

**REINTERPRETING THE SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS OF
GAY MEN IN PENTECOSTAL/CHARISMATIC
CHURCHES**

by

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I declare that **REINTERPRETING THE SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS OF GAY MEN IN PENTECOSTAL/CHARISMATIC CHURCHES** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature
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ABSTRACT

This study explores how gay Christian men in the pentecostal/charismatic movement reinterpret their spirituality as a reaction to the discourse about homosexuality in this movement. The spiritual experience of gay men is contextualized within the particular emphasis on individual experience found in pentecostal/charismatic spirituality. Practical theological research is conducted within a postmodern discourse set in context of a Participatory Action Research project. A narrative therapeutical approach served to identify harmful discourses and encourage the continuing deconstruction of such discourses.

The extent to which power/knowledge relationships affect gay Christians' spiritual relationships became apparent. Conflict between the church's discourse about homosexuality and the gay Christian appears to start a process of deconstruction of fundamentalist pentecostal/charismatic hermeneutical approaches to the Bible. The research process facilitated a process of reconstruction of gay spirituality and created opportunities for spiritual and social growth. This research may inspire gay Christian voices in pentecostal/charismatic circles to become heard.

Key Words:

Pentecostal /Charismatic/ Spirituality/ Homosexuality /Gay Men/ Postmodern / Discourse/ Practical Theology/ Narrative analysis / Participatory Research

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CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

I have decided to present our research journey of reinterpreting the spiritual relationships of gay men in a pentecostal/charismatic church in an 'uncomfortable' manner by presenting the text from the back forward. My intention is to constantly remind the reader of the struggle of the gay person to be true to his identity against the grain or flow of community and theological discourses and discourses of spirituality.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

1.1 ALIENATION, MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION

The prologue is important in grounding my motivation or the inspiration for this research. I remember meeting a young man who was new to the Pentecostal church of which I was a member. He became part of our social group after making a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ. After some time he confided in me that he had a serious problem which made him feel very embarrassed, guilty, and lonely because he could not share it with anyone. The problem was that he was sexually attracted to men and in this struggle he experienced conflict with his commitment to Christ and the church, which was intolerant of such a lifestyle. The way in which he understood the situation was that he had to choose between Christ and Satan, between living as a Christian and being gay. I wonder what happened to this young man. I also wonder how he came to these conclusions. Could he perhaps have been forced by the prevailing discourse into an unnatural relationship with a girl ending up as a married gay man? Or perhaps he became a suicide statistic? I hope that neither was the case.

The positioning of the words in this heading was deliberately chosen in such a way as to reflect my idea of 'exclusion' being the result of alienation and marginalisation. From my interaction with the co-researchers¹ on this journey, their experience seemed to

¹ My co-researchers, whom I will introduce in more detail further on in this dissertation, consist of six gay Christian men who are members of a gay affirming charismatic church in Pretoria.

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correspond closely to the dictionary description of the word 'alienation' described as being caused to feel isolated or to lose support (Oxford 2001 s v 'alienate') and of the word 'marginalise' that seems to be an action that would make a person or group to feel less important or powerful (Oxford 2001 s v 'marginalize'). From the explanation of these two terms it would seem that the person who is alienated and marginalised is made to feel disowned, left out, and rejected and thus prevented from taking part in the life of mainstream society. Such a person would be considered as having to live outside, or on the outskirts of life as lived by the majority of society, excluded from at least some societal interaction (Oxford 2001 s v 'exclude').

The gay² person in the mainstream pentecostal/charismatic movement³ is deliberately marginalised and alienated from the rest of the body of Christ and is as such excluded. Many examples may be quoted but I trust that only a few of these will suffice.

Homosexuality is widely condemned in Pentecostal churches in the United States of America. In a list of religious groupings indicating the members who were most accepting of homosexuality and those least accepting, Pentecostal churches in the United States were listed as least accepting (Comstock 1996:17). This position taken by, among others, Pentecostal churches, is based on a particular interpretation of certain

² The term 'gay' and 'homosexual' will be used interchangeably in this dissertation to refer to both men and women who may be sexually and / or romantically exclusively attracted to a person of the same sex (Muller 2005). The term 'homosexual' is avoided by some people because until 1973 the American Psychiatric Association gave a negative clinical description of same-sex attraction as a pathological state. 'Western people who regard themselves as having a same-gender sexual orientation tend to prefer the terms gay and lesbian; the latter term (noun or adjective) refers specifically to women. The term *gay* can apply to both men and women. Other terms include *same-gender-loving*, and *same-sex-oriented*' (*Etymology and usage*).

³ Burgess and McGee (1989:219-220) differentiates between 'classical' Pentecostal Churches that originated in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century, 'Neo'-Pentecostals in the mainline churches and the 'charismatic' Pentecostals in the Roman Catholic Church. For the purposes of this dissertation the term 'pentecostal/charismatic' will be used to include those Christians who adhere to the centrality of Jesus Christ as Saviour, Baptizer in the Spirit, Healer and coming King (Möller 1998:179). 'Ecclesiastically the two groups are usually associated with different denominations'. 'Some of the oldest classical pentecostal denominations in Northern America ... are: The Assemblies of God, The Churches of God, The Church of God in Christ, The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and The Pentecostal Holiness church'. 'In South Africa the term *pentecostal* usually refers to denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Faith Mission and the full Gospel church of God' (Bosman 1997:6).

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selected biblical passages which condemns the homosexual act, condition and orientation as sinful (Comstock 1996:13).

The Pentecostal Assemblies of God of America in its statement of faith says: 'We firmly stand against and denounce homosexuality, adultery, sexual perversion' (Assemblies of God: Statement of Faith). The Assemblies of God, second largest Pentecostal faith group in the United States, 'consider all forms of same-sex sexuality as a sin: whether they occur within a loving, committed, consensual relationship, or take the form of homosexual rape, prostitution, orgies, or child sexual abuse. Sexual orientation is regarded as a choice; it can be altered with God's help (Assemblies of God: Statement of Faith). Neither of these beliefs agrees with those of gays, lesbians, human sexuality researchers and mental health therapists and their organizations and professional associations. They do not differentiate between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior' (Assemblies of God: Statement of Faith).

The United Pentecostal Church International (Robinson 2004) interprets Romans 1:26-27 as declaring that homosexuality is 'vile, unnatural, unseemly and an abomination in the sight of God'. They also condemn homosexuality as a 'moral decadence and sin' and encourage people to pray for 'the deliverance of those enslaved by that satanic snare.' A common theme mentioned by many Pentecostals is that a homosexual orientation is caused by an indwelling demonic spirit, and that exorcism⁴ is the only meaningful treatment.

MacNutt (2000), well known for his work in the field of healing in the charismatic movement, maintains that 'homosexuality can be healed. That is, a homosexual can become a heterosexual; the homosexual orientation can be changed through prayer for inner healing and the power of the Holy Spirit. This solution, too, we believe, accords well with what Scripture teaches'.

⁴ Various beliefs appear to exist within the pentecostal/charismatic tradition regarding the possibility of a Christian 'having' a demon and exorcism. David du Plessis (2004:269) states that the 'tradition of exorcism is built on one Scripture only – one that has a false punctuation in it'. He remarks on the practice of exorcism in the pentecostal movement, based on an incorrect interpretation of Scripture, as a 'tragedy that results in brethren exorcizing people, making them think that they have been helped' (Du Plessis 2004:269). Don Basham (2004:271) seem to support the idea that Christians may 'have' demons and that these may be exorcised.

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The *Natal Witness* of 26 September 2003 reported that:

The Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in South Africa on 25 September 2003 reconfirmed its stance that the practice of homosexuality is a sin. AFM president Isak Burger said that five years ago his church council unanimously adopted a policy document on the practice of homosexuality, "confirming our traditional understanding of scripture that it is a sin and out of step with God's word and His will for mankind".

(Quoted in *Christians for Truth* 2003)

Clearly, from the statements made by the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, the Assemblies of God in the USA and the United Pentecostal Church International in the USA, the mere thought of Christian gay men having any kind of meaningful spiritual relationship is generally unthinkable in most pentecostal/charismatic churches. This statement is also based on my extensive exposure to the pentecostal/charismatic environment for over 30 years and the abovementioned statements of faith. The fact that many gay men have been alienated from the mainstream Christian church because of their sexual orientation is a result of this exclusive thought and grounded in an exclusive theology.

The experience of being alienated, marginalised and excluded is not limited to the pentecostal/charismatic movement. Muller (Germond & de Gruchy 1997:174-175), who comes from a Dutch Reformed Church background and who now ministers in the Reforming Dutch Reformed Church identifies the same problem in other churches that 'accepts them as people, but judges their sin, meaning their gay orientation'.

Paul Germond (Germond & de Gruchy 1997:194-195) maintains that because of the predominantly heterosexual nature of the Christian church, it assumes that heterosexuality is the norm and that 'homosexuality is constructed as the archetypal perversion'.

Another assumption is that 'heterosexuality is an essential constituent element of human nature.... Homosexuality is regarded as a perversion of the "natural" human state' (Germond & de Gruchy 1997:195). In Christian heterosexist communities homosexual

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people are regarded as perverts and deviants from the central definition of being human namely that of being heterosexual.

The wider Christian community does not recognise that many homosexual people feel the need to be open about their sexual orientation while also professing faith in Jesus Christ. The very idea is usually seen as absurd because the term 'Christian gay person' is an oxymoron. This is illustrated by some communities in the Church who maintain that 'gay people are to be ignored as if they do not exist or else that they are to be condemned and persecuted as perverts, for certainly the kingdom of God is not made up of such damnable and disgusting sinners' (Williams 1997:13). The unholy alliance of Christianity and homosexuality is likewise pointed out by the Southern Baptist Convention who condemns homosexual acts and the homosexual condition/orientation as sinful and prohibited by God and leaves no choice to the homosexual than to acknowledge, renounce, and change their sinfulness or be expelled from their religious body. The Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, National Association of Evangelicals, Roman Catholic Church, and Orthodox Judaism have taken similar positions (Comstock 1996:13).

Because of the need to live as homosexual Christians, many gay men and lesbians have been resilient in shaping their own spiritual pathways and new ministries have been formed to meet their spiritual needs (Walsh 1999:20). In my journey with the participants in this study I found this to be true in their lives. A study done by Mahaffy (Yip 1998:41) indicated that lesbian Christians resolved the dissonance between their religious beliefs and homosexual feelings by 'either changing their religious beliefs, leaving the church or living with the dissonance'. The gay men involved in this research all resolved the dissonance mentioned by leaving the mainstream church to join a gay-affirming church.

Together with Germond (1997:203) I also wanted to know whether there are any 'messages of inclusivity that lie at the heart of the Bible transcending the culturally bound messages that marginalise women, slaves, and gay and lesbian people?' and was encouraged to find a Jesus in the synoptic gospels who demonstrated inclusion of those excluded by their culture society and religion. I also found that the apostle Paul preached a theology of inclusivity by proposing a doctrine of salvation through grace. This is clear when considering that '[a]ll who rely on observing the law are under a curse', and that

'[c]learly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "the righteous will live by faith." (Gal 3:10, 11) Tragically many Christians return to the law for their salvation. The very use of the law in condemning homosexuality is an example of this tragic misunderstanding of the gospel of grace, the theology of radical inclusion' (Germond 1997:209).

1.2. THE FACE(S) OF 'SPIRITUALITY'

The importance of the spirituality of gay men and re-interpreting their spiritual relationships in the context of this research makes it important to say more about the term 'spirituality'.

1.2.1 Exploring some meanings ascribed to spirituality

Richard Wendel (2003:165-179) notes that much difficulty is experienced in defining the term spirituality. 'Spirituality' can often be interchanged with 'faith' and Wendel (2003: 165-179) refers to Hosmer and Jones (1979) who noted that 'spirituality is one of those umbrella words that covers anything from a serious excursion into Zen Buddhism to a passing interest in astrology'. In an article written by Stanley Grenz (2002) it is asserted that there is a 'mushrooming of interest in spirituality, leading to what we might term a "secular spirituality", ...'. In terms of the Christian context Grenz (2002) maintains that 'spirituality can only be understood truly and fully, when it is viewed within a theological framework. Placing it within the purview of theology leads to an understanding of spirituality that is both wider and deeper than is engendered by the narrowing of the discussion to "practical Christianity" viewed as either discipleship or spiritual growth, as important as these are'. He continues to say that '[f]rom the perspective of Christian theology, therefore, the contemporary quest for spirituality, reflecting as it does the desire for personal identity within the context of relationships, is ultimately the search for God. People long for an identity that only God can give through a relationality that only God can fulfill.' The role of the Holy Spirit as the facilitator of the relationship between the Son and the Father enables us, as those in whom the Spirit dwells, to 'participate through the Spirit in the relationship the Son enjoys with the Father as corecipients with the Son of the Father's love for the Son. Because the Spirit draws us into the divine life precisely at the place of the eternal Son, that is, as those who are "in Christ" the Son, we

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truly are the beloved children of our heavenly Father. This identity, being God's beloved children and being named by God (Rev. 2:17; 3:12), that God freely bestows on us in the Son by the Spirit marks the fulfillment of our longing for identity and selfhood, and consequently, it comprises the telos of the human quest for "home."

Grenz's opinion above, seems to resonate with the type of interpretation of spirituality – a strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit - that one would expect to find in pentecostal or charismatic communities (see paragraph 1.2.2). 'In most religious traditions, spirituality refers to the unique medium or path by which persons seek to live out their religious beliefs and values, either individually or as members of a community. Thus, while one may speak of a general gay spirituality, it would be more correct, in fact to refer to gay "spiritualities", as there is more than one authentic way to comprehend the sacred' (Boisvert 1999:55).

In my journey with the men whom I will introduce in a later chapter, I experienced a spirituality that is described by Louw (2003:210) as something that 'emanates from human experience and is the knowledges and wisdom created in experiences of a relationship with God, humanity and self.' He continues to say that '[s]pirituality reflects the meaning-making process of all of human experience and reflects the choice and attitude of how we embrace and live life'.

Roland Martinson (2002) refers to Tom Beaudoin who 'wrote a provocative book, *Virtual Faith ...* regarding his own experience and that of lower- to upper-middle-class 20- to 30-somethings on the subject of spirituality. He cited four spiritual values or struggles in the lives of young women and men'. These values concerned their response to institutions, the importance of personal experience, their ambiguity regarding identity and the question of fidelity. Regarding the centrality of *personal experience* in the spirituality of this generation '[h]e noticed as he listened to his contemporaries that if they had experienced it, it was true. Experience is a prime indicator of that which is true and important. Suffering is especially seen as a test of genuine faith and truth'.

1.2.2 Spirituality in pentecostal/charismatic theology

By discussing pentecostal/charismatic spirituality in a separate paragraph I wish to make the point that although it forms part of the broader Church, the charismatic and pentecostal movement, unlike other traditions in the Church, places emphases on different facets of spirituality which are typical to the movement. The question that needs to be answered is 'how does pentecostal/charismatic spirituality differ from other Christian spiritualities'? Abraham (2003:9) says that pentecostal spirituality is distinct 'as it is the spirituality of the Spirit of God'. In other words, the Spirit of God is believed to be operational in every sphere of their spirituality.

Jaichandran and Madhav (2003:41) point out that 'spirituality' is a relatively new concept to many pentecostal believers. Their emphasis is typically on 'being spiritual'. This 'involves actions like fasting, praying, speaking in tongues, operating the gifts of the spirit, raising hands while singing or praying and emotional attitudes like joy, sorrow, confidence, being comforted etc'.

Spittler (Jaichandran & Madhav 2003:42), a Pentecostal theologian, maintains that pentecostal spirituality consists of five implicit values. They are: the importance given to 'individual experience; the importance of the spoken (orality); the high esteem placed on spontaneity; an other-worldly tendency in which the eternal, the "up there" in heaven is more real than the present; and the authority of the Bible as the basis of what we should experience'.

'[I]n Pentecostalism a personal and living relationship between God in Christ through the Spirit on the one hand, and the human being on the other, is simply not negotiable'. 'It is clear that in the Pentecostal paradigm, truth is related to Christ Himself and not to any theological or even biblical concept' (Möller 1998:186). Some of the important implications of this statement are that people who receive the baptism in the Spirit have an encounter with Christ who is the Baptiser with the Spirit and that this encounter 'primarily concerns a revelation of God in one's life, and not merely an experience as such (Möller as quoted by Möller 1998:187). The following statement made by F P Möller regarding the baptism in the Spirit appears to be very significant in the light of an interpretation of the spiritual relationships of gay people: 'It is a result, the consequence

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of the encounter with Jesus Christ as the Baptiser in the Spirit; it is an experience in the God-human relationship' (as quoted by Möller 1998:187). An encounter with Jesus Christ in the baptism in the Spirit would be a very important aspect of the spirituality of any pentecostal/charismatic believer and it would therefore be meaningful to reinterpret 'being gay' within this encounter. This line of thought is supported by Pretorius (2002) who places the model of Spirit-Christology in the centre of charismatic spirituality. 'The most succinct definition of Spirit-Christology is that the Holy Spirit is attributed a constitutive role in the soteriological theology that can be identified as stemming from the person and the work of Jesus Christ (Pretorius 2002:62).

In keeping with the history of the Pentecostal movement the subjective, experiential emphasis in pentecostal/charismatic spirituality can probably be seen as having more of an impact in the movement than that of objective truth⁵. According to Spittler (1988:412) '[n]othing matters more to Pentecostals than their own "personal experience with God," their individual encounters with Jesus, their experience of the Holy Spirit'.

Jaichandran and Madhav (2003:55) ask the question whether the pentecostal revival at Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF), a highly experiential one, is simply individuals being renewed by the Holy Spirit or if 'whether what one sees happening in pentecostal churches is the subtle influence of postmodern spirituality'. Margaret Poloma (Jaichandran & Madhav 2003:57) a sociologist who studied the 'Toronto Blessing' concedes that there is an influence of postmodernism in the behavioural manifestations that she discusses. However, according to Poloma (Jaichandran and Madhav 2003:57) '[e]ven as there are some similarities Pentecostal spirituality shares with Postmodern spirituality, there are also some dissimilarities that are unique to Pentecostal spirituality. For example, while the emphasis of postmodern spirituality is on the deconstruction of language which results in the sheer silence of the mystic, Pentecostal spiritual experience centers around the language of God-experience'.

⁵ A striking skepticism of higher education previously existed in the pentecostal movement. In South Africa the first Bible College in the Apostolic Faith Mission was only opened in 1954 (Gedenkboek van die AGS v SA 1988:28). Previously it was said that 'the school of experience of the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit was seen as a better training method' (my translation) (Gedenkboek van die AGS v SA 1988:28).

'It cannot be denied that the most important value that governs Pentecostal spirituality is the locus of individual experience. Viewed positively, this means that the Pentecostal is not satisfied until he or she has had an experience with God' (Jaichandran & Madhav 2003:55). Yung (2003:76) in discussing some problems in the pentecostal/charismatic movement, mentions that 'the strong emphasis on the work of the Spirit results in the renewal movement being so experience centered that the word of God often ends up being neglected. It is not that those in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement do not take the Bible seriously. Rather, they often do not pay enough attention to the diligent study of the word to interpret it properly. Thus biblical truth is sometimes compromised within the movement by default'. Could this be impacting on the pentecostal/charismatic movement's view of the gay Christian?

The concept of 'spirituality' in the pentecostal/charismatic movement thus appears to revolve around a subjective spiritual experience. 'Pentecostal spiritual models, rituals, symbols, signs are all geared towards ministering to the feelings of the person' (Jaichandran & Madhav 2003:55).

1.2.3 Re-introducing spirituality into therapeutic practices

The need for recognition of the spiritual dimension of the lives of people who wish to speak to a therapist about their life experiences is widely recognised (Carlson & Erickson 2002; Griffith & Griffith 2002; Ross 1994; Walsh 1999). This acknowledgement of everybody having an intense desire to deal with his or her spirituality fits in quite well with the pentecostal/charismatic theology. According to Möller (1998:181) 'strong emphasis is placed on a very personal relationship of the believer with Jesus as the revelation of God to humanity'. This relationship is typified by Albrecht (1999:218) as ongoing and an emanation of 'a particular configuration of beliefs, practices and sensibilities'. The importance of a personal relationship is also reflected in the work of Beaudoin (Martinson 2002) relating to a general population of 20- to 30-somethings. Personal experience in spirituality would therefore appear to also be important outside a defined pentecostal/charismatic theology.

