their horizons. The ancient world cannot be understood except in relation to my horizon and as researcher, I do not have to or cannot *get out of my skin* becoming "objectivistic" in the process. However, the horizon of the researcher can be enlarged in order to understand. It entails an understanding across horizons that Gadamer (1982:292) calls a "miracle of understanding."

Gadamer rejects the positivistic paradigm of “enlightenment” but he is still concerned with the question of truth that arises through dialogical encounter with other traditions. He views the text not merely as an expression of life but to be taken seriously in its claim to truth (Gadamer 1982:297). His philosophy is a challenge to modern and premodern conceptions in his emphasis on the hermeneutical essence of knowledge involving interpretive judgements. These then will flow from the interpreter’s situated ness in history and from his/her presuppositions. He still allows for considered judgements based on evidence and reasons but in a postmodern way considers them to be undetermined by such evidence and reasons (Stiver 2001:53). It is not an embarrassment then for reasonable people to disagree. Furthermore, the influences of presuppositions and traditions are not impediments but also necessary grounds for understanding. Critical judgement means not to try and extricate one self from the human situation to be totally objective but from the horizons that the traditions themselves set in critical dialogue with one another.

### **1.3.2 Paul Ricoeur: Explanation of Existence**

The non-positivistic postmodern “logic” argumentation of Ricoeur is the same as what Charles Peirce (1957), *Essays in the philosophy of science* and Ernest Cassirer (1955), *The Philosophy of symbolic forms*, described as abduction. In such an abductive epistemology, the premise is the relativity of knowledge and the symbolic nature of language. All the signs in language generate constantly new ways of understanding via experience.

#### **1.3.2.1 Text Interpretation**

For Ricoeur hermeneutics is in essence explanation of existence and answers the question of what it means to be a human being from the world of the text? and where “the text is the mediation by which we

understand ourselves” (Ricoeur 1973:141). The explanation of texts is an ongoing process in which meaning is never final, and the process of understanding never stops. Therefore, the dream of a hermeneutical ontology cannot be realised and to be human means to be dependant on ongoing interpretation (Ricoeur 1974:6-24). Although the text hides meaning, it invites the reader to a relationship where it could reveal meaning. Ricoeur functions within a hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition and uses imagination, language, dreams, metaphor, and narrative to shape the process of understanding as a creative event (Ricoeur 1974:160-208). He works with symbols and texts in history combining suspicion and hope in a hermeneutical way that avoids both gullibility and scepticism (White 1991:312).

He rejects a foundational approach emphasising the mayor role of the reader’s presuppositions and that thought flows form pre critical, naïve experience. Symbol gives rise to thought and pre reflective and first order language is filled with symbolic and figurative language that motivates the reader to critical reflection who in turn does not leave primary language behind (Ricoeur 1967:17). Hermeneutics is concerned with expressions in symbol, metaphor and narrative with regard to not only the meaning but also concerning the very being of humanity (Ricoeur 1991:16-19). The model of the text can be used as a paradigm for the interpretation of events and actions, where actions for example monastic retreat become a kind of text for others to interpret in multiple ways and influenced by the various presuppositions and traditions of the interpreters. A broadening of hermeneutics develops with his growing emphasis not only on texts but also on history and human life. Narrative dynamic of plot and character become essential to understand self and history beyond the confines of history. A fusion of horizons is inherently involved in such interpretation in which the interpreter (researcher) cannot leap out of his/her own history into the past but should allow for a fusion of horizons (see Stiver 2001:54-

55). Ricoeur's insights provide a possible way to do justice during research to both horizons in a postmodern context namely the life worlds, presuppositions, traditions, experience of both the researcher and those met on the research-journey.

The focus on the text rather on the author of a text provides a focus and substance that may be easier to grasp or to interpret than the internal experiences or thoughts of an author of the text. Ricoeur (see 1981:131-144) does not only focus like Gadamer on the dimension of *belongingness* or commonality of human experience and tradition that make it possible for horizons to connect at some level, but also on *dissociation* and alienation. His thoughts on this arise especially from the distinction between direct speech and texts or the move from direct speech to writing. The dissociation of the text from the writer opens the way for the text to be seen as projecting a world, which may or may not coincide with the actual, conscious intentions of the author. The emphasis is then not so much on the world behind the text but on the world in front of the text (what was expressed) where interpretation is to explicate the type of being in the world unfolded in front of the text. Self-understanding, appropriation, and self-criticism are mediated through dissociation of the writing from the author. The text is not limited to a specific conscious intention of the author but viewed as a rich or fertile source of interpretation with various possible readings.

This process of understanding asks for a deeper reading of the text and the problem of understanding concerns the situation (context) of the reader/listener (Ricoeur 1973:213-215). Understanding is not merely an attempt by the reader to put him/herself into the shoes of the author of the text but an event between reader and the text itself. It is not an event by which meaning behind the text is sought but it is the events that take place before the text and in interaction with the text (White 1991:317). He sees

text as an autonomous entity apart from its originating background. Understanding and explanation is inter-dependent and interpretation signifies the dialectical relationship between understanding and explanation, and takes place between reader and text. It is a process of giving meaning and appropriating meaning within relationships of texts, things, and interpretation by others (cf Ricoeur 1981:36, 52, 150; 1987:252). Ricoeur's hermeneutical model can also be extended to human action and experience for example retreat and this action already involves meaning and is symbolically mediated (cf Ricoeur 1984:57). The interpretation of an action is as such, a text that asks for its own history of interpretation (Stiver 2001:98). In practice, it means that the action of retreat has many possible interpretations which in turn allows for further ramification and development in research.

### **1.3.2.2 A Hermeneutical Arc**

Ricoeur developed a framework for a threefold process of figuration or mimesis divided into prefiguration (mimesis 1), configuration (mimesis 2) and refiguration (mimesis 3) which he called the hermeneutic arc (see 1985: 52-87, 157-179). Mimesis refers to the transformation of worlds into symbolic worlds that encompasses both practical and theoretical elements. It is a general principle with which to map out a person's understanding of the world and of text (and of the action of retreat): the individual assimilates himself or herself via mimetic processes. Mimesis makes it possible for individuals to step out of themselves, to draw the outer world into the inner world and to lend expression to their interiority. It produces an otherwise unattainable proximity to objects and is thus a necessary condition of understanding (Flick 1998:33). Mimesis is the textual imitation of human actions and reality is being imitated in a narrative way that can make new (Ricoeur 1987:243). Mimesis has to do with the texture of the narrative (cf Dreyer 2003a:326). It denotes the pre-understanding of human action and rearranges these actions in a way to

change the reader's view of his/her actions (cf Vos 1996:31). Ricoeur (1981:180) puts it as follows: "Mimesis is poesis that is construction, creation. " It refers to the pre-understanding of human action and imitates the gods in the ritual, playing out the human condition in the theatre to rewrite in the process actions in the narrative. In the narrative questions and answers of existence emerge and the way to self-understanding is via the story (see Vos 1996:32-33). The aim of hermeneutics is to arrive at refiguration where the reader/listener may reach his or her own story. The hermeneutical arc relates further to the distinction between sense and reference and provides a way to answer questions about plot and context of faith communities and their own narratives for example asking what is behind what people say when they tell the innate story of the group, what do they really say? *Sense* parallels the more critical, analytical mode of thought for example explanation regarding the structure of the text for example code, rules and lexical meaning of ideas | language. *Reference* parallels appropriation where one moves beyond the world of the text opening up a new world in front of the text or how the text depicts reality and the meanings in narrative that refer back to the past or projecting forward in the future. This movement concerning time is possible because of language's symbolic/metaphoric quality. Language as signs is referential in nature and provides the creative potential in narratives (see Ricoeur 1984:77-81; cf Dreyer 2003a:325). Sense in different terminology relates to a semiotic analysis and reference to semantic analysis. His hermeneutical arc as a holistic process of understanding shows a move from a first understanding, then through critical explanation to a second, post critical understanding. The differentiation of Ricoeurs' threefold mimesis should not be segregated into modes of watertight compartments, appropriation for example affects also the configuration of the world of the text (Stiver 2001:64, 72).

- **Prefiguration**

Prefiguration (mimesis 1) refers to the pre-understanding (pre-concepts) a reader/listener/ researcher brings to the text, to the opaque world on which an author draws to write and on which the reader draws to interpret (Ricoeur 1984:53). The self of people acts as an agent and although not written yet, already contains a proto-plot in the prefigured world. Mimesis 1 or prefiguration (pre-conception) is the activity of the author or storyteller in the creation of a text. It is the pre-understanding of what human action is, of its semantics, symbolism, and temporality. From this pre-understanding arises fiction and with fiction comes the second form of mimesis that is textual and literary. This tacit narrative activity of the self or construction of an ongoing narrative (proto-narrative) is possible, although not as a fully coherent outcome, because human action is already articulated by norms, signs and rules or symbolically mediated (Ricoeur 1984:57). The lives of people are not full-blown narratives as such but provide a basis of narratives that in turn help mediate, without eliminating the tensions of time. Tradition constitutes and shape people, which in itself is a kind of story (Stiver 2001:67). Prefiguration of the narrative is that which comes before the text, the reality within which certain acts and experiences take place, which has a narrative structure with symbolic value. The researcher's and the researched have a pre-understanding or story regarding God, retreat and spirituality. The prefiguration implicit in people's lives is an upcoming and developing story that points towards and is being shaped by configuration.

- **Configuration**

Configuration (mimesis 2) draws on this prefigured world, and refers to the author's imaginative construction of the text especially the emplotment and characterization as well as the way a reader construes the narrative world of the text. It is the involvement of the reader/listener and his/her productive imagination or configuration of action and the mimetic

transformation in processing experiences of social or natural environments into texts. These texts may be the everyday narratives recounted for other people in certain documents or in producing texts for research purposes. Such configuration is equally true of history and fiction. At this point, the reader and author artfully order the more chaotic prefigured time into a synthetic whole (Ricoeur 1981:20-26; 1984:68). Stiver (2001:68) questions where critical explanation fits into Ricoeurs' arc as he seems to go beyond the analytical, critical middle moment of explanation in the arc. Then the narrative reading as such by the reader could become a holistic act of reflection that is in it also a creative process. My research journey will aim to be a *narrative reading* of the monastic texts (actions) and a holistic epistemological act of reflection on the investigation (journey).

▪           **Refiguration**

The aim of the hermeneutical process is to reach refiguration where the reader arrives at an innate new story that becomes meaningful by interacting with the stories of other readers (Ricoeur 1981:186). There is more than one possible refiguration of a text as texts have surplus of meaning. A fusion of horizons occurs between the text and an appropriated world in front of the text where the text resembles a musical score lending itself to different realizations (Ricoeur 1984:157-158). Refiguration parallels his earlier use of the terms appropriation and application and refers to a possible world in which the reader may live by being open for the world of the text or a letting go in the process. The point is to move beyond critical explanation to a post-critical stance. The reader receives the self of the text and this new self or uniqueness of the text provides another view of the situation, and may move to action or creation of the new story (see Ricoeur 1981:184-193; cf Stiver 2001:69; Pieterse 2001:81-82).

Narrative hermeneutic is used to determine how memory was shaped in the past with the starting point current practices and the meaning attached to it. *Phronesis* is the next step as reflective action of the researcher that focuses on texts and events in the texts that provide these actions with ideals and norms. The reader/listener becomes part of the narrative, which has the capacity to change the reader. Ricoeur calls this a reflection on the working of mimesis. The mimetic transformation of texts in understanding occurs through processes of interpretation for example mimesis 3. It happens in the everyday understanding of narratives, documents, books etc. as well as in the scientific interpretations of such narratives, research documents, or scientific texts. Mimesis 3 marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. It is presented as the ongoing lifestyle of the listener/reader as a changed life or refiguration (cf Ricoeur 1981:20-26; see Flick 1998:34; Dreyer 2003a:326).

This is part of the process or strategy that I follow in listening to the different retreat stories in the different traditions and the new story that may develop. There is a correlation between the action of storytelling and the temporal nature of human experience. "Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Ricoeur 1984:52). The aim of telling stories and reflection on the story or the involvement with story gives birth to a new future story. The outcome of this research story cannot be determined beforehand and the time framework of the different stories where past and future are combined with the present should be kept in mind constantly. In applying these considerations to qualitative research and to the texts used within the research, the following mimetic elements can be identified (Flick 1998:33):

- The transformation of experience into narratives, reports etc. on the part of the persons being studied,
- the construction of texts on the basis of and in the interpretation of such constructions on the part of the researcher and
- the reading of the presentations of these findings when such interpretations are fed back into everyday contexts.

Ricoeur (1981:203) correlates the methodology of text interpretation and human actions by viewing human action after the analogy of texts. In this way action situations correlate to texts, which are established in writing, and these actions have a lasting form in the structures of socio cultural time or social patterns for example the actions of Benedictine monastic spirituality in the monasteries. These actions as social or religious phenomena function as texts addressed to those who can interpret (read). These then can be interpreted as “documents” and influence those (for example the researcher) who become involved with it (for example retreat) and can be understood differently within different contexts. I agree with Pieterse (1996:88) that Ricoeur’s theory creates the opportunity for empirical research as explanatory, critical dialogue between the researchers’ own context and the context of text perspective within a hermeneutic approach.

### **1.3.2.3 Symbol, Metaphor and Narrative**

#### **▪ Symbol**

The linguistic turn in the twentieth century not only recognized the significance of language for thought but also figurative language as much more than ornamental. Stiver (2001:100) states that figurative language became even of greater significance than non-figurative language especially in religion. This is a challenge to theology’s non-figurative reflections and conclusions on figurative scripture language over the

years! Ricoeur (1967:171-174) was convinced that only symbolic language with its richer texture can describe for example the irrational phenomenon of evil and symbol develops for instance from a more physical description of evil to less physical and more ethical. This also undergirds his view that theology is second order figurative language. The reader cannot exhaust symbol because rich symbols cannot be reduced to literal language. Symbol has rich multi-dimensional semantic meaningfulness, elements of mystery as well as a reminiscence function, is embedded in the psychological, cosmic and linguistic dimensions, and influences the existential selfunderstanding (Ricoeur 1967:347-357; see Ricoeur 1973a:221, 222). Symbols ask to be interpreted in an indirect way, have a concealing function (mystical element) to make readers/listeners think about and ponder on it and lead to understanding (Ricoeur 1967:351). His hermeneutic approach opens up the potential that symbols through a process of creative interpretation may lead to a better self-understanding (cf Vos 1996:34-35). In hermeneutics the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavour to understand by deciphering or critical reflection are therefore interwoven.

- **Metaphor**

Ricoeur (cf 1977:12-24) agrees with the observation of Aristotle that to be master of metaphor is the greatest thing by far and reveals that imaginative judgement is at the heart of his approach. He is part of the movement in the latter part of the twentieth century away from figurative language as merely ornamental, in relation to more straightforward prosaic exposition, to recognizing its central position in language. His interactionist approach in which metaphor involves a sentence or an entire work instead of the substitution of individual terms emphasizes the process in which the literal meaning is replaced with the aim to construct an imaginative new meaning (see Ricoeur 1975:78-79). This approach allows for meaning to be let loose, provoking new insights and meanings that escape the

repertoire of careful hermeneutical control and where the best explication of metaphor may be another metaphor. Explanation in metaphor is one of probability and not positivistic scientific explanation, and concerns the sense aspects or immanent pattern of the discourse (see Stiver 2001:107,109).

▪ **Narrative**

Ricoeur regards narrative in the same way as metaphor not as dispensable and ornamental in serious philosophical discourse, but as necessary and the way in which people story their lives as the framework for understanding human identity and existence (Ricoeur 1984:6). Narratives are not reducible to prosaic paraphrases. Rather, narrative *story* things in a unique way as creative arts of productive imaginations. Therefore, one cannot evaluate or explicate the meaning that narrative conveys about reality in terms of positivistic science. Rather the interpretation of narrative follows the contours of Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc (see Stiver 2001:114-115). Ricoeur (1984:72) suggests regarding the tension of the interplay between chronological and human time, that human beings are inherently shaped by narrative or story shaped, with narrative offering a way of configuring a discordant concordance of time. Narrative is therefore indispensable and central to self-identity and any attempt to deal with the temporality of the self should allow for both continuity and discontinuity because people change. Narrative may function as a mediator between these two poles. People are not absolute authors of totally separate stories in the creation of their stories but at best co-authors with others who are also attempting to do the same. Personal identity exists in interaction with the surrounding society (cf Ricoeur 1992:118, 158-163). The development of identity can thus be described as construction of a life-story or configuration of personal events into a personal life-story including the past, present and anticipated future. This narrative capacity of self as the author is made possible because the self

can reconstruct the past from the present as well as give shape to the future with the self as actor.

A practical theological anthropology is not only concerned with a person or the person or people in general but with a person with a life-story, a person with a past, present and future. Every person has a core narrative around basic life concepts for example work, money, marriage, religion etc. from which new stories are being constructed into new specific situations. The core narratives may function as life maps for the interpretation of experience in the present and as ways of living the past in the present as well as roadmaps for the future (see Müller 1996:22-24; cf Stroup 1981:105-111). Therefore personal identity as primarily an event of interpretation becomes a hermeneutical concept where memory could use certain events from the individual's past to interpret it in terms of the meaning for the whole.

Ricoeur views theology as second order reflection on first-order narratives that should not be indifferent to the historical dimension. Theology may connect to *the* story (biblical story), *your* story, and *my* story (biographies, autobiographies) or to *our* story (the broader cultural narrative in which identities are formed). Ricoeur also manages to set important narrative concerns in a wider framework of philosophy.

#### **1.3.2.4 A Narrative Hermeneutical Approach**

The oscillation between the following opposite or different positions is relevant:

- **History and Fiction**

Referential unity refers to historical unity that addresses itself to events that actually happened or actual deeds in the past as historical reality (documentation and archives). Fictional narrative ignores the burden of

providing evidence of this kind because character, events, situations, plots are imaginary. It has no unity of reference in the structural unity of sense but narrative genre as a whole refers to historicity as a whole – all narratives have in some sense a referential claim. They intersect on the plane of historicity (the form of life that correlates with the language genre of telling) or the historical condition of man for example the hermeneutics of narrative function – basic historicity of human experience. There is a close relationship between the act of telling and the historical experience of which it is part. The narrative's referential component is the meanings in the narrative that refers to the past and projects to the future (see Ricoeur 1981:171-176, 280 - 287; Van den Hengel 1982:188; cf Ricoeur 1984:56). The sense aspect of the narrative refers to the immanent meaning of the narrative and includes the internal system of codes, rules, lexical aspects, and associations within language usage. Fiction and historiography are knitted together closely and both can be viewed as work of the productive imagination, both involving reference to history and a configurative or mimetic element. Ricoeur (1978:177) puts it as follows: "History by opening us to the different opens us to the possible. Fiction by opening us to the unreal opens us to the essential." The dialectical interaction between the story character and historical character of the narrative is important for the process of understanding or making sense of it all. History is not only a description of how it really happened (what was the case) but also the imaginative construct of a historian who represents it in a coherent and rounded form (what could be the case). This refers to the story-character of history. Fiction projects a world in which people might live. In an act of fusion of horizons, people move from the fictional world to relate to their world. He identifies "an interpretation of history and fiction, stemming from the criss-crossing processes of a fictionalization of history and historization of fiction." The complex interplay integrate lived time, chronological and broader historical time into a narrative identity (Ricoeur 1984:246).

On the sense level historical and fictional narrative both share the common form of the story which is prior in the writing of history to a search for laws; at the level of reference, historical narrative refers to events outside the narrative – fictional narratives do not. However, both have an intersecting reference in common for example a reference to history – to the fundamental fact that humans are historical beings that make their own history (see Van den Hengel 1982:134-138). Fictional narrative is never completely free of historical references because it reflects the humaneness and historical living of people in order for them to identify with the story (Dreyer 2003b:347). The value of the fictional dimension of history is its informative character without which it would be only cold clinical facts about what really happened and difficult for people's ideas about the world to relate to. The information thus provided give insight in the worldview of the storyteller. The value of the narrative function is in the historical and fictional working together to make sense of the world and creating opportunities for human action. The aim of narrative hermeneutic is not to judge the stories as true or false on the ground of historical authenticity, but to view their experiences as authentic despite of what may be historically true or false (see Ricoeur 1970:123-141; cf Ricoeur 1978:188; Pambun 2001:287).