Walsh (1999:35) refers to Dorothy Bevcar's account of 'how she brings her own spiritual orientation into her practice to tap into clients' yearning for meaning and purpose and

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facilitate a holistic sense of wellness'. The individual's spirituality or religion serves resilience, which refers to a person's ability to rebound from adversity stronger and more resourceful. 'Spiritual distress, an inability to invest life with meaning, impedes coping and mastery in the face of life challenges' (Walsh 1999:38).

One also has to take note of the huge influence of spirituality on health, facing death, recovery from addictions (for instance the 12-step programs of recovery followed by sufferers of various kinds of addiction), poor living conditions and racism, to name only some aspects of people's daily lives. I was touched by what Fred Taylor (Walsh 1999:129) had to say with regard to the Christian perspective on spirituality. He said that 'there is an authentic congruence between the therapeutic discipline of being as attentive to the surfacing of strengths alongside the surfacing of pain and distress and of holding human sin and God's grace together with grace, not sin, as the last word'.

In the light of such an obvious need for re-membering spirituality in therapeutic work and in order to serve the needs of all people, and especially those who have been largely ostracised and marginalised by the church because of their sexual orientation, we need to consciously re-introduce spirituality in our practice of pastoral narrative therapy.

According to Viljoen (2001) '[t]herapies that recognise the value of spirituality, religious values and the effects religious beliefs have on people's stories about themselves, invite spirituality back into the therapeutic realm'. Andrews & Kotzé (2000:327) in reflecting on a particular therapeutic journey with someone caught up in repressive religious discourses, remark on the value of spiritual talk in therapy. This client 'turned restrictive religion into healing by being able to open up her spirituality to find her new preferred spiritual talk'. In our research about spiritual relationships I also hoped that my co-researchers and I would 'discover new spiritual meanings and understanding of their experiences'.

Viljoen (2001) makes an important point regarding religion and spirituality:

Religious dogma had played a key role in legitimising the oppression of marginalised groups in South Africa. Ironically, religious beliefs and spirituality sustained many of the oppressed and played a role in their liberation. Religion sustained the oppressed at the same time it was used to provide biblical legitimacy to the actions of the oppressors.

I find the particular value of the narrative pastoral therapeutic approach in the words of Carlson and Erikson (Viljoen 2001) who 'are of the opinion that the shift towards social constructionist therapies may be opening the door to include spiritual and religious issues in therapy'. Indeed, 'a growing appreciation of the importance of spirituality emerged when social construction theory entered the therapeutic domain'.

Griffith and Griffith (Viljoen 2001) also affirm the value of exploring spirituality in therapy by explaining how 'spirituality could open up spaces for new self-narratives and therefore have a healing effect on people'.

It is also necessary to point out that when referring to the 'spirituality' or 'spiritual experiences' of gay people one important difference between heterosexual and gay people seems to be relevant. Donald Boisvert illustrates this difference in saying that there is an

intimate connection between the oppression of gay men and the emergence of a gay spirituality. Gay men are intensely conscious, personally and collectively, of the disdain in which they have been held by organized religion throughout history. Their political oppression has its source in the oppression of Scripture. The blossoming of gay spirituality can be seen, from the sociological perspective, as a classic example of the positive recuperation, by the victim and the outsider, of the religious discourse of rejection and intolerance

Boisvert (1999:57)

Narrative pastoral therapy, when practiced as social constructionist therapy, may facilitate the inclusion of spiritual and religious matters. This is the opinion of Carlson and Erikson when commenting on the historic exclusion of such matters in therapeutic conversations (Viljoen 2001).

1.3 PERSONAL MOTIVATION FOR ENGAGING IN THIS RESEARCH

Having been exposed to gay people for many years in the secular workplace, I was privileged to attain some insight into the desires, fears, pain and heartaches that is part of people in this subculture. A cry for love and a desire for acceptance by society and the church can be heard if one listens closely. This confirms the remarks by Walsh (1999:3) regarding the need for a spiritual orientation in all people. In all the years of my involvement with the pentecostal/charismatic culture only one message was sent out

regarding gay people. This message is one of 'turn or burn': either repent of your sin so that you may be 'healed', or come to terms with the fact that you will not have eternal life or go to heaven if you carry on in your old ways. And if a person does not experience 'healing' he may be saved through abstinence even though this may mean indescribable hardship and pain in some cases. Thus 'the church makes a distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual practices' (Stuart 1997:181). There is also the option of leaving the church not by choice but through the church's moral condemnation.

I am reminded of some effeminate gay men I have come across in pentecostal/charismatic churches who are living celibate lives because they may not express their homosexual orientation if they intend staying in fellowship with their respective churches. No change has taken place in their sexual orientation and they remain attracted to men but cannot express their sexuality for fear of eternal damnation by the Church. This fact urged me to consider the possibility of the change in sexual orientation as expected by most of those in the pentecostal/charismatic churches and the validity of such a claim. The ex-gay movement appears to advocate this possibility and in July 1998, the Christian Coalition along with a dozen other organizations paid for full-page ads supporting 'ex-gay ministries' in several of the largest newspaper publications in the United States to attempt to reach out to gay people giving them hope that their lives could be changed from gay to heterosexual with God's help. In response to these ads Anita (2004) (full name not given) made several important remarks. She pointed out that her response was based on the way *all* gays and lesbians were portrayed by the ads and felt that this misrepresented her life. According to Anita she had read several hundred testimonies from people who claimed to be delivered from homosexuality. These testimonies seemed to confirm the ad in the Washington Post ad stating that *gays* suffer from rejection from early childhood, lack of bonding to same-sex parents, sexual violence and rape, or mental and emotional abuse as critical elements in the formation of their gender-identity. The article also states that these life situations don't deny the choice a person makes in yielding to temptation, no matter how strong the urge. In responding to this generalised description of gay people Anita states her belief that

these elements can certainly influence some people to turn to same-sex relationships (and these seem to be the people who are helped by 'ex-gay' ministries) but that there are hundreds of thousands of men and women who are gay by orientation and not by circumstance. I am one of

them. There was no drug abuse, promiscuous sex, or homosexual influences in my past. My home was a place of safety and love. I was surrounded by loving and stable heterosexual relationships. I was taught about the sanctity and joy of marriage. I knew I was a girl and I looked forward to growing up into a woman of God.

This important clarification of being gay by orientation and not by choice, a position seemingly supported by my co-researchers in this research project, leads me to wonder about the possibility of changing from homosexuality to heterosexuality.

The question that I have to answer for myself regarding the demands of the charismatic church made on homosexual people, is whether we are serving the message of Christ or whether we are adhering to an interpretation of some selected Bible texts seemingly condemning homosexuality. Is it perhaps a matter of clinging to the letter that kills in stead of ministering through the Spirit that gives life (2 Cor 3:6)? In terms of a post-modern approach to theology I question the insistence of the church for gay people to conform to the discourse about homosexuality as it is practised in the church.

A major Afrikaans newspaper (*Beeld* 14 September 2002) reported about an Apostolic Faith Mission pastor who left his wife and moved in with a fellow gay pastor. My question in this regard is how anything like this could happen within a church tradition where being gay was not only unacceptable but was strongly condemned? It was even more surprising because the men concerned were fully aware of the church's doctrine in this regard and knew that they would have to face disciplinary actions. Both of these men subsequently chose to resign from the pastorate and the church. There was no room for them in the church unless they repented of their wrongdoing and lived a celibate or heterosexual lifestyle. I was once again made aware of the church's intolerance to the expression of gay love.

1.4 THE PURPOSE OF MY STUDY

Through this project I attempted to collaboratively do research *with* Christian gay men within the pentecostal/charismatic frame of reference. In identifying and deconstructing some of the discourses hindering these men from living a meaningful life in terms of their spiritual relationships, there is a possibility of new realities being constructed. This would

Chapter 1 Introduction to the research journey

serve the doing of practical theology within a postmodern discourse by including the important elements of contextualism, localism, and pluralism.

My present aim for the project is:

- 1 to explore the influence of socially constructed discourses regarding sexuality, gender, Christianity, spirituality, the church, sin and salvation and their influence on Christian gay men;
- 2 to explore power/knowledge relationships affecting the relationship between gay men and the church;
- 3 to deconstruct dominant discourses that are impacting negatively on the participants' wellbeing and to co-construct with them alternative preferred stories that will impact on their past, present and future realities;
- 4 to communicate the preferred stories of their spiritual relationships within the pentecostal/charismatic movement.

I am not convinced that there are simple answers to the many questions surrounding the gay issue in the church. There were many questions that I wanted to ask of the research participants; gay men who regard themselves as members of the church of Jesus Christ and who have aligned themselves with the particular workings and gifts of the Holy Spirit in terms of Pentecostal theology. I was wondering about their self-presentation in the context of religion and spirituality. I was also curious to know how the dominant cultural and theological discourses influence them in their day to day spiritual life. Would they have the courage at some stage to openly declare their gayness and spirituality in a mainstream pentecostal/charismatic church?

I thought that if Christian gay men within the pentecostal/charismatic frame of reference could start questioning prevailing discourses surrounding their being Christian as well as gay and added to that their encounter with the Holy Spirit as a distinct spiritual experience, it would bring to light some of the, until now, hidden issues regarding this matter. I believe that in deconstructing some of the discourses hindering these men from living a meaningful life in terms of their spiritual relationships new realities may be

constructed which would serve the communication of the message of God's love to all people.

The need for the active involvement of homosexual Christians in searching for solutions is clear. 'Increasingly theologians within the South African churches demand that further discussion of homosexuality be a discussion *with* [her italics] homosexuals rather than *about* [her italics] them' (Stuart 1997:185).

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

Gay men in most Christian communities have, until very recently, been alienated, marginalised and excluded. This practice continues in pentecostal/charismatic communities. In trying to understand this, one could possibly look at the relationship between this practice and Christian fundamentalism. The absolute necessity of acknowledging the spiritual dimension of those people with whom we have therapeutic conversations is pointed out by various authors (Griffith & Griffith 2002; Ross 1994; Walsh 1999). As the particular emphasis upon pneumatology in pentecostal/charismatic communities distinguishes them from most other church traditions, the openness to the influence of spirituality in people's lives is particularly fitting in this context.

Spirituality appears to be embraced in various and differing ways by people. In the journey of discovering and re-interpreting the spirituality of gay men, one needs to be aware of the possibilities of difference between gay and heterosexual spirituality. I attempt to show where my journey originated. I also express some thoughts on how we may, together, be able to deconstruct some of the discourses in pentecostal/charismatic communities which impact negatively on gay men's spiritual relationships.

1.6 LOOKING AT CHAPTER TWO

The chapter serves as an introduction to the paradigms of thought that I acknowledge as the guides who are helping me to navigate my way through the unknown territory of gay spirituality. Some of these guides that I wish to identify are Postmodernism, Social Construction Discourse, Post-structuralist Discourse, Postmodern Theological Discourse, Contextual Practical Theology. I also show why I prefer to use a Narrative Pastoral Therapeutic Approach in this journey.

CHAPTER TWO: EPISTEMOLOGICAL GUIDES ON THE JOURNEY - PARADIGMS OF THOUGHT

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO A POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGY

2.1.1 Guides on this journey

My discursive position in conducting this research about the spiritual relationships of gay men in a pentecostal/charismatic faith community is one guided by a postmodern epistemology. By saying this I refer to the following guides I use to help me to make this journey: social construction discourse, post-structuralism and postmodern theological discourse and contextual practical theology. My understanding and use of narrative pastoral therapy will be explained. An explanation of the nature of the guides/concepts may be helpful in setting the stage for the discussion of gay men's spirituality.

2.1.1.1 Discourse

The term 'discourse' has become a central concept in postmodern thought (Lowe 1991:44). I was guided in my understanding by a number of scholars of which only a few are mentioned here: Burr (1995), Dunlap (1999), Foucault (1970), Foucault (1978), Foucault in Fillingham (1993:100), Hare–Mustin (1994), Lowe (1991), Davies and Harré (1991).

Lowe (1991:45) refers to the term *discourse* as indicating a public '*process of conversation*' through which meanings are constituted, and '*systematic and institutionalized ways of speaking/writing* or otherwise making sense through the use of language.' Burr (1995:48) refers to a discourse as '... a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements...' that portrays a particular kind of image of an event or idea. The forming of this particular image comes into being through the use of language. It is important to understand that more than one discourse may exist about any object and that each highlights different aspects of the object. Burr (1995:49) maintains that '[e]ach discourse claims to say what the object really is, that is, claims to be the truth. [These] claims to truth and knowledge are important issues, and lie at the

Chapter 2 Epistemological journey – paradigms of thought

heart of discussions of identity, power and change,'. Varying discourses regarding the spirituality of gay people can be found. Within a particular environment dominant texts or bodies of knowledge may result in a marginalisation of some voices whilst privileging other knowledgeable voices. Within any specific culture, there are often different and competing discourses. Some discourses have a dominant and privileged position. These discourses become so familiar within a culture that they convey taken-for-granted knowledges, which in turn becomes part of the identity of most members of the society. On the other hand, subordinate, marginalised discourses, associated with groups on the margins of society, are excluded from influence since they do not carry any authority. Usually a dominant discourse supports specific institutions and ways of being (Hare–Mustin 1994:21), for example, patriarchy or hegemonic racial and religious structures. Dominant discourses regarding homosexuality in Western Christian society⁶ depicts the gay person as sexually acting against nature and as having a choice regarding the expression of his/her sexuality. The dominant Western Christian discourse also generally excludes the gay person from the right of having any significant spiritual relationships. 'Sexual orientation' as an example of a subordinated discourse has until recently not been given any voice in discussions about gay sexuality and especially not in theological discussions regarding this matter.

⁶ 'A number of scholars have maintained that Western societies have been far more repressive toward homosexuality than the indigenous cultures of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. They explain this unique repressiveness by referring to the "Judeo-Christian tradition," which has supposedly been transmitted virtually unchanged from one generation to the next since the time of Moses or Jesus. As a result of religious indoctrination, contemporary Western attitudes and laws reflect the needs of the biblical period, not those of today' (Greenberg 1988:12).

One could also view the present Western Christian discourse on homosexuality in the light of a Western individualist construction of people. As such, people are being considered as originary sources of their actions which creates opportunities for forming a divisive discourse alienating the 'other', in this case the homosexual as the victim of a typically Western tradition of antagonism (cf Gerger, McNamee & Barrett 2001).

According to Wilcox (2003:39) ' same-sex erotic activity has been recognized across time periods and cultures' until the nineteenth century when in the Western culture, identity became linked to a person's sexual expression or orientation (also cf Halperin 1997:208).

In Japanese Buddhism no dualistic division regarding sexuality exists and 'the idea that certain sexual acts or desires are "against nature" is only intelligible in a system where 'nature' has been established according to a designer-realist deity's blue-print or design' (McLelland).

Davies and Harré (1991:43) stress the constitutive force of discourse and the way in which people are positioned through discursive practices. Therefore our positions in discourse provide the content of one's subjectivity (Burr 1995:145).

Once we take up a position within a discourse (and some of these positions entail a long-term occupation by the person, like gender or fatherhood), we then inevitably come to experience the world and ourselves from the vantage point of that perspective. Once we take up a subject position in discourse, we have available to us a particular, limited set of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking, self-narratives and so on that we take on as our own.

(Burr 1995:145)

However, subjectivity is fluid as it is constantly constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which people participate (Davies & Harré 1991:46). 'This understanding of subjectivity engenders hope because it is contested. Subject positions are not fixed' (Dunlap 1999:138).

Acknowledging that discourses have real effects on people's lives, it is therefore of great importance that this research takes into account dominant cultural and religious discourses about homosexuality and spirituality and how/whether they oppress people or groups of people such as gay Christians who are positioned within marginal religious and cultural discourses.

2.1.1.2 Postmodern discourse on gay spirituality

According to Kotzé (1994:22) postmodernism engages in reacting to 'the modernist ideas of committedness to the use of a language of objectivity, empirical observation, quantitative measuring, reductionism, inductivism, representationalism, as well as truth as facts and knowledge that can be verified'. According to Herholdt (1998:457) in terms of postmodern hermeneutics the term postmodernism 'may be characterized as pluralist, pro-metaphor, relational, holistic, relativistic, indeterminate, evolutionary, post critical and participatory'.

Burr (1995:185) defines postmodernism as '[t]he rejection of "grand narratives" in theory and a replacement of a search for truth with a celebration of the multiplicity of (equally

valid) perspectives'. According to Anderson (1997:36) postmodern thought moves toward 'knowledge as a discursive practice, toward a plurality of narratives that are more local, contextual and fluid; it moves toward a multiplicity of approaches to the analysis of subjects such as knowledge, truth, language, history, self, and power'. Furthermore, a postmodern view of reality holds that realities are socially constructed, realities are constituted through language, realities are organised and maintained through narrative and that there are no essential truths (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). Postmodernism guides me in viewing reality as socially constructed through language and propose that through narrative, realities are organised and maintained (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). In my encounters with my co-researchers I was guided in the research process by a postmodern approach that steered me away from modernist ideas of 'knowing' towards a position of 'not knowing' and towards an awareness of multiple perspectives of what spirituality means to my co-researchers within their own context. My research approach (Participatory Action Research) as discussed in Chapter Three was particularly suited to a postmodern study wherein the participants, or co-researchers, were not studied as objects of interest but wherein they formed part of a process of co-constructing knowledge. As such they were part of an evolutionary process of pluralist thought about gay spirituality.

2.1.1.3 Social construction discourse on gay spirituality

It appears that it is an almost impossible task to describe *social constructionism* in such a way as to represent all those who work within this context. However, Burr (1995:2) maintains that according to Gergen a number of key assumptions may be indicative of a social constructionist approach. These are: that one needs to have a critical attitude towards taken-for-granted knowledge; that the world has to be understood as historically and culturally specific; that knowledge is constructed between people within the social processes and interactions between them; and, that these *social constructions* require different kinds of action from people.

According to Gergen (1998) the development of social constructionism emerged from a reaction to realism that was a dominating influence in positivist/empiricist science in psychology. This development away from realism opened the way for the voices of people who felt that they had not been respected and been discriminated against, to be heard. In this research project the approach of the participants leaned towards an

openness and willingness to hear the voice of their co-researchers in expressing their own realities of experiencing God, or gay spirituality. In this process the modernist approach using foundational truths and empirical studies was challenged. In the course of the research project the discourse in pentecostal/charismatic communities regarding spiritual relationships of gay people was challenged by my co-researchers in relating their own stories of spiritual relationships with God. Rather than living life as a gay man according to the 'religious experts', these men started to construct new realities for themselves. Rather than being an 'object' to be changed to fit into a discourse that provides a place where spiritual relationships may be had, these men became co-creators of meaning in the light of their own lives. This serves as an example of social construction wherein people become part of the process of meaning-making. This meaning making process will be further discussed in chapter six.

2.1.1.4 Post-structuralist discourse on gay spirituality

Sampson (1989:6) refers to the difficulty in defining the structuralism of the 1950s and 1960s and the post-structuralism of the 1970s and 1980s but places them on an equal footing when he describes the essence of both to be 'its search for basic processes that lie beyond individuality and human awareness and out of which the individual-as-such is constituted.... This search has usually turned to the analysis of language and symbolic practices as the key to be deciphered'.

According to Mary Klages (2003) the structuralist model argues that 'the structure of language itself produces "reality"--that we can think only through language, and therefore our perceptions of reality are all framed by and determined by the structure of language'. She explains that according to the structuralist model (or discourse) '[m]eaning doesn't come from individuals, but from the system that governs what any individual can do within it'. 'Rather than seeing the individual as the center of meaning, structuralism places THE STRUCTURE at the center--it's the structure that originates or produces meaning, not the individual self. Language in particular is the center of self and meaning'. Lemert, (quoted by Manning and Cullum-Swan 1994:467) describes structuralism as 'dehumanizing' in its rejection of the 'homocentric' subjectivism and metaphysics of theories such as existentialism and pragmatism. Personal experience is seen as secondary to systems of order and the individual becomes a user of codes and symbols

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taken from 'preconstituted options, voices, and programs' (Manning & Cullum-Swan 1994:467). People's social actions are thus organized by and manifestations of the rules created by social structures. Behaviour is seen as *structured* by this external authority.

Referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic ideas about developments in structuralist and post-structuralist thought Claude Lévi-Strauss 'theorized that within a culture, like a language, all of society, all human relations were governed by certain overarching rules' (Fillingham 1993:94). The approach adopted by structuralists was the acceptance of binary oppositions as paramount. All systems or structures are seen to consist of binary pairs or oppositions, the placing of two terms in some sort of relation to each other, such as good/bad, male/female, straight/gay so that things are thought of as only one way or the other. Foucault refers to sex being in a binary system: 'Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden' (Foucault 1978:83).

Jacques Derrida appears to bring the structuralist period to an end by his work on deconstruction. Derrida 'challenges the core identity theory and logic on which opposition and hierarchy are based. Through his close readings of texts, he seeks to discover *within* the meaning of any single term its opposite member ...' (Sampson 1986:8) and in doing so works with binary systems.

Two key points to the idea of deconstruction is keeping in mind that we will continue to look at systems or structures, rather than at individual concrete practices, and that all systems or structures have a center, the point of origin, the thing that created the system in the first place. Second is that all systems or structures are created of binary pairs or oppositions, of two terms placed in some sort of relation to each other (Klages 2003).

Post structuralism can therefore be seen as a reaction or response to structuralism, being an attempt to look for 'basic elements of people's behavior and the rules or laws by which they are combined' (Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk 2002:186)

In the current research project we worked with binary oppositions such as truth/lie, in/out within the gay context in an attempt to deconstruct dominant discourses which are impacting negatively on participants' wellbeing, and to co-construct with them alternative

preferred stories that will impact on their past, present and future realities. Through working in a discourse of post structuralism I attempted to work with my co-researchers in a post-structuralist manner by looking at the determinants of the concepts of 'truth' and 'lie' and examining the participants' spiritual experience in this light. The theological structuralist discourse determines the possibilities of gay people having any meaningful spiritual relationships. By challenging the binary opposition of gay/straight new insights into possibilities for spiritual relationships were formed.

2.1.1.5 Postmodern theological discourse on gay spirituality

A postmodern theological discourse questions much of what has been presented as eternal biblical truths, valid for all peoples at all times. Rossouw (1993:895) has the following to say regarding the relevancy of theology for the present time:

A theology that pretends to be a timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts, runs the risk of becoming obsolete, and is itself a reaction to preceding cultural developments. Isolating theology from culture is a coping strategy by theology – to deal with the challenges that culture poses to a specific theological interpretation of the world.

Theological thought within the postmodern paradigm is subjected to a taking account of:

1. the personal presuppositions and social context of the theologian;
2. the context of the situation;
3. the interrelatedness or systemic wholeness;
4. the complexity or self-organization tendency of systems;
5. the paradigm theory which proposes making sense or increasing understanding by using various frameworks (Herholdt 1998:219).

Truth is therefore not viewed as eternal, unchanging and final, but rather as relative to context. This fact serves the effort of postmodernism to restore the loss of meaning attributed to modernism (Herholdt 1998:215) and in doing so affirming the value of those people who are marginalized, an affirmation of the Christian principle of the all-encompassing love of God for those whose dignity and human value is denied by society (Rossouw 1993:902,903).

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Regarding the viewing of truth as relative to context, the Reformed tradition accepts that the Bible is a human book having a human and historical character, implying that Biblical documents must be studied taking into account its historical and cultural context (Nederduitse Gerformeerde Kerk 2004).

This view is in direct contrast to that of the fundamentalist approach to the interpretation of truth as it is found in the Bible. In the context of the pentecostal/charismatic community, eternal truths taken from the Bible are proclaimed as the ultimate word in, among others, matters regarding homosexuality. This word does not take into account the context of the Biblical texts referring to “homosexuality” or the context of the homosexual person today. The Bible is seen as a type of law book for life and especially texts referring to gay behaviour are taken in a literal sense as an eternal truth applicable across history. This implies the rejection of a gay orientation without considering that the term homosexual or homosexuality was not even known in Biblical times (Anthonissen & Oberholzer 2001:74).

Looking at gay spirituality in the light of postmodern theological discourse, confronts one with concepts such as acceptance of all in Christ, grace, and the all-encompassing love of God. It was in this light that my co-researchers seemed to position themselves (see chapter five).

2.1.1.6 Contextual Practical Theology

There are a number of descriptions of practical theology. Pieterse (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:51) defines practical theology as ‘the theological theory about communicative actions that mediates God’s coming to people in the world through God’s word’. With an emphasis on *doing* theology, Poling (1991:186) defines practical theology as a ‘critical and constructive reflection within a living community about human experience and interaction, involving a correlation of the Christian story and other perspectives, leading to an interpretation of meaning and value, and resulting in everyday guidelines and skills for the formation of persons and communities’. Poling’s definition seems to be closer to the essence of the research I planned to embark on. The approach I wish to follow situates the research in a contextual practical theological framework and can be described as ‘evolutionary (political theology and the theology of development) or revolutionary (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc.)’ (Bosch

1991:421). Gustavo Gutiérrez views the central concern of theology as a ‘critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word’ (De Gruchy 1994:11). While embracing the mission of the church as a proclamation of the reign of God in Jesus Christ, I accept the challenge of communicating this message of peace and reconciliation to the marginalised in their lived situation. I also acknowledge the influence of contextual feminist theology⁷ on my life and research first because it accepts ‘[t]he value and place of historically and contextually rooted stories ... in doing theology which is concerned with human suffering and emancipation’ (Ackermann 1996:33-34). Second because of its clear position in positioning itself - at least by Ackermann (1996:38) – as a ‘feminist theology of praxis’ which is challenging current church praxis on hearing the voices of women/marginalized oppressed people. Regarding the hearing of the voices of oppressed people, Astley (2002) speaks of ‘ordinary theology’. In doing ‘ordinary theology’ he wishes to emphasize the need to listen to ‘*Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind*’ (2002:56). In listening to the voices of gay men in this study I also wish to do ‘theology in context’ joining with Astley’s description of the preposition ‘in’ as expressing the sense that theology needs to be done from inside a particular framework of interests and concerns (2002:1). According to Wittgenstein religious belief is demonstrated by what people do rather than what they say and includes their attitudes which are part of praxis (Astley 2002:116). If we are to understand or grasp the meaning of the theology done by people, we need to look at the way people live, behave and we also need to listen to what they are saying.

This point is particularly valid in the pentecostal/charismatic church as far as it concerns the inability and/or unwillingness to hear the voice of the oppressed, marginalised gay people in its presence. As far as this study is concerned, I also align myself with Bosch (1991:424) in the following identifying features of contextual practical theology:

1. a refusal to accept the world as static;
2. a commitment to the marginalised;
3. the belief that theology can only be done *with* those who suffer;
4. *doing* theology is more important than knowing or speaking of theology.

⁷ A contextual or feminist theology of praxis can be understood as: ‘*critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable reflection on the theories and praxis of struggle and hope for the mending of creation based on the stories and experiences of women/marginalized and oppressed people*’ (Ackermann 1996:34).

It should be clear that a participatory approach (see chapter three) to practical theology fits in with the ideas suggested by a contextual approach. In involving my research participants in conversation about their spiritual relationships, God, the church, etc., I am involving non-theologians in the process of *doing* theology (Bosch 1991:427). This should serve to open the way for continued conversations with those people who, until now, have been marginalised in the pentecostal/charismatic churches.

2.1.1.7 Narrative pastoral therapeutic approach

In this project, I wish to incorporate the narrative pastoral therapeutic approach in order to 'enter into' the life experiences and thereby to partake of them, as it were (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991: 260). The deliberate storying and re-storying of a gay person's life, or a group or cultural story, serves as 'a method of personal (and social) growth ... ' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991:259). Gay people's realities are also constructed through language and these constructions are related through the stories they tell about their lives. Through deconstructing the dominant story, space will be created for the construction of an alternative story. Dominant discourses are usually taken for granted; they are not usually questioned because they are so familiar. As a narrative therapist I am interested in 'discovering, acknowledging and "taking apart" (deconstructing) the beliefs, ideas, practices and cultural discourses that dominate the lives of gay men in charismatic churches' (Morgan, 2000:45).

The idea that knowledge is objective and fixed derives from a structuralist stance. This view accepts universal truths and objective realities. Because of my positioning in a postmodern paradigm I approach therapy not as an objective observer, but as a 'participant-observer and a participant-facilitator of the therapeutic conversation' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). In assuming this position I acknowledge the fact that meaning and understanding of gay spirituality are socially and intersubjectively constructed and that through therapeutic conversation new or alternative meaning is constructed (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:372). This new meaning is dependent upon the therapist's not-knowing of what the therapist is about to hear during a conversation. The therapeutic questions are based on this unknown content. This contrast with a traditional modernistic therapeutic approach of asking questions based on the therapist's theoretical knowledge of the presenting pathology or generalised psychological theory (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:38).

The narrative approach emphasises cultural and religious stories. Cultural determinants of meaningful life events are recognised within the telling of these stories. The narrative approach is positioned in a post-modern social construction discourse whereby *truth* is seen to be the sum of a number of discourses, which in turn is context-dependent. I consider the stories of gay men as having been and continuously being constructed by the context in which they find themselves. Following this assumption, the church/religious context in which they find themselves, will also contribute to the creating of their stories. The dominant stories formed in this manner may or may not reflect the person's desired reality. The only way in which to discover the influencing discourses is for these people to tell their stories. In doing so it becomes possible to deconstruct the dominant stories in order to discover the underlying discourses that construct them and to invite the participants to see and appropriate their stories from a different perspective.

The participants in this research study could create an alternative story to co-develop a preferred identity. However, what I experienced was that the use of the narrative approach, which is a useful way of helping people to voice their experiences and to communicate meanings, have created the opportunity to start developing preferred stories with thick descriptions of cultural and religious discourses regarding their spiritual relationships. I am of the opinion that we have only started out on the road and I hope to see my co-researchers developing their stories given some time. Gerkin (1986:52) maintains that 'to be a person is ... to live a story'. This includes a relationship with God's Story.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

The guides that I chose to use in conducting narrative therapy in this collaborative research project about the spiritual relationships of gay men can be described in terms of a postmodern worldview which is something far greater than simply a time-period. These guides opened new ways of working *with* people therapeutically and helped me to experiment with new ways of thinking, working and living in the world of the charismatic gay person: a world that has changed to such an extent that many of the modern ideas simply are not relevant any longer. The guides that I am referring to are the discourses on gay spirituality of postmodernism, social constructionism, post-structuralism, postmodern theology, contextual practical theology and narrative pastoral therapy.

2.3 LOOKING AT CHAPTER THREE

In chapter three we look at the general research approach that I chose for this project which is of a qualitative nature involving participatory action research by using a narrative therapeutical approach. The nature of my research namely the stories of the spirituality of gay men in the pentecostal/charismatic community helped me to choose this approach to research. I discuss the strong motivation for the study being a contextual approach to practical theology and this is placed within post-modernism.

CHAPTER THREE: DOING RESEARCH

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research approach that I chose is of a qualitative nature involving participatory action research by using a narrative approach. The reason for choosing this approach is because the nature of my research, involving the stories of the spirituality of gay men in pentecostal/charismatic churches, lends itself to this approach. Gamson (2000:348) notes that '[t]he study of sexualities in general, and homosexualities in particular, has long been closely intertwined with qualitative research' The study is strongly motivated by a contextual approach to practical theology and this is placed within post-modernism. An exploration and clarification of these terms would serve the purpose of defining the study more accurately.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Theoretical developments within gay and lesbian studies such as the social construction of homosexuality in which interpretive issues become very important makes the field of qualitative research the ideal research paradigm for the study of gay men and their spiritual relationships (Gamson 2000:348). It is also quite understandable that qualitative research methods 'with their focus on meaning creation and the experiences of everyday life, fit especially well with movement goals of visibility, cultural challenge, and self-determination' (Gamson 2000:348).

Denzin & Lincoln (2000:3) offer the following description of *qualitative research*:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

They contrast qualitative and quantitative research as follows:

The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasise the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework.

(Denzin & Lincoln 2000:8)

In defining the term *qualitative research* one must be aware of its interrelatedness with a wide range of other terms, concepts, and assumptions. Four paradigms⁸ should be taken note of. They are positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and related ideological positions, and constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:105). Constructivism appears to be the most appropriate paradigm for the purposes of this study. One of the reasons for this choice can be found in a comparison of a quantitative with qualitative research methodology.

In contrasting quantitative research with qualitative research, it is important to consider the paradigmatic nature of positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and related ideological positions, and constructivism. From the following brief overview I trust that it would become clear why this research project was positioned within a constructionist paradigm and why the participatory action research approach was considered as the most suitable one.

3.2.1 Positivism

The ontological basis of positivism is *realism* or the assumption that one can know certain 'facts' and that these 'facts' can be proven because they are part of the natural laws of the universe. This knowledge is considered as time- and context-free. The position is considered as deterministic and reductionist.

⁸ The basic belief system or worldview guiding the researcher, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:105).

The epistemology fundamental to positivism is the assumption that the researcher and the researched are independent entities and that the 'object' can be studied without any influence from values or biases outside of the study. This process may in this manner produce 'true' findings that may also be duplicated.

The methodology used is based on the verification of hypotheses through empirical testing. Any condition that may adversely influence the outcome of the research must be controlled.

Positivist research, especially research within the theological framework using as point of departure a particular Christian religious paradigm, often consider as "fact" some assumptions or interpretations about gay people, thus stigmatising and pathologising such individuals. Following this approach sexual categories are taken for granted and those assumed to belong to them are investigated (Gamson 2000:353).

3.2.2 Postpositivism

The ontological basis is the acceptance of 'reality' but with the understanding that it is not fully apprehendable because of the limited human intellectual abilities. Reality can thus never be fully explained even though one may be able to come close to the 'truth'.

Epistemologically, dualism is abandoned whilst objectivity remains very important in determining 'reality' even though it is accepted that the results of an inquiry may seldom if ever reflect the ideal of objectivity.

The methodology followed is more inclusive in that research is done in natural settings, more situational information is collected, 'discovery' as an element of research is included, and the *meaning* and *purpose* that people attribute to their actions, is given a place in the research. Although more inclusive, in our research project a paradigm such as postpositivism would not allow the voice of the gay person to be heard fully if objectivity of the researcher is still partly accepted as determining 'reality'. Even though the approach acknowledges that 'reality' can only be apprehended imperfectly, the approximated 'reality' would present a misrepresentation of gay men and their spiritual relationships.

3.2.3 Critical Theory and Related Ideological Positions

The ontological basis of critical theory et al is that of a historical realism. This virtual reality was shaped into the present structures over time through an accumulation and reification of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors.

The epistemological position in critical theory reflects an assumption that the researcher is not independent from the 'object' but that the researcher's values influence the research process. Unlike the epistemological positions found in positivism and postpositivism, values play a role in the findings.

The methodological approach is one of dialogue between the researcher and the subjects. Because of the transactional nature of the research, this dialogue must be dialectical in nature 'to transform ignorance and misapprehensions (accepting historically mediated structures as immutable) into more informed consciousness (seeing how the structures might be changed and comprehending the actions required to effect change)' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:110)

Working in this particular paradigm could limit the research process to those areas of gay men's spiritual relationships that harmonise with the researcher's value system. For this reason I also do not consider this paradigm as appropriate.

3.2.4 Constructivism⁹

The ontological basis of constructivism can be described as *relativist*. Realities may be understood as being multiple, intangible mental constructions, based in the social and experiential realm both local and specific in nature. The form and content of these constructions are dependent on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions.

⁹ The terms *constructivism* and *social constructionism* is often used interchangeably in literature. Notwithstanding this there is, however, a differentiation to be made between the two terms. 'Constructivism and social constructionism arose from different intellectual traditions' (Anderson 1997:43). Radical constructivists like the biologists Maturana and Varela, used the term *autopoiesis* to indicate a system that makes human beings autonomous systems, emphasizing the role of the individual mind in the construction of meaning (Botella 1995). Social constructionism, however, 'focuses explicitly on the role of social processes in the construction of meaning. Consequently, Gergen rejected both exogenic and endogenic epistemologies' (Botella 1995; Anderson 1997:19; Gergen 2000).

The guiding epistemology in constructivism is the variable and personal nature of social constructions that are formed and refined in the process of interaction between the researcher and the respondents.

The methodology that is followed in constructivism is influenced by the variable and personal nature of the social constructions. The variety of constructions is interpreted with conventional hermeneutical techniques and by using dialectical interchange these constructions are compared. This process should bring about a new and more fitting construction.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) describe the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur*, a professional Jack of all trades. This would be someone who puts together a set of practices that can solve a problem through using a pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive set of tools. The choice of tools is not predetermined but depends on the context. Although qualitative research is multimethod in focus, it also attempts to ensure that an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question is secured.

From the foregoing discussion it appears that the constructive paradigm fits more comfortably within a qualitative research methodology and that gay men's spiritual relationships can be researched within this paradigm to benefit not only the researcher but also the gay man questioning his spirituality.

3.3 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

When I considered the positioning of this study within a constructionist understanding of reality, it seemed fitting that the participatory action research approach be used.

3.3.1 What is Participatory Action Research?

My use of *participatory action research* in this study means that I wish to follow this approach because it involves all the parties (including the researcher) in the research process. This does not mean that participants are only *perceived* to be part of the process. They *are* in reality a part of the process and they are expected to take an active role in discovering and examining the circumstances that they perceive to be in need of

change or improvement. This changes the research process away from a process of an expert '*researching on*' to a joint process of '*researching with*'.

According to McTaggart (1997:2) 'the term *action* is important to the extent that it reminds people that it is participants' own activities which are meant to be informed by the ongoing inquiry, not merely the future research directions of external researchers'. The importance of being part of the research in its conceptualisation, practice, and application to their world must be conveyed to the participants. 'It means ownership: responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice' (McTaggart 1997:6). The extent of being actively involved in the research could imply that even the research methodology itself might be reinterpreted and reconstituted by the participants.

I consider it important to stress the type of involvement of the researcher in the process of change and in this regard I would like to refer to Heshusius (1994:16-17). She refers to 'participatory consciousness' as a deeper level of '... kinship between the knower and the known. An inner desire to let go of perceived boundaries that constitute "self" – and that construct the perception of distance between self and other – must be present before a participatory mode of consciousness can be present' (Heshusius 1994:16). This type of participation does not refer to a specific type of activity but rather to a 'mode of consciousness' going beyond all preoccupations with self, and self-esteem to a 'total turning' to other that leads to a heightened awareness (Heshusius 1994:16).

McTaggart (1997:7) maintains that participatory action research 'is political because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances and about informing this change as it happens, ...' I expected to see people (in this case the researchers) as well as circumstances changed while this research was being done. I also expected as Selener (1997:42) mentioned, *empowerment* for the oppressed. With regard to change he identifies *process* outcomes that 'take place during the various stages of the project, and *final* outcomes ... that are more likely to be identified or bear fruit at the end of the research project'.

In contrast to conceptions of conventional research, which often proceeds from point A to point B, thus commencing from a hypothesis and then proceeding to a conclusion, participatory action research aims to involve itself in a 'cycle of action, reflection, raising

of questions, planning of 'fieldwork' to review current (and past) actions – its conduct, analysis of experiences encountered, the drawing of conclusions, and the planning of new and transformed actions – that characterizes all research endeavor' (Wadsworth 1998).