There is also structural unity between historical and fiction narrative: in history as narrative, general laws function differently than in natural sciences in that the historian does not establish laws but only employs them (cf Van den Hengel 1982:180). Historical explanation is a discourse with a narrative form and singular statements in configurations that constitute a story. Plot provides the connecting link between historical and functional narrative: the organization of facts or events, successive actions, thoughts and feelings as having particular directedness and the reader is pulled forward by the development and respond with

expectations concerning the outcome (Ricoeur 1978:182). As story, all history is about some mayor achievement or failure of men living and working together and the reading of these histories derive from the reader's competence to follow stories. All narratives combine chronological (sequence) or episodic dimension and non-chronological (pattern), the attempt to grasp together successive events to elicit a configuration. The writer of narrative strives to combine sequence and pattern through reflective judgement. To tell and to follow a story means to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successive wholes. Through narrative art the story and a storyteller becomes related; a relationship between teller and tale and teller and audience develops (essence of narrative art).

History, for example of the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize traditions is more than the unearthing of facts buried in documents which are to speak or simple factual description (a positivistic modern view of history). Modern thought led to dualism of mind versus matter, to a dependence on logic and mathematics apart from inner perceptions, to a mechanistic view of the world and to the domination of nature by humanity. The twentieth century postmodern turn was primarily a linguistic turn (deconstructive, context-orientated) without positing universal assertions about reality. The trend is thus complicated nexuses of meanings that allow people to structure reality and to communicate (see Riggs 2003:66-73). History is an imaginative reconstruction (meta-history) with a great gulf between what actually happened and what is historically known. All knowledge is historically conditioned by the world people inherit and by the involvement in the historical condition with others. Knowledge is inter-subjective and the current meaning of a text which comes through the historically conditioned understanding (interpretation), opens up a new horizon of meaning beyond any authorial intention (Ricoeur 1980:125). The historian does not merely tell a story but makes an entire set of events as a

completed whole into a story; an explanation by emplotment (romance, tragedy, comedy, satire). There is also an explanation via ideology or ethical element in history because the historian has a position in the present world of social practice with all its ideologies (anarchism, conservatism, radicalism, liberalism). The historian seeks to explicate the point of it all within feminist, mechanist, and contextual discursive arguments (Ricoeur 1978:189-190). The events are truly made into a story but are still claiming to be a representation of reality (verification function).

Narrative affirms its relationship with reality through the encounter and mutual interaction between historical narrative and fictional narrative. Meaning is generated in the dialectical exchange between the story-like feature and history-like feature of narrative (Pambrun & Meier 2001:285). On history's side, no historical text consists of a mere description of events as they really occurred but of a selection of events that are ordered or configured, by drawing upon representative or imaginative constructions. Ricoeur (1978:188) invites us to understand and assent to what has happened "as if" – an imaginative reconstruction. It is an act of configuration as dynamic operation to organize events into a completed entity that sustains the structure of the entire storylike feature of history at work. From the side of the fictional dimension no operation of configuration is completely independent of a historical reference (Pambrun 2001:286). Otherwise, the readers cannot identify with the story. The narrative must reflect a familiarity with the historicity of people. For Ricoeur then the value of fiction is its cognitive power, the implicit idea of the world that is much more than positivistic data.

Therefore, to determine then what the faith stories of a community or a tradition are and what comparisons and differences there may be, the narrative strategy proves to be helpful in the going back to the plot and context of their stories to determine what lies behind their group-story,

what does it really say? The *hermeneutical arc* of Ricoeur is a practical way to arrive in a hermeneutic way at refiguration (at reception of the story) or to develop as reader/listener a new personal story. The personal life stories of the researcher and the researched find their meaning in the interaction with the stories of others. This story about the characters deeds, words, and experiences are communicated in such a way by the author that it may change the personal stories of the listeners/readers. The configuration process provides a bridge, between the prefiguration of the emplotment/activity of narration and the process of refiguration. Whilst reading/listening the receiver can create unity in the mimesis process, the texture of the narrative or imitation or representation of the action. It should consist of a reflection by the reader/listener/ researcher on the activities, norms, ideals to which the text refers and being absorbed or pulled in by the narrative. Mimesis one or prefiguration is the creative action of the author, mimesis two is the involvement of the reader/listener or configuration and mimesis three is the changed or new life of the reader or new story, a refiguration (see Ricoeur 1983:46-92; cf Dreyer 2003a:326). The outcome of the research story or new story cannot be identified beforehand but through the involvement of the reader/listener, a new future story might be born (a process of *prefiguration, configuration and refiguration*)

Mimesis as the transformation of worlds into symbolic worlds (practical and theoretical elements) or the creative imitation or representation of action, especially their logical structure and significance, then reenacts the reality of human action according to its essential magnified traits. Fiction is the productive imagination that refers to reality not in order to copy it but to describe a new reading. All symbolic systems make and remake reality. Cognitive import makes reality appears as it actually does. Fiction reorganizes the world in terms of works, works in terms of the world, and describes again what conventional language has already described

(Ricoeur 1984:31-48). Both history and fiction refer to human action; history in compliance with the rules of evidence common to the whole body of science (truth claim) and fiction in claiming to describe again reality according to the symbolic structure of fiction.

▪ **Character in Narrative: Victim and Agent**

Characters have a set of distinctive marks, which allows the re-identification of an individual as being the same and being recognised. The character is the one who performs the action in the narrative. The identity of the character (numerical – finitude perspective and qualitative – uninterrupted continuity or permanence- in- time) is comprehensible through the operation of emplotment transferred to the character. Characters are plots themselves. The character in a story for Ricoeur (1993:147) is not an entity distinct from his/her experiences. As a researcher within such dialectic, one will become one of the characters in the research story and not distinct from your own experiences. The narrative constructs the identity (narrative identity) in constructing that of the story told. The identity of the story makes the identity of the character. Characters can be identified, designated by proper names, and held to be responsible for the actions ascribed to them and as such, they are their authors or victims (Ricoeur 1984:193).

To tell a story is to say who did what and how by spreading out in time the connection between the various viewpoints (joining together of action and character). Stories are about agents and sufferers (victims). The agent considers options open, deliberates, and chooses one of the options contemplated. The agent initiates the processes of modification or conservation. Characters are agents that fulfil certain functions for example helper, subject, and protagonist. Agents are responsible (as determined by the narrator) for the effect of their action. Both *the who* (identifying an agent) and *the why* (the agent's motives) question

regarding the agent are complimentary actions. These processes also affect the victim (sufferer). There is an essential dissymmetry between the one who acts as agent and the one who undergoes and culminates in the violence of the powerful agent. Action are always interaction with others either in the form of cooperation or resistance with the potential of positive change or negative obstruction. The reflective questions regarding monastic traditions and the action of retreat; the *who, why, what, with whom, against whom*, are related and a problem of identity that can mark a return to what is really happening and to the self (Ricoeur 1984:55; Ricoeur 1995:306). To answer these questions, the experiences of people in the present (retreatants, monks) in story form should be taken seriously. The interpretation of the experiences of people may reveal their needs and how they see themselves, as agents or victims. Narratives have the potential to open up new possibilities in the lives of people and the involvement of the listener/reader of these stories opens up possibilities not to be victims in their own life-story but agents in symmetrical subject-subject interaction with others (Dreyer 2003b:349).

### **1.3.3 Jürgen Habermas: A Theory of Practical Intent and Emancipating Interest**

Habermas appropriated Gadamer's approach as a way to fulfil people's interest in public dialogue. He was convinced that Gadamer's approach was to assume meaning and not being critical enough of the deep distortions of knowledge to fulfil the emancipating interest of people. Habermas (see 1985:181-211) is concerned what will happen when one is subjected unconsciously to pernicious ideology or when communication is systematically distorted while the interlocutors are unaware of it. His theory is critical of society in order to accomplish a better and more just society. He emphasises the embeddedness in time of scientific knowledge and the need for a communicative model of rationality. Every positivistic approach, in hermeneutics too, has a hidden knowledge interest for

example a *technical interest* to dominate and by not explicating it, it creates an illusion of objective, value free knowledge. In the process, scientific knowledge could dominate the social process instead of people controlling it. The hermeneutic scientific approach is further lead by a knowledge interest for example a *practical interest* aiming to reach inter-subjective communication. All knowledge is a product of specific interests and humankind should be helped to control future development through goals obtained by communication. (see Habermas 1972:51, 195, 302-304). In the reflection on own interests and by the mutual discussion and formulation of mutual goals, people may determine their own destiny. In the process, society can be freed from the technical and scientific domination that depletes the sources of value and meaningful existence. Reality and the obtaining of scientific knowledge are approached in different ways depending on the knowledge interest involved:

- Firstly, a labour or physical existence focus with technical domination and an empirical analytical approach to reality,
- secondly, a linguistic approach in order to understand and choose the best or appropriate communication actions by inter-subjective consensus and hermeneutical orientation, and
- thirdly, an emancipating knowledge interest, where power imbalances and dependent relations, ought to be corrected through critical self-reflection. In this approach, there is always an interactive relationship between subject and object and between theory and praxis (Habermas 1972:310-324).

A hermeneutic is needed that focuses on the uneven relationships and power imbalance in communication to reach an ideal communication situation that is domination free and that provides symmetry in the fusion of horizons (Habermas 1972:192). Social sciences should lead by *emancipating interest* and hermeneutics complimented with an

*ideological-critical* approach. It entails furthermore a critical self-reflection in order to identify and abolish the obstacles in communication actions for example relationships of power and dependence. The task of hermeneutics should include a critical stance regarding tradition by exposing hidden ideologies when trying to make it meaningful in later contexts. Ideal communication action will take place when there is an unconditional acceptance of one another in the interaction, communication on an equal footing and when aiming for mutual understanding and consensus (Habermas 1982:72-84). The following conditions to prevent pressure or force, should apply:

- discussion without pressure to act/react and the freedom to share arguments freely,
- all partners in the discussion to have equal opportunities in the communication process, and
- all participants free to vent feelings and wishes and with the opportunity to command, to make promises or to be accountable or hold others accountable and to disagree (Habermas 1982:47; 1984:177).

In practice it means that the researcher while investigating in critical stance the “object”, is also critical of his/her own beliefs, ideologies, agenda and stance for instance his/her interests for doing research in a specific way. During the research journey, an interactive relationship between subject and object and theory and praxis will be maintained. The aim will be to reach inter-subjective consensus in a subject-subject relationship about truth, correctness of premises and authenticity of subjective experience. Three spheres of interpretation or areas of reality provide the context for actions of communication to take place in:

- objective reality of things and events (instrumental actions, theoretical discourse),
- social reality of values and norms (strategic practical discourse),
- and the subjective reality of intensions, needs and emotions (communication actions-identity discourse).

The rationality of these actions is found in the argumentative praxis where subjects may articulate themes of claims of validity and either confirm or refute it. In this way the scientific rationality within a communicative-theoretical perspective may be viewed as a communicative-rational learning process where people in the inter-subjective conversation can reach consensus about validity claims. In the process, normative premises as well as subjective experience may be put into words and be discussed (see Habermas 1981:384-385; 1993:65-74).

Within the scope of a theory of practical intent and emancipating interest then it is possible to view scientific-rationality, within a communicative-theoretical perspective, as a communicative-relational learning process. During this process, people in an inter-subjective dialogue relationship may reach consensus about statements of validity, normative premises and subjective experience can scientifically be described and argued. Bernstein (1983:43) summarizes Habermas's theory as follows: "he argued for the necessity of a dialectical synthesis of empirical-analytical science and hermeneutics into a critical theory that has a practical intent and is governed by an emancipating cognitive interest".

#### **1.4 Basis Theory**

Basis theory is fundamental practical theology theories that provide the starting point relevant to this research process opening up new perspectives and directions regarding the research problem. It also provides a framework to understand the communication processes of the

praxis of research, testing, and evaluating it critically it (see Pieterse 1993:51-52, 132-133).

#### **1.4.1 Practical Theology and Theories of Communication**

##### **1.4.1.1 An Existential, Hermeneutical, Dialogical Approach**

Existentialism focuses on the role of shared meaning. Authentic communication and self-actualisation assume an evolving relationship between participants during a communication encounter, that what happens to them during this process, determines the existential significance of the encounter (Jansen & Steinberg 1991:57). The reality of the experience, and actions of people can only be studied adequately by understanding what intentions, values and meaning lie behind it (*Verstehen*). The idea of *Verstehen* or to understand originates with Max Weber (1864-1920) who viewed the primary objective of sociology as understanding because human action is a combination of behaviour and meaning assigned to it. Two forms of understanding are relevant: direct *observational* understanding of the subjective meaning of a given act and *explanatory* or motivational understanding which puts a particular act or action within a sequence of activity that facilitates explanation (Cartledge 2003:79). The researcher is part of social reality as interpretative subject and uses the process of *Verstehen* as method in social sciences and study human actions in order to understand the meaning or sense thereof and especially what meaning the person attach to his/her actions. Understanding as an active process of construction involves the one who understands and is a creative process of invention (see Flick 1998:35; Pieterse 1996:73).

The hermeneutical approach emphasizes the interpretation of messages by people during communication, specifically the messages in communication as a dialogical process within a social context. The subject

and object converse with each other in this interaction process. The social context in which communication takes place is also emphasized (Slabbert 1992:49). There is a suspicion of the object but the object of study does not become the subject in the research process. People seek self-actualisation or for true human existence (meaning). This takes place within a context of dialogical communication as meeting, relationship, and interpretation among people and with God (Pieterse 1996:152-155). During such encounters, relationships may develop between people and between people and God. The world, people and God may be interpreted in a meaningful manner to find authentic existence in a free and responsible way.

Therefore, all understanding will proceed in the form of a dialogue or conversation. In doing research, the researcher's description of monastic retreat, reflecting on it epistemologically, takes place in the form of a conversation. In this dialogue the questions, spirituality, and commitments of the researcher are brought to the monastic traditions under study and in turn the researcher is confronted and questioned by their commitments, spirituality and practices. It is dialogical in the sense of a simultaneous event of all participants in a continuous and ever evolving constitution and exchange of meaning between them. Inter subjectivity; mutual understanding, freedom, and equality are key aspects (cf Jansen & Steinberg 1991:13). Mutual understanding by way of informing and interpretation of ideas and messages is possible as well as achieving consensus between participants. Boundaries may be shifted and horizons enlarged during the process. (see Browning 1991:15). The fundamental tenet according to Pieterse (1990:223-240; cf Pieterse [ed] 1995:57-73) regarding the perspective of dialogical association between people is that their communication is interpersonal; occurs in freedom and on an equal footing; is rational in that it provides good reasons for views and ideas; gives rise to mutual understanding through the exchange, communication

and interpretation of ideas and messages and is essentially existential communication.

Van der Ven (1999:46-49) views hermeneutical work as always concerned with revealing the meaning of texts produced in the past. The construction of a bridge between the past in which the text was created and the present, are necessary resulting in a new text representing a new reading of the old texts. The meaning that is contained in the text itself is uncovered and illuminated from the perspective of the present. This process takes place not without personal involvement or interest for example the reader/listener/ researcher may seek to better understand his/her own existence in the mirror of the text. Two sources are to be considered during this poly form and polyphonic meeting within an ideological-critical paradigm: the religious text from the past containing the reflection of the beliefs of people in the past as well as the present day situation in which the faith of contemporary people finds expression in non-verbal and verbal forms. Authentic communication and self-actualisation takes place in an evolving relationship between the participants in the encounter (Jansen & Steinberg 1991:57). It bridges the time gap between the past and the existential present, it is a dialogue of relationships regarding the relationship of the old text to the old situation and the relationship of the modern text to the contemporary situation. During the dialogue, the existential significance of the encounter is determined and the meaning of the ancient texts may emerge. Such an interpretative interaction and the process of the hermeneutical circle are not only applicable to written texts, but also to the actions of people that can be interpreted in the same way as texts (Ricoeur 1991:20-30). This hermeneutic communicative action as verbal and non-verbal interpretation and communication can be understood as linguistic praxis, praxis-coordination, and praxis-reflection. It provides a framework for empirical research. In linguistic praxis, to speak is to act and it is performed in three

modes: the objective mode that is concerned with truth, the social mode with correctness and the subjective mode with authenticity. In all three modes the speaker's intent is that, the recipients will receive the message and accept it. In this sense, the communication activity is aimed at the establishment and development of understanding, with the hoped-for result of agreement or consensus. In hermeneutic-communicative praxis, people (researcher and researched) reconstruct, reflect and reinterpret their own praxis that comes to the fore in the midst of the hermeneutic-communicative praxis. As Ricoeur (1992:143-168) shows, it is the narrative connection between contemporary actions and those of the past and the future that gives direction and meaning to the communication actions of people in contemporary contexts.

#### **1.4.1.2 Symbolic Interactional Theory**

The empirical starting point of symbolic interactional theory is the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their activities and environments. The focus is on the processes of interaction for example social action characterized by an immediate reciprocal orientation and the investigation of these processes stress the symbolic character of social actions (cf Flick 1998:17). The different ways in which individuals as pilgrims on retreat give meaning to the action and elements of the retreat give, the way they and the researcher give meaning to objects, events and experiences, are the central starting point for the research journey.

Symbolic interactionists view social life as an unfolding process in which the individual interprets his or her environment and acts based on that interpretation. This interaction is based on meanings that are assigned to the world. Social life is expressed primarily through symbols of which language is the most important. Prior to action there is a stage of deliberation or examination about how the situation is defined and how others are perceived to be viewing these actions. The reflective part

concerns how the action will be perceived socially (Cartledge 2003:78-79). The symbolic interactional view of meaning is a process of social interaction and hermeneutical activity that rests on the following premises: Human beings act towards things based on the meanings the things have for them. The meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction that one has with others. These meanings are handled and modified through an interpretative process (see Bryman 1996:55; Blumer 1969:2). The reconstruction of such subjective viewpoints becomes the instrument for analysing social worlds, which in turn means that the researcher is challenged to see the world from the perspective of the research subjects. Participation observation is crucial in this theory although other methods are also used (cf Flick 1998:18; Cartledge 2003:79).

Communication is approached as a dialogical dynamic process focusing on the continuous and ever evolving constitution and exchange of meaning between participants. The sender, message, and recipient are approached in a holistic way as inter human communication (see Pieterse 1996:148). There is shared involvement by the sender and recipient regarding a subject on which they are communicating. During this interaction, the goal is to reach agreement about meaning by using a system of symbols. Within each interaction, there are dynamic variables that may influence the sender and receiver's conceptualisation process (Vos 1995:158). The idea is to mutually deepen and enrich their understanding of the subject. Language or communication via symbols within a shared culture or social context about the same subject may lead to deeper understanding of a subject and to an enrichment of knowledge about the subject.

Three key concepts are relevant here (Vos 1996:174-177; cf Pieterse 1993:153):

- *Society's* role in creating an own self and an organized self through a shared system of symbols or language that is part of a culture. People receive symbols from their life world and create their own worlds by using the symbols. In this way, they are socialised within a social context where inter-subjective, collective rules of behaviour and similarities apply.
  
- *Self* as the core of the process of social comparison, experience of capability, situation, and context and group membership. It involves the internalising of individual experiences as well as the development of self by getting involved with the viewpoint of others. The self has a reflective capability to have inner dialogue by viewing self as an object and to anticipate the response in others. All forms of social interaction begin and end with self and the subjective understanding of reality surrounding the self.
  
- *Consciousness* as a process of self-interaction and part of each social action, especially in problematic situations where alternative potential behaviour is being considered.

#### **1.4.1.3 Narrative Hermeneutic Theory**

Contextualization, locality, and pluralism are important aspects within a narrative paradigm; which in turn are being shaped by contextual experiences within a narrative frame. A Narrative approach provides an inclusive frame of thought to accommodate different theories and to make them operational (Müller 1996:4). Gerkin (1986:54-59) describes practical theology as practical narrative theology and refers to such an approach as narrative hermeneutical. Narrative practical theology is, therefore, an ongoing hermeneutical process within the immediate storied context of ministry. The intention of this process is to transform the human story,

both individual and corporate, in ways that open the future of that story to creative possibilities.

I agree with Crites (1971:291) that the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative. Every new stimulus and sensation, or interpersonal action, consciously or unconsciously are being shaped in a story form through thought processes. Stories are events linked in sequence across time according to a plot. Narrative emphasizes order and sequence. Storying is both linear and instantaneous and incorporates the temporal dimension. Stories exist by virtue of the plotting of the unfolding of events through time (see White & Epston 1990:3-9; cf Morgan 2000:5). The life stories of people are created by linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a period and finding a way of explaining them or making sense of them. People including those met on the research journey give constantly meaning to their experiences while living their lives that shape the plot of the story. They create the stories of their lives by linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a time. People, interpretive in nature, experience events daily, and seek to make it meaningful in story form. Narrative is like a thread that weaves events together, forming a story. Stories can provide a network that may enhance meaning to life or function as epistemological lenses on your personal life or the lives of others. It gives a description of or an explanation for things as they are and as a narrative report, it binds actions, events, and people in a comprehensible pattern or experience (Müller 1996:21). There are many stories occurring simultaneously and different stories may be told about the same event for example retreat. Other events or the interpretations of others as well as my own as researcher, could lead to an alternative story.

“Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a

condition of temporal existence” (Ricoeur 1984:52). The purpose or future of the acts of storytelling and reflection on the story can only be found within the timeframe of the life stories of people. Both the past and the future are connected with the present. Therefore, the outcome or the new life-story as well as the research story cannot be predetermined. It is only through involvement with the story that a new or future story may be born. The plot and context of the story of a faith community or tradition will be investigated in order to listen what is behind that which they say, when they tell the story (ies) or to hear what they are actually saying. Not only the sense of the narrative (immanent meaning) but also the referent of the narrative, the past and future, appropriation as well as semantic analysis is important (Ricoeur 1981:171-176, 280-287; cf Müller 1996:25; Dreyer 2003a:327).

The aim of postmodern narrative hermeneutic is the construction of alternative stories in order to replace unacceptable old ones. The ideological-critical process functions within a deconstructionist perspective that seeks alternative perspectives, stories, practices, and behaviour and relationship patterns (cf Dreyer 2003b:344). Narrative can also be helpful in the understanding of the complex system of codes, signs, and metaphors in cultural institutions or faith communities. It comprises of plot, context or setting and characterisation (ethos, values), reveals their history in story form, and provides an indication of the meanings that the group attaches to events (see Hopewell 1987:103-107). In the narrative, questions and answers of existence come to the fore. The way to self-understanding is through the story.

#### **1.4.1.4 Constructionist, Postmodern Narrative Theory**

In *constructionist, postmodern narrative theory* the observer or researcher of a system or communication action becomes part of it. The researcher is actually becoming involved in a process of constructing a new system.

All descriptions of the research problem are primarily viewed as information of the researcher or observer. What the researcher tells or writes about what was observed or experienced; tell more or just as much about him/her as about the situation or system that was observed. This according to Keeney (1985:120) is then a movement away of observed systems to observing systems. Narrative hermeneutics make use of constructionist and social constructionist models (see Neimeyer 2000:207-242).

*Constructionist theory* tends to focus on experiential exploration of the tacit processes of self-construction, especially within the context of intimate attached relationships. It emphasizes how each person creates personal representations of self and the world, and acquiring the ability to transcend problematic constructions in order to construct things in very different ways. It seeks to gain insight in the way people view the world by means of metaphors through which they give meaning to their lives and is therefore interested in individual self-understanding and self-development (see Meier 2001:394).

*Social constructionist theory* on the other hand emphasizes the social origins of meaning and concentrate on discursive practices as the objects of study, as well as on transformation and critique. What it means to be a person is determined by cultural ways of conversing about personhood. Therefore, this theory focuses on self-understanding and self-development within the social context or the interaction of stories of people with one another. It is a systemic and collaborative approach that encourages equal status between researcher and subjects under study. Gerkin (1991:61) uses the term “participant observer.” Knowledge is not viewed as a psychological construction within the observer/researcher but as a shared construction within an interpreting community. During this process, all participants can take part to construct a new reality or story (Müller

1996:33). The relationship between researcher and all involved in the research journey could also influence the essence and nature of this new story.

*Narrative theory* attempts to bridge constructivist and social constructivist theory positing that people are storytellers by nature. People attempt to organize their experiences into coherent accounts. The life stories may at times become incoherent, oppressive, or circular. The aim in postmodern narrative theory is to assist people in a deconstructive reading of limiting assumptions, resisting oppressive narratives by dominant forms of discourse. In the process, they may become authors of more liberating hopeful stories (Neimeyer & Raskin 2000:6-7). During the research journey, I aim to listen to the stories of individuals and faith communities, to deconstruct master narratives and to construct authentic narratives. Postmodernist theory makes one aware of the linguistic cultural and social structuring of human experience. However, when overemphasizing it, the self may be engulfed or annihilated in the process. Therefore, the reflexive ability of the people participating in the research, their potential as purposive agents as well as what is happening within them during discourse will also be maintained.

*Postmodernistic theory* challenges hierarchy and the dominance of value-assessments of people as a form of deconstructive criticism. It displaces terminology and concepts from the context in which they are normally used and is ideological-critical, inclusive of the contributions of other viewpoints and acknowledges pluralism as a reality of life. The focus is on the symmetrical interaction between people as important persons and co-subjects in research. Thus there is no one and only or “final truth” (modernistic) to be discovered by a “rational” subject (researcher) but rather various, sometimes suppressed discourses and different perspectives on the whole. Communication becomes not so much a

subject-object process but rather an interaction- process between co-subjects (see Pare 1995:3-7). On the research journey, they are participants together with the researcher who is not the only expert with all the knowledge or truth about a phenomenon anymore. This social constructive approach of inter subjectivity with a consensual type of knowledge where the dialogical participation of all is valued has the potential to construct a new reality together. The researcher is not only in a critical stance regarding the “object” but becomes also suspicious in a self-critical way. Both the researcher and the characters are involved in the active process of story development and interpretation. The reflection on the stories of all involved, may eventually become a new writing or own story of the research process with new possibilities not ending with a conclusion but with an open ending as a text which may become the preface to another text for others that wish to do further research. Reflexive practice or hermeneutical-communicative actions of the researcher (see Van der Ven 1998:9) are relevant to the research of the problem statement stated. The description of the facts or situation during research is but only one aspect of a much more complex approach to reality where experiential, experimental, transformational, conceptual, and moral aspects will play a major part too.

I have certain expectations of the research journey as well as different experiences of my own and those of others that will be analysed, formulating findings and making choices during the whole process. Reflection (cf Van der Ven 1989:11) typical of self in the form of self-dialogue or internal dialogue with different selves is not action independent of the practice of research but part of the whole process where the researcher becomes interpretive subject and interpreted object. The topic of monastic retreat will not be approached merely as an object to be experimented on but implicitly as an experiment in itself, the researcher reflecting in the form of strategies, analysis, guidelines, and

evaluation. The epistemological reflection of the researcher on the investigation will be part of the process of knowledge production. Dreyer (1998:24) therefore emphasizes the role of the researcher as interpretive subject and object. The challenge will be to remain reflexive regarding his/her theological presuppositions because different ecclesiological perspectives may lead to different interpretations of empirical data and to different proposals of action.

#### **1.4.1.5 Myth Theory**

Myths as exemplary stories express peoples' beliefs and ways of thinking. The usual context of myth is ritual and myth provides the ideological content of sacred behaviour. Nijk (1968:272) views myth formation as secondary and as a continuation in language of the original ritual.

Ritual is described in detail under heading 1.5.3 and Rite of Passage ritual in chapter five as necessary background for the understanding of myth theory. Myth theory in turn forms the basis for observing, explaining, and understanding of the mystic aspects of monastic traditions.

The distinctive feature of a religious sign system is the combination of myths, rites, and ethics (Theissen 1999:2; cf Stoltz 1988:79-147). Myths function on an unconscious level and manifest in narrative form. It expresses people's beliefs and way of thinking. Social behaviour and interaction can be explained by identifying their mythical roots (cf Malinowski 1971:11-35; Bolle 1987:261). Rosemary Radford Ruether (1993:8) says the following:

Myths in the sense of exemplary stories are not illegitimate, and history is never completely objective, but is always a selection and interpretation of the past to make meaning for the present. But this does not mean that there can be no historical knowledge apart from subjective

wishes, nor that myth does not need to be examined for its spiritual and ethical values.

Rites are cultural forms and recurrent patterns of behaviour and social activities that interrupt daily life. In this way, the sacred becomes present in the mundane. This sacral reality represents another reality, an alter state of consciousness or mythical narrative of someone's life. Rites consist of ritual formulae that interpret the mythical narrative (cf Lang 1988:442; Theissen 1999:3). Rites like all forms of religious sign language represent a specific ethical consciousness (cf Theissen 1999:4).

In the middle Ages in the Catholic tradition, ritual became the focal point (ritualism) at the expense of the bible (myth). This in turn led to a reaction during the Reformation to accentuate the bible (intellectualism) at the expense of ritual. Lukken (1999:57) accentuates the integral corporeality as source of ritual to counteract the danger of dogmatism. Ritual carries a spiritual act or a creative act of the past (*Urzeit*) into the reality of the present, and the ritual drama supersedes the everyday reality with the potential of influencing this reality and those part of it (Dreyer 2003:320). As symbolic action, another function of ritual is to bring people in contact with a deeper (spiritual) reality and to create an opportunity to have an intense experience of the Mystery and transcendental or ultimate reality. Ritual transforms, mediates, orders space and time, marks transition periods. It has ethical, therapeutic, expressive, and “exorcising” dimensions. As social or religious drama, it embodies the memories, vision and ethos of a community or group.

In order to describe, explain and understand the systems of signs, codes and metaphors of for example mystic traditions (or other cultural or church groups), narrative provides an important way of understanding (Hopewell 1987:103-107). Narrative refers to the group's history as well as the

meanings they attach to the events. Myths show how godly powers and figures from the past for example St. Benedict, St. Francis, or Br. Roger became role models for their followers. Their actions become the model for the thinking and behaviour of others. The value patterns of a group or the characterisation in the narrative develop from the implicit myth of the group (Hopewell 1987:107-111). The latent myth is the sacred stories of people (the group) and the deep-seated myths behind the stories for example the sacred myth (foundational myth) of the monastic and Dutch Reformed traditions is the Jesus-narrative. These shape the experiences of people about themselves and their life world. What people share with others about their experiences of the world are the stories of their lives (see Crites 1971:296). Crites (1971: 295) describes the function of myth in this regard as follows: “they orient the life of people through time, their lifetime, their individual and corporate experiences and their sense of style, to the great powers that establish the reality of their world.” Myths tell a story or stories about people and their inner, psychological, and associative spiritual experiences in picture language and represent the life and wisdom of a group of people or tradition over millenniums (cf Campbell 1972:13). Therefore, myth theory could provide a cognitive basis for practical models of for example monastic behaviour. Scientific findings, which relate more to the outside world, cannot displace these myths.

(Honko 1984:49-51) describes myth theory via the criteria of form, content, function, and context:

➤ The *form* of myth

The form of Myth is a narrative about the origins of that which are holy where mythical prototypes or ancient figures function as role models, and creation- and foundational events are expressed in narrative form. Myth as narrative is different from myth as history because of the role of memory in

narratives. Memory is life carried by living people and in permanent evolution between dialectics of remembrance and amnesia and may remain latent for a long time to suddenly revive again and is part of the own era as a living link with the eternal present. Myths may be expressed in literary or narrated form, in dance, prayer, icons and symbols or thoughts, behaviour and dreams.

➤ The *content* of myth

The content of myth varies, for example: theogony, cosmological, cosmogony, anthropological, ancestral, cultic, saving, or revelation, *jenseits* and end time myths. Cosmological or creation myth gives authority in religions or faith communities to narratives about how the tradition or religious practices originated.

➤ The *function* of myth

Myth functions as a model for human activity and show how godly figures or powers from the past become role models for following generations. For example, the activities and teachings of St. Francis provided a cognitive basis for a practical behavioural model for the Franciscans.

➤ The *context* of myth

The context is usually ritualistic as patterns of behaviour sanctioned by usage thereof for example the rituals in Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize spirituality during liturgy and prayer times during the day. The ancient rule of St Benedict becomes ritual drama in the present influencing the lives of its followers. The role of the latent foundational myths in narrative form and story content of a new beginning provide a practical model for everyday behaviour for instance in monasteries. When the researcher describes or explains the faith communities it will be rational-analytical as well as against the background of the narrative and mythical character of the faith communities and spiritualities. Myths tell in picture

language of powers and wisdom that have remained through thousands of years. Behind myths as symbolic manifestations are universal archetypes that also make its ultimate core of meaning relative in interpretation. The meaning that myth conveys is the meanings of the followers whose myths they are and must be translated into their language. Myths are an important part of an *associative spirituality* for example monasticism in which mystical elements or the mystery of God and experiencing the transcendental through silence and meditation, are practiced. However, not in a *disassociate spirituality* for example Dutch Reformed tradition where dogma, logic and rational aspects are more important than in an *associate monastic context*. Both are relevant and inclusive because it is about the presence and experience of God although in different ways.

The history of Jesus of Nazareth is the foundational narrative or implicit myth of Christian spirituality that arose in communities in response to that history. The goal is then to test and evaluate the past, present and future of the tradition/community/spirituality according to its implicit myth by going back to the plot and context of their story and asking: “what lies behind what people say when they convey the own story of the group and what do they really or actually say” (Dreyer 2003a:324-325)?

#### **1.4.2 Truth, Perspective on the Bible and Epistemology**

Two relevant questions regarding the nature of truth and reality are: how do we know what we know and how do we justify what we believe to others? Cartledge (2003:41-45) describe three relevant theoretical frameworks for the understanding of the nature of truth in relation to claims of human knowledge:

- *Correspondence* theory claims that what is said about the world as true depends on how the world is. The concern here is whether a belief or proposition is either in correspondence with reality or

facts. Truth is viewed as mind-independent and relates to propositions that are asserted in relation to external reality.

- *Coherence* theory is more concerned whether a belief or proposition is in coherence with other beliefs, propositions, or statements of truth as well as truth as a contingent creation of language expressed in a culturally mediated way.
- *Pragmatist* theory's concern is whether a belief or proposition is useful to people as a necessary and/or sufficient condition for being true. Truth must be understood in terms of practice or as in postmodern discourse in terms of its function as a tool for achieving certain ends where true assumptions provoke actions that lead to desirable results.

According to Kirkham (1992:22) Charles Sanders Peirce (1957) understood truth as settled habits of action by the community. The community is constantly enquiring and could eventually converge on truth but until then all truth claims and beliefs are viewed as criticisable and fallible. The only propositions everyone would be expected to agree upon are those that reflect object reality. Peirce's pragmatist theory is based upon a correspondence theory (see Kirkham 1992:83-84).

Wright (1993:32-41) suggests a critical-realist epistemology that combines elements of all three theories. In critical realism, knowledge is viewed as partial, limited and may need to be revised in the light of external reality and acknowledged incoherence. It is not a detached but a relational epistemology functioning within a narrative-laden world. Knowledge then could progress via revision and "true" knowledge could make a difference on practical levels. During the research journey, perceptions of the present reality of mystic traditions and retreat, memories of past experiences as

well as the different stories of reality of scholars and monastic communities provide data upon which to make informed judgements. Consciousness and reason may provide sources for frameworks and concepts tested via empirical data collected.

Gods' truth is revealed in praxis, through the structures of reality by which Gods' actions and presence are disclosed through people's actions to reveal the truth. Revelation is not an isolated individual experience but a participation in tradition from a particular perspective or a tradition dependent, cultural, and linguistic phenomenon of a religious community. Within such a context, ecclesial praxis functions as a dynamic human process of critical reflection. Religion becomes the interpretive scheme that embodies myths, narratives, and rituals and which gives structure to human experience and understanding of the world. These practices and rituals provide information for interpretive frameworks and are regulated by those that form a Christian community with common beliefs and values (Anderson 2003:50-52). The community defines acceptable practice; experience and doctrine based upon its coherence with their linguistic cultural usage of the bible to resource and legitimise contemporary religious practice (cf Lindbeck 1984:112). Truth as experience and experience of God, although important, are embedded in the narratives, in the symbols and practices of these communities. Knowledge therefore is concrete and real within the framework of practices within the faith community (see Shuman 1997:215-217).

The bible as the "property" or faith documents of these communities offers interpretations based upon practice and provides a basis and interpretive framework or symbolic universe from which reality may be understood. It also provides an opportunity for people of the community to make it their own story (Cartledge 2003:49). Therefore, the truth of the bible or the truth of Gods' word is not something to be extracted by the human mind, to be

possessed as a formula or doctrine without regard to its purpose of bringing people into the truth. Gods' truth does not end with the community's concept of truth, neither does reason become the criterion for what is true, God is the authority for what is true of God. God and not the bible is the primary authority of faith communities of which the bible serve as witness.

To try to formulate a word of God as sheer objectification of truth detached from His being is according to Anderson (2003:53) idolatry that may come under human control as subjectivism of the worst kind. Rather, the bible is not merely a product made by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but continues to be a form of Christ-praxis (continued work of God in the risen Christ through the Spirit) that provides a basis for the life of the church. The fact that God reveals Godself in the texts of the bible cannot be proven but can only be believed. The church as community engages in the hermeneutical task of interpreting the Word of Christ in the context of the Work of Christ. A concept like "the truth" written out into permanent formulas does not exist. The bible contains the testimony of people about their meetings with God and about the truth that they heard from God which is temporary in character (cf Loader 1996:575-576, 579-586). These testimonies proclaim propositions about the truth and by listening to/reading these propositions the reader may be led to an encounter with God. God reveals truth in this encounter with people. In the process, the bible becomes word of God anew (Malan 2001:638). Immanuel Kant (1984:180-191) emphasised that the only way to speak or reflect about God during such an encounter, is in an analogical way, and using metaphorical language. Reason and senses know and experience the *phenomenon* (or "*Erscheinung*") and not the *noumenon* (the "*Ding an sich*"). God becomes in this sense only accessible as potential *noumenon* of which reason may have some idea of, but whom nor reason nor sense

can confirm (Malan 2001:636). The *noumenon* in monastic mystic traditions refers to the Mystery of God.

Du Toit (see 2000:92) discusses three factors to be taken into account with regard to the bible message and in the discussion about what the faith community believes about the bible. These are the bible as a pre-scientific or premodern document, the tradition as way in which the church or Christian community previously thought about it for example in dogma and an acceptance of and sensitivity for the current context (inter-scientific) as life- world of people. Since Kant, a different approach to the mythological texts of the New Testament developed for example Bultmann's demythologizing proposal (see Malan 1998:4-5) as well as the deconstructive reading of the text (cf Van Aarde 1996:460-461).