Power-sharing practices were introduced from the beginning of this study, thereby opening the way to question and challenge dominant discourses involved in church hierarchy, paternalism, patriarchal theological discourse, male dominated leadership structures, cultural beliefs and other discourses that could have become apparent during the research process.

3.3.2 The “how” of Participatory Action Research

McTaggart (1997:27) refers to Kurt Lewin who invented the term *action research* in English and who described it as proceeding in a spiral of steps, each consisting of planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action. If improvements of any kind are to be made, the group has to identify the area of concern, plan their involvement, what they would be willing to do, observe and evaluate the result of each step during the process of change. The realisation of improvements will be made more likely because the group will be committed to the course of action that they themselves decided upon.

Following the indications of what a plan of action in doing participatory research should look like (McTaggart 1997; Wadsworth 1998) and keeping in mind my role as researcher being described by Stringer (1999:25) as *catalyst*, I planned to identifying a group of Christian gay men who would be interested in addressing important issues regarding their spirituality in the context of the pentecostal/charismatic movement. I also realised that in the process of doing this research my role was to *stimulate* people to change by addressing issues that concerned them *now*, to *enable* them to analyse their issues and to help them to examine courses of action and to consider the probable consequences of those options (Kickett, McCauley, & Stringer as quoted by Stringer 1999:25).

My thoughts on the process of getting in touch with Christian men who are gay and who have a pentecostal or charismatic religious background was to search for such persons on a gay website by inviting them to become part of a study about spirituality. My reason

for going about the search in this manner was that I assumed that many gay Christian men 'out there' would respond. I would then, in a respectful and virtually anonymous manner be able to identify possible participators and explain the purpose of the research project to them. I hoped that after getting in touch with interested people I would be able to influence them to take part in the research by making it clear that they would be actively involved with the process of identifying issues that were troublesome to them regarding their spirituality and that they would be free to discuss and come up with possible alternatives to the undesirable life experiences that they were presently having. I would also explain that the research would possibly take place in a group setting with other men and that they would therefore have to be able to get together with their co-researchers on a regular basis, possibly weekly, for a couple of months at a suitable location as decided upon by them. The men would not initially be burdened with too much detail about the process of the research but would be invited to become involved in taking part in a change process concerning their own spirituality and to work towards a goal of creating an ongoing positive initiative which could involve more than just their own lives but that may touch other people in the process. I would ask questions such as: "Are you concerned about your own spirituality?"; "Are you, or were you a member of a pentecostal/charismatic church?"; "Would you be interested in taking part in considering some of the issues important to gay Christian men?"; "Would you like to see some of the perceptions held by the church changed?".

My goal was to include about six men in the group. I would be happy to include more people but I felt that too big a group could interfere with the process of especially involving everyone and would perhaps extend the time spent in group interviews over a longer period than the participants would have available. In chapter three (3.6) and chapter five (5.2 and 5.3) details of my search for participants and the outcome is explained in detail.

After identifying a number of potential participants, I planned to invite the men to a suitable venue to meet with them and to explain the process in more detail and to answer any questions that they might have. I would then give them a handout to explain something about the research and to indicate why they were needed, what they were required to do and my undertaking to release them from continuing with the research at any stage of the process if they so wished. Of those men who were then willing to be part

of the project, I would ask a commitment in writing by signing a consent form in which I would stipulate their rights and responsibilities in terms of the research project.

The next phase in the project was planned to be the 'field work' in which I would then meet with the participants on a fairly regular basis, or as decided by the researchers, at suitable times and locations. I planned to make use of a narrative therapeutic interview style, with the permission of the participants, to attempt to identify difficulties that they experience in their spiritual relationships in the context of their religious culture of origin (pentecostal/charismatic). My intention was also to use the men who were not immediately involved in the interview to act as a *reflecting team*. I would explain this concept to them at our first meeting before starting with the interview (see paragraph 3.6). In keeping with the narrative style of interviewing I also planned to continue the 'therapeutic' process by writing a letter to my participants after the interview with each of them. By doing this I was going to give them an opportunity to reflect on our conversation and to enable them to bring new thoughts to the group if they so desired.

In conducting the research process in this manner I was hoping to be a catalyst in identifying areas of difficulty with which all the participants could identify and in so doing stimulating them to start thinking of ways in which to deal more constructively with these difficulties. This process would, I thought, bring about a level of participation in thinking about change, not only in their own lives, but hopefully for those men in a similar situation who were not included in the research project. As such the level of participation would be increased and could evolve in creating ideas for change and planning on how such change could reasonably be achieved.

On completion of the 'field work' I planned to start writing down that part of the research but to keep contact with my co-researchers with a view of getting together with them at a later stage to review what we had discovered and to again identify the most important issues to be dealt with in their opinion. I also thought that I may at some stage ask the participants for their thoughts on anything that I was not sure about and to incorporate these ideas in my writing.

The extent to which our research group achieved the 'proceeding in a spiral of steps' consisting of planning, acting, observing and evaluating (McTaggart 1997:27) or as more

broadly described by Wadsworth (1998) as analysing, reflecting, questioning, fieldwork, analysis and new actions, is elaborated upon in chapter seven.

3.4 NARRATIVE RESEARCH

In my research project, I wish to incorporate the narrative approach in order to 'enter into' the phenomena and thereby to partake of them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991: 260). The deliberate storying and restorying of one's life, or a group or cultural story, serves as 'a fundamental method of personal (and social) growth ... (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991:259). During our times together during which each participant told his story of being gay, and especially towards the end of the research process, my co-researchers appeared to underscore the statements made regarding personal and social growth.

The narrative approach emphasises cultural and religious stories. Cultural determinants of meaningful life events are recognised within the telling of these stories. The narrative approach is positioned in a post-modern social construction discourse whereby *truth* is seen to be the sum of a number of discourses, which in turn is context-dependent. I consider the stories of gay people in religious setting as having been and continuously being constructed by the particular context in which they find themselves. Following this assumption, the church/religious context in which they find themselves, will also contribute to the creating of their stories. The dominant stories formed in this manner may or may not reflect the person's desired reality. The only way in which to discover the influencing discourses is for these people to tell their stories. In doing so it becomes possible to deconstruct the dominant stories in order to discover the underlying discourses that construct them and to invite the participants to see their stories from a different perspective. The participants in this research project did not wish to create an alternative story to co-develop a preferred identity. More information about my co-researchers' reasoning concerning their desire to create or not create an alternative story will be discussed in chapter seven. However, I believe that the use of the narrative approach, which is a useful way of helping people to voice their experiences and to communicate meanings, has created the opportunity to develop thick descriptions of cultural and religious discourses regarding gay spirituality.

Through an understanding of social constructionism that makes one aware of the effects of social conditions, and the awareness of individual agency together with the telling of

the life story, one realises the possibilities of using the narrative approach in participatory action research. Multiple realities and political aspects of the religious discourses need to be acknowledged.

3.5 FEMINIST RESEARCH

Within the scope of this research, there is clearly a need for an awareness of the work that has already been done in the fields of practical theology and feminist theology by people like Ackermann and Bons-Storm (1998), Isherwood and McEwan (1994) and Van Leeuwen (1993). One also needs to be sensitive to the prevailing discourses regarding women in many religious contexts. But, when one takes into consideration the possibilities for positive change and spiritual growth, it would be impossible not to incorporate the valuable lessons taught by feminist research.

Marcia Westkott (1979) objects to the exclusion and alienation of women and pleads a case for the inclusion of women within the social context acknowledging their needs as human beings. She argues that the social contexts are patriarchal and 'through the organisation of social relations, women are controlled by men and are culturally devalued (Westkott 1979:424). The critical emphasis that is placed on content and the addressing of methodological issues 'do not directly challenge the epistemological basis of mainstream social science' (Westkott 1979:425). The correlation between the appeal for inclusion of women and gay men within the social context should be clear. By being aware of the relevant discourses reflecting the marginalisation of gay men in the religious setting in this research project, one is able to confront and attempt to challenge and change not only content but also the underlying epistemology.

The suitability of the inclusion of feminist thought and research in this inquiry is supported by the work on feminist perspectives in practical theology by Denise Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm (1998). According to Ackermann (1998:78-84) the dominant model for practical theology in South Africa is grounded in a male, Reformed world. The question that needs to be asked of a 'feminist theology of praxis' is whether liberation and healing can be advanced through such an approach. Ackermann (1998:80) wishes to see all theological theories and all theological praxis as contributing to the healing of South Africa. In the light of the thoughts expressed by Ackermann, one

can confidently say that feminist writing and research should also inform a research project about the spirituality of gay men.

3.6 HOW THE RESEARCH PROCESS EVOLVED

When we met for the first time (see chapter five paragraph 5.2) I explained to everybody present what the research project would be about and that I envisioned that it would take at least two to three months. To try helping the men to gain an insight into the project I gave them each a printed invitation (Annexure A) in which I asked for their participation in conversations about spiritual relationships. I did not go into any detail about the research process because in terms of the participatory action research process a detailed process could not be predetermined and would depend on the way in which the participators got involved and their own decisions in so far as identifying problems and the need for change.

We spent some time discussing the research, its focus and possibilities of adding to an understanding of the life of a Christian gay man in the pentecostal/charismatic context. During this time Nicky accentuated that this type of research is invaluable and that he would welcome the participation of as many men as possible in the research project. All the men who were present agreed to take part and I introduced them to a consent form (Annexure B) explaining the conditions of the research and giving them some time to either complete it at the time or to take it home. I explained that they were as free to suspend their participation without any obligation as they were to join in the research. In planning our research we agreed to get together as a group on a weekly basis and we determined a date and place for our first meeting.

A group of six men met with me at Paul's house on the 6th of April 2004. One of the men who was not present at our initial meeting but with whom I had a few a telephonic conversations had some questions and I also gave him the invitation and consent form which he signed. The idea of getting involved in a project such as the one we envisioned was still strange to them and I repeated the information about the research and invited any comments or questions. During this discussion I also invited the men to ask me any personal questions that could be helpful in the envisioned research relationship that we would be engaging in together. The fact that my religious community of origin was

pentecostal/charismatic seemed to make it easier for them to be able to relate to what I had to say regarding spirituality.

The men seemed to favour a research approach that would honour their need to tell their stories of struggle and survival as Christian gay men in the context of the Christian church and of the pentecostal/charismatic movement. I must mention that some men had come from a Reformed religious community of origin and only aligned themselves with the pentecostal/charismatic movement later in life. After I told them a little about what the narrative process looks like, we decided to follow the narrative approach in our research through which we would attempt to assist them to break from thin conclusions about their lives, their identities and their spiritual relationships and to engage in thick or rich descriptions of their lives, identities and of their spiritual relationships. Taking this decision in itself already appeared to identify a “problem” that needed to be considered even if my co-researchers did not conceptualise or verbalise it in this manner. I was hopeful that in this process we would be able to make sense of their experiences and to provide these men with ‘options for action that would not have otherwise been imaginable’ (White 2000).

I then asked for permission to proceed with our first interview and outlined the form that the interviews would be taking. I explained that I would have a conversation with the person concerned while the rest of the group would form a group of listeners separated from the person being interviewed during the time of the conversation between him and I. In this way I wanted to engage in ‘reflecting teamwork’¹⁰, described as a *definitional ceremony* by White (2000). The value that I ascribe to this way of approaching our conversations was in creating the opportunity for people ‘to engage in a telling of some of the significant stories of their lives – stories that, in one way or another, are relevant to matters of personal and relational identity’ (White 2000). This process is eloquently described in the following way by Myerhoff (1982:100):

Sometimes conditions conspire to make a generational cohort acutely self-conscious and then they become active participants in their own history and provide their own sharp, insistent definitions of themselves and explanations for their destiny, past and future. They are then knowing actors in a historical drama they script, rather than subjects of someone else’s study. They ‘make’ themselves, sometimes even ‘make themselves up’, an activity which is not inevitable or automatic but reserved for special people in special circumstances.

¹⁰ A form of therapeutic teamwork introduced by Tom Andersen in 1987 in his paper *The Reflecting Team: Dialogue and meta-dialogue in clinical work* (White 1995).

From this description of a *definitional ceremony* it appears that in this process of a reflective team experience it could very well be expected that more than merely relating a story of living life as a gay Christian would emerge. In this *definitional ceremony* possibilities of therapeutic value could be created in the sense that the men involved would find an opportunity of getting in touch with their own experiences and relating this to their spiritual relationships. Its value could also be considered as particularly appropriate to the alienated position of the gay Christian man in a pentecostal/charismatic church setting. Myerhoff (1986:267) contends that '[d]efinitional ceremonies deal with the problems of invisibility and marginality; they are strategies that provide opportunities for being seen and in one's own terms, garnering witnesses to one's worth, vitality and being'.

As an introduction to the process of taking part as an 'outsider witness' I explained that the group of 'witnesses' would listen carefully to the stories so that they would be able to retell the story as they heard it. The format of the re-telling of the story by the 'witnesses' was important. I attempted to give guidelines so as not to encourage giving praise, pointing out positives, and congratulating as a type of acknowledgement but to rather emphasize the importance of giving thoughtful reflections such as how the story touched them and why that was important to them. To help them to do this I gave them a printed guide (Annexure C) indicating what to ask themselves while they listened. To help me in guiding the outsider witnesses in their retelling of the story when it was their turn, I used a set of questions as a point of reference (Annexure D). I also discussed the switching of roles between the person whose story was being told and the 'witness' group. After listeners have had their turn to reflect on what they had heard they would be required to step back into the role of audience and then the interviewee would have time to reflect on what he had heard from the 'witness' group regarding his story. (This process of switching between the two parties was an ongoing activity which took place several times during an interview.)

We then started with our first interview with Nicky attempting to follow the guidelines that we discussed before the time. In an effort to keep the 'witnesses' involved, I chose to interrupt the interview at appropriate times, to give the listeners the opportunity to engage in the process of reflecting on what they had heard. Initially this process took some time as they were inexperienced in engaging with a conversation in this manner. I found that the 'witnesses' became so involved in identifying with the story of the

interviewee that they sometimes had a problem in focusing on only some aspects of the story that they had heard and would also proceed to relate their own stories. In their reflections I did not find the men evaluating, judging or diagnosing the person who was relating his story, something that may sometimes be found in the case of using 'outside witnesses' who refer to their own 'expert knowledge'. Keeping to the structure that we had decided on took some time but by the second interview, which took place one week later, we started to get reasonably on track. In reflecting upon the digressions from the proposed type of response by the 'witnesses' I was reminded of the remarks of White (2000) in this regard and to value this as possible ways of contributing 'to the rich description of the personal and relational identities of the persons whose lives are at the centre of the ceremony'.

The interviewing stage of the research stretched over a period of three months and the time spent in interviewing and involving the 'outsider-witness' group took from about an hour and a half to two hours. During interviews I made some notes on a flipchart, with permission from the person being interviewed, of outstanding aspects of his story. This was something that I found useful in reminding us of some details of the person's story. I also wrote a letter to the person who shared his story, reflecting on what I had heard and asking some questions about aspects of the story that could be useful to both us and the group, should he wish to share his response with the group. This letter was given to the person concerned at the following meeting at which time he would read it and respond if he so wished. At times this activity took us back to the previous time's discussion for a while, before commencing with the next interview.

The last conversation, which was with Johan, took place on 22 June 2004. The participants were of the opinion that we still needed to get together to gain a broader insight into what we have discussed so far and to see if we could utilise some of these thoughts to our benefit in the future and to consider any plans of action based on what we have discovered. We then met together as planned on 13 July 2004 for a re-viewing of our thoughts over the past few months. This meeting proved to be valuable in terms of focusing on the freedom that my co-researchers now seemed to experience to accept God's love and together with that to accept a responsibility of being witnesses of this experience towards especially the gay community.

3.7 OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

The aim in this chapter is to situate the study of the spirituality of gay men within the broad approach of qualitative research. The foci of qualitative methods being, inter alia, meaning-making and everyday life experiences, fit very well with sexualities research (Gamson 2000:348). For the purposes of this research project the social constructionist approach appears to encompass the most important conditions for doing meaningful research with gay men, some of those conditions being respect for the feelings and emotions and daily lived experiences of the co-researchers and a taking into account of the holistic nature of their lives. In doing participatory action research I would also like to acknowledge the important contribution made by feminist and narrative research both through the hearing and acknowledging of the voices of marginalised and excluded people in our society, of which gay people form part. Through this research project the men involved in this project were acknowledged as valuable human beings who needed and received a 'hearing' of their voice from a position of alienation, marginalization and exclusion.

3.8 LOOKING AT CHAPTER FOUR

Important influential discourses within the pentecostal/charismatic movement are discussed. These include the fundamentalistic approach to gay people and the use of 'texts of wrath', or those biblical texts seen as having *undisputable* authority in judging gay people as sinful and deserving of eternal damnation. Essentialism and the social construction of homosexuality are discussed in terms of their effect on the lived experiences of my co-researchers and how *gay theology* is constructed in this research project.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEOLOGY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of my research project something needs to be said about the influence of theology¹¹, and specifically pentecostal/charismatic theology, on gay Christians and also the influence of gay Christians on pentecostal/charismatic theology. All of the participants in this project have Christian religious backgrounds and chose to leave their religious culture-of-birth mainly because of the prevailing anti-gay discourses. McNeill (1988: xi, xii) says that 'there are specific questions that lesbian women and gay men ask of reality that differ from heterosexual questions, and that there is thus a distinct contribution to be made to theology and spirituality from a gay perspective'. The discussion of the influence of theological discourses on gay people is thus seen as more than a criticism of the mostly abusive character of these discourses. The discussion also aims to highlight positive outcomes through the influence of these discourses. Let us therefore consider the nature of the current theological discourse regarding homosexuality in the pentecostal/charismatic movement and look at the effects of the socially constructed discourses on gay people in the church as experienced by some of the co-researchers in this project.

It has to be noted that that the concept of and discussion about homosexuality is a relative newcomer to the field of theology. I will attempt to show that theology leaned heavily on the fields of psychology in developing its viewpoints. Supporting the church's mostly negative judgment of homosexuality is a number of biblical texts often used in a fundamentalistic manner. The concept of fundamentalism will also be looked at as it is directly related to the interpretation of the relevant texts. The reaction of many gay Christians to the church's views on homosexuality varies but in the case of my co-researchers all of them followed an individualised road to incorporating spirituality into their lives.

¹¹ The term 'theology' is used rather than 'religion' because it reflects the opinions of a group of (usually authoritative) figures in the church and as such it a more comprehensive approach is followed.

I would like to commence with a short discussion of the church becoming involved in this challenging field of sexuality and ethics.

4.2 PSYCHOLOGY, MORALITY, RELIGION

The need expressed by McNeill (1988:xi) for the development of a *sexual theology* as distinct from a theology about human sexuality seems to be a valid point made especially in the light of the increasing level of theologising about homosexuality in South Africa and the slow pace of change or at least inquiry regarding homosexuality and the church. With some regularity some article or comment is being published in the popular press about this important aspect of the church's involvement in the field of Christian morality (see Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane 2005; Pieter Craffert 2005; Neels Jackson 2004; Neels Jackson 2005; *Huisgenoot* 23 Okt 2003; Adrio König 2003; Andries Venter 2005).