The revelation positivism of for example Bavinck (1956:95) in the Protestant tradition, where knowledge of revelation is viewed as the deeds of God in history available through the bible and in which revelation preceded the recording of the text, has been relativised by relational reasoning. During the history of the epistemology, relativation began with the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. Lauster (2004:264-265) as postmodern thinker, describes the essence of Barth's perspective on the bible as "Gottes wort ist Gott selbst in der heiligen Schrift" (Lauster 2004:264). The bible is both human word (fallible) and word of God. The bible as human word or text is a sincere testimony about God and of revelation. The bible as word of God is God in the bible. The testimony points in essence beyond it to an excelling, more superior Authority (point of reference) or God. The bible is a testimony of the revelation; it has no self-verification or authentication within itself but does have a revelatory character. The bible is not the revelation as such but a witness/testimony of or narratives about people within a historical-cultural context regarding the presence and mystery of God and therefore not a compilation of

rounded off truths about faith. It contains analogical metaphoric faith-language and is a dynamic action of revelation history (Van Aarde 1995:42). Instead of a choice for relativation in which anything becomes acceptable, Van Aarde (1999:457) uses the term *deconstruction* that refers more to analytical construction than negative destruction. The bible tells the story of Gods' involvement with the reality of human existence and does not deliver clinical always accepted, objective truth that are not part of the context. It is not so much the words as such that are inspired by the Holy Spirit but the message, big lines, stages or the essence of Gods' self revelation. The authority of the bible is located in the Christ of Scripture as the word of God and not in the bible as a product of holy inspiration that could be detached from Christ. Truth is relational within the relation and interaction between insight, knowledge and experience where interpretation plays a major role (see Van Huyssteen & Du Toit 1989:4-10; 24-26; cf Britz 2002: 359; König 2002:145; Anderson 2003:56).

Truth then is regarded as a relational process and a listening process to the bible and its message within its context and the context of the reader in relation with Jesus Christ, and not an objectivistic or a subjectivist action. Truth is not something outside of the listener but dialogical in the sense that the truth of scripture comes to the reader and the reader(s) come towards scripture (Heyns 1976:34). Stroup (1981:91) puts it as follows: "The narrative of Christian confession or autobiography emerges from the collision between individuals and their personal identity narratives and the Christian community and its narratives." Historical truth is foremost faith-related where the facts of history are experienced in faith and revealed as confessions or faith-truths. New insights are always possible and understanding calls for interpretation that is to discover, translate, apply, and live the relational truth in a relational sense. It does not mean that truth should be abstracted from personal knowledge and faith nor that personal faith can be detached from Gods' own being and

word. Furthermore, it is not the theological reflection as such that leads to new revelation but because God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scripture is the normative truth of that revelation. However, theological reflection should take note of the presence of the One who is revealed in his continuing ministry to the world through the Holy Spirit. Scripture continues to be a specific form of Christ-praxis providing a normative basis for the church. The authority of the bible and faith in Jesus Christ as saviour cannot be separated; faith comes first, and then follows “authority” of the bible (see Anderson 2003:55-56; cf Britz 2002:259).

## **1.5 Praxis Theory**

### **1.5.1 Practical Theology: A Praxis Orientation**

Theology is practical in nature, Catholics with the legacy of Aquinas (focus on speculative, philosophical nature of theology), and Protestants with the legacy of Augustine (focus on theology as *scientia practica*) reached consensus on this issue during the second half of the previous century (Polman 1957:520; see Van der Ven 1990:39). The older model of practical theology as merely the application of biblical and systematic theology has been challenged significantly. Pannenberg (1973:439) viewed theology as completely practical but then with church practice as its specific object. Praxis according to Pieterse (1993:41) relates to the experience and knowledge of *Gods' presence* in the *world*. The (“exclusive”) orientations regarding the praxis (or “object”) of practical theology, for example either the pastor/priest or the congregation/parish or both had broadened since the sixties to *include* the context of society (Van der Ven 1990:40; see Pieterse 1993:42).

The move in practical theology to a praxis orientation can further be explained by the postmodern shift in culture from modernity especially in

the West but also from the perspective of liberation theology that have stressed that truth is not something abstract or remote but something that is done, it is truth in action or orthopraxy (see Phan 2000:4-63). This shift to praxis or value laden action arises out of the concrete realities of poverty and oppression in third world countries. Contemporary political theology sees itself as practical fundamental theology and Latin American liberation theology applies the three steps of praxis: seeing, judging, and acting (cf Van der Ven 1993:34). In postmodernity, the focus is on experience as prime mediator of truth and reality and on the local narrative rather than universality or meta narratives (Cartledge 2001:17).

The object of practical theology is the communicative praxis of the faith-community at the service of the gospel in the context of the contemporary society. These faith communities are part of society and influence one another. Theory in practical theology means theological theory derived from the understanding of the gospel in tradition as well as from insights from current social science theories and from scientific insights of practical theology (Pieterse 1996:171-172; cf Van der Ven 1993:9). Praxis according to Cartledge (2003:249) is value laden activity, conscious or unconscious, explicit, or implicit in which a mixture of beliefs and practices intertwine. Praxis therefore is not the same as mere practice but refers to a particular action, saturated with meaning, value directed, and theory laden, reflective on the means and ends thereof and in which truth is not merely applied or practiced but also *discovered*. The praxis-concept includes the actions of the pastor/priest, congregation/parish, as well as actions of individual Christians and Christians in groups in society and spirituality in church, religion, and society. Van der Ven (1990:44) describes praxis as “koordinatensystem der Gesellschaft, des Christentums und der kirche.” Pieterse (1993:43) refers to Mette (1978) and Zeffass (1988) stressing that praxis is not about action alone but includes existential aspects for example meditation, prayer, relationships, and

mystical encounters etc. Praxis is action generated by practical knowledge through which the church community lives out its beliefs (see Anderson 2001:47-49). It is reflective practice aiming at the transformation of the current situation. Theory and practice are linked; both can only develop when current practice is changeable or historically determined as well as both being reciprocally critical of the other (cf Pieterse 1996:172-173). There is a bipolar tension relationship between theory and practice with creative critical interaction during the research journey. An integrated circular model of working back and forth between theory and practice is followed. The research dissertation avoids a dualistic approach of theory-formulation applied to empirical work, striving for a bipolar tension relationship between theory and practice (Zerfass 1988:40). Praxis one has its theoretical origin in theological tradition or theological understanding of the research praxis, which is analysed in its concepts. Then through empirical investigation follows an analysis of the situation (social scientific insights). The results of the situation analysis interact with the reflective thought processes of the researcher. This process in turn will be enriched by theological and epistemological reflection in the current context. In certain scenarios, the whole process can lead to a development of practice theory leading to a new modified praxis two.

### **1.5.2 Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach**

For practical theology with its orientation of engaging with real people in real social contexts, the need to use empirical approaches is fundamental to the discipline. Although theoretical and abstract discussions are also essential, they are primarily used in relation to concrete and empirical studies of people (Cartledge 2003:11). Next to historical, hermeneutical, ideology-critical, linguistic, and metaphor-analytical methodologies, the empirical approach is also very relevant for practical theology. Theology is an empirical discipline that aims to explore, describe, and test theological ideas within a specific context with the direct object thereof; the faith and

practices of people concerned. Practical theology needs a sound and clear methodology to fulfil its task of reflecting on the people's praxis from the viewpoint of Gods' revelatory practice in a way that is as scientific as possible. The social sciences are helpful to enhance this enterprise and theology is dependent upon these disciplines within practical theology. Theology gathers in itself the appropriate methods and techniques to facilitate this development, the overall framework of thought then is theology, and the hypotheses to be tested theologically (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:323-326). Empirical investigation is done through dissociation, objectification, description, exploration, and explanation.

The term *empiric* signifies the daily process of peoples' experience in interaction with their environment. It progresses within a cycle of observation and impact of the environment on a person, experiencing the environment by testing or trying it out and evaluating if the environment changed because of the action of the person. In empirical science, this process develops in a systematic and controlled way. The experience of the environment for example monastic retreat, especially the trying-out part of the process is examined, described, tested, and explained. It may include according to Pieterse (1993:31-33) the following: presumptions regarding knowledge of the relations and processes in the environment, expectations or the derivations from the presumption that certain actions will have certain effects, as well as testing or evaluation as investigation of the correctness of the expectation.

A relevant question asked and discussed by Van der Ven (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:326-330; cf Van der Ven 1993:101) is whether practical theology should be considered mono, multi, inter or intradisciplinary in an empirical approach:

- *Mono-disciplinary* refers to the application of theology, for example ideas drawn from systematic or historical theology to a concrete situation in a normative-deductive way.
- *Multi-disciplinary* refers to a two-phase approach in a series of monologues where an empirical description by a social scientist is followed by theological reflection. For example, a theologian works with a social scientist in order to get enough valid and reliable empirical information. In the process, theological enterprise could become very dependent upon the social science analysis of the present situation as well as the theories of social science.
- *Inter-disciplinary* refers to the interaction between the social sciences and theology and stresses reciprocity and a number of co-operative parallel dialogues. This approach could put pressure on the researcher because it requires legitimating by both theology and the social sciences. In establishing a dialogue with the present-day social sciences, theology then could enter into an unequal balance of power because the social sciences do not need theology in order to practice their discipline, whereas for practical theology, at least within the inter-disciplinary version, this cooperation with social sciences is essential.
- *Intra-disciplinary* refers to the requirement that theology in itself becomes empirical, that is, that it expands its traditional range of instruments, consisting of literary-historical and systematic methods and techniques, in the direction of an empirical theology. The term intra-disciplinary in the general epistemological sense refers to the borrowing of concepts, methods and techniques of one science by another and the integration of these elements into the other science.

In this research journey, an intra disciplinary approach will be followed. The history of theology is an example of intra disciplinary borrowing; adaptation and integration (see Van der Ven 1990:101). There is no standard approach as to how theological insights should be applied in practice and the research problem will determine if other social sciences will be used or to work together with other disciplines on the same problem. Because this study is approached in an intra-disciplinary way, it implies that a more empirical stance is taken accompanied by empirical methodology.

Hermeneutics establishes a framework within which this research journey is conducted and my empirical approach takes into account the following main hermeneutical principles (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:331-332):

- The research problem will be studied from the researcher's own prejudices and being conscious of it during the meeting with the otherness of the text, human actions or the data under investigation.
- The researcher participates in the life of the fellow human beings and their world whose praxis is under study and may be influenced by it or also influences this world.
- The researcher relates to the time perspective that guides hermeneutic investigation. The history of the texts or of the persons under study is investigated because it influences the life of the researcher and of others. It can function as tradition, which bridges the gap between past and present and from there, anticipates again the future.
- The researcher stays aware of the fact that people's lives cannot be studied in a vacuum or island but in the religious, ecological, economic, political, social, and cultural multi-dimensional context.

- The researcher maintains a hermeneutic of suspicion in which the thoughts, praxis, and feelings of the subjects under investigation as well as his/her own are explored and also explained from an ideological-critical stance.

## **1.6 A Social Constructionist Model**

The social constructionist model provides questions, pointers and directions for enquiry that might if pursued, lead to a better understanding of the domain under investigation. It suggests new focal points for the research by strongly emphasizing certain relations and dimensions (Mouton 1990:144). It simplifies and systematizes the research domain by positing certain assumptions. It also provides a universe of discourse or way of talking about certain structural and behavioural aspects of the phenomena under investigation (defining it).

### **1.6.1 Researcher and Co-Researchers: A Narrative Journey**

A narrative approach to the research question will be implemented where people are viewed as subjects and co-researchers with their stories part of the research process. The framework of thinking is shaped by experiences with a narrative form characterised by contextualising, locality, and pluralism. The researcher moves from the known to the unknown by means of analogy or by the projection of a narrative about what is known (Brueggeman 1993:8-9; Gerkin 1986:53). Conscious or unconscious thought frameworks or paradigms through which the surrounding world is scientifically reviewed, determine this process. Such an approach is much more inclusive and refers to the whole eco system in which communication-processes progress where narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative. A research model of narrative involvement will evolve from an eco hermeneutical (holistic) perspective where the focus is on the understanding of the whole of the context within different contexts and the researcher is drawn into the meaningful whole as a virtual reality

experience. The aim of the holistic non-exclusive approach is to minimize the dangers of excessive selectivity in the collection of data and allow for more clarity in the contextual contributions to its analysis. As researcher, I will position myself within the social constructionist (postmodern) paradigm where the focus is on epistemology and concepts as meaning, interpretation, and intersubjectivity of knowledge. Not so much then the ontological world is the focal point but rather the world of experience, the world we can know (cf Bruner 1987:15; Müller 1996:14, 80). Therefore the people involved in the research within the framework of monastic retreat are approached as interpretive communities of storytelling cultures and research participants or in a sense also co-researchers. It relates to what Gerkin (1986:54) describes as practical narrative theology, “an ongoing hermeneutical process within the immediate storied context of ministry.” The intention of this process is the transformation of the human story, both individual and corporate, in ways that open the future of that story to creative possibilities.

The researcher and other subjects in the research process may become co-constructors of a shared reality (retreat). Understanding then can become a narrative process, which gathers momentum within the occurrence of involvement. To understand, the researcher needs the story because it shows relationships and put it within a wider understandable context. The relationships between author, storyteller, and implicit reader/listener, meant reader/listener, characters, time and place will be examined. The whole idea is to experience the context via involvement and to listen intently and respectfully to the stories of all involved as well as the un- story, that which is not being told (see Laird 1989:427-450; Müller 1996:25). The communication between storyteller via characters addressed to readers/listeners in the text can be described in Ricoeurs’ (1995:190) words as: “someone speaks, someone speaks to me in the text, someone addresses himself or herself to me, a voice, which is of

course an instance of the text...the speaking in the writing is the new voice, the narration of the narrative". By analysing the narrative point of view of the storyteller and how the characters are portrayed in the literature review as well as listening to the stories of retreatants, the ideological perspective of the narrator (how the world is viewed and evaluated) could be revealed. The process of understanding and interpretation (hermeneutics) will not occur or start after the completion of the empirical investigation. It is a process, taking place continually by reflecting on and interpreting the social context of monastic retreat and formative spirituality and its conventions, ethos and identity. The focus is on the reconstruction of the relevant constructs of what it means to be a human being and not on a researcher who as a specialist may gain normative knowledge in order to find the one and only truth or answer.

Both theoretical knowledge and experiential knowledge are relevant within a networking structure where the researcher assists with the birth of the new story that is being discovered together. In this process, the researcher should be open and receptive to recontextualising thought processes. The researcher's own self-understanding is important too; who he/she is, whom he/she belongs to, where he/she is now and where he/she comes from. The own context of the researcher, which is part of identity, will influence the listening process during research. As participant observer of different retreats within different traditions, a social constructionist view of knowledge means that knowledge is a shared construct within an interpretive society or a communal textual interpretation. Language and semantics become the way in which meaning is shared and applied which in turn leads again to the act of story creating (cf Müller 1996:81). Narration emphasises the inter-subjective knowledge of interpretive societies or storytelling cultures where cultural and individual experiences are put within an understandable framework through the process of narration. It involves, says Gerkin (1984:45), "the

opening up of our understanding to admit the intrusion of the world of the other in the hope and expectation that something truly new may be shared in the encounter.” It is an involvement with a co-subject(s), into the life world and mind of others. Gadamer (1976:57) says, “We engage him/her, and he/she engages us.” The approach is inclusive and refers to the whole eco-system in which the communication process of retreat progresses or the understanding of the whole within different contexts. Auerswald (1968:204) talks about “a co evolutionary ecosystem located in evolutionary time and space.”

Gerkin (1984:137, 153-154) applied Gadamer's hermeneutical theory within a social constructionist model where pastoral interaction between people can take place in a non threatening, warm and accepting relationship for the different stories to flow together. Pastoral care is viewed as dialogue between the story of the person and themes from the Christian story. The relationship between pastor and person is within a non-threatening environment, characterised by warmth and acceptance. The importance of the inter-subjective influence of language and the hermeneutical tradition of text interpretation where knowledge is perceived as a function of communal textual interpretation, are emphasized (Pare 1995:5). The challenge is to listen to the stories of people and identifying collective recollections, deconstructing master narratives and reconstructing authentic stories. Within the framework of the social constructionist model the aim will be to gain insight into how people represent themselves and the world by means of metaphors that give meaning to their lives as well as individual self-understanding and development of self especially the development and insight that take place within the social context (Meier 2001:393-394; cf Neimeyer & Raskin 2000:5). These stories of people in interaction with each other for example within their respective monastic, Dutch Reformed and other traditions will be recognised as a way of giving meaning to their experiences. Narrative

in this sense becomes a way of knowing. The question to ask is not so much “what has really happened” but more “how do you experience and interpret what has happened?” The history of the traditions of the St Benedict, St Francis and Taize traditions is not history as objective facts from the past but the product of collective recollections within specific social contexts. These shared memories also legitimise and maintain the social or religious order. The constructionist and social constructionist models acknowledge the stories of people by which they give meaning to their experiences (see Müller 1996:16).

Research within the narrative mode will take a form that (White & Epston 1990:79-83):

- privileges the lived experiences of each person/group,
- encourages a perception of a changing world through the plotting or linking of lived experience through the temporal dimension,
- invokes the subjunctive mood (liminal or betwixt, the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire and focus is on human possibilities rather than certainties) by triggering presuppositions, establishing implicit meaning and generating multiple perspective,
- encourages polysemy (polyphonic orientation and encouragement of multiplicity) and the use of ordinary, poetic and picturesque language in the description of experience and in the endeavour to construct new stories,
- invites a reflexive posture and an appreciation of one’s participation in interpretive actions,
- encourages a sense of authorship and re authorship of the lives and relationships of people in the telling and retelling of the research story and

- acknowledges that stories are co-produced and endeavours to establish conditions where researcher and co-researchers (subjects) becomes privileged authors.

In narrative hermeneutic, history is only important because memories in story-form reveal the practical horizon or current existence of people (cf Pambrun 2001:287-288). By interpreting the historical experiences, the experiences and needs of people may be exposed in the process by asking what they want; do they see themselves as victims or agents, what new possibilities are opened? Ricoeur (1981:274-296) views discourse as narrative in nature that strives to shape scattered events into a meaningful plot. In the narrative discourse the narrator fades away to let the events speak for themselves that becomes a confession, which tells what happened. The word-events refer back to the action in history of the experience of and interpretation of what occurred.

### **1.6.2 The Researcher and The Researched: Participatory and Reflective Understanding**

Hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts and constitutes the objective layer of understanding because of the essential structures of the text. There is no opposition between explanation (natural sciences) and understanding (humanities or social sciences) and the pretension of neutrality is an illusion (Ricoeur 1991:53). Therefore, the researcher will integrate the two and give priority to a holistic understanding. The goal is to overcome the nineteenth century's discord between understanding and explanation where explanation was viewed as belonging to the physical sciences and interpretation to the human sciences. Interpretation becomes an event between the researcher and the text or action itself where while interpreting, the researcher is not initially in control but is first seized by meaning rather than doing the seizing, not dominating the action.

Understanding is more than a simple mode of knowing but more a way of being and a way to relate to beings and to being as such). It is an understanding of *being in the world* and the mode of being of the being that questions (interpreter). In the narrative, existential questions and answers come in a narrative way to the fore where the way to self-understanding is through the narrative (see Ricoeur 1981:52; cf Ricoeur 1991:60). It is not so much then the researcher as knowing subject that sets him/her up as measure of “objectivity” but rather striving to inhabit the world, to orientate oneself in a situation of retreat, to apprehend a possibility of being, indicated by the action. According to Ricoeur (1983:66) the ontological moment takes place when situation-understanding-interpretation occurs.

In the hermeneutical circle, subject and object are mutually implicated when the subject (reader) enters into the knowledge of the “object” (co-subjects/text) and in turn, the subject is determined by the hold that the object has upon it, even before the subject comes to know the object. It is participation as an apprehension of a belonging to the whole of what is. The subject is not the source of the unity of meaning but something that precedes the subject. The reader as interpreter and co-subject does not dominate meaning but is shaped by meaning at the same time that it is made by the subject (ontological condition). Nevertheless, dissociation is also necessary to make understanding possible. Ricoeur (1981:145-181) differentiates three phases in the process of understanding:

- First there is the participating understanding of a text or narrative within the context of the reader where the reader/researcher is part of the faith community,

- second follows the phase of explanation of the own context and a distancing and critical stance to look at the faith community from outside and how they understand the text and
- thirdly there is again participatory understanding where the interpretation of the first phase is brought in a critical-hermeneutical way in relation with the results of the second phase.