The word *homosexuality* was first introduced in the Bible in the late nineteenth century. However, the term originated in the medical and psychological fields. The modern Western concept of gay identity is mostly the product of 19th century psychology and also the gay liberation movements that started after Stonewall¹² (Greenberg 1988:458). According to Foucault (1978:43) Westphal's famous article of 1870 on 'contrary sexual sensations' can be considered as the date of birth of the classification of gay men and lesbians. The word '*homosexualität*' was actually coined in 1869 by Karl Maria Kertbeny and 'was a very useful neutral way to refer to "same-sex love", which "scientifically" defused such highly charged words as "bugger" or "sodomite" or "degenerate"' (Norton 2002). This word was not incorporated into the medical or anthropological sciences until very late in the nineteenth century after a 'process and linguistic developments by which homosexuality came to be 'medicalised'. 'In 1870 an American psychiatrist abstracted Westphal's article using the phrase 'inverted sexual feeling', and in 1878 Arrigo Tamassia invented *inversione dell'istinto sessuale* in an article in an Italian medical journal. His phrase was simplified to 'inversion', which remained the standard medical term' (Norton 2002). One could suggest that social control of gay people now became possible and

¹² 'Stonewall' refers to the riot that took place in Greenwich Village in New York on June 27, 1968 when the patrons of a gay bar *Stonewall Inn*, together with community residents fought back against police who raided the bar. This incident ushered in a new militancy and gay-liberation groups sprang up everywhere. Groups also started in England and Europe. Activists started to identify themselves openly as gay and displayed an assertiveness and self-confidence not often seen before this time.

homosexuality as a perversion and aberration was created and became a crime (Rabinow 1994:138-144). However, binaries such as homosexuality/heterosexuality, as we know today, are artificial and cannot hold up when the multiplicity and variety of human beings are considered (Tremblay 2000). These binaries have been challenged in books such as *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and history* (Herdt 1994) and *Beyond Gay or Straight: Understanding sexual orientation* (Clausen 1996).

The process of developing the perception that homosexuals differed from heterosexuals was a gradual one and appears to have coincided with the rise of the status of the medical profession and its scientific explanations of human behaviour (Looy 1997:499) which resulted in the identification of homosexuality as a social problem (d'Augelli 1991:216).

The church in aligning itself with the medical-historical description of homosexuality accepted the lifestyle as abnormal, sinful and wrong. By accepting the proposed binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality and adopting a judgmental stance toward gay people that was supported by a number of texts taken from the Bible, the church became one of the instruments of subjugation, stigmatization and exclusion in the lives of many gay people. Before the 'discovery' of homosexuality in the 19th century, the church did not express its disapproval simply because homosexuality as we know it was not seen as the lifestyle we now understand it to be.

Also in line with medical science that increased its position of power through the study of human anatomy and thus becoming expert and exercising the all-knowing gaze as Foucault described it (Fillingham 1993:71-74), the church assumed the power as the representative of God on earth to 'similarly scrutinise gay people with dominant heterosexist moral 'gazes' expecting them to heal, convert or conform' (Otto 2003:4).

4.3 FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE PENTECOSTAL/CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

A discussion of fundamentalism in the pentecostal/charismatic movement needs to be placed within the wider scope of other religions before describing it specifically within the pentecostal/charismatic context.

Chapter 4 Theology and homosexuality

Various descriptions or definitions of fundamentalism, formulated by many authors, some mentioned by Hunsberger (1996:40), may be found in religious literature. One such definition is given by Altemeyer and Hunsberger who have researched the hostility experienced by homosexuals from religious fundamentalist groups. Religious fundamentalism was defined as:

the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by the forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity.

(Altemeyer & Hunsberger in Hunsberger 1996:39-40)

Although the label *fundamentalist* is applied to some Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and Christian faith communities, the similarity in the use of the term lies in the insistence of its leaders of certain 'fundamentals', 'the non-negotiable bedrock beliefs of a religious tradition which have undergone cultural erosion or direct attack by secular forces in the modern age' and the claim to be 'the sole authentic representative of the religion it speaks for, and fundamentalists often treat fellow believers who do not grant them this prerogative with more venom than they do outsiders' (Cox 1995:302). Although Cox is not referring here to pentecostals as fundamentalists, the description and characteristics depicted reminds me of the claims to ultimate truth made by the Pentecostal movement as well as their insistence of the *correct* interpretation of texts referring to gay people.

In his discussion of fundamentalism in Pentecostal and charismatic circles, Spittler (1994:114) maintains that although the interpretation of the Scriptures varies within the Pentecostal movement, pentecostals 'decidedly think and act like fundamentalists'.

A direct reference to fundamentalism in the Pentecostal movement as far as it concerns homosexuality is made by Anthonissen and Oberholzer (2001:74). In referring to a statement made by the Assemblies of God in the USA in 1979 they link the rejection of homosexuality to a fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible whereby the desire to have fixed standards for moral behaviour is met by the literal interpretation of texts referring to homosexuality as valid for today without taking into account that the term homosexual/ity is not an original biblical term. The statements made by various

pentecostal/charismatic groups in South Africa are not much different to the statement of the Assemblies of God. I refer specifically to the statement made by the AFM referred to in chapter 1 paragraph 1.1 and repeated by this church's president Isak Burger that translated states that 'I am not a fundamentalist but if it makes me a fundamentalist if I believe the Bible, people should feel free to call me one' (Jackson 2005a). Does this imply that people who do not agree with Burger do not believe the Bible? Would I have to accept that there is only one correct interpretation of the Bible and that the AFM church's interpretation of the texts pertaining to homosexuality is the only correct one? Statements such as these have to be examined in the light of the particular manner in which the Scriptures are interpreted (see 4.4.1).

Regarding the understanding of Scripture in Pentecostal communities, '[t]he pentecostal movement stands in the tradition of those groups who maintain that the record of Scripture is historically accurate, particularly in terms of the so-called supernatural stories ...' (Clark 1997:55). In addition fundamentalism in the pentecostal/charismatic movement also advocates the belief in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, its inerrancy and subscribes to the 'tenets of the great Christian *confessions* of the immediate post-Reformation era' (Clark 1997:55). For the purposes of our own research it is important to note Clark's comment that the aforementioned values 'are often maintained in a distinctive way, combining a literalistic and uncritical biblicism with an unyielding commitment to the fundamental doctrines' (Clark 1997:55). The truth of this remark was manifested in the life experience of the co-researchers who came from pentecostal/charismatic communities in its effects of pain, alienation, marginalization and exclusion. Despite the claims made that pentecostals are directed in their hermeneutics by the Holy Spirit (Möller 1998:186), the yardstick used in dealing with the *problem* of homosexuality in their midst seems to be that of a biblicistic use of Scripture. This inconsistency is also demonstrated when Herholdt says the following:

Indeed, to Pentecostals and Charismatics, the Bible is not a limited book, for Acts still continues. Pentecostalism is a Spirit religion, for the charismatic gifts serve as a medium for God to address his people in a very relevant way. The hermeneutical bearing of this is that the concentration of hermeneutical effort is on God's side, and not on human endeavour. Believers actively engage in the charismatic gifts, but it is God who speaks and makes his message known. The kerygma is not a static set of truths that waits to be discovered, for God speaks when believers speak as the

spirit gives them utterance. The input of the believer therefore contributes to a reader-response type of communicative understanding of the Word.

Herholdt (1998:429)

Yet, Herholdt also remarks that 'Pentecostals, like many Christians from other traditions, often succumb to a fundamentalist understanding of Scripture and the text is taken at face value' (Herholdt 1998:428). Is this perhaps the reason for the pentecostal/charismatic movement's approach to homosexual people in their midst? It may be helpful to look at the *problem texts* as they are used by fundamentalists.

An interesting development in the Apostolic Faith Mission, which is the largest pentecostal group in Southern Africa, is that since it has been united into one multi-racial/multi-cultural church in 1996, it now has to deal with the influence of a political contextual theology concerning Scripture, a form of theology that was not generally practiced before, in especially the so-called White church. Probably the most prominent proponent of the political hermeneutic approach to the use of Scripture is Frank Chikane the vice-president of the Apostolic Faith Mission (Clark 1997:64). Chikane states that his understanding of the Bible is no longer *fundamentalistic* where biblical absolutes are applied, but rather that he believes the message of the Bible to be relative to the writer and a specific context, the reader, and to the group which proclaims it (Chikane 1988:152-153). One could only hope that Chikane's thoughts regarding biblical interpretation will infiltrate the church in South Africa (and including the AFM Church of which he is vice-president) in future as no visible changes have yet come about especially regarding the interpretation of texts regarding homosexuality (See paragraph 1.1).

The relevance of this for our present research project is that the influence of this approach lies in the 'understanding that the social and political contexts within which the Scriptures are read *determine* (not merely *affect*) the way the Scriptures are understood' (Clark 1997:62). The use of Scripture in liberation and political theology appears to be *functional* in that it is 'based upon a pre-conceived understanding of the socio-political status of a group of people who are deemed to require liberation' (Clark 1997:63). As such one could hopefully expect the influence of liberation theology in the

pentecostal/charismatic church in South Africa to impact on the acceptance of gay people as part of the body of Christ.

Most of the foregoing remarks refer to the Pentecostal movement. However, fundamentalism is not only relevant to the Pentecostal movement. A fundamentalistic approach to the Scriptures combined with a simplistic and biblicistic methodology of dealing with Scripture is also characteristic of the charismatic movement. 'This leads to their often basing cardinal doctrines upon verses taken out of both literary and historical context' (Clark 1997:68).

I would now like to look at the texts that are most often used by the church to condemn a homosexual lifestyle in the following paragraph.

4.4 'CLOBBER TEXTS'

Nicky, a co-researcher, refers to the six¹³ Bible texts that are customarily used to defend the fundamentalist position of the church and to justify the exclusion of gay people from the family of God, as *clobber texts*. This term seems to indicate that they are used as instruments of violence. In similar vein Germond (1997:193) refers to 'the Bible as a 'six-gun', a pistol loaded with six texts ... that are used as bullets – Bible bullets – to kill lesbian and gay people in a contest about whether they can be full members of the community of faith. They kill because they are used to legitimise the rejection of gay and lesbian people from the church'. 'And in doing so the bible has been used to bring death rather than life, to create outcasts, to make countless Christians feel like aliens in the household of God.'

The passages in question are found in Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Timothy 1:8-10. The following extracts of the texts in question are taken from the New International Version of the Bible except for 1 Timothy 1:9, 10 which was taken from the New American Standard version:

¹³ Some authors refer to seven or eight texts adding, for instance, Genesis 1-3 and Judges 19 to the others mentioned in this context and state that these texts directly or indirectly refer to *homosexual practices* and not to *homosexuality* as it is presently defined (Anthonissen and Oberholzer 2001:121; Sehested 1999:54-55).

Genesis 19:4,5: 'Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, 'where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.'

Leviticus 18:22: 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.'

Leviticus 20:13: 'If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.'

Romans 1:26, 27: 'Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.'

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10: 'Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.'

Timothy 1:9, 10: '...law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,'. (The NIV makes no mention of 'homosexuals' but in stead used the word 'perverts'.)

In the following discussion my purpose is not to attempt to present the *correct* interpretation of these texts, something that I don't believe is possible, but rather to get a little closer to the way in which spiritual relationships of gay men are affected through the use of these texts. Germond (1997:188) suggests that these Biblical texts may be interpreted from a theological position of either exclusion or inclusion of gay and lesbian people from the life of the church. There may, however, be more ways in which gay and lesbian people are either excluded or included dependent upon the theological conditions applied within a specific theological framework. In reality the church, or for that matter, societal structures could simultaneously include and exclude gay people. An example of this type of exclusion/inclusion can be found in the decision taken by the Western Cape

Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church regarding the gay Dutch Reformed minister, Laurie Gaum of St Stephens Church, who was to be allowed to continue in his position as a minister on condition that he signed an agreement of celibacy (Malan 2005:1).

In embracing the postmodern view that there is not one single truth, I see more than one possible interpretation of the *problem texts*. The multiplicity of viewpoints regarding the texts in question, depending on the particular hermeneutic perspective adopted by the interpreter, is the rule rather than the exception (Sheppard 1985). Working with the texts in question seem to lie within the field of textual hermeneutics and theologians from various religious backgrounds have struggled with these and other texts only to find that there is no final answer to the questions put to the texts and in my opinion no final answer could be reached taking into account the numerous possible exegetical and hermeneutical ways of working with especially ancient Scriptures. Despite the existence of some (even the smallest) doubt as to the *correct* understanding of especially the so-called *clobber texts*, these texts have been used to control gay people in or even outside the church. O'Brien (1999) appeals to Christians to wrestle with the Word involving their minds, hearts and lives. Through engaging in this action and avoiding individualism it is possible to discover meaning in the Bible within the community of believers. He confirms what we as co-researchers have partly experienced:

The Scriptures have served as propagandistic fodder for slavery, subjugation of women, even ethnic cleansing. Yet many of us believe the Bible is profoundly life-giving, offering a vision of justice, salvation, peace, and human dignity. While the Bible has been used to justify militarism and nationalism, it has also motivated powerful witnesses of peace and nonviolence. The same Bible sometimes wielded to oppress and exploit has also inspired healing ministries and freedom movements.

O'Brien (1999)

In looking at the six texts in question some important general observations that have been made by some authors on the subject may be repeated briefly (cf Wink 1999; Anthonissen and Oberholzer 2001; Muller 1997; Boswell 1980; Everding 2005; du Plessis 1999; Germond & De Gruchy 1997):

1. the texts in question are mostly used in a judgmental manner against people who have a homosexual orientation¹⁴ based on the assumption that the texts concerned express eternal truths not to be questioned;
2. the texts are used without regard to its historical and cultural context;
3. 'the word "homosexual" does not occur in the Bible: no extant text or manuscript, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, or Aramaic, contains such a word. In fact none of these languages ever contained a word corresponding to the English "homosexual", nor did any languages have such a term before the late nineteenth century' (Boswell 1980:92).

According to Germond (1997:189) two sets of assumptions are active during the reading and interpreting of Bible texts. First there are assumptions, perceptions and perspectives of the writers themselves, and second, readers come to their reading of the Bible with their own assumptions that influence the message. These assumptions should always be kept in mind in interpreting texts. One could easily generalise one's own assumptions and superimpose them on that which is written with sometimes very serious effects on the people concerned as is the case with gay people. The way in which pentecostal/charismatic theologians and pastors interpret the relevant texts continue to have dire consequences for most gay people within these contexts.

André Muller (1997:175) who pastors the Reforming Church in Pretoria is of the opinion that the texts concerned are to be read and translated taking into account the cultural and historical contexts in which they originated. He maintains that probably none of the *clobber texts* are applicable to gay people in our society (Muller 1997:176).

In referring to these texts an interesting and positive comment is made by Empeur (1998:81-82) who says that the 'only relevance that the few passages about homosexuality have for the gay person is the need to understand them so that they do not become a barrier in their being able to find nurture and comfort in the Scriptures'. In

¹⁴ According to the American Psychological Association (2004) '[s]exual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others. It is easily distinguished from other components of sexuality including biological sex, gender identity (the psychological sense of being male or female), and the social gender role (adherence to cultural norms for feminine and masculine behavior)'.

considering the *clobber texts* above, one has to ask as Furnish (quoted by Empereur 1998:82) does whether one can expect answers to questions that the Bible does not ask. He says:

When one forces the Bible to address questions of which it has no conception, whatever answers one may get are not really *biblical* answers at all.' Furnish says that to concentrate on a biblical teaching on homosexuality is to distract one from the Bible's agenda. It has far more to say about greed, self-interest, injustice in the marketplace, and exploitation of the poor than it does about sex with a person of the same sex. He notes that the various moral teachings in the Bible are an expression of concern that people be faithful to the claim that God makes on them. But because these rules and counsels are historically conditioned they may be less relevant for our time.

Empereur (1998:82-83)

Much has been written by the 'experts' in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics to attempt to come to an acceptable conclusion regarding the problem texts as they refer to homosexuality and Christianity. However, thus far hardly any agreement has been reached regarding the applicability of these texts to homosexuality in the church of the 21st century (Germond 1997:212). In my own opinion it seems reasonable to say that referring to biblical texts as if they clearly indicate homosexuality, a term originating in the 19th century, would imply a reading of ancient texts through our own 21st century lenses, something that would naturally result in a distortion of the texts concerned. What we refer to when speaking of homosexuality in contemporary society, is something entirely different to what the Bible is referring to in the *clobber texts*. The understanding of homosexuality that I have come to know, and in this regard my co-researchers educated me, is 'referring primarily to a mutually consensual, monogamous, loving and committed relationship between an adult gay couple or an adult lesbian couple' (Siker 1996:140). What is referred to in the *clobber texts* are 'exploitive forms of homoerotic¹⁵ sexual practice, whether it be homoerotic rape (as in Sodom and Gomorrah), homoerotic acts within idolatrous cultic prostitution (as in Leviticus), or as in the Pauline letters, the Greco-Roman practices of male homoerotic prostitution and pederasty ...' (Siker 1996:140).

¹⁵ 'Homoerotic' in this context refers to the 'sexual activity of the individuals involved rather than homosexuality which refers to their sexual orientation. Homosexuality is limited to homosexuals. Homoeroticism can be experienced by both homosexuals and heterosexuals' (The Bible and Homosexuality 2004)

Genesis 19:4,5

This text is often used as proof of God's expression of anger against homosexuality. This opinion is expressed on the basis of the attempted rape of Lot's two angelic visitors by the men of Sodom (Helminiak 1997:83). However, the men referred to were most probably mainly heterosexual men and the intention was the rape of men implying the gaining of power and domination over the visitors (Sehested 1999:54-55). That the aggressors in the Genesis 19 account were heterosexual men is echoed in a related story in Judges 19:22-25 where a group of men were refused sexual intercourse with a visiting Levite but was given the Levite's concubine whom they subsequently raped and abused throughout the night. In both of these accounts the old Eastern hospitality rules were violated (Louw 1980:104; N G Kerk 2004).

I would then argue that the sin of Sodom was not homosexuality but a variety of other sins such as idolatry, murder, greed, theft, rebellion, covetousness, mistreating the poor, arrogance, adultery, lying by priests and prophets, pride of the heart, cruelty and failure to care for the young and poor, oppression, and pride (Deuteronomy 29:17-26, 32:32-38, Isaiah 1:9-23, 3:8-15, 3:11-19; Jeremiah 23:10-14, 49:16-18, 50:2-40; Lamentations 4:3-6; Ezekiel 16:49-50; Amos 4:1-11; Zephaniah 2:8; also see Dawson & Mollenkott 1994:60-62; Du Plessis 1999:41; Germond 1997:214; Helminiak 1997:83; Louw 1980:104; Nagel & Dreyer 1997:357-358). Indeed, God already made the decision to destroy Sodom before the angels' visit (Gen 18:20-21). The story of Sodom should rather be seen as a story of violent rape and should be used as a warning against sexual violence (Du Plessis 1999:42).

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are the two most important Old Testament texts that are used in the condemnation of homosexuality today. In a discussion of these texts one has to contextualise it with reference to the holiness code with its prohibitions on the eating of meat with blood, the use of more than one type of yarn in a garment, the planting of different seeds in a field, and so on. It would seem that the laws found in the Old Testament can be classified into moral, social and ritualistic categories. Concerning the texts in question it appears that its use of the word *tow'ebah* refers to a ritualistic uncleanness and not to a moral uncleanness (Townsend 2002). According to Dawson

and Mollenkott (1994:65) ritual purity was a sign of Israel's unique character as a people set apart for God and following precise instructions for purification and restoration were understood to be grounded in *ceremonial law* rather than in *ethical* or *moral law*, the latter two being concerned with principles of right and wrong behaviour in a more general sense. Semen and blood, which is crucial to continuation of human life, were included in the ceremonial law as may be shown in Leviticus 15 where sexual intercourse during a woman's menstrual period was prohibited because of her uncleanness and the referral to the emission of semen in Lev 15:16-18 and Deut 23:10 making a man unclean. 'In both Leviticus 18 and 20 we have reason to believe that the sex acts described made one ritually unclean, and were not meant for social and/or moral Law' (Townesley 2002). This statement is supported by the taboo placed on sexual intercourse during a woman's menstrual cycle in Leviticus 18:19, and 20:18 and the ritualistically unclean state resulting from a man and woman who had sexual intercourse (Lev 15:18). 'Given the conspicuous usage of *tow'ebah* in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, it seems reasonable to assume that uncleanness is the intention in these passages' (Townesley 2002). It is also important in the context of these texts to point out that they refer only to male-male sexual behaviour and excludes female homosexual behaviour making it inconsistent in using the texts to condemn homosexuality on the basis of its being unnatural or immoral. Of course there could be another intention behind the use of the word *tow'ebah* but in the light of my discussion above, it does not appear to be homosexuality in general that is being prohibited. Regarding Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 I would like to add that this position regarding uncleanness is not new but was also found in the early church. Eusebius of Caesarea and the Apostolic Constitutions have stated that the uncleanness related to male-male sexual behaviour is ritual, not moral (Boswell 1980:102).

In expressing the possibility of other intentions behind the use of *tow'ebah*, considering the importance of male honour in the Bible may be worth looking at. In the Holiness Code as mentioned above, the mixing of kinds seemed to be forbidden. Mixing two kinds of fabric (Leviticus 19:19) for instance, would mean the blending of two wholes that are complete in themselves. The result would be confusion and disorder. The texts in Leviticus referring to male homosexual behaviour are set in the context of heterosexual behaviour where a man takes the dominant (penetrative) position and possesses the passive (receptive) woman. Because there was no place for a relationship between equals in antiquity, for two males to engage in sexual intercourse would mean that one partner would have to adopt the female role and change into a combination of kinds,

male-female through becoming the passive partner and thus becoming unclean. This resulted in the dominant partner becoming unclean because he came in contact with the unclean. Set against the background of the *honour* of the man being the superior person in Biblical hierarchy, it would therefore be possible to interpret the prohibition against *male* homosexual behaviour as a protective measure to preserve the honour of the man. This is demonstrated in Leviticus 18:6-18 where a list of incestuous prohibitions is given but where the man's honour is clearly the focus (The Bible and Homosexuality 2004).

Romans 1:26, 27

The context of Romans 1 is *idolatry* and *lust* and Paul's comments are made on the common assumption of the day that people are 'inherently 100 percent heterosexual, without any room for variance' (Dawson & Mollenkott 1994:72). Romans 1:26-27 reflects the culturally influenced perspective that Paul was taking. He refers by implication to heterosexuality as 'natural' and assumes that homosexual acts are against nature. This culturally conditioned viewpoint is also seen in Paul's ideas about hair length of women and men and about the unnaturalness for a man to wear his hair long (1 Cor 11:14-15). 'That view of what is 'natural' and 'unnatural' is also in accordance with his culture, the Greco-Roman world. The fact that he opines what is natural or unnatural does not make that opinion binding for all generations' (Seow 1996:25,26). Paul shared some presuppositions with other Hellenistic Jews regarding homoerotic actions. These include the idea that a person who has same-sex intercourse goes against his or her 'natural' desire for the opposite sex; homoerotic acts were seen as an expression of lust and an insatiable sexual appetite, examples of which were to be found in the practice of pederasty¹⁶ and male prostitution; sexual intercourse was thought to require one partner to be active (the male) and the other to be passive (the female) and by having same-sex intercourse, confusion was introduced in sexual roles and identities; the fear of the extinction of the human species because of the belief of Philo and others that men who had same-sex intercourse would become sterile. Siker (1996:143) emphasizes the

¹⁶In the Greek world, an older man, an *erastes* would take an *eromanos*, a boy between 12-18 (after onset of puberty), as a student. The relationship that was expected to occur by the parents, and both *erastes* and *eromanos*, involved the man teaching hunting, warfare, adult male customs, etc., to the boy. An integral part of this relationship was anal or intercrural intercourse, with the teacher being the active partner and the student playing the passive role' (Townesley 2002) A typical characteristic of these relationships were that they were usually between people of unequal status.

importance of taking into account the cultural context in which Paul is writing about homoeroticism. When Paul argues that homosexuality is 'against nature' he does not only mean that it is against the order of nature itself, but that it is against the person's own nature. Like all earlier and contemporary Jewish (but not all classical) writers on the subject, Paul does not recognise a category of homosexually orientated people, but only homosexual acts. He takes it for granted that homosexual behaviour is a free, perverse choice on the part of 'naturally' heterosexual men and women. This assumption is clear in his statements that homosexuals 'gave up' or 'exchanged' heterosexual relations in verses 26 and 27. The same argument is made by König (Beeld 2006) who also adds that the reference in verse 26 to 'their women' appears to refer to these heterosexual men's wives. It is also important to see that Paul's focus in Romans 1 is not essentially on homosexuality but on homosexual acts as part of idolatrous practices (John 2004:49). To Dawson and Mollenkott (1994:66) the point of Romans 1 and 2 is not to isolate an undesirable group of people but rather to point to the sinfulness of *all* people (Rom 3:23). David Halperin (Dawson & Mollenkott 1994:73) points out that the disapproval of Biblical writers of homoerotic sexual intercourse was understandable as an abusive practice of sex took place in a society in which social class and power played an important role.

It seems important to take into account that Paul wrote this passage in the context of homosexual temple prostitution being a 'common phenomenon of cultic rituals in the geographic location and time in which Paul was writing'. Verses 21-27 of Romans 1 appears to reflect practices customarily performed by the priests and priestesses (*galli*) in the Cybelean/Attic mystery cult which was a prominent cult in Rome at the time. The tying of the Cybelean rituals with the passage in Romans was a viewpoint also expressed by Hippolytus, church leader and Christian martyr in the early 3rd century (see Townsley 2002a).

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and Timothy 1:9, 10

In discussing the texts in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 Townsley (2001) focuses on the Greek words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* as they are used here. The use of the word *arsenokoitai* is found for the first time in Greek literature in 1 Corinthians 6:9 (NIV) where it is translated as 'male prostitutes' while *malakoi* is translated in the same text as 'homosexual offenders'. Interestingly enough, the translation of *malakoi* in the

King James version of 1 Corinthians 6:9 is 'effeminate' 'In the Revised Standard Version of 1946 and 1952, the two words were arbitrarily combined and rendered simply 'homosexuals,' giving the unfortunate impression that all persons whose erotic interests were oriented toward the same sex were by that very fact excluded from membership in God's family – even if they lived celibately. The original language, however, made no reference whatsoever to sexual orientation. The intent seems to have been to single out specific *kinds* of sexual practices that were considered deplorable' (Dawson & Mollenkott 1994:75). In 1 Timothy 1:9-10 (NIV), *arsenokoitai* is translated as 'perverts'. It seems strange that Paul here chooses to use a newly constructed word which refers to male homosexuality only and thereby excluding female homosexuality. Would Paul have singled out male homosexual behaviour as undesirable while not mentioning female homosexual behaviour? This would seem inconsistent with Paul's use of language. One could also speculate that Paul did not want to include all types of homosexual behaviour but used this word to prohibit only certain types of homosexual behaviour that produces ritual uncleanness in the context of the first century church. From the use of this previously unknown term *arsenokoitai* one could also conclude that Paul did not want to refer to any type of homosexual behaviour (2001). Among the early Greek-speaking Christian theologians who condemned homosexuality the words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* were never used. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.) preached in Greek against homosexuality and like others including Clement of Alexandria, never used these words, not even was the issue of homosexuals mentioned when he preached on these two passages (Boswell 1980:335-353). When we look at the juxtaposition of *arsenokoitai* and *pornoi* in 1 Tim. 1:10 it would suggest that the issue at stake is really prostitution, which seemed to be of greater concern to Paul than any sort of homosexual behaviour. The word *pornos* and its derivatives are mentioned almost thirty times compared to *arsenokoitai* which is only mentioned twice in the New Testament (Wright 1984). Similarly, there is no historical reason for the term *malakoi* to ever have been translated as a general homosexual, or specifically a 'passive' homosexual context (Martin 1995:128). The literal translation of the term *malakoi* is 'soft'. The word is also found in Matt 11:8 and Luke 7:25 where the word is translated as 'soft' or 'fine' referring to clothing. '[We] have no idea what it means in this context (especially, since we find this word in a 'list' format, there is no real 'context' from which to derive a meaning anyway)' (Townesley 2001).

There are, however, scholars who are of the opinion that Paul's intent was to refer to the unacceptability of homosexuality (Malick 1993). Other scholars infer that Paul is referring to the widely practiced pederast customs in the Greek Roman world of the time (Anthonissen & Oberholzer 2001:137-138).

No matter how these texts are interpreted it remains clear that the number of direct references to homosexuality is relatively small and '[m]any of us Christians have awakened to how mute the Bible is regarding a committed homosexual union between mature adults' (Myers 1999:67-68). In the agenda of the twelfth session of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, Dr André Bartlett states that the basis for judgment of homosexuality in the Bible is much smaller than, for example, the textual support for the submissive role of a woman in the marriage relationship, or the acceptance of the normality of the practice of slavery (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 2004). After evaluating the relevant texts König (Beeld 2006) concludes that there is no condemnation of a committed homosexual relationship to be found in the Bible. Even though it appears that the traditional interpretation of texts referring to homosexuality is being rejected by more scholars in favour of the view that what appears to be indicated by these texts are idolatrous actions performed by heterosexual people, the majority of churches, including the pentecostal/charismatic movement are not yet convinced of the validity of the re-interpretation of these texts.

4.4.1 The pentecostal/charismatic way of interpreting texts

I would like to concur with Otto (2003:51) that deciding whether some or all of the texts referred to as *clobber texts* refer to homosexuality and whether the texts are condemning homosexuality or not is a matter of interpretation or hermeneutics. In the context of the pentecostal/charismatic movement the choice of literal interpretation has resulted in the experience of discrimination, condemnation and judgement (Griffin 1999:214, and Cargal 1993:170). In North America some scholars have begun to challenge the hermeneutical approach of the pentecostal movement in the light of the challenges of postmodernism, but scholarly work of this nature seems to be largely absent in South Africa (Cargal et al in Clark 1997:71-103).

Clark and Lederle (1989:35-42) maintains that a complex relationship between doctrine and experience exists within the pentecostal/charismatic movement. Clark (1997:89), in referring to this relationship maintains that a 'viable and consistent pentecostal approach to hermeneutics must be realistic ...' about this tension. Whether the pentecostal/charismatic church is choosing a literal interpretation of these texts in order to harmonise with experience and how this experience is influenced by the current discourses is perhaps a question that one could ask.

It may be useful for the pentecostal/charismatic movement to take note of the proposal made by Stronstad (1992) regarding what he considers as being the essential elements of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. He maintains that a

Pentecostal hermeneutic will have a variety of cognitive and experiential elements. On the one hand it will contain an element of experience, both at presuppositional and verification levels, on the other hand it will also be rational, respecting the literary genre of the relevant biblical data and incorporating historico-grammatico principles of exegesis. Not only will a Pentecostal hermeneutic be both experiential and rational, but it will also be pneumatic, recognizing the Spirit as the illuminator as well as the inspirer of Scripture.

(Stronstad 1992:25)

If the bible is to have a message for the contemporary situation it has to be interpreted rationally by making use of historical and grammatical principles which would help one to understand the original meaning of the text. This is possible because of the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit making it possible to also reveal truth in the present. The interpretation of the text is not limited to historical meaning, 'but a multiplicity of meanings and the dialogical role of an experience as revealed by the spirit for a present, given, situation also form part of this interpretation' (Pretorius 2002:122). Regarding *multiple meanings* of texts, Clark (1997:100) maintains that Cargal may be mistaken regarding traditional pentecostal preaching and states that few pentecostal preachers would argue for multiple *meanings* of a text, but they *would* accept multiple *applications and implications*. As far as the *clobber texts* quoted above are concerned, I have never personally heard any other meaning conveyed from a charismatic or pentecostal pulpit other than a judgmental one regarding homosexual behaviour.

The relationship between doctrine and experience can be seen in a different light when comparing the viewpoint of pentecostal biblical scholars with that of pentecostal preachers which differs significantly (Cargal 1993:164). Whereas the pentecostal biblical scholars appears to have 'increasingly emphasized the historical context of biblical narratives and reduced their meaning to the intent of the "inspired" authors", Pentecostal preachers within parish communities have generally continued traditional modes of Pentecostal interpretation with their emphases on the immediacy of the text and multiple dimensions of meaning' (Cargal 1993:164). It is probably this fact that leads Gordon Fee to state that a pragmatic hermeneutics has developed among pentecostals by which they 'obey what should be taken literally; spiritualize, allegorize, or devotionalize the rest' (Cargal 1993:165). These traditional forms of pentecostal biblical interpretation ironically 'have more in common with postmodern modes of interpretation that do the "critical" interpretations of Pentecostal biblical scholars' (Cargal 1993:165).

The implications of a type of pentecostal hermeneutics that takes seriously the divine inspiration of the Scriptures as well as the possibility of the reader to be guided by the Holy Spirit as to the *true* meaning of the Scriptures for the present situation, leaves the reader with multiple possibilities as to the applicability of any biblical text to his or her own life. Embracing this interpretational methodology to the Scriptures appears to be in harmony with a postmodern theological approach in that it makes space for a personal encounter with God. Some pentecostal scholars find the acceptance of the postmodern paradigm for Pentecostalism in order to gain a little as totally undesirable (Clark 1997:84-85).

Interestingly, the apostle Paul could be seen as someone who was strongly motivated and influenced in forming his theology by his own personal experience of Jesus through a revelation from God, an experience that led him to new ways of considering Scripture and tradition. Paul's seemingly subjectivity of his revelatory experience leading to his interpretation of Scripture contrary to Scripture and tradition caused many of Paul's contemporaries to dismiss him. An important thought expressed by Siker (1996:145) is that 'Paul's experience of God in Christ has become Scripture for us. Thus while I agree that we should be wary of theological arguments made solely on the basis of experience without significant recourse to Scripture, tradition, and reason, at the same time we need

to pay close attention to the living reality of Christian experience, and especially to communal experience of God's Spirit at work in our midst'.

During the time I spent with my co-researchers I have found that whenever the more progressive or contextualised interpretations of these passages of Scripture are discovered by these gay men/gay Christians, they experience tremendous liberation from bondage to traditional Christian discourses and become able to start living a spiritually fulfilling life as God's creation made in God's image able to worship the creator in spirit and truth. When Herman visited the Reformed Church he heard for the first time, as a gay man, that Jesus actually loves me. In an e-mail to me (21 April 2006) André says: When I could associate myself with God and understand myself in God's light from the Bible, I could also grow spiritually.

If, when trying to understand the relevant texts, one would approach the *problem* from the point of view of the Spirit rather than Christian legalism, 'the question ceases to be "What does Scripture command?": and becomes "What is the Word that the Spirit speaks to the churches now, in the light of Scripture, tradition, theology, and yes, psychology, genetics, anthropology, and biology"' (Wink 1999:46)?

If we accept that some of the texts are referring to homosexual behaviour and therefore clearly condemns it, we could ask, as Walter Wink does, whether the biblical judgment is correct. In support of this argument one could look at the issue of slavery which is supported by the Bible. One and a half century ago slaveholders could defend slavery on Scriptural grounds, yet today hardly anyone would justify slavery from the Bible. In the same way 'fifty years from now people will look back in wonder that the churches could be so obtuse and so resistant to the new thing the Holy Spirit was doing among us regarding homosexuality' (Wink 1999:47).

4.5 I WAS BORN GAY - ESSENTIALISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

In our conversations together, I discovered that most of my co-researchers were of the opinion that they are gay because they were born that way. André said that somewhere somehow I was formed that way, according to Herman I was born that way,

Johan realised that he was different in his standard five school year and Paul, when asking God why he was different found comfort in the thought or answer that he was gay not because he did something wrong, but because it was God's will. God seemed to say that it was okay for him to be gay. These men are representative of most other gay men in their thinking that their sexual orientation was fixed either before birth or early in life (Boswell 1980; Tremblay & Ramsey 2000; Wilcox 2002).

Initially I sensed the pain, despair and hopelessness of my co-researchers in as far as having no choice in the matter of being gay or heterosexual. However, after some time I began to become aware of other thoughts on the matter, some of which I will mention briefly. Are the memories of these men reliable proof of an early gay identity or is it possible that in re-relating their life stories a gay identity is supported by a re-reading of the past? I asked myself whether the acceptance of the *fact* that 'God made me this way' made it easier to feel accepted as a *child of God*, being part of God's creation. A similar thought is expressed by Warner (Wilcox 2002:503) arguing that this may be a critical strategy for LGBT¹⁷ Christians. Warner suggests that the unavoidability of sexual orientation 'removes blame and guilt from LGBT people and their parents' (Wilcox 2002:504). These considerations steered me into examining the terms 'essentialism' and 'social construction' in so far as it relates to homosexuality.

The question confronting me is whether homosexual identity has always existed or whether it is a product of the historical moment. Put differently the question is whether sexual orientation is a core part of a person's being (essentialism) or whether various forms of sexuality, be it heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, etc is the product of a specific cultural and historical understanding (social construction).

The concept of essentialism was defined in the work of Plato (428-348 BCE) and claims that certain unchanging forms exist in the natural world. It seems that an essence, as named by the Thomists of the Middle ages, does not change and is categorically different from another essence. 'Essentialism was the philosophical foundation for positivism in philosophy up to the twentieth century (DeLamater & Hyde 1998). It seems that the present-day concept of essentialism carries the meaning of a phenomenon being 'natural, inevitable, universal, and biologically determined' (DeLamater & Hyde 1998).

In support of the contemporary view of biological determinism sociobiologists have studied proximate (having an immediate impact on behaviour) causes of behaviour such as the study of Bailey and Pillard in 1991 on genetics in which they studied 56 gay men with an identical twin brother and found that 52% of the co-twins were also gay (DeLamater & Hyde 1998). A similar result was obtained in a study conducted by Bailey, Pillard, Neale, and Agyei in 1993 with lesbians who have an identical sister with a 48% concordance rate. Similar results were obtained by Whitam, Diamond, & Martin in 1993 (DeLamater & Hyde 1998). These studies could be seen as providing evidence of the genetic determination of sexual orientation, but they do not support complete genetic determination, which would require a 100% concordance rate. Various other studies done to support an essentialist viewpoint are, among others, the studies identifying a particular gene on the X chromosome that seem to explain *some* cases of male homosexuality indicating transmission from mothers to sons, hypotheses that there are neuroanatomical differences between the brains of gay and heterosexual males, and the much referred to study done by LeVay in 1991 to prove that there are hypothalamic differences between gay and heterosexual men and indications of a similarity between the hypothalamus of gay men and heterosexual women (Davies 1995:323-324; DeLamater & Hyde 1998). Various studies based on differences between hormone levels in gay and heterosexual men and women have also proved to be inconclusive regarding the determination of hormone differences on sexual orientation.

All the biological theories--evolutionary, genetic, hormonal, and neuroanatomical--are based on the assumption, although it is rarely stated, that there are two underlying true forms, heterosexuals and homosexuals. Despite Kinsey's pioneering conceptualization of a continuum between heterosexuality and homosexuality, the theories rest on an assumption of discontinuity, i.e., that homosexuality and heterosexuality are two distinct and separate categories. In addition, these theories rest on an assumption of the constancy over time of the two categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

(DeLamater & Hyde 1998)

In contrast to essentialism, the term social construction in this context carries the assumption that reality is socially constructed in relationships through language and that

¹⁷ Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transsexual

people construct realities as *they live their stories* (Freedman & Combs 1996:23; Gergen 1994:72-76). The question that I am confronted with is whether I can associate myself with the idea that the reality of my co-researchers' homosexuality is the product of the forming of relationships through language and that their realities are constructed in the course of *living* their lives. However, I am then also reminded by Mollenkott (2000) that '[i]t is because sex and gender are socially constructed that gender roles differ from culture to culture. Social construction also explains why many non-Western leaders deny that homosexuality exists in their culture'. She mentions the Meru in Kenya who recognizes the *mugawe*, a man dressed like a woman, often homosexual sometimes marrying a man, as a powerful religious leader. Mollenkott (2000) also refers to 'the Azande people of Zaire and the Sudan who have practiced lesbianism and intergenerational homoeroticism for centuries'. Besides these examples 'gender-variant deities and sex/gender transformations of worshipers have been documented in the religions of 28 African tribes. Yet it is common for African religious and political leaders to assert that homosexuality and transgenderism are white vices unknown to their people until colonialization by Euro-Americans. They are telling the truth as they see it: There is no "gayness" as it is currently constructed in the Western world' (Mollenkott, 2000). The social construction of concepts such as homosexuality and heterosexuality is also explained by Duberman (1988:517) as being the inventions of particular societies and cultures. He also maintains that the construction of a homosexual *identity* is unique to the Western world after the mid-nineteenth century probably as result of force by the development of a rigid medical discourse towards the end of the nineteenth century that insisted on categorising sexual behaviour for the purpose of regulating it (Duberman 1988:519). Homosexuality as a social construction seems a plausible idea, taking into account various examples taken from different cultures from all over the world like the North American Indians, the Keraki and Anga tribes of New Guinea, Melanesia and the traditional cultures of Japan and China and interestingly enough, the remark made that 'same gender sexual contact in nonindustrial cultures is, unlike our own, rarely if ever found as an exclusive sexual orientation' (Duberman 1988:521).