In this way, *interpretation* and *explanation* can be complimentary within a hermeneutical framework

Ricoeur (1984:5) does have place for a more critical analytical mode of thought and says, “to explain more is to understand better.” The move is from a first understanding through critical explanation, to a second post-critical understanding. The emphasis on the legitimate character of interpretation is postmodernistic in the sense that objectivity no longer has the meaning of verification but takes holistic nature of understanding turn that involves evidence, arguments, and conclusions that are probable but not proofs (Stiver 2003:61).

Research in this study will be done from an inside perspective (participatory understanding) and an outside perspective (explanation). In the *insider* approach critical theological reflection on the faith of the faith community and how they experience God is done as a participator while trying to understand it and making it meaningful for the own context. In the *outsider-perspective* research is done from a distance where through conceptualisation and empirical investigation the faith experience, communicative actions are analysed in a scientific way and evaluated critically (Dingemans 1990:93-100). The dialectics of the *fusion of horizons* anticipates conquering the remote distance in time between the reader’s historical experience and the historical experience of the text. The

key hermeneutical issue is how mediation takes place between the worlds of the text for example the horizon of possible experience in which the work displaces its readers and the world of action of the reader (Ricoeur 1995:240; see Ricoeur 1991:53-74). It concerns the relationship between the text as a configuration of a world and a horizon of meaning and the reader's own act of interpretation of existence. The narrative assists the reader's present existence and the relationship with the horizon of meaning opened by the text. The researcher or reader attune himself/herself to the narrative qualities of the text; that is to the operation of meaning, its creative interpretation of its own historical experience and the corresponding reference of the world of the text (or retreat-action) . The reader interprets his/her own present experience or contemporary historical context. The text is read in the light of a quest for meaning and this act in itself is an attempt to configure what is happening in the reader's historical experience. In this way, in an act of interpretation, which encounters an act of interpretation, the meaning of the world of the text lends itself to further readings. A fusion of horizons takes place, which anticipates conquering the remote distance in time between the reader's historical experience and the historical experience of the text. Wherever there is a situation, a horizon can be contracted or enlarged. Communication at a distance between two differently situated consciousnesses occurs by means of this fusion for example at the intersection of their views on the distant and the open. An element of dissociation within the near far and open is presupposed. People live neither within closed horizons nor within one unique horizon and a dialectical tension between what are one's own and what is alien or far exists. What enables the communication at a distance is the matter of the text, which belongs neither to the author nor to, its reader. This hermeneutical process could bring people and stories together, bring forth up to now unknown horizons, and create new realities (cf Pambrun

2001:288). Understanding then becomes a narrative process that also needs an event of belonging and involvement of the reader in the story.

The outsider approach (distance between self and praxis) as well as the insider approach (getting into the subject's position and personal impressions) will both aim for inter-subjectivity and interpretation. The researcher's role is not to create a dualism of either belonging to (insider approach) or dissociation (outsider approach) but to maintain the dialectic between belonging and dissociation. Both the objectivity stance and the insider approach are considered important and could compliment each other (Ricoeur 1991:75; see Van der Ven 1993:80-106). Therefore, the researcher will not aim to choose between the researcher as insider and the researcher as outsider, detachment or involvement but rather to be placed at an equal distance from the two extreme approaches and to embody the dialectics between belonging and dissociation in every research endeavour, whether quantitative or qualitative. My assumption is that to forget the insider approach is to result in an alienating dissociation and to forget the outsider approach is to result in a sanctioning of ideology or relativation (see Ricoeur 1991:265-272; cf Dreyer 1998:20-22).

As the aim of the research journey is to listen to stories and to be drawn into it, then objectivity at all costs by trying to be an observer and to bring about change, is not the issue. The aim is to strive for subjective integrity and participatory interaction. Based on Ricoeur's view on the dialectic between belonging and dissociation, the researcher will try to embody the dialectics between belonging (*Verstehen* or insider perspective, engaged participant) and dissociation (outsider perspective). Both aim to reduce or eliminate ideology, by becoming immersed in the researched participants and their interpretations, the researcher's own ideological and subjective interpretations can be reduced and by distancing himself, not taking the interpretations of the researched at face value (critical objectifying);

ideological interpretations of the researcher and the researched may be reduced or eliminated (Dreyer 1998:22).

The goal is to understand and interpret qualitatively the subjective dimension of the reality of retreat (a situation where people are in relation with God, self and with others), the human experience of it, the deeds and the intentions and values behind the actions. It is also a reflection within the action (experiential), reflection on the action (experimental) and teleological reflection within/on the action (transformational) (see Van der Ven 1998:106-114). The researcher will be a participant in this social reality of retreat where own assumptions should be under critical scrutiny (belonging) and dissociation (critical of tradition or the way of retreat) for which quantitative methods are more appropriate. In this way a fusion of horizons could be reached; a new broader horizon that excludes the idea of a total or unique knowledge and emphasizes that understanding is never final but an ongoing process. There is no need to be enclosed in one point of view, because wherever there is a situation, there is a horizon that can be contracted or enlarged (see Gadamer 1975:245-253; cf Ricoeur 1991:73). The researcher and researched do not live within enclosed horizons or within one unique horizon and this fusion of horizons also excludes the idea of total or unique knowledge. Absolute knowledge is impossible, remain incomplete and partial and although a critique of ideology is necessary “ideology always remain the grid, the code of interpretation” (Ricoeur 1991:269). Explanation as part of empirical research seeks knowledge and understanding as to how and why things are related looking for causes and results (Van der Ven 1993:80). Within a hermeneutical frame of understanding, critical explanation analysis (dissociation) and interpretation (participating understanding) are both necessary in the research process. Therefore, interpretation, and explanation of retreat as human communication action will both be used in a complimentary way (cf Ricoeur 1981:150).

### 1.6.3 Self-Understanding and Narrative Reflexivity

#### ▪ **Temporality and Self-understanding**

Temporality is the deep unity of time past (having been), present (making present), and future (coming forth) before its extension and repetition of historically dispersal into within time ness. Symbol, myth and narrative as mimesis of human action and interlacing meaning and time shape, embellish and express what is deeply significant for human existence. The process of mimesis leads to a discovery of self and of the human community as historical and temporal. Stories about past, present and future as a unit develop from one temporal source, for example the present and are about the unity of a person's whole life. Ricoeurs' thesis, according to Van den Hengel (1983:139-142), is that narratives and temporality are reciprocally related because narratives as form of language's ultimate referent, is temporality that expresses a form of life for example the ontological dimension human experience of time is bound up with narratives (mostly unconsciously). Temporality and narrative intersect in the plot and growing into consciousness on the emplotment level. Consciousness, viewed according to a temporal parameter, orders experience according to past, present, and future and within a functional parameter it remembers, anticipates and attends to experience. The argument is that only the present exists, which includes the whole experience for example, the present of things past, a present of things present and a present of things future. Within such function of consciousness, the present of things past becomes memory, the present of things present becomes direct awareness and the present of things future becomes anticipation. These three modalities for example the now of experiences of the past as memory, the now of experiences of the present as awareness and the now of the future as anticipation coming together, all determine the content of the experience of the present (cf Meier 2001:396-397). The past cannot exist in isolation, past and present

and future flow from one temporal parameter for example the present. The tensed unity of these modalities requires narrative forms both for its expression (mundane stories) and for its own sense of meaning of internal coherence. A narrative is about life in its totality (Dreyer 2003:342). The most direct way to construct memory is by telling a story and a story is much more as clinical production of facts that are remembered. To remember is the present of the past and expectation or anticipation is the present of the future (Crites 1971:302). The stories of peoples or monastic communities reflect their inner being and motivation for actions in two ways:

- First there is the story itself as action that tells what has happened. It is told not always chronologically or linear and past, present and future may be intertwined. The reader/listener or researcher then arranges this story to understand the impact of the past on the present and the desire for the future. To ask questions regarding this aspect of the story is to bring aspects of distant history to the fore, link them with and place them next to aspects of recent history which are about current unique outcomes, immediate future possibilities and distant future possibilities (cf Tomm 1993:10).
- Then there are the desires and needs of the characters, their characteristics and features, convictions and meanings. The aim of questions about this aspect is to identify possible correlations.

White and Epston (1990) refined the whole process of storytelling within a postmodern perspective. When people see their lives from the perspective of the dominant narrative it may lead to a personal story that may become oppressive, incoherent or not developing any more. The aim of postmodern narrative hermeneutics is to construct alternative stories as alternative perspectives, narratives, actions, and practices to replace

these unacceptable ones. A person within the Dutch Reformed tradition may be helped to deconstruct restrictive premises for example a rigid discossiative context within a tradition and to oppose oppressive discourses of for example modernistic paradigm to become author of a more hopeful life-story by creating a new one that brings change. Readers/researchers have the capacity to interpret existence itself and to come to self-understanding. To relate this openness to action the reader needs narrative texts as models of agents being within time (see White and Epston 1990:2-5; cf Meier 2001:398; Pambrun 2001:291). Therefore, because of the expectation of the reader of being in the time, he or she uses stories of how others fulfilled this mission. The interpretation of the reader's present experience of history includes a diagnosis of the desire as reader – what word do you wish to add to the movement of history, how do you see yourself amongst others as a victim or agent in this time?

▪ **Narrative Reflexivity**

Narrative promotes a reflexive habit (self-awareness regarding presuppositions, interests and concerns) in the researcher/reader. Different narratives play out different scenarios of how people respond to and act in different situations and to the extent in which the reader identify someone to be responsible he/she also imagines what it means to be responsible. The action of storytelling and reflection on the story's goal (future) can only be found within the time framework of people's life stories. The past and future are connected in the present. Therefore the new outcome (new life-story) cannot be determined beforehand. By participating in the story, a new future story may be created (Dreyer 2003a:327). Narrative furthermore through first and third person interplay – first person reflections or third person accounts, leads to imputation as tactic for exploring responses, reactions, evaluations, intention. Narrative holds together all these distinct features together in a unity identity while allowing the reader to draw upon the narrative as a laboratory in which to

explore all kinds of possibilities involving his/her own act of existing for example to test feelings and the capacity as readers and agents. In the operation of configuration, the fusion between the fictions and historical in the readers own life and action becomes the focus of attention. For this reason the narrative identity of the reader, in his own act of existence will become a moment of *refiguration*. Then a new fusion is called for and intensified in the manner in which the reader brings the fictional quality (the explorations opened by the world of the text) to bear on the interpretation of the historical present, that is his/her own possibilities, given the contingent events of the readers own life. Thus, interpretation joins existence and new light is shed on the events in the present.

To read then refers not only to the capacity to read, but also to a person's capacity to tell his/her own story as well as to follow mediation, which in time, allows the reader to interpret his/her life. In this sense, the configuration of the narrative becomes the cognitive and existential operation in the refiguring of existence. The present that is the life of the reader becomes the place where the reader's relationship to the future as hope and the relationship to the past as possibilities intersect. The present includes the whole experience because the present is all that exists. In the present the past is remembered as a fixed affair while the future is still open (see Crites 1971:302-303). The past, the present and the future flow from one temporal parameter, the present (Dreyer 2003b:342). The reader/ listener does not only read or listen but has the capacity to tell his or her own story. In this process of a relationship with the text, the reader can come to self-understanding and interpretation of self. Self-understanding is therefore always a mediated experience (there is no immediate relationship of self to self). To reach deeper self-understanding, a turn to the strategies and operations of meaning made productive by classical narrative texts may be necessary. This in turn invites people to imagine new possibilities in the midst of their concrete historical events. It

happens because narrative promotes an image of the self in the form of characters or figures in the story and the reader recognize him/herself as someone who acts while recognizing another who acts, suffers and who lives the experience of a history. These figures also acquire in the course of history an identity and in the concordances and discordances of life, a unity of life is recounted and held together through the operation of the plot. The plot generates a story and allows a history, a life to take shape. Narratives hold together both the storyline and the narrative identity of the characters. In the process, different narratives and stories are presented to the reader through the presentation of different characters and their roles in order to explore the sense of who does or say what (for example the mimetic ability of the reader). The way, in which narrative designs a unity of the subjects' life, helps the reader to begin recognizing his/her own life as one which has to configure a unity in the concordances and discordances that make up their own history. While the narrative develops characters with a self, actors who are responsible for what happens, the reader may begin exploring own senses of agency and an ethical identity emerges from the narrative identity (Pambrun 2001:292 - 295). Therefore, because the plot has fused a fictional and historical reference, the narrative identity fuses the possibilities gained from the reading of the text with the concrete historical opportunities of the present.

The narrative process model of Angus, Levitt and Hardtke (see 1999:1255-1270; cf Meier 2001:291) provides an explanation of how strategies and processes are used to transform events for example a weeklong retreat at the monastery of Taize into meaningful stories. These meaningful stories organize and represent the sense of self and others in the world. The reader/listener and the story (storyteller) engage in a threefold mode of enquiry namely external narrative mode, internal narrative mode and reflexive narrative mode:

- External narrative mode entails the description and elaboration of life events (social etc) in which the questions “what happened,” “who and why” are addressed. It refers to inter narratives (Meier 2001:291), how one story is replaced by another, and a new story created.
- Internal narrative mode comprises the description and elaboration of subjective feelings, reactions, and emotions connected with the event that addresses both the question: “what was felt at the moment of the event occurring” as well as “what is experienced now that it is told” (Meier 2001:395)?
- Reflexive narrative mode entails the reflexive analyses of issues attendant to what happened in the event and what was felt when the question “what does it mean”? or “what was experienced during the question what does it mean?” were addressed. The listener/reader links meaning to experience in interaction with the storyteller and characters in the story. This is done based on needs, motivation, expectations regarding self and others who play a significant role in the listener, storyteller and the characters (Dreyer 2003b:341).

#### **1.6.4 A Pastoral Therapeutic Context**

Ricoeur (1995: 309, 313-314) views the narrative of a persons’ life as construct with a beginning or several beginnings, middle part with high’s and low’s and an end that shows that closure or wholeness has been reached. This narrative is open and may be reviewed constantly and thus a variety of narratives about the own life can be told from different viewpoints. It is essential also; to be open to the stories and histories of others which themselves are open/closed stories/histories.

Donald Capps (1998:34) took Ricoeur’s model into the pastoral therapeutic context, where there is, a need is to give systematic,

constructive attention to the ways that individuals *story* their lives in order to develop new more fulfilling life stories. Three different aspects of people's situations can be distinguished:

- The facts (the what) or the aspects of the situation agreed upon by most observers through consensus,
- stories (the why) as the meanings and interpretations that people give to the facts, the constructs, theories and made up hypotheses and
- experience (the how); the label to describe internal feelings, fantasies, sensations and the sense of self.

Roberts (1994:xiv-xv) states that stories are central to therapy where it has the potential power to link people together as well as to pull the events of their lives together. It may also become a versatile tool to help them to reflect on where they have been, where they want to go, as well as creating a collaborative therapeutic relationship. Capps (1998:30) puts it as follows: "Stories are relatively simple formats that illuminate complex interaction patterns." Stories can locate people in their lives and reveal where they come from and articulate central values and themes. The stories from the past can also provide a foundation for new stories, new beliefs, and ideas to be shared. The understanding through the stories that people tell, as well as an ongoing dialogue about the new stories being created, can help people to both hold the past and move on with the present and future (Roberts 1994:7). Stories have become a widely used construct and the renewed interest may be the relevance within a postmodern context as well as the influence of social constructionist theories. In the therapeutic context people come with views that have been influenced by their social/family interaction and language based construction of their situations. Pastors and therapists are trying to enter these constructed views and to influence them in certain directions or

helping them to rewrite some of these stories (Capps 1998:24). Therapists provide a space for the deconstruction of a clients' story in order for it to be viewed as only one interpretation among many possible ones, past and present. The process of deconstruction of old stories and the revisioning of a new story is to listen for dominant themes in the different stories and to reinterpret them on the basis of own personal experiences. The stories and experience of each person should be acknowledged, and might be challenged in a gentle respectful way on the way to developing new ones. This approach is relevant for the way in which the researcher listens to the various stories during the research journey and the potential therapeutic/regenerative context of retreat.

Capps (1998:53-172) describes three different, but mutually supportive, approaches to the storying and re-storying process. This provides a relevant narrative model namely:

- *Inspirational* stories (the art of the power of suggestion and persuasion with the possibilities for change),
- *paradoxical* stories (the subversive untying of pragmatic paradoxical knots in stories with plots that thicken) and
- *miracle* stories (the identifying and discerning of the exceptions that are already there and asking the day after the miracle question or the unexpected sudden absence of the problem).

Capps (1998:14) believes that regarding the three ways of *storying* lives, each person will have his/her favourite type, largely because it is the way people will see their own lives evolving. These are helpful ways to reflect on how people story their lives (that of the researcher and research participants). These approaches provide useful tools that pastors (and a researcher) may use in the listening to the personal stories of others and for the process of revision/rewrite into new stories as well as for

constructive interpretation to occur. It could also enable pastor and researcher to be more text and action focused than reader focused and thus allowing those whom are met on the research journey to determine the broad outlines of the conversation and to develop together new and meaningful stories. It further allows for the own individuality, innovation and style of the researcher to be expressed in the research process. Each preferred story type provides a different lens through which to listen, to look, and to interpret.

### **1.6.5 An Empirical Approach**

The research journey proceeds and develops from the current practice of monastic retreat as a *hermeneutic-communicative praxis* with the focus on the acts as such, on the stories told about the action, the theological understanding of it and the analysis of relevant concepts. It is an epistemological reflection on the stories of the different traditions of Benedictine, Franciscan, Taize and Dutch Reformed about retreat and formative spirituality in order to determine the relevance of the monastic traditions for retreat in the Dutch Reformed tradition. During the epistemological and empirical analysis of the situation, critical and creative interaction takes place within the mind processes of the researcher. The epistemological reflection within a dialogical narrative context and hermeneutic process means that theological theory as synthesis of experience and insight as well as empirical analysis of the current practice is cybernetically involved in the process of scientific understanding. During the research journey, empirical analysis plays a major role and the process will develop in a critical hermeneutical and dialogical way. The basis of the hermeneutics is a dialogue of relationships (Van der Ven 1993:78) between the relationship of the ancient texts to their contexts and the relationship of present day texts to their contexts. The older texts (stories) and their contexts are studied more by means of historical and literary methods and the present day texts (stories) via an empirical

approach. Both objective criteria (more quantitative) and subjective perceptions and evaluations (more qualitative) are relevant.

The approach to practical theology during the research journey will incorporate critically, the postmodern turn and the liberationist emphasis on *orthopraxis*. The model of Browning (1991:5-15, 34) puts practical theology within the framework of postmodern thought. In this model practical theology is approached as practical wisdom and moves away from the distinction between basic theory (*theoria*) and practical theory (*techno*) to integrate theory and practice as an ongoing process of action and reflection (cf Müller 1996:1). Practical concerns are part of practical theology and theory is not distinct from practice. All practices have theories behind them and within them (see Browning 1991:6). The movement is from practice to theory and back to practice because theory is always embedded in practice and practical activities both precede and follow it. Praxis may denote theological, meaningful (theoryladen), value-laden actions, habits, and practices (see Cartledge 2001:17). It is a way of being in the world that is part of the worldview, beliefs, and values of a person, community or tradition. Practical wisdom, *phronesis* is more than mere application of abstract principles to concrete situations. It is a value oriented dialogical discussion between experiences in practice and knowledge of existing theories. The questions asked in this process is not so much: “what is the case,” “what is the nature of things” or “what are the most effective means to a given end”? Rather “what should we do” and “how should we live”? In this sense religious communities (for example Taize, Benedictine, Franciscan, Dutch Reformed) could be carriers of practical wisdom or be powerful embodiments of practical rationality. Browning (1991:10) puts it as follows: “they exercise practical wisdom *because* of their religious symbols and convictions.” Religious narratives then can enliven, liberate, energize, or make more effective the workings of practical reason or the scientific practical theological process.