I am conscious of the fact that by using the terms gay and heterosexual men above, the existence of a binary of heterosexual/homosexual seems to be indicated. This is not my intention but the result of a lot of research and academic writing on the subject of sexuality. Tremblay and Ramsey (2000) accurately voice the opinion that the concept of

bisexuality is not incorporated into our understanding of sexuality but is rather being forced out by the binary discourse of homosexual/heterosexual. After having been involved in this research project for more than two years, I realised that this statement was a correct version of the way in which I experience, speak and write about sexuality. 'The modern concept of male homosexuality or "gay," as the likely social construction Michel Foucault and others have emphasized it to be, has embodied...' the belief in such a binary. One could, according to Tremblay and Ramsey (2000), ask whether bisexuality is not really the factual 'norm' as proposed by Freud. In my discussion of the existence of indications of homosexual behaviour in the Bible in point 4.4 above, it would seem that the constructivist view is supported that although same-sex relations were known throughout history and among different cultures, it was not viewed as it is viewed in our Western society of today (cf Jett 1998).

In terms of postmodern trends in social and theological thought, what is natural or essential or what is absolute regarding '[h]uman nature has been demonstrated to be socially and individually constructed'. 'Each human being creates his or her own unique and specific character within the context of broader social constructions about human nature that include cultures, institutions, beliefs, practices, desires, aspirations, and much else. An individual's nature is a complex construction, but always uniquely individual, always mediated by a particular social, linguistic, political and cultural context' (Germond 1997:197). This opinion stands opposed to theology's claims. Traditional theology usually considers only the male and female gender as *normal*, the cause of any deviance to this universal pattern as sin, and confession and repentance as the only solution to making *deviants* acceptable to God. In fact '[h]omosexuality is seen as a disavowal of an all-embracing dualism which is assumed as fundamental to social, psychic and sexual organisation. The dualism is derived from notions of the proper functioning of the human anatomy as well as notions of the proper purpose of sexual intercourse, namely procreation' (Germond 1997:195). The unacceptability of the church's exclusion of some within the range of human and gender diversity is voiced by Virginia Mollenkott (2001) who points out that society is still ruled by a binary gender construct to which the church also subscribes.

The foregoing discussion may seem to favour the concept of homosexuality being the result of social construction. Constructs that may have been thought to be immutable

givens, our gender identity, sex roles and sexual orientation appear to be much closer to temporary, transient human constructs (Duberman 1988:523). This may not be a comforting thought to those gay people who believe that they have no choice in the matter of being gay. There may, however, be a degree of choice that depends on the extent to which the person recognises the degree to which he has been 'caused'. A combination of the two concepts may be considered as Recio (2000:5-7) has proposed. The view expressed by the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH 2004) appears to take both essentialism and social construction into account. One of the psychiatrists quoted expresses this position as follows:

Like all complex behavioral and mental states, homosexuality is...neither exclusively biological nor exclusively psychological, but results from an as-yet-difficult-to-quantitate mixture of genetic factors, intrauterine influences...postnatal environment (such as parent, sibling and cultural behavior), and a complex series of *repeatedly reinforced choices* occurring at critical phases of development.

Satinover (quoted in NARTH 2004)

It would be a disregarding of the complexity of sexual identity to simply discard one concept for another, in this instance essentialism for social construction or vice versa, and the discussion needs to be furthered through research *with* and not *about* gay people.

4.6 INDIVIDUALISED SPIRITUALITY

I am of the opinion that gay men in the pentecostal/charismatic movement have the option of remaining 'trapped in doctrinally-ordained closets' (Wilcox 2002:511) or to follow the route of developing their own individualised form of spirituality. This seemed to be the choice made by my co-researchers. They have, as numerous other gay Christians have done, left their traditional churches for a church where they would be able to incorporate their spirituality without constraint into their self-definition. My own opinion is that leaving their church-of-origin should not be seen as the only option for gay men. There may be viable options open for exploration to those gay men who are willing to make sacrifices, especially at the beginning of their journey of truth.

Familiar phrases such as 'God told me', or 'the Lord revealed to me' are regularly used by the gay men in our research group. This is perhaps another way, besides insisting on an

essentialist argument, in which especially pentecostal/charismatic gay Christians may argue that God has sanctioned the gay lifestyle. An argument based on scientific (genetics) and religious beliefs, both of which are considered by most in our society as important, makes the essentialist argument doubly powerful. In this instance the essentialist argument seems to be supported by the claim that God is the creator of gay people and that God shows favour to the gay person by communicating in various ways with that person. For most pentecostal/charismatic people the foundation on which their religion is based is their personal experience of a relationship with God through their having an open channel of communication facilitated by the Holy Spirit. In addition to this experiential emphasis, the gay pentecostal/charismatic Christian may now celebrate his gayness because of the belief that God created him gay. This allows the gay person to develop his own individualised form of spirituality in which God may be worshipped through the Holy Spirit as an all-inclusive God of homosexual, heterosexual and all other variations of people on the scale of sexuality. This allows the gay man to be free in a way that would be impossible in a traditional pentecostal/charismatic church. This movement of the gay person away from a 'spiritual home' to a 'sacred space' seems to echo Wuthnow's observation that there has been a shift in religion in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century 'from a "spirituality of dwelling" to a "spirituality of seeking"' (Wilcox 2002:499). A fresh or individualised form of spirituality is also promoted by a re-interpretation of the texts referring to homosexuality. Through examining and questioning problem texts (*clobber texts*) as either incorrectly translated or misinterpreted, and accepting that what the Bible apparently refers to has no bearing on our current understanding of homosexuality, the gay man is enabled to worship God without a feeling of guilt for transgressing God's laws. The discussion of individualised spirituality by Wilcox (2002) seems to indicate that the way in which a gay person would individualise his spirituality is dependent on his religious background, his view of the nature of God, and the way in which he chooses to interpret problem texts. In our group a similarity in all of these aspects seemed to exist which appears to serve as an instrument in forming a community of faith.

4.7 OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter the impact of the pentecostal/charismatic discourses about homosexuality on gay people was emphasized. The challenge put to the pentecostal/charismatic movement is of becoming aware of and interpreting current studies and views in the fields of psychology, ethics and morality on their theology. The extent to which fundamentalism plays a role in the movement's views on homosexuality is considered and appears to be intertwined with its proclaiming of certain biblical absolutes and interpretation of Scripture. Texts which are traditionally seen as condemning homosexuality are discussed in some detail as they are viewed by various scholars. The specific manner in which texts are traditionally interpreted in the pentecostal/charismatic movement is discussed and possibilities for a Spirit-enlightened practice of exegesis are mentioned. Whether homosexuality is predetermined genetically or the result of social construction and the important implications for the gay person's faith is then considered. The chapter is closed with a look at the individualised form of spirituality which appears to be a distinguishing characteristic of the gay person's religious life.

4.8 LOOKING AT CHAPTER FIVE

Chapter five in its entirety is spent on the most important element in this research project namely my co-researchers. I describe the process of meeting them, their getting involved in the research and getting to know more about them as Christians who happen to be gay. The forming of new, and in some instances, lasting relationships is described in context of the participatory action research project that we launched together. The participants are introduced in the way in which they chose to present themselves to the group and the way in which the research process was conducted is described.

CHAPTER FIVE

FORMING NEW RELATIONSHIPS: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In considering a research journey with gay men in a pentecostal/charismatic context, I was comfortable with the pentecostal/charismatic context which is familiar to me, but uncomfortable with the largely unknown territory of life as lived by the gay Christian. As such I realised that the journey that I was contemplating was one that required a commitment from me. Knowing this did not make me more comfortable with the idea. However, I knew that I needed to take a position if I wanted to engage myself with gay men's spirituality. The type of commitment required is put as follows by Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:3): 'Ethically this position means a commitment to transformation, positioning oneself on the side of those suffering, and against all oppressive or exploitative discourses and practices'. After some time elapsed I took the courage to make a mental commitment to the project with the knowledge that I could never again think and feel the same after having embarked on this journey. I started forming new relationships.

5.2 RETRACING MY STEPS IN SEARCH OF PARTICIPANTS

In informal talks with members of the charismatic community of which I am a member, I came to realise that it would be difficult if not impossible to identify and involve gay men in our community in my intended research project. The main reason for this would appear to be the assumption that there are no practicing homosexual people in pentecostal/charismatic communities. My decision to look for participants outside of the regular heterosexual pentecostal/charismatic communities was mainly based on this information and also on the plain message regularly sent from the pulpit that gay people are not included in the household of God.

Initially I tried to reach people within my target group through a gay site on the internet <http://www.litnet.co.za/gay/default.asp>. I hoped that the medium of the internet would

Chapter 5 Forming new relationships: the research process

provide an initial anonymity and make it more comfortable for people to speak about their homosexuality and hopefully to get involved with the research project. Only two men were interested in possibly getting involved and not one of them was from a pentecostal/charismatic church background.

I remembered having read an article in a magazine about a gay woman who pastored a gay friendly charismatic church in Pretoria namely the Deo Gloria Church. My next step was to get hold of this lady. The Institute of Therapeutic Development in Pretoria put me in touch with a few people who could possibly help me in my search. This was how I was able to get in touch with the lady in question. This pastor was very willing to help me and suggested that she first speak to her members and then come back to me. After having done this she gave me some names of people in her congregation that I could contact. I was able to get in touch with four people, two of whom was not able to participate mainly because the concept of being charismatic or being familiar with the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was foreign to them. As this was an important criterion for inclusion in the project I was unable to involve them. One person, the only person of colour, attended one of our sessions as a group, but was unable to continue due to work constraints. Only one member of the Deo Gloria Church became permanently involved with the research project.

I made some more enquiries and was given the name of the pastor of Agallia Ministries, a gay affirming charismatic church. When I contacted him he expressed a great deal of interest in the research project and offered to help me to get the research project going. He was willing to be involved in the project and promised to speak to some of his members about the research. He then gave me the names of a number of them whom I contacted personally.

The initial number of people that I met with was seven of whom three withdrew. I was then left with four people. Our initial meeting was held in Nicky's house during April 2004 so that we could share thoughts on the best way forward for the research project. Nicky was the pastor of Agallia ministries at the time.

After the formal start of our research project with Nicky, Paul, André, Jacques and one other gentleman who I do not have permission to identify and who withdrew from the project, two more men, Herman and Johan, were introduced to the group. This made the total number of participants six, with five people being members of Agallia Ministries and one a member of the Deo Gloria Church. Unfortunately Nicky, the pastor of Agallia Ministries, could not stay with the group for the whole period of time as he was relocating to Australia.

In the next paragraph (5.3) I would like to share a little about these men who have become my co-researchers and who is an integral part of the research project.

5.3 INTRODUCING MY CO-RESEARCHERS

The people that I am introducing are all presently pentecostal/charismatic gay men who are actively involved in the church and its ministry and who consider themselves to be Christian men who happen to be gay. All these men have made it quite clear to me that they consider or identify themselves as first Christian and then gay. The language used is sometimes of a typical pentecostal/charismatic or gay variety and I will attempt to comment on some of these terms. These men may be considered as representatives of other gay pentecostal/charismatic men outside of this group and through the relating of their stories they/we are giving a voice to those gay men silenced in the traditional pentecostal/charismatic movement.

5.3.1 Nicky

Nicky, pastor and lecturer at a South African University, is a man in his early thirties who holds a doctorate in theology. His mother was Jewish and his father became a Jew. Nicky came from a rabbinical family and put in his own words I had a very ethically and politically correct relationship as a Jew. I was a Hassidic Jew. I only associated with Jews. I spent my first year in rabbinical school but I never really had a personal relationship because God and the context of God being

Father was not the context that a Jew would approach God in. So it was a very political relationship. When he became a Christian Nicky left the Jewish faith and joined the Anglican Church where he studied for the priesthood. After being *born again*¹⁸ in a charismatic church, an experience which he clearly distinguishes from becoming a Christian, he left the Anglican Church and joined the charismatic church where he had the experience of being *born again*. This is also the church where he was exposed to teaching regarding the position of the church on gay people and their lifestyle. He judged this teaching as being false and not a true reflection of what the Greek and Hebrew texts were communicating. He then left the church and somewhat later headed up Agallia Ministries, a gay affirming church in Pretoria.

Nicky spoke about the influence of the fact that he is gay on his spiritual life. When I was in the Anglican Church I was forced to ‘come out’, by the whole church. I then felt very remote from God. And after becoming a reborn Christian I’ve never ever experienced it. I’ve always experienced a very close personal relationship. In fact I can tell you, as most people I know will tell you, I don’t even listen to secular music. It is a complete continuous spiritual moment. It doesn’t end it doesn’t stop. I’ve never, as a charismatic spirit filled Christian never, ever once experienced from God rejection or what I’m doing is wrong or who I am is wrong. He then continued to say that he was functioning as a Christian, laying hands on people, watching people being healed, watching people being set free, and watching people being slain in the spirit, without touching them. I have a particular way of ministering, I don’t like laying my hands strong on someone, I normally just put my fingertips ..., so they know that it’s God that’s moving and not me, type of

¹⁸ ‘Born again’ is a term used to indicate that a person has undergone a spiritual rebirth (with reference to John 3:1-5) indicating a deliverance from a sinful past life enabled to live a new life in relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

thing. So, there's never been a moment that I've felt rejected by God. There've always been things playing in my mind thinking if I'm in a relationship and in a sexual relationship, then I would find that God doesn't physically work through me And I remained sexually pure for those years and then I went into a relationship, and it was a physical, sexual relationship, and none of it happened. It still has continued. ...Nothing has dissipated in my relationship with God. From God I haven't experienced rejection, from man constantly.

5.3.2 Paul

Paul is a retired man in his sixties who was married for 31 years. When his wife died, he 'came out' to his children and started attending a gay affirming church and is now in a relationship with another man. When he was about 21 years old he realised that he is gay ('ek is eintlik 'n moffie¹⁹). However, Paul got married when he was 25 years old and after being married for three years, Paul told his wife that he was gay and that he hated every sexual act between them. His wife was very supportive and understanding and they decided to stay in the marriage as a 'couple' and to act as if nothing was wrong and to raise the children from her first marriage together as their own. Paul is a Christian who used to be an active member in the Apostolic Faith Mission church before his wife died. He has now left his former church and is currently a member of the Deo Gloria church.

Paul, in thinking about his struggle with the fact that he was gay but that it had to be concealed from everyone including the church, remembered some of the feelings and thoughts he had at the time. Although one knows that being a Christian requires

¹⁹ The word 'moffie' is mostly used of a gay male person in a derogatory manner by heterosexual people consistent with a homophobic social discourse. The word has recently been reappropriated by mainly homosexual and transvestite men in referring to themselves. Although the word is used in a type of self-mockery, the connotation of the word depends on who is using it. Although many homosexual people use

one to be honest, it is impossible because society requires compliance with its rules. That means that you have to live a lie so as not to be an embarrassment to your wife, children and later, grand children. I fought with God. Sometimes when I was down I asked God why I had to live with this lie. It isn't right. At some stages I was so desperate that I wanted to physically hurt myself. Let them change me into a woman! I thought about all sorts of things. About a person being born as a hermaphrodite and then having the penis removed and being raised as a female while the person was actually male. I thought about these things and asked God whether this was fair. But, I did not get answers. After his wife died, Paul started going to a gay-affirming church and made the choice to tell the truth to anyone who wanted to know.

5.3.3 Jacques

Jacques, who is now pastor of a gay affirming church in Boksburg, was born again in a charismatic church. He completed theological studies at the Bible School in his local assembly and was very active as a member. Only after a number of years he came out to his friends, family and all his friends at church. This was the outcome of a long and very hard journey to come to a clear interpretation of the Bible texts that were used to condemn homosexuality. He related this journey as follows: And then around 1998, 1999 the Lord started speaking to me. You know, the spirit started speaking to me, about the gay issue. It was so intense. This happened out of nowhere. I was in a very big charismatic assembly in Pretoria where we experienced a revival and where the Lord worked powerfully. During this time the Lord started speaking to me and what the Lord told me shocked me because it was

the word of themselves they still resent being called a 'moffie' by homophobic people (cf De Waal 1994:x; Knoetze 2005).

totally contrary to what I was taught. I phoned my brother and told him about it. I rebuked Satan, I bound Satan because this is what I was taught. But it didn't go away. Over a period of a few years, from 1998, it took me a few years to come to the point because I fear God. I'm in the ministry. I cannot teach these things and one day when I stand before God he says but you misled the people. I wanted to be sure. Then the Lord took me to the Scriptures. One by one. I started studying it. Then I asked Nicky about this. I also went to Janine. I didn't simply want to accept my own thoughts on what I heard from the Lord. I needed to have it confirmed and the Lord confirmed it.

His decision to accept his gayness and to interpret it as good and acceptable to God was a very traumatic but also freeing experience for him. He spoke of anger and I asked him about this. I said it was unfair. My brother has a wife and child, my family is very fond of him and he is just the man, especially now that he's also given his life to the Lord, after I prayed for him for many years. So I said, but God it's unfair! Why did you give *me* this path? And then the Lord spoke to me one evening and he said 'it is fine'. When I asked him how he was feeling about this now he said: I feel blessed in the sense that the Lord now trusts me with his power, I have my own assembly now and the Lord is busy working.

His coming out resulted in restrictions for him to minister at various local and international venues. His search for people who understood where he was coming from led him to Agallia ministries. He is now in his late thirties.

5.3.4 André

André was brought up as a member of the Reformed Church. He came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal saviour (born again) in response to the ministry of Pastor Ray McCauley of the Rhema Church. The issue about being gay now became a huge crisis and I shouted at the Lord (Ek het op die Here gegil!) and asked why me? What must I do? And nothing happened. I eventually became a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission church with my mother following shortly afterwards and my father was baptised in water with me. And so we spent many happy years in the AFM together as a family. I had a few girl friends, because that was the way it should be. At that time I also pursued theological studies doing a diploma in theology with the International Theological Institute. Well, a pastor must have a wife, and shame, I was going out with a girl with the most gorgeous brother. So I went to visit her and stared over her shoulder at her brother. Do you see the lie that we live and this only to please society *and* the Lord because I so much wanted to be acceptable to the Lord. I then teamed up with a well-known gospel singer who helped me to get started with my music ministry and for about 17 years I travelled around the country visiting various denominations and ministering in song and the Word. The only thing that I could do when young people came to me for advice because they thought they were gay was to tell them to stay with the Lord, to cling to God, because I couldn't tell them that I was gay. I had to lead them on the right path. I continued to believe that somewhere something would happen, perhaps God would deliver me or something like that would happen or I'd have to live a celibate life, which I did. To give me a purpose for living, partly, I took three boys into foster care

and this kept me very busy and out of trouble. And then, one day when visiting Agallia Ministries, I had a breakthrough. I knew Nicky from a long time before, and was surprised to meet him as the pastor of this church. We became friends and I started discovering the truths that I know now. I started to understand some of the things about my struggle with being Christian and gay. One lives a lie because there are things that one doesn't know. One lives in hope that somehow something will happen and that that Lord will heal one. And then one day I realised that it wasn't an illness but that somewhere, somehow, I was created like this and that I must do something about the situation as it was. Well I visited Nicky's church for about a year and eventually joined Agallia Ministries and subsequently became one of the pastors of the church. André is in his late thirties.