James Fowler (1983:60) describes the concept practical wisdom (theory and practice drawn together) as a kind of *knowing* that guides being and doing. It is a knowing in which skill and understanding cooperate, experience and critical reflection work together and disciplined improvisation takes place against a backdrop of reflective wisdom. Browning's model is an attempt to integrate theory and practice in an ongoing process of action and reflection (cf Anderson 2001:26). Practical reason consists of an overall dynamic; an outer envelope and an inner core (Browning 1991:10-12). The overall dynamic of practical reason (*phronesis*) is a broadscale interpretive and reinterpret process (hermeneutical process). The *outer envelope* is the legacy of inherited narratives and practices delivered by tradition, which always surround people's practical thinking, and therefore practical reason is always saturated with traditions. It constitutes the vision that animates, informs, and provides the ontological context for practical reason. The *inner core* is the human experience, action and theological reflection part of practical reason that may ask questions in the light of the gospel as "what then should we do?" and "how then should we live?" This core functions within a narrative about Gods' creation, governance, and redemption of the world and within a narrative of how the life and death of Jesus Christ further Gods' kingdom in the world.

Practical theology within a hermeneutical model like this and the description and understanding of situations like monastic spirituality and the different communities of the research question, proceeds in the form of a dialogue or conversation. The researcher brings questions and commitments to the relevant communities or traditions and in turn is confronted and questioned by their commitment and practices (Browning 1991:15). The epistemological reflection proceeds as a hermeneutical dialogue where the researcher interprets and assesses the action of reeat

and in turn is interpreted and assessed too. Heitink (1999:6-7, 102-103) describes an integrative model of interpretation, which links the hermeneutical perspective of the human sciences with the empirical perspectives of the social sciences. Practical theological research of the relation between text and context is hermeneutical by nature, but empirical by design. It is *hermeneutical* by nature because the research is directed to a process of understanding for example the understanding of the significance of the Christian tradition in the context of modern society. It also requires an *empirical* design because practical theological research chooses its starting point in the actual situation of retreat and tradition. It is approached as a situation of action to be explained by means of empirical research and to be interpreted by means of theological theories. In this way, practical theology as a theory of action, as empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of Christian faith in the praxis of modern society, can bridge the gap between understanding and explaining. Human science and physical science differ in the sense that in nature it is about *explanation* and with people about *understanding*. Physical science is characterised by reason and elucidation while human science is led by imagination and understanding. The physical scientist, for example would explain a rainbow from the elements of wavelength and density while the hermeneutical “scientist” would also focus on the landscape within which the rainbow is perceived (cf Heitink 1993:182). That which the researcher seeks to understand is not so much the psychological constitution of another subject, but a meaningful content immersed in a tradition of its own (Gadamer 1976:273-274). People or communities and their stories are brought together and unknown horizons of understanding may come to the fore creating new realities in the process.

### 1.6.6 Action-Reflection Dialectics

The model of Larty (2000:72-76) suggests a being and doing approach by asking questions about the content of faith and praxis stressing that tradition, context and experience are shaping factors. It is a praxis-orientated approach asking questions about those engaged in the practical theology research task. Therefore, the context of the theologian/researcher is also examined and in a postmodern way, a hermeneutic of suspicion question arises as to who benefits from the research:

- The process starts with concrete experience, moves to
- a situational analysis of experience in a multi perspective way by means of sociological and psychological analysis followed by
- theological analysis allowing faith perspectives to question this encounter. These faith perspectives in turn are themselves the subject of questioning of the encounter in the situational analysis of theology and
- in the end the researcher and the group in which this process is set, offer a response.

The empirical theological model of Van der Ven (Schweitzer and Van der Ven 1999:331-335; see Pieterse 1996:179,181) have five phases in the empirical cycle where *empiricism* refers to the entirety of these five phases:

- Firstly the development of the theological research problem and goal to investigate.
- Secondly the theological induction phase where empirical research by means of either quantitative or qualitative methods are used whilst reflecting on and comparing the impressions, experiences and information that is gained and the processes the researcher is going

through. It is a continuous back and forth movement between perception and reflection whilst coming across a rich variety of convictions, attitudes and emotions among a rich variety of people.

- The third phase is empirical theological testing where the theoretical and empirical concepts previously gathered are conceptualised and operationalised. The operationalisation implies the transformation of the concepts concerned in terms of observable, measurable, and testable behaviour.
- Empirical theological testing is the fourth phase where the researcher collects data required systematically and analyses it.
- The final phase is theological evaluation, summarizing and interpreting the testing results and determining whether the theological theory fits into the empirical reality. In van der Vens' approach, in contrast with my own approach, there is a preference for quantitative methodology and the objective dominates the normative (social reality) and subjective aspects. When he does make use of qualitative methods, it forms part of the induction phase of the research.

The models of Van der Ven (1999) and Larty (2000) are *action reflection models*, relevant for the research journey starting with the concrete reality of a specific setting where the empiric reality under investigation and the involvement of the researcher intertwine. It provides a conceptual tool to be used with discernment and in which only the researcher can guarantee any quality of theological reflection or engagement. Practical theology as process focuses on experience of the situation or concrete reality that moves subsequently to theological reflection as engagement with the theological structures in a meaningful way. This process is in concordance with the practice of liberationist theologians.

Cartledge (2003:22-24) articulates a *dialectical model* of practical theology that he borrows from Jürgen Habermas (1985) via the pastoral hermeneutic of Anthony Thiselton (1992), conceptualising it in terms of a *life world* and *trans-contextual* system. In practice the practical theologian/researcher engages with the lifeworld of for example the monastic traditions with his/her own internal dialectics and own story, within his or her spirituality and tradition. *Lifeworld* or the concrete reality (concrete circumstances or setting under study and experience of retreat) signifies the hermeneutical level of inter-personal understanding and cooperative behaviour system in which contextual-behavioural features are transcended. From the life world arise questions, engagement and re engagement with ecclesial belief and practice and recommendations for renewed ecclesial belief and practice. This praxis-orientated approach will start at the life world end of the dialectic. The concern is the beliefs and practices of the subjects under study as beings in real life human experiential reality, which should take seriously their concerns, expressions of belief, and practice and perceptions. The focus remains on the actions as such and the stories about it as well as the symbols, traditions and their praxis. This information in turn is constantly in dialogue with more theoretical literature from other sciences as well as the literature study of the different traditions under study and meta- and base theories. The data from the empirical encounter is then investigated and mapped with major themes and interests highlighted in the process. The working back and forth between praxis and theory (creative analysis of data and theological reflection) may generate new insights. Beliefs and practices in the life world will encounter beliefs and practices in the meta narrative, tradition or spirituality. The dialectic then proceeds via the research model of Van der Ven (1999) and finally could result in findings or a recommendation for renewed theological praxis.

From the *trans contextual system* or theological identity (theological structures of individuals or group, constellation of beliefs, historically and culturally mediated traditions) arise questions such as articulation of issues and the project, analysis of data, literature review, engagement of theological science with social science and finally the analysis of data, recommendations for new understanding and critical and constructive theology (Cartledge 2003:28). The system includes a meta narrative that refers to an overarching theological narrative that stands outside the concrete reality. This bigger, wider and all embracing narrative (story) or grand narrative may help others in the life world to understand meaningfully their own narrative (stories) as the two narratives are brought in relation to each other (Middleton and Walsh 1993:39). The goal of hermeneutics is that the reader/listener may come to his or her own new story in interaction with the stories of others. The actions of the different characters told to the readers/listeners by an author/narrator in such a way that they are able to change their own stories (Dreyer 2003a:326). During this process, they might look at their story and discover the three-dimensionality of it or experiencing it as triologue; that is discovering God as part of the story (Müller 1996:86). Narrative as the history of a group in story form signifies what meanings the group give to their actions. It consists of plot (storyline), setting (context and worldview), and characterization (values or ethos of the group). The story of Jesus (the gospel) as ideal foundational narrative functions as an alternative or contra narrative against for instance dominant cultural narratives for example the dogmatic Christian narrative from a Eurocentric perspective. Contra-narratives are helpful in giving meaning to the world, people and their experiences in the midst of continuous change (Dreyer 2003b:344). In postmodern narrative hermeneutics, critical of meta narratives, the aim is to construct alternative stories, perspectives, and behaviour and relationship patterns to replace not acceptable stories by deconstruction as ideological-critical process (cf Ricoeur 1991:285-294).

### **1.6.7 Ritual and Rite of Passage**

Marcel Barnard (2004:129-133), reminds readers that within church walls, ritual and the involvement of church members in liturgical ritual are declining. However, outside church walls, old and new rituals are being revived and implemented. There are at home, in schools, television, public domains for example Taize services, liturgy of Iona, Thomas services, pilgrimages and celebrations that experiment on the intersecting plane of spirituality, liturgy and ritual (cf Post, Pieper & van Uden 1999).

#### **1.6.7.1 Ritual**

Ritual is part of monastic spirituality, Christianity, and life. It is a phenomenon in societies, religions, cultures, and retreat. According to Harris (1992:3), the word ritual could be an unfortunate term as it denotes to some a boring routine or a form without soul or substance. For others ritual may become or be experienced as participation in a happening, a celebration, or meaningful event. It may be appropriate to use different words for example *celebration* or *rite* or *symbolic event* to counteract the perception of boring routine, lifelessness and having no passion, associated with the term ritual.

#### **▪ Definition**

Research conducted by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1909), Victor Turner (1969), and Mary Douglas (1966) stimulated a renewed interest in ritual. The term ritual functions as a container concept with many related elements. Ritual is a complex term to define. It is like a form of collage with different layers and the different constituents of ritual do not equal the organic whole. To preserve the richness, unity and impact of it, it is not be treated or analysed as a series of discrete elements but as a whole.

Turner, Westerhoff and Arbuckle in defining ritual emphasised the *social context* and community dimension of ritual. Ritual is described as a social drama that embodies the memories and visions of a community (Neville & Westerhoff 1978:130), and part of a society's communication code for transmitting messages to one another about matters of ultimate concern and about those entities believed to have enunciated, clarified and mediated a culture's bonding axioms to its present members (Turner 1976:504-505), with the stylised or repetitive, symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture within a social context, to express and articulate meaning (Arbuckle 1991:26). However, the patterned, structured, predictable, purposeful, repetitive, ceremonial, dramatic and symbolic aspects of ritual are also central to ritual (see Willemon 1983:4-6; Müller 1996:185). The broad definition of Menken-Bekius (2001:36) is a helpful tool in understanding and applying secular and religious ritual in practice. She defines ritual as “vanzelfsprekende, eenmalige of herhaalde, veelal symbolische handelingen, veelal vergezeld van bijbehorende formules en teksten, waarin de mens lichamelik en interactief betrokken is op een werkelijkheid die in het ritueel zelf present wordt gesteld.” Lukken (1999:47) accentuates the pregiven and symbolic character of ritual: “in het ritueel komen symbol, symboolhandeling en symboltaal samen, maar dan zo dat de nadruk ligt op de voorgegevenheid ervan, op de ontlening, op de herhaling.” I agree with Lukken (1999:103) that the Cross is central to Christian ritual as presentative symbol, for example referring to history as now present and actual in the life world of current history of that which Jesus of Nazareth embodied and completed. Within the context of variety religious and cultural ritual, Christian ritual has its unique irreplaceable identity for example the paradox of the *Paschal mystery* (cf Lukken 1999:325-327).

Ritual consists of symbolic actions in which words, deeds and gestures play a role and is accompanied by verbal and symbolic actions for

example music, kneeling, laying on of hands (see Blom & Lindijer:1986:17). The combination of gesture and word in a rite enhance its power to convince or to create a moment of revelation or disclosure. Ritual has a definite symbolic functionality and meaning within a community familiar with the ritual and able to decode its meaning. The type of communication that ritual entails consists of a response to a specific event, a specific person, society, previous and future generations and in religion essentially also to God. It signifies formal and structured actions that people agree on and occurs repeatedly for example when people greet and introduce one another. Ritual has a social function within the meaning the group or community attached to it. It may also have a teaching or reflective function when stimulating the senses within a specific context for example a cathedral. There is very often a religious dimension in ritual where the repeated, normative, symbolic, and functional behaviour of rituals are associated with religious expression. As symbolic action, the function of ritual, for example the Divine Office in monasteries, is to bring people in contact with a deeper reality and to create an opportunity to have an intense experience of the Mystery and transcendental or ultimate reality. Ritual transforms, mediates, orders space and time, marks transition periods. It has ethical, therapeutic, expressive, exorcising dimensions (see Lukken 1999: 25-35; cf Müller 1996:184-185)

▪ **Characteristics**

Some of the features that ritual have in common making them recognizable as ritual, are the following (see Schmidt 1988:395-420; Vos 1996:53-60; Menken-Bekius 2001:36-43; cf Smith & Tausig 1990:98; Driver 1991:159-160; Harris 1992:33-35):

- Ritual in a symbolic way represents the holy, transcendental and sacred and the ritual elements are not separable from their

signification. For example during a ceremony, the sacred will be an attentive or remembered presence rather than a materially embodied one or one that is made present in the components of the ceremony as such.

- Ritual is usually accompanied by bodily movement or gesture or performed in a dramatic way. The nature of ritual is repetitive and structured in nature and comes via tradition in a specific form. It may also be re enacted and re created when specific actions from the tradition are relived and commemorated in dramatic ways, repeatedly by looking back in remembrance or looking forward to the future.
- Ritual is social in character and embedded in society and function as a vehicle to carry and shape values in a society and to influence human behaviour in that society. Ritual has layers of meaning that is determined by context. These layers of meaning make it possible to communicate a variety of meanings with one action or ritual event but makes it also susceptible to misunderstanding and confusion of meaning. Ritual displays a playful and imaginative character that enhances the communication value and impact of it. As social drama that is removed in a sense from the immediate reality, meaningful comment on reality may be presented as well as providing a way for community cohesion to become manifest.
- Ritual represents within the Christian community something known to the community, transfers what it represents to the participants, mediates regarding the past and the future, has status and power because of repetition, confirms the status and identity and cohesion of the group, provides a meaningful and

cathartic way to respond to far reaching occasions in life, and provides a view on God and his presence.

- Ritual is behaviour in which the mind, emotions, experience, and those involved in it can integrate actions in a meaningful way.
- Symbol, symbolic language, symbolic actions are the smallest unit of ritual and functions as basic building blocks of ritual. Each symbol may have individually a variety of meaning but within a specific ritual for example bread and wine in the Eucharist; a unique, new or deeper meaning is possible.
- Both myths as sacred stories and ritual make use of symbol to convey meaning, the one will use words or metaphor and the other actions, objects and words.
- In the Benedictine, Franciscan and Taize traditions, a variety of ritual play a significant role. For many years in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the sermon in liturgy with rational, dogmatic and moral words with elaborative language became the most central ritual. Ritual communicates via restricted language and metaphorically, via the symbolic elements it consists of. It is embedded in a liturgical context for example of the Divine Office of monasteries. The Eucharist reminds of and gives shape to salvation and during this process; the ritual image can grow into a symbolic imagination and become meeting places with God.
- A religious element is usually characteristic of ritual and as symbolic action; it leads people into a deeper reality or experience of the transcendental. Couture (1990:1088),

describes ritual as “repeated, normative, symbolic, and functional behaviours often associated with religious expression.”

- **Types of Ritual**

- **Structural Ritual**

Confirmatory and transformation rituals act by centring a persons' will in transcendental sources for example anchoring the immediate order in a realm that transcends it. The purpose of structural rituals is to maintain distinctions in the maintenance of structure within a divine order (see Driver 1991:137, 150). It includes taboos (cf Theissen 1999:134; Soskice 1985:15), positive injunctions, as well as greetings of a religious nature, prayers of affirmation and rituals of meditation, which stress the sustained perception of transcendental meanings present in ordinary experience. It provides group cohesiveness and set group members apart from those not sharing in their customs (Schmidt 1988:412). It can be an efficient vehicle for expressing a society's values and passing it on (Harris 1992:21; cf Kuitert 1992:216). Examples are the recital of blessings and viewing life as an opportunity to constantly dwell in Gods presence (monastic mindfulness), seeing a beautiful tree or flower, meeting Christ in the poor or an encounter with persons of wisdom as the Desert Fathers. Practices like these ritualise consciousness and are especially important for mystical groups of almost all world religions (see Smirnov 1994:11). Such practices act as frames for a God consciousness preventing a person from becoming engulfed by mundane activities, and promoting the modified consciousness as an enduring entity (Depoortere 1995:32). In *confirmatory* ritual, the transcendental and ordinary realms are connected while preserving each, the distinctions, and boundaries that structure the cosmos are sanctified and will therefore cluster especially around liminal points to preserve and define differences (see Zuesse 1975:517-530).

Confirmatory ritual acts as a frame of awareness, tend to be more abbreviated than transformation ritual and may include religious greetings, blessings, and prayers of affirmation and rituals of meditation that stress and define the sustained perception of transcendental meanings present in ordinary experience (Heitink 1990:129).

The purpose of *transformation* rites is to bridge the divisions within divine order and to effect transformations by recentring and renewing that order when threatened by internal or external change (Wallace 1996:413-420; cf Finn 1989: 69-89). These rituals arise in response to anomaly, decay, imbalance and fault and aim to restore harmony and ideal patterns for example a retreat for stressed out and tired “rat race” Christians. The essential dynamic is a re centring process established in the following way:

- First, the disturbing element becomes disconnected from its surroundings, by literal spatial dislocation if possible for example the pilgrim is going away from his/her usual daily environment to a specific place.
- Then he or she (disturbing element) comes directly into contact with the transcendental source or master in the sacred, which dissolves it and reforms it for example a time of flux and of liminality, outside of ordinary structures where positive potentially integrative factors that may be constructively reshaped are identified.
- Finally, the reshaped person or element of the person relocates into the divine order. Transformation ritual places the disturbing element in a new location in the divine order for example via initiation the child enters the adult phase, funerals where the person is fully acknowledged dead, rites of passage for example birth, initiation, marriage, calendar rites,

consecration rites and conversionary rites. Restorative rituals include purifications, healing rites, divination and crisis rites. The condition of liminality is a fertile source of rituals and symbols, myths and works of art. Lukken (see 1999:245-275) describes radical changes regarding Christian rituals of transition and a new growing pluriformity stature of these rituals for example initiation rites (baptism and confirmation), marriage, forgiveness and reconciliation, sickness and death.

➤ **Stability Ritual**

The past and present are connected to each other in ritual and provides security and hope for the community (Hanekom 1995:86). Examples are fertile and harvest rituals, the New Year's Eve worship service in some Christian communities. To maintain and strengthen their identity as growing Christian-communities, exclamations, songs, confessions of faith and prayers became rituals and part of rituals. The believers participated in these to express and structure the identity of their community within a variety of other religious communities (Dudley & Hilgert 1987:139). Ritual within the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize traditions also provided structure and stability for monks and pilgrims over the years in an ever-changing world.

➤ **Ritual of Mystery**

Within Christian faith communities, sacramental ritual, for example the Eucharist and Baptism communicate and stimulate the mysterious or mystical aspects of religion. Ritual played an important part in the early Christian communities as they did not try to rationalize their profoundest experiences but rather made the unknown and unexplained character of life, part of the more intimate relationship of the community and between the believers and the transcendent God (Dudley & Hilgert 1987:146). The regular enactment of ritual is able to renew the experiential focus on the sacred and the mythical via a re-centring process. Ritual may be helpful to

those participating to start reflecting on for example the Mystery of Passion of Christ. Usually while participating in a monastic retreat, a specific space, or place for example the chapel, with symbols, icons and an “atmosphere” of mystery and silence is available. The perceptible for example symbols, rituals, and music communicate the non-perceptible to the mind, heart, and senses of the pilgrim.

➤ **Therapeutic Ritual**

Ritual can have an integrating and healing function especially during crises for example when somebody dies. Initially those close to the deceased can move into the chaos of deep depression, disbelief, or shock. They may know that action is essential during the chaotic, fragmented phase not necessarily knowing how to respond further during the mourning process. Rituals of mourning then can provide an anchor or some order within the chaos of pain and a helpful means to overcome the pre-occupation with disintegration (see Heitink 1990:129-130). In the process, the trauma may lead to a positive and meaningful participation in the ritual, shaping it into a profound religious experience. Modern Western society has lost over the years many of the healing and stabilizing impact of ritual. However, for quite some time now people have been pleading for and rediscovering the therapeutic effect of meaningful rituals. Menken-Bekius (2001:61-105) emphasizes the potential worth and healing impact of good ritual in the pastoral context and reminds people how daily and other rituals are part of being human. Ritual as a way of expressing oneself can become a vehicle by which to come to know oneself better or to rediscover life and meaning in life or how to depart from life in a meaningful and dignified way. Through ritual people, invite the supernatural, the mystery into their lives. Seeking the origins, secrets of life and the regenerating power of the mystery (see Lukken 1999:61). Ritual also structures people’s lives within time and space. It provides a bridge between the inner-world of emotions, passions, and desires and

the surrounding outer-world of actions, people, and environment. The more intense the emotions, the more the need for a channel to assist in bringing it in a more controlled form into the open. The “dying moments” (for example dealing with bitterness, guilt, forgiveness) type of ritual as one element of the monastic retreats I have directed, as well as the “kneeling with the head on the cross” ritual at Taize, had a *psycho-hygienic* (term used by Menken-Bekius for the healing/therapeutic function of ritual) function in the lives of pilgrims who participated in these. The fact that silence and longer periods for meditation and reflection on stories are provided for whilst taking part in the ritual of retreat and other sub-rites, is a confirmation of the powerful creative potential of pilgrims by way of their imagination. Menken-Bekius (2001:66) stresses the importance of the imagination in secular and religious ritual and says “wat betreft de religieuze rituelen acht ik het een van die belangrijkste verworvenhede van de moderne theologie dat ze de betekenis van de verbeelding heft (her) ontdekt.”

➤ **Faith Enriching Ritual**

The function of ritual in stimulating spiritual growth is multi faceted: it may ethically accentuates the crucial values in life, neutralising via incantation the alarming power of mystery of evil, expressive as a means of venting feelings, social in inviting others to become part of it, canalising very strong feelings in a positive way as a transformer does with electricity, and mediating the past as remembrance and providing a basis for the future and intensifying the experience of the now in the sense that it connects past and future making it more accessible and controllable (Lukken 1984:24-40). Religious rites could be helpful to individuals to become aware of both the profane and the sacred integrating it as an entity for and within the community of believers (cf Müller 1996:188).

➤ **Functional Ritual**

Wallace (1966:420-430) identifies the following functional rituals: divination rites to control non-human nature or the supernatural, intensification rites to increase food supply, protective rites to avert misfortune, therapy rites affecting humans for example curing rites and anti-therapy rites with injurious ends like witchcraft or sorcery, ideology rituals directed at the control of social groups and values for example passage rites of the life cycle and territorial movement, social intensification rites to renew group solidarity as in Sunday worship services, arbitrary ceremonial obligations as in taboos and rebellion rites that allow catharsis, salvation rituals that enable individuals to cope with personal difficulties for example possession, shamanic, mystic and expiation rites, and revitalization rites designed to cure societal and identity crises such as millenarian movements.

Retreat and pilgrimage follow a rite of passage structure. Turners' conceptualization of separation, marginality, reincorporation, and structure and anti-structure is a helpful tool in the planning of retreat as well as understanding the process of monastic retreat as a relevant ritual. In anthropological theory, Victor Turner's approach to ritual provides a helpful analysing mechanism and a framework for planning of a ritual.

**1.6.7.2 Rite de Passage Structure: Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner**

Victor Turner (1987) builds on the *rite of passage* structure, a term first used by and identified by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) which accompany and nurture persons through stages of life and development. It describes two types of rites: rites that mark recognized points in the passage of time for example new moon and New Year as well as rites that accompany the passage of a person from one social status to another in the course of life

(Turner 1987:386). Van Gennep (cf 1960: 1-25) shows how life could be mapped in a series of states for example foetus, child, adult, authority for example spouse, parent, chief, priest, elders, and ancestors. Within each state, a person's life is defined in relatively clear terms but the passage between states, is marked by unusual rituals – the *rites of passage* or ritual process of status transformation accompany transitions from non being to being in birth, from childhood to adulthood in puberty, from being single to being married, and from life to death in funerals. In many instances, a biological event may precede or accompany the rite, but it is the rite as such that communicates via symbols, that provides people with a meaningful identity within the community. Rites like these represent a legitimate crossing of a boundary, which bring along a new identity with new responsibilities and rights. These rites assign people a location in cultural space and designate them a status that the other members of the society recognize as proper (Van Staden 2001:583). After observing many types of rites of passage, Turner identified three stages common to all namely:

➤ Separation

It forms a discontinuity with the old social identity. People experience it as separation from other people, places, and time. The participants are separated from the ordinary group rhythm and move into an off limits area for others not involved with the ritual. The initiands are removed from their ordinary life world to experience an out of the ordinary situation. They also leave secular time in order to enter timelessness. Furthermore, a different timetable for sleeping, eating, learning, and working is followed (Turner 1967:223-226).

➤ Marginality (*Liminality-Communitas*)

It generates new understanding for the new status of the initiands by virtue of their separation from their familiar world. They are cut off

from the points of reference, activities, and people they are accustomed to during daily life and can become disoriented. They are in a process of abandoning previous habits and understanding of their personal identity and social relations. Because they have not yet acquired new statuses and roles and their previous identities no longer function, they are in between, in liminality. During the ritual they recognize their relation with the institution into which they are being initiated and unity and equality are emphasized, they are in *communitas* (see Turner 1967:99-101; cf Turner 1969:95).

➤ Reincorporation (Aggregation)

The reincorporation phase initiates social continuity within the new status as well as new understanding. The ritual process is now completed, and the initiands return to society with their new statuses, roles, obligations, and rights. They are accepted into society as being capable for their new roles and redefined status in the community (Turner 1967:251-260).

Although the rite of passage raises initiates from one status to another, they are not progressively elevated through each stage. On the contrary, the margin phase (or liminal phase) is marked by humility and status decline before moving via rites of incorporation to a new more elevated status than the old status before the rites of separation (see Scandrett-Leathermann 1999:312-313; cf Harris 1992:42).

Turner (1967:23-30) was familiar with rites like these for example practiced by the Ndembu of central Africa. His research showed that ceremonies as the Nkang'a, a girl's puberty ritual moving from one state that of being a girl to another state that of a woman, fitted perfectly into the Van Gennep framework. During the separation phase, the girls are taken from "normal" society, taken to a place in the forest outside her village,

and positioned at the foot of a muddy tree, which produces white latex when cut (symbol of mother's milk and breasts). A war of sexes is played out on the first morning when the women of the village return to the tree where the girl slept for the night. The women of the village dance around her lying perfectly still while the men of the village look on and being insulted until noon. Now the girl lays on her other side and the men are allowed to join the circle of women dancers. At the end of the day, she is carried to a secluded hut at the edge of the village where she remains for weeks or months being instructed in the knowledge an Ndembu woman is required to have. On the first day in the forest, she is clearly betwixt and between states; she has not arrived anywhere and in the following weeks and months, she continues her abnormal life. She has been set apart; whenever she can, she adopts a foetal position clasping her arms or hands over her ears. Men avoid her; she is dangerous, set apart in the marginal or liminal phase of the rite of passage. The Aggregation phase sees her returning to normal society, which finishes with a triumphant dance demonstration of womanhood as her dress drops down exposing her now developed breasts. She is given the chiefs' wand of office for the day. Her husband is there and often the day will conclude with the couple's marriage. The rite of passage is over. She, who has entered it a girl, leaves it as a woman.

The liminal period in rites of passage from the Latin word *limen* signifies a threshold to indicate the transitional phase of the status of transformation ritual process. Liminal entities are neither here nor there but are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom conventions and the ceremonial. Turner (1969:96) describes this stepping over the threshold as though there are two main models for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating namely:

- The first is of society as a *structured*, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico legal economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating people in terms of more or less,
- The second who emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an *unstructured* or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.

The liminal phase is also referred to as *anti-structure* or inter structural situation. It is a state of transition and may even become a process of transformation where the neophyte as transitional being or *limina persona* is defined by a name and a set of symbols (Turner 1979:234, 235). On the one hand, they are reduced or ground down, their status levelled or humbled by the way of dressing the same or only a strip of clothing or even naked. On the other hand, they are being fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with the new situation in life. This transition (cf Scandrett-Leatherman 1999:314) is like death and birth where the physical birth of a baby and the ultimate birth, through death, of a spiritual person provide strong analogies for the rite's transition into the spiritual cosmology.

The liminal group is portrayed as a community of comrades in which familiarity, ease, and outspokenness thrive and not structure of hierarchically arrayed positions. During the secluded situation distinctions of rank, age, kinship position are transcended under the principle "each for all and all for each." To identify the feeling of human bonding, Turner (1977:96) uses the Latin word *communitas* to emphasize the social relationships rather than the word community that often indicates special relationships. Scandrett-Leathermann (1999:314-315) uses the term *communal connectivity* to describe this social bonding. *Communitas* is not

only created via a status levelling process, but also through the general qualities of anti or inter-structure, which are common during ritual-liminality. Turner (see 1977:106-107) develops a series of binary discriminations to illustrate the contrast between liminal anti-structure and the social status system for example transition/state, communitas/structure, equality/inequality, absence of status/status, no distinction of wealth/distinctions of wealth, sacred instruction/technical knowledge, silence/speech, continuous reference to mystical powers/intermittent reference to mystical powers, simplicity/complexity.

The neophytes or initiands in the withdrawn and secluded liminal state, away also from their previous habits and schedules and actions, are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality then is therefore also a stage of reflection, *reflection on the sacred and esoteric and mysteries of life and the supernatural* (see Turner 1979:238, 240-241). During this phase as symbol rich ritual, their nature may change, transformed from one kind of human being into another. It may also provide access to an antithetical realm of the spirit and accentuate spiritual meaning over perceptual or physical activity. During the process, the self-sustaining integrity of merely perceptual experience may be shattered in order to be transformed by the authentic realities of the ideal. The self is challenged to submit to the central and defining force of reality for example the transcendental other. Silence plays an important part during this phase of the ritual and the betwixt-and-between- period may become a period of fruitful darkness to the neophytes. For example, the powerful may be humiliated and the weak may purge resentments as in the Incwala first-fruit harvest ritual where the king of the Swazi people must move into a sanctuary or ritual hut, put under traditional rules and divested of all outward authority attributes. In this liminal period, king and people are closely identified in a mystical solidarity (Turner 1979:243).

After this period, the normal, structural order of the Swazi kingdom will be regenerated into lightness.

Liminality cannot replace social structure as such because society is a dialectical process of successive phases of structure and anti-structure (liminality). In society well-bonded social groups, will alternate between fixed and floating worlds. The liminal areas of time and space for example rituals, retreats, carnivals, dramas, films are open to the play of thought, reflection, feeling, will. In and through these, new models might be generated that could replace some of the structural models that control the centres of a society's ongoing life (see Turner 1977: vii, 203). At other times as in the Ndembu ritual while liminality finds its power in its contrast to the social system, it may serve to reinforce the social structure. Nevertheless, it usually softens the impact of rigid social structures by suggesting a deeper meaning (communal connectivity) that underlies the status-sensitive interactions of daily life (Scarlett-Leatherman 1999:315).

## **1.7 Methodology**

### **1.7.1 Introduction**

In empirical fieldwork research qualitative and quantitative research are relevant. Quantitative research collects and processes physical data that is measurable, comparable, and countable. Qualitative research is more interested in deductions, points of view, insights, and the data less subject to control although comparable. The research will follow a predominately qualitative approach to study from a reflective stance people (co-researchers) in terms of their own definitions of the world (the insider perspective), focusing on the subjective experiences of the individuals or groups remaining sensitive to the contexts in which they interact with each other. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are important. The researcher uses quantitative surveys that are statistically quantifiable not

so much for the statistics of the data but to identify focal points and tendencies in the relevant stories.

## **1.7.2 Quantitative Research Methods**

The quantitative empirical analytical method is similar to research in the natural sciences and uses terms as variables, measurement, experiment, and control applying them to social reality. It is conceived as a rational and linear process of research (Cartledge 2003:77).

### **1.7.2.1 Surveys**

Survey questionnaires (cf Appendix) are used to acquire research data collected from a cross section of people at a single point in time in order to understand the ways in which certain variables relate to one another. Each question contains at least one variable or more and collects information from the same variables from a number of respondents. There is a variety of sample strategies for gathering the data from particular groups of people. It includes both random and non-random sampling techniques (see Cartledge 2003:74-75; cf Mouton 2001:75,107). The sequence of the questions must be determined as well as the try out of it in the field. The transition between the various parts should be well prepared and not too abrupt and should contain sufficient variety. During the try out phase respondents will be asked about the difficulties and problems encountered while answering the questions.

### **1.7.2.2 Data Collection**

Once the questionnaire is finalized the question arises which group of people will be studied in the sense of what is the population under study (universe) and what sample (research population) will be drawn from the population as a whole (Van der Ven 1993:140). In this research journey, the population is the pilgrims or retreatants and their spiritualities or people representative of the traditions under study and then a selection of

cases of each of these traditions will be drawn focusing on those on retreat. Once the sample has been determined, the actual collection of data will begin in direct contact with the people who must be willing and able to participate. The fact that people may decide not to participate because of practical circumstances or lack of interest ought to be kept in mind and may influence the response rate. The data produced by the survey questionnaires, can be coded, and subsequently entered into a computer statistical package, for example the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The data from the questionnaires are reduced to individual variables of which the answer options are coded within the database (see Cartledge 2003:75-76).

### **1.7.2.3 Experiments**

In social psychology, experiments are often used in which at least, two groups, comprising people who have been randomly allocated, are tested in relation to a particular theory where one group is the experimental and the other the control group. The experimental group will then be exposed to an experimental stimulus of some kind or independent variable and the control group not and any difference between the two understood to be due to the independent variable since all other factors are deemed to be equal (Cartledge 2003:75; cf Mouton & Marais 1990:49,80,96).

### **1.7.2.4 Data Mining**

Quantitative research will also seek to use other previously gathered data that is publicly available and if possible, a comparison can be made with earlier studies (Cartledge 2003:75).

### **1.7.2.5 Structured Observation and Interviews**

The quantitative approach to the collection of data may also be applied to qualitative methods for example a structured design with a clear and predetermined list of items may be used in order to structure the process

of observation. In structural interviews usually no attention is given to the interaction between interviewer and interviewee and a predetermined set of questions is used (Cartledge 2003:75).

### **1.7.3 Qualitative Research Methods**

Qualitative research is a multi perspective approach to social interaction, with different qualitative techniques and data collection methods. The aim is describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing such interaction in terms of the meanings that the subjects attach to it (De Vos 2000:240). The focus in this research project will mainly be on qualitative methods where events, values, actions, norms etc. will be viewed from the perspective of the people who are being studied. It asks for sustained involvement by the researcher with these groups, providing detailed description of the social and spiritual contexts under investigation as well as analysis and explanations of the phenomena being described reflecting also the meanings ascribed by the people under study, taking account of their social and historical situation in which they communicate. This method of research allows the researcher to get closer to the data and engage with the subjects as an insider and is more flexible and more responsive to their perspectives (see Mouton & Marais 1990:164-168, cf Cartledge 2003:70). In the social context the research develops as a procession of interconnected events over a period providing a video clip or Poloroid picture development process sequence of events. The researcher will also operate with an open and flexible research strategy rather than a fully prescriptive one. In practice then the questions are not so much tightly designed or theory-driven questions but more general an open in nature and in the process theories and concepts will be tested as they arise from within the data under collection

### 1.7.3.1 Participant observation

In participatory action research a group of people plan together what to research and how to go about it, involving the group in the whole process of research and together aim at discovering new knowledge, developing consciousness and mobilizing for action (Collins 1998:2-3). Although this research study is not participatory research in its strict sense, some of its principles will be honoured for example breaking down the distinctions between researcher and researched and subjects and objects of knowledge, linking theory and practice, and a more participative, person-centred enquiry as doing research with people and not merely on them or about them.

The researcher will describe and analyse experiences, beliefs and behaviour of a group of people within a particular time, place, and culture, spirituality by means of observation with varying degrees of participation or non-participation and does so from the perspectives of those under investigation as well as own perspectives. Methods will include interviewing people in an *ad hoc* manner as opportunity arises, examining documents relating to these groups and life histories and biographies of key individuals. Thus, ideas generated from one source of material compared to other sources (triangulation) enhance the reliability of the results. It usually will mean that the researcher is immersed in and among those whom he or she seeks to study for example during a retreat or staying at a monastery, in order to generate an in depth understanding of the group and its context. Time will be spent with retreatants representative of the different traditions as well as with monks in the monasteries. Comprehensive field notes documented constantly and broad questions asked, phrasing initially in an open way consulting what the various conversational partners' thoughts are, before inadvertently narrowing down the options for further questions.

Participant observation is a field strategy that combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents, direct participation and observation and introspection. The researcher observes the research field from a member's perspective and influences it because of his or her participation (see Cartledge 2003:70-71; cf Flick 1998:141). The observational procedures applied in this qualitative research will develop within the following dimensions (Flick 1998:137):

- Covert versus overt observation: the observation will be revealed to those who are being observed.
- Non-participant versus participant observation: the observer will become an active part of the observed field.
- Systematic versus unsystematic observation: the observation will remain rather flexible and responsive to the processes itself.
- Observation in natural versus artificial situations: observations will be done in the field of interest.
- Self observation versus observing others: although observing other people much attention will be given to the researchers' reflexive self-observation, for further grounding of the interpretation of what is observed.

Therefore, as participant observer on the research journey gaining access to the research groups, a decision will be made as to what role to fulfill. That of more distant research, for example (a *covert* process) present but not speaking or being part of the process being observed, researcher participant (an *overt* process), for example taking part in the social setting engaging in positive interaction in a monastery and retreat and "interrupting" when relevant for the research. The aim will be in the study to be participant who is already involved in the situation under study but also to take time to step back and analyse what is happening from a research perspective. I agree with Flick (1998:144-145) that although it is

crucial in the qualitative research methodology and within my post modern approach to gain an insider perspective in the study field, it is also necessary to take on the status of a stranger or outsider at times in adopting a critical external perspective. The researcher will strive to dialectically embody or fuse the two functions of outsider and insider in order to methodologically authenticated theoretical premises and making the research subjects not into objects but dialogical partners.

### **1.7.3.2 Interviews**

Interviews are important within field research and compliment participation observation (Cartledge 2003:71). The researcher uses qualitative interviews with the emphasis on the relativation of culture, the active participation of the interviewer and giving the interviewee choice. The idea is to learn how people see, understand, and interpret retreat and their lifeworld. Listening will play a mayor part and not only the posing of focused and detailed questions, thinking about what to follow up only after the interview. However, topical interviews with more focus on subjects chosen by myself as researcher and interviewer and more active questioning and more rapid exchanges following up within the interviews. At times, a combination of focuses and styles are implemented in one single interview listening and asking (see Rubin 1995:31, 195). All the interviews are audio taped and transcribed verbatim and analysed.

#### **▪ Unstructured Interviews**

The researcher provides a minimal amount of guidance to the interviewee and allows the conversation to develop naturally but a group of themes or ideas regarding the research question may be used to guide such an interview (Cartledge 2003:72).

#### **▪ Structured Interviews**

The questions in this form of interview contain questions as part of an

interview protocol that guide the interview and the procedure is followed strictly in every situation. It produces similar transcripts of the interview every time (Cartledge 2003:72).

- **Semi structured Interviews**

Although it would have a set of questions, it allows new questions to emerge during the conversation. There is the expectation that the interviewed subject's viewpoints will more likely come to the fore in a relatively openly designed interview than in a standardized interview. The goal is to reveal existing knowledge in the form of answers in order to become accessible to interpretation (cf Flick 1998:76, 87).

- **The Focused Interview**

The specific feature of this type of interview is to use a stimulus like for example a specific retreat an aspect thereof that is content analysed beforehand for example silence, meditation and asking questions on it before the retreat. This enables a distinction made between the objective facts of the situation and the subjective definitions of the interviewee in order to compare them. In this way, one studies subjective viewpoints in different social groups. The four criteria (see Flick 1998:77, 81) to be met in the design of the interview and the conducting of the interview itself are: non-direction, specificity, range and the depth and personal context shown by the interviewer

- **The Semi Standardized Interview**

This type of interview takes place when the interviewee has a complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study that includes explicit or immediate assumptions that may be expressed spontaneously in answering an open question. But these are complemented also by implicit assumptions that could be reconstructed by asking different types of questions to for example pastors of the Dutch Reformed church: "Could

you briefly tell what you relate to the term retreat if you think of your church tradition”?, “What are the essential and decisive features thereof ?”

- **The Problem Centred Interview**

This type of interview provides biographical data and the interviewee’s view with regard to a certain problem. It is important that the interviewer makes clear his or her substantial interest, is able to maintain a good atmosphere in the conversation and deciding when to bring in his or her problem centred interest in the form of questions (Flick 1998:88-90). An example of a question regarding monastic retreat is:” what comes first to your mind when you hear the key words monastic retreat in monasteries or would you think that going on a retreat for a few days is running away from the challenges of real life?”

- **The Expert Interview**

In this type of interview the focus is on the capacity of the interviewee of being an expert in the field of monasticism or retreat or spirituality and the interview will have a more directive function to exclude unproductive topics. The researcher conducting the interview could also make clear that he or she is also familiar with the topic.

- **The Ethnographic Interview**

Participation observation mainly takes place in the context of field research but in applying it, interviews also play their part. The challenge is how to shape conversations arising in the field for example while visiting the Taize community into interviews in which the unfolding of the other’s specific experiences are aligned with the issues of research in a systematic way (Flick 1998:93). Here opportunities for an interview often arise spontaneously and surprisingly from the regular field contacts. Spradley (1979:58-59) suggests the following for conducting such an interview: “it is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of

friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist the assist informants to respond as informants. Exclusive use of these new ethnographic elements or introducing them too quickly will make interviews become like formal interrogation.” Elements to be included are a request to hold the interview resulting from the research question, explaining the project and notes taken and need for involvement by interviewee and ethnographic questions for example descriptive, structural and contrast questions. This is conducted in a spontaneous way over lunch or between prayer offices.

- **Focus Groups or Group Interviews**

This method will use group dynamics to uncover information about a particular group or sub-group of people and while building on the unstructured interview technique, extends it beyond one person to a group. For example, a young adult group from a particular school or university attending a retreat. The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group. Focus groups may also be used with other methods for example surveys, observations, single interviews etc. These interviews are useful in orienting oneself to a new field, generating hypotheses based on informants’ insights and developing interview schedules and questionnaires. It is advisable to work with strangers than well-known people, to begin with more heterogeneous groups and then more homogeneous ones and to start the interview with warm-up introductory comments and questions (see Cartledge 2003:72; cf Morgan 1988:12; Flick 1998:123). A number of themes and topics guide the discussion and enable different perspectives that are highlighted and contradictions to be noted. The researcher to obtain greater depth of information may pursue these different perspectives.

- **Life Histories**

This method entails the construction of the lives of key individuals under investigation for example diaries, autobiographies and conversations with acquaintances and colleges of the person (Cartledge 2003:72).

- **Oral History**

Oral history is similar to life history although from the perspective of a social group rather than an individual and this information from members of a group about the past enables the telling of their history (Cartledge 2003:73).

- **Narratives as Data**

The starting point in the narrative interview is to approach the interviewees' experiential world in a more comprehensive way. It is characterized as the outline of an initial situation (how everything started), then follow the events relevant to the narrative as selected from a whole host of experience and the presented as a coherent progression of events and finally the situation at the end of the development is presented (Flick 1998:98). It starts with a generative question that refers to the topic of the study with the intention to stimulate the main narrative of the person interviewed. The interviewer strives not to interrupt or obstruct this narrative in any way but empathises with the narrated story trying to understand it (Flick 1998:100).

- **Documentary Analysis**

The literature that the different groups or traditions under study produce themselves for example books, magazines, newsletters etc will provide information to be used in research (Cartledge 2003:73).

- **Grounded Theory Process**

This approach gives preference to the data and the field under study as against theoretical assumptions, which, are not applied, to the subject under study but discovered and formulated in dealing with the field and the empirical data to be found in it (Flick 1998:41). It thus develops theory from data in the field and uses twenty to thirty interviews in order to saturate descriptive and explanatory categories (Cartledge 2003:73).

- **Theological Reflection**

The framework of empirical theological research implies according to Van der Ven (1993:121) dialectic, within which perceptions of hermeneutic-communicative praxis are continually occurring or collected. The researcher registers observations in different ways: random or systematic, participatory or non-participatory, indirect or direct and overt or covert. Charged with this stream of perceptions, the researcher approaches the internal dialectic as continuing theological reflection for example a process of ordering and interpretation, which in turn may modify the perspective within which the “facts” are perceived.

Whenever some perceptions have been acquired, the results are subjected to a closer review, for example to reflection to arrive at preliminary conclusions which may put subsequent perceptions into a more specific or accurate perspective. This phase will consist of the interaction of perception and reflection. Theory and an overview of relevant empirical research literature guide the reflection. The extrapolation and application to the research findings of theological insights obtained from and through the guidance of the theological and empirical literature (see Van der Ven 1993:124). Reflection may stimulate a more discriminating analysis of both the literature-based insights and of the results of the researcher’s own perception.

Reflection is part of action (reflection during action) regarding the experience of self, others, groups, situations, processes etc. in that it occurs during the action through abduction, deduction and induction. It is also an analysis of the experiences of the researcher during the research process. However, reflection is also experimental in nature in that it is reflection as explication and analysis of the processes in the action itself (Van der Ven 1998:110-112). Theological reflection as a critical, creative and hermeneutical process on the findings of the research journey can proceed in three ways:

- Firstly a working back from the findings to the original theological theory from which the research was done,
- secondly, a theological interpretation about the research subject based on the concrete context found during the empirical investigation and thirdly theological reflection on the methodology because of the completed study, and
- thirdly, theological reflection on the research problem after the investigation within a new horizon of understanding in which the researcher may theologise about the problem. This hermeneutical process may produce new insights. It is also commendable to meditate after the investigation on the method and strategy used in the research. Relevant questions are, did the used methods fit the field of research producing adequate results, what mistakes were made and how can it be improved (Pieterse 1993:188-189)?

There is dialectic between theology and spiritual experience in that theology can evaluate experience and experience can stretch theology. Theology not only challenges, supports, critiques, evaluates expressions of spirituality but is in itself shaped and changed as new experiences in the spiritual life evaluate, support, challenge and critique it (Downey 1998:125). The researcher ought to take care not to allow theological

presuppositions to unduly or unconsciously dictate or restrict spiritual experience or the understanding of spirituality and to be constantly open, aware of and acknowledging such presuppositions in the reflective process

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods take the researchers' communication with the field as an explicit part of knowledge production. The subjectivities of the researcher and of those studied are part of the research process (Flick 1998:6). The researchers' reflections on his or her actions and observations in the field, the impressions, etc. become data in their own right, and are documented.

Dreyer (1998:14-27) argues that in both quantitative and qualitative research the practical theological empirical researcher has to embody the dialectics between belonging (insider perspective) and dissociation (distance or outsider perspective). Qualitative research with the high level of interaction between researcher and researched, will usually involve higher levels of belonging than quantitative research. To be engaged participant the researcher has to enter and interact (dialogical communicative actions) with and respect the life world (social, cultural, economic, political) of the researched. The role of detached observer means not merely accepting the content with the descriptions and interpretations or common sense of the research participants but also taking a critical reflexive stance. This means in practice to be critical of methodological choices, research methods, and interpretations during research. Furthermore, this critical stance pertains also to the researcher's own life world, theological presuppositions, the cultural, social, and political positions, as well as his/her scientific "habitus" including the meta-theoretical and theoretical frameworks that feature implicitly and explicitly in the research.

▪ **The Appropriative Method**

The aim in this method is to understand the Christian spiritual life (spirituality) as experience through interpretation and application (Downey 1998:129-131). The purpose of interpretation and application will be appropriation, for example, real understanding that is not only notional or theoretical but also with value-adding and transformational potential. The core conviction driving the method is that all genuine understanding for example purposes, meanings, values are subjectively understood from the inside out (appropriative). Interpretation of a spiritual experience or action, tradition past or present means that the researcher and the co-researchers allow preconceptions and tightly held convictions to be questioned in the process.

The appropriative method involves three steps (Downey 1998:129):

- The first being the description of the phenomenon as experienced or expressed in all its complexity,
- the second step is critical analysis on manifestations of spiritual experience in the past and present and
- the third is constructive interpretation that goes further than mere description or critique to provide insights for spirituality today with the potential to enrich the spirituality of all participants in the researcher process.

▪ **Social-Constructionist and Narrative Method**

Anne Lamott (1995:62) refers to Alice Adams's formula of writing as an exciting way of story development with the formula ABDCE for Action, Background, Development, Climax and Ending. This provides a framework to approach the research question also in a narrative way. This method provides guidelines to write one consistent, yet non-linear story

during the research process in view of the ABDCE formula (see Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:76-96; cf Müller 1996:96).

□ **Action**

Action refers to the action of the story and the story of the action especially the stories heard about retreat. Especially the now of the story and its dynamics, asking as researcher *what is happening here?* The now is dynamic in nature and to have it told opens up a possibility to create a new now for the future. It entails an empirical look at the people on retreat and an honest and serious effort listening to and describing it. Where it become necessary to go back or forward, when moving away from the *now* during the research an effort will be made to go back from the past or future and focus again on the now (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001: 79). Instead of working with hypotheses of what should be, the aim will be to understand the environment of practical knowledge where in human social action enacts and constructs culture. The aim is to allow the *co-researchers* to tell their own stories in their own ways uninterrupted. The action of the research will also consist of interaction between the researcher and the people and their actions, becoming part of the action of retreat, being aware of the interests of the researcher, and being transparent about it.

The researcher will strive to be part of the action that is researched and to hear the story through reading of applicable literature, observing and talking to the people, observing the art forms of the community and writing the stories down. Structured, half-structured and unstructured conversations and other qualitative methods are relevant. Awareness is necessary of the different discourses in the community that have impact on the action and people involved. The researcher's own story will become part of the research and feedback from the participants on the description of the action will also be obtained. The relationship or feelings

between researcher and the different role players who are part of the action field will be described (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:80).

#### □ **Background**

Lamott (1995:62) describe it as follows: “Background is where you let us see and know who these people are, how they have come to be together, what was going on before the story.” During this phase of the research process, the *now* of the story is set against the current socio political, economic, spiritual background of the researcher and co-researchers (setting design). Associations and connotations of the *past* are relevant, for example, the role of the monasteries and desert fathers and mystic spirituality’s role in the development of retreat are experienced to understand the action better.

Don Brownings’ (1991:47) first, second and third movement: descriptive, historical and systematic are related to the movement of action and background together. He describes the first movement as horizon analysis that attempts to analyse the horizon of religious and cultural meanings that surround people’s religious and secular practices. He uses the term thick description to emphasize the necessity to interpret the action that is being researched against the background of different perspectives for example economy, psychology, sociology, spirituality etc. After this description and as part of it, the background extends to the historical perspective and the systematic concepts already developed, concerning the specific or related relations.

#### □ **Development**

Lamott (1991:62) states: “Then you develop these people, so that we learn what they care most about. The plot – drama, the actions, the tensions – will grow out of that.” She uses the metaphor of the Polaroid picture development in which one cannot know beforehand exactly what

the picture is going to look like until it has finished developing, a gradual process providing more detail sometimes with surprising detail. The narrative researcher remains *patient*, interested, and curious not knowing beforehand what the outcome or solutions are or should be but waiting for the research plot to develop. This approach of patient waiting does not mean passivity, lack of realism or a withdrawal from interpretation but a social-constructionist approach where the researcher and characters are involved in an active process of story-development (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:82).

The researcher therefore will try to facilitate, wait, and reflect until the plot emerges and to be more than just a scribe but to listen to, get to know them better and have compassion with the characters. The emancipating role of the researcher means for example that the data may bring about provocative ideas, not foreseen or hypothesised, and to stimulate further dialogue and debate.

The challenge will be to bring about the different stories (background, own story, literature) in conversation with each other during the research process, reflecting on it, involving others in the integration and interpretation as well as to involve the “co-researchers” continuously and to let them reflect critically on preliminary interpretations.

#### □ **Climax**

Lamott (1995:62) describes this phase as follows: “You move them along until everything comes together in the climax, after which things are different for the main characters, different in some real way.”

The researcher still does not know the answers or outcome at this stage of the process or the way the plot will eventually develop but do envision a temporary destination. The characters should be allowed to develop from

here in their own time and way towards the end. The expectation is that retreat may be an effective way deeper into God but the challenge will be to wait for the climax to happen instead of manipulating it. The research document should therefore be a honest development of character and plot and not a propagandist or controlling stance taken (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:83). This can only happen after the different stories have been heard in the different traditions and the emerging of a possible new story has developed.

□ **Ending**

Lamott (1995:62) says: “And then there is the ending: what is our sense of who these people are now, what are they left with, what happened and what did it mean?” The methodology of research equals the writing of a story, the creating of a book and involves many of the stories of those involved in the research. It is more than mere reflection on these stories but also a new writing, an own research story with new possibilities. Therefore, the narrative approach to research does not end with a conclusion but with an open ending, a preface to the next text, which could stimulate a new story and new research (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:85).

▪ **Literature Review and Literature Study: Historical Descriptive**

Although the focus in this research project is empirical in nature, the literature review and subsequent literature study is also essential and part of the listening process of the research journey. It will take place as an identification, review and studying of existing scholarship regarding the research theme, identifying key concepts as well theories, models and methods in the field covering the main aspects of the study, topical in nature and based on the research problem under study.

In the historical descriptive method, the focus will be on individuals, particular movements (traditions), specific topics, and issues pertaining to the research question. The reading and interpretation of the historical texts on the Benedictine, Franciscan, and Taize traditions, which recount the spiritual experience and way of retreat, takes place in context. The guiding conviction is that these texts provide reliable access to authentic spiritual experience, which the texts themselves verify as such (Downey 1998:126). In the viewpoint of this researcher, this method, with an awareness and appreciation of the historical narratives, serves as a reminder that the story of contemporary Christian spirituality and retreat do not occur in isolation but is part of a narrative that many before today experienced. Their experience may enlighten, instruct, guide, challenge, or validate the present story. The researcher will also keep in mind that a historical text or document does not give access to the actual spiritual experience of persons and groups from earlier eras but it provides an account of their spiritual experience.

- **Data Analysis**

Ultimately all fieldwork culminates in the analysis and interpretation of data, be it quantitative survey data, experimental recordings, historical and literary texts, qualitative transcripts or discursive data. Analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships. The aim of the analysis will be to understand the various constitutive elements of the data via inspection of the relationships between the concepts, constructs, or variables and to establish or isolate patterns, trends, or themes trends in the data. The data will be analysed by using the approach of Rubin and Rubin (1995:226-227). Data analysis will begin while the interview is still underway. This preliminary analysis can show how to redesign the questions to focus in on central themes as interviewing continues. After the interviewing is complete, a more detailed and fine-grained analysis follow of what the conversational revealed. In

this formal analysis, additional themes and concepts are identified building toward an overall explanation. To begin the final data analysis, all the material from all interviews that speaks to one theme or concept is put into one category. Material within the categories will be compared to look for variations and nuances in meaning. Comparison across the categories is also important to discover connections between themes. The goal will be to integrate the themes and concepts into a theory that offers an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of the research arena. The completion of the analysis takes place when the researcher feels that interpretations made are ready to be shared with others and what it means for theory and for understanding of the lifeworld.

Interpretation involves the synthesis of the data into larger coherent wholes and the interpretation (explaining) of observations or data by formulating hypotheses or theories that account for observed patterns and trends in the data. It also means describing the relation between the results and findings to existing theoretical frameworks or models.

### **1.6.2 The Complementarities of Qualitative *and* Quantitative Research**

Both the exactness of *quantitative* analyses and the depth of *qualitative* investigation are necessary for comprehensive research (Pieterse 1996:186, 187). Van der Ven states that the focus in the Nijmegen department of practical theology, of which he was part of, is on the relation of complementarity's between the two approaches. The hypothesis is that they are not opposites but that they complement each other (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:336). Within an interpretative wider hermeneutic paradigm, there is room for both where for interpretation the qualitative method is appropriate and the quantitative method for explanation. Ricoeur's (Ricoeur 1981:150) hermeneutical framework uses both interpretation and explanation because all science is models of

interpretation and all knowledge is interpretation where the researcher tries to make sense of observations within a framework of understanding. The aim is to evaluate and test the interpretation constantly critically whether it fits into reality.

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have advantages and disadvantages. Quantitative surveys allow for developing a hard core of knowledge, inter-subjective testing of results reliability and validity, replication and generalization. Qualitative surveys provide the opportunity to take the subjects uniqueness into account, the dynamics and the drama or their interactions and communications, the depth of their emotional engagement and the specificity of the images, symbols and rituals implied (Schweitzer & Van der Ven 1999:337). Qualitative methods will involve participants on the research journey and help to survey the subjective learning processes as well as the intentions and motives behind actions (Pieterse 1996:184).

Quantitative research is embedded in a positivist theory. The methods and processes of natural sciences are appropriated to the social sciences. It excludes the metaphysical and scientific knowledge proceeds then by means of verified facts and aims to be value free and objective. It operates from the outside looking in with detached scientific objectivity, has a static view of reality and individuals as external to it, and constrained by it (Cartledge 2003:76-77, 81). Science is viewed as deductive in the sense that theories generate hypotheses or conjectures regarding causal relationships that are then tested empirically. Quantitative research is a rational and linear process where researchers conceptualise research in terms of a logical structure. However, research is often more complex and not as orderly and linear in practice and involves imagination.

Qualitative research belongs to a non-positivistic approach to research where people are not objects but conscious, purposive actors with definite ideas about their world, attaching meaning to what is happening around them and construct a social world of meaning that they inhabit. Qualitative research then does not present its findings as final and true but as an invitation to view reality from a different angle and aims to enable the search for meaning in a complex social world. It seeks sustained engagement with the people under study and follows an insider approach is more flexible in its approach and more responsive to the subjects' perspectives (Cartledge 2003:78, 81). Typical of qualitative research according to Flick (1998:27) is:

- Its orientation towards analysing concrete aspects in their temporal and local particularity starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts.
- It provides an insider perspective that studies people in terms of their own definitions of reality, the subjective experiences of individuals and their stories, the contexts in which people interact with each other and the perspectives of the participants and their diversity are taken seriously
- It gives room for reflexivity of the researcher and the researched where the subjectivities of the researcher and the researched are part of the research process.
- A variety of approaches and methods are available, it takes into account that viewpoints and practices in the research field are different because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them.

- It views the researchers' communication with the research field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge production.

The approach followed by the researcher is to recognize the value of a more detached and structured approach that uses methods of distance as well as the engagement with the life world of those under study. It is knowledge revealed or gained by participation and by reflection, by engagement and detachment. My research journey follows a predominantly qualitative approach.