Something that André seems to have great difficulty with is how to live with the lie. To him the belief that it was sinful to be gay was causing a rift. This rift seemed to be between him and God, and also between him and friends and family. I cannot say that I have experienced rejection from my friends because I am gay. As far as my family goes, you know like Jacques, we walk a lonely road. My mother told me before I was ordained that she doesn't accept my ordination or my church, but that she would continue to pray for me and that my father would disinherit me if he knew. I wanted to tell my father and my brother so often in the past, but I couldn't do it. We live in the same house but I walk the road on my own. None of my family has ever been to my church; they will not accept my church members and I would rather that they stay away because they will only hurt these people. So where does one go. We only have one

another. We walk the road alone in the hope that God will soften people's hearts so that they become open to the truth.

I asked him to say more about the problem of lying, perhaps when he was still in the AFM church. I was lying to everybody. Not to God because he knows my situation, nothing is hidden to him. Although I walked with God, I spoke to the Lord often, I still felt this estrangement although we knew each other so well. I couldn't put everything together. So, I had to lie to the people around me and to the church. I didn't feel the barrier between me and God to be huge; just a small blockage. It was difficult for me to process this. I asked how this blockage influenced him at the time. Yes, it still caused me to doubt whether I would go to heaven. You know, it is difficult not to hear Satan's lies in these circumstances. In the midst of living with the lie, André speaks of having some of his greatest spiritual victories. I was called by someone one evening to come and help praying with a friend through whom demons started to manifest. I was the only person he could think of that was 'spiritual enough' to help in the situation. I had to take the initiative. But I felt at the time that I was undergoing counselling (forced upon me by my pastor because he was suspecting something was not right), and that there was still this barrier between me and the Lord. However, that night, we exorcised a number of demons from this person in the name of Jesus. I felt that I was weak at the time, but yet God worked through me in a mighty way. I must say that some of the most valuable spiritual experiences I enjoyed were during that time.

We spoke of anger; anger that André felt towards the church and towards God. When he spoke to a prominent church leader in South Africa, André was told that he would never be able to minister in that denomination's congregations because the church wanted to

protect its members. This angered him. Questions about his sexual orientation came up. How could God make him like this? The fact that he had to accept that everything happens with a purpose, something that he was taught since Sunday school was not helping. The anger towards God dissipated through time and I still hoped that the reason for this situation would become clear at some stage. I was simply continuing to hope, pray, seeking God's face, because somehow, sometime, he would have an answer for me. Something that in my case was wonderful, because one evening about three years later, the answer came. The answer was that I could be a gay Christian. The truth of the Scriptures came through. I started experiencing freedom; freedom on most levels. I say this because when I go to my old congregation on a Sunday morning, the mask goes back on. But, I've come to accept this. It still is not pleasant to know that in some situations one has to live a lie. I take an example from Scripture. When Joshua sent two spies to see what the conditions were in the Promised Land, these spies were hidden away from the men looking for them by Rahab, the prostitute. When she was asked about the spies, she blatantly lied and said they weren't there. What do you call that? She lied in the interest of the kingdom. Now I don't want to say that we have to lie for the kingdom of God, but from experience I would not go public in some instances purely because of the negative effects it could have on the kingdom of God.

5.3.5 Herman

Herman is from a Dutch Reformed background. His life at school and during the beginning phase of his work career seemed to be characterised by uncertainty about his

own identity. He tried to live according to the norms of society in so far as it concerned sexuality and heterosexual relationships. He says that I never knew in High School what was wrong with me. In the society in which I grew up there wasn't something like *gay*, in fact the word wasn't even used. Therefore I didn't even know what was wrong and that I could be gay. After he got engaged, because that was what society expected, Herman realised that something was wrong. I did not know what it was and I thought that it was a sexual demon and I prayed that it would go away. He eventually decided to break off his engagement and moved to Pretoria where after some time he started attending the Reforming Church, a gay friendly church. Before this time, however, Herman mentioned that he felt far removed from God because according to society one cannot be gay and Christian. Although Herman was a pertinent figure in the church and believed that God loves him, he still could not understand what was wrong, and why it felt that he was living a life removed from God. I don't think that the Lord ever forgot me, because He brought me back to reality. After moving to Pretoria a friend of his took him to the Reforming Church. Of this experience he says that he had a *wow* experience to come to realise that Jesus actually loves me and that what I have is not a demon and that I'm not abnormal. It is normal. Everything that I'm experiencing is normal. Herman also mentioned that now his spiritual life deepened and in stead of living in a continual state of stress thinking that his gay lifestyle was wrong and being afraid to go to bed without confessing his sins to God, because in the morning he might be run over by a bus and then he would go to hell, when I found out that it isn't wrong (my sexual orientation), the fear, the dread, the stress was gone. I prompted Herman to tell me more about why he thought this situation changed. Through a process of deepening my spiritual life, through knowledge yes. Because I also read the Bible like Danie Botha²⁰. I also read the Afrikaans

²⁰ A South African gospel singer who publicly condemned gay people and their lifestyle (Burger, 11/11/03)

Bible; that is the only Bible that I knew. And in that Bible it states that a person may not be gay. And now only do I understand that the Afrikaans Bible was translated by Afrikaans people and that translations have been done inaccurately for many years. I also believe that one must read the Bible in context, and not just take a single phrase and apply it to your life. Now I feel stronger in my faith. This was a new beginning for me. For him, this was a turning point in his life.

After some time Herman started visiting Agallia Ministries and subsequently joined the church where, according to Herman, he has been on an ultimate high, spiritually, for the previous six months.

5.3.6 Johan

It was actually at the stage when the kids at school started to have a 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' that I already started looking at the other boys and not at the girls. (My translation). Johan grew up in a Christian home where the family was involved with the church. So there was never a time that he (God) was not a part of my life. He continues to say that in some facets of my life and in certain phases of my life he (God) probably didn't have as much of an impact, or I didn't give him enough room to have an impact as in others, but he was always there. And I am, ... in my thoughts I am with him and then I have a conversation with him and when I'm alone I just talk to him, and so he has walked with me throughout my life.

reported in the article *Gays 'gaan hulle oë in die hel oopmaak'*. At a performance given at the Dutch Reformed Church in Elsburg-South on 9 November 2003 he said that the Word of God clearly states that when someone is involved in lesbianism or homosexuality, "he or she will definitely not see the kingdom of God and they will open their eyes in hell" (my translation).

Johan knew that he was different to the other boys, but only when they were given sex education at school in standard five I realised what it means to be homosexual. In general there was always negative talk of gays (moffies) amongst the boys but I didn't connect that with my feelings for boys. It was only when we had the sex education that I started realising the connection between being gay and these feelings that I had and then it started becoming wrong, and I understood that it

wasn't supposed to be like that. I went through my entire high school career without telling anyone, because no-one needed to know this and I decided that this situation had to change. Then I would pray about it and expect it to go away and so my life carried on. With the knowledge of the unacceptability of homosexuality in the society which he was part of he started a relationship with a girl to try to fit into the expectations society had of young men of his age. I had a relationship with this beautiful girl in standard eight who had a *stunning* brother. After this relationship Johan didn't have another girlfriend and his mother asked questions about this but he made excuses of too much work and the importance of his studies. Just before leaving school, at around 17 years of age, at the prompting of his mother, Johan told her that he was gay. Just before this happening, one of his female friends invited him together with some other friends to go out to a club. They landed up at a gay club and according to Johan he then started realising that there were other people like him and started feeling less guilty about the entire issue. Yes, I knew that it was wrong because the Bible said it was wrong, and that to me was an issue, but yet for some or other reason I couldn't accept that Jesus would cast me away. It doesn't matter what anybody says. It doesn't matter what anybody says about the Bible, to me he is a God of mercy and a God of love and after all he made me. If he had given me a choice in the matter, I have now already struggled for seven years with this issue, I would surely have been straight

by now? But, clearly I didn't have an input in the matter and I couldn't imagine that God would now send me to hell because of something to which I didn't make any contribution. So I worked this out for myself even before my mother spoke to me. In our conversation as a group Johan elaborated upon his struggle with being gay. I think that the lord Jesus was very *nice* to me. During the time that I struggled with the gay issue it was a struggle that originated in society, because of *their* non-acceptance, not because God didn't accept it. I knew him (God) all the way and I didn't have a problem with God but with the acceptance of my family and with the rejection of society and their negative talk about gay people. And because I didn't openly live a gay life at school, I suppressed it, I didn't have issues with my Christian faith. And when I came to fully realise that I was gay and that that's the way it is and started going out with guys, I didn't have a struggle with my faith. That is why I didn't feel that I had to talk to the psychologist because I had peace about the fact that Jesus loves me, that he will not abandon me, and I was so certain about this that it wasn't necessary for anyone to come to me and to try to prove things to me with texts from the Bible. The fact that he came to earth to suffer and die on a cross so that I could go to heaven, to me meant that he would not cast me aside because of something over which I do not have control. I made this out for myself in such a way that nobody could throw me off balance with all sorts of texts from the Bible. I knew that God would never abandon me, because he loves me and because he made me. I had a relationship with Jesus since my childhood and that's probably why I couldn't believe that he would now cast me aside.

His mother asked Johan to see a psychologist to find out what could be done to fix the problem. The psychologist helped Johan to let his parents know that he was homosexual, that he could not be changed and that it was nobody's fault. When Johan was asked whether he wanted to see Professor Murray Janson, a pastoral psychologist to help him to come to terms with his spiritual relationships, Johan declined. I knew that Jesus would never cast me aside.

Johan continued to read the Bible, and he worked at his relationship with God on his own even though he knew that society and the Church didn't accept homosexuality as a lifestyle. Eventually he was introduced to the Reforming Church where he became involved as a member and then subsequently he joined the Agallia Church congregation. Johan is now in his twenties. In our conversations together I became aware that Johan lives with the sure conviction that God loves him unconditionally and that God will never abandon him.

5.4 THE GOLDEN THREAD - SPIRITUALITY

In having conversations with all my co-researchers I discovered that there is a golden thread running through their lives, both before coming to an acceptance of their homosexual status and also afterwards. Even though all of the men concerned were aware of the nature of our research centring on spirituality, in telling the stories of their lives they seemed to always express their spirituality as an integrated part of their existence, of who they are. This may have been the effect of their being part of the same church community. However, I also realised that this was no different from the typical expression of a small group of people within the pentecostal/charismatic environment. It is almost as if the common bond of pentecostal/charismatic experience always comes to the fore in almost any meeting or 'get-together' irrespective of the purpose of the meeting. I realised this from the first day that we sat together while waiting for everyone to arrive. Conversations mainly centered on the community of faith, and in listening to them I became aware of the important role that spiritual matters played in the lives of

these men. I also wondered, taking into account their ‘coming out’²¹ as gay men and the ‘conflict between LGBT identity and traditional Christian views of gender and sexuality...’ (Roof, in Wilcox 2002:500) whether that was part of a necessary strategy to solve this dilemma. However, in retrospect, I believe from my longstanding involvement with the pentecostal/charismatic movement, that the social centring on issues of faith is more than a strategy to resolve certain issues. It is an almost unavoidable subject that serves the social construction of a particular form of spirituality for these gay men. Of course, the same could be said of any other group in this movement, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

Within the confines of Christianity, according to Wuthnow (Wilcox 2002:500), ‘coming out still tends to call into question the validity of one’s Christian identity. My co-researchers were all forced to come to some or other understanding or coherence of the relationship between their sexual and religious identities. This was made possible through negotiating their own lived religion according to scripts, practices, and human agency (Wilcox 2002:500). Scripts are written by their religious group of origin, parental teachings, cultural ideas and where applicable the current beliefs of their partner. These scripts are an important influential force in forming a unique spirituality. To Nicky, some of these scripts had their roots in the Jewish faith and culture into which he was born, and in the Hasidic form of piety, whereas to Paul his scripts consisted mainly of the strong influence of his parents’, his Afrikaans culture and the teachings of the church in which he was raised. These religious scripts were mainly negating the homosexual lifestyle. The religious practices performed, which originate from the cultural environment in which the

²¹ ‘Coming out of the closet’ or simply ‘coming out’ is a modern term used to indicate the public announcement of one’s sexual orientation and is related to a custom used until the mid-twentieth century to introduce young 18-year old girls (debutantes) as adults to society and who would after this event be eligible for marriage. This process of “coming out” appears to be important in the formation of a positive gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity (American Psychological Association 2004) and is asserted to deepen gay men’s relationship with God as in the attempt to integrate their sexual lives with their spiritual lives (Goss 2002:208). The ‘closet’ could be described as a place of wrestling with the repression of homo-erotic desires and being true to one’s sexual desires. It ‘expresses a type of conversion process, a breakthrough experience in which a gay man publicly confesses his own erotic desires toward men. It is a type of conversion process whereby a gay man turns away from the norms of compulsory heterosexuality to embrace an openly homosexual identity’ (Goss 2002:202). The term in Afrikaans, the home language of all but one of my co-researchers, often literally means to ‘climb out of the closet’ indicating to me a process not easily completed but with a connotation of effort and determination to stop hiding, hidden away from the rest of society.

individual is raised and continues to live, reinforce the scripts. The aspect of agency enters as the individual makes sense of the confusion and uncertainties in which he finds himself and selectively chooses, interprets and makes sense of his scripts and practices in forming an identity as a gay man. This process seemed to have been a common element of the stories of the men involved in this project as they started to question the validity of the scripts and practices which until their accepting of their homosexuality directed their religious lives. Probably the most important starting point for the majority was a re-reading of the *clobber texts* to find a possible *new* meaning to these in their search for truth. Johan did not start with the texts but seemed to find affirmation of his identity as a gay man in the accepting, loving relationship that existed between him and God whom he experienced in the light of the revelation of Jesus to man. According to André the fact that his co-researchers were not accepting the simple statement made by the church that being gay is wrong, and disbelieved that the Lord will now simply reject me proved that they were responsible people who wished to please God.

In my conversation with Johan, the other researchers and especially André clearly indicated that their individual construction of identity as gay Christians revolved around their spirituality. This spirituality exceeded the boundaries of a religious group or the specific interpretation of biblical texts and extended into a space of spiritual practices guided by a deep inner desire to please God and to serve God to the best of their ability. Paul's opinion in this regard was that unlike heterosexual people it was very important for them as gay Christians to be accepted by God because they were rejected by most people. Jacques maintained that to be gay means to be under continual pressure from society and especially other Christians because gay Christians are condemned as sinners on their way to hell and that forces one to fight through one's spirit, to fight right throughout one's life! Johan's opinion was different to the views of the other men in that he felt that he did not have to fight for acceptance from God, simply because of an inner assurance that Jesus loves him and that he would never, ever cast me aside. He also rejected the attempts by people to try to convince him otherwise based on their *clobber texts*. The remarks made by Herman were that to him it was amazing that homosexuality was almost a side issue to Johan and that his relationship

with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, with God forms part of his whole life. That is his life. That is what his life revolves around.

In our conversations together it became very clear that these men were much more than religious. They were actively involved in a lifestyle of practicing Christianity through a form of spirituality that they had to construct in response to the mostly condemning voice of the church and of other Christians.

5.5 NEW RELATIONSHIPS FORMED

During our conversations as a group I was conscious of the possibilities of new relationships being formed. This may take place on various levels, some of which are on a person-to-person level, on a person-to-society level, on a person-to-Scripture or on a person-to-God level.

The relationship between me as researcher and my co-researchers was initiated at our first meeting and continued to grow as a creation of our being together having in mind the same objectives. I believe that the common ground that existed in terms of our religious background facilitated this process. Indeed, as Donald Boisvert (1999:56) describes gay spirituality in terms of the human need for gods, I realise that we all have something in common, 'the carving out of meaning, the bringing forth of transcendence, the ultimate wrestling with the angel. This is primarily why there exists a gay spirituality' (Boisvert 1999:56).

On a person-to-God/person-to-Scripture level it is noticeably a more intense struggle that characterises the forming of new relationships. The disrespect which has mostly been shown by the church and experienced by gay people has as its source the Scriptures. The only way in which this can be dealt with in a positive manner is for the gay person to come to terms with the meaning of Scripture for him or her as it pertains to God's view of them and the implications thereof. Through intense study of texts and commentaries most of my co-researchers had to start making their own meaning and they had to come to an individual understanding of what especially the *clobber texts* were saying to them.

In working at understanding these texts as gay men and as Christians they started a process of redefinition of who they are in Christ and seeing themselves as being accepted by God. In developing their spirituality in this way they may be seen as demonstrating a 'positive recuperation ... of the religious discourse of rejection and intolerance ...' (Boisvert 1999:57). The experience of exclusion and of rejection is replaced through a parallel religious and theological discourse that includes and accepts and serves as 'a significant source of personal and collective empowerment' (Boisvert 1999:57).

The above relationships continue to develop in strength and value and the forming of new relationships on other levels are certainly not excluded. In context of this study the spiritual relationships are to me of great importance and sheds light on the continuing conversations about gay men's spirituality. However, in terms of the research process I wanted to establish whether our relationships fitted into the context of participatory action research as relationships that are growing through the participation of the participants in the process of change.

5.6 EFFECTS OF USING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The initial purpose of this research project was to involve a group of researchers in identifying certain problems important to them in their context, namely being gay and Christian and charismatic, and together to develop strategies to change and improve the problem situations. Whether these goals were reached will be discussed in this section.

5.6.1 Levels of active participation

From the beginning of our research journey that we embarked on I attempted to recruit the participants into accepting that the ideal situation would be that we work together as co-researchers who would be required to contribute actively to the process. As co-researchers, 'co-' indicating complementary equality in status and participation, we were all empowered to question, evaluate, examine and reformulate whatever we needed to in order to improve problematic circumstances as we perceived it. I indicated that my role

as researcher was not to stand outside of the group but to be an active part of the process. Conveying these concepts to the group was not difficult at all and my co-researchers accepted my intentions with the research process seeing it as being potentially beneficial to all Christian gay people everywhere. At the initial meeting with the potential group in Nicky's house, he gave his full cooperation to the project and encouraged the others present to do the same, because of the benefits that could be reaped in time to come. These benefits, according to Nicky, were mainly the creating of an awareness among more people of the reality of the existence of gay Christians and that it was not an oxymoron but that they formed part of the body of Christ even though they were misunderstood and maligned by their brothers and sisters in many of the mainline denominations. It was important for me to emphasise from time to time during the research process that we needed to think about the implications of our discussions and the possible impact that it could have on our own as well as on other people's lives. This, I thought, was necessary to prevent us from becoming so involved in an academic style of discussion that while we were totally committed to our thoughts on various matters, such as the perceived misinterpretation of texts by the church, we would leave the matter there and not take it any further or think how we could perhaps make an impact on the particular situation. In this way I encouraged my co-researchers to remain involved *with* the process and not to see themselves as people on the outside who have become the subject of research.

5.6.2 Responding to challenges for change beyond the personal

Although I emphasised the importance of not only researching our spirituality together but using our research as an instrument of change in some way, I found it fairly difficult to persuade my co-researchers to plan past their immediate context. At the time of our conversations as a group, I perceived the process to be void of potential for change beyond the research context. What I discovered subsequently (more than a year later) was that change did come about but that the impact of the research process was more about change on a personal level, which is something that I should have expected given my remarks in chapter three regarding the *definitional ceremony*. The absence of a broader impact, at this stage, however, does not discourage me. Through sharing their experiences of a re-interpretation of their own spirituality with other Christian gay people

who are having difficulties in their spiritual relationships, beneficial change on various levels may be effected. I did not think of 'change' in this sense at the start of the research journey and in reflecting on the process I have come to realise that more was happening in our research than I was aware of. I will elaborate on this in chapter six.

5.6.3 Questions about identification of a research concern

In searching for reasons why the process did not go in the direction I would have wanted it to go, and at the same time satisfying the objectives of the Participatory Action Research approach, I realised that the initial objectives of identifying problems and making changes to problematic situations were not initiated by my co-researchers. Even though I attempted to explain the objectives of this research approach and the importance of being part of the research in its conceptualisation, practice, and application to their world to my participants, the conversations that we had did not serve to identify particular problems with a view to changing circumstances. The first stage of PAR²² was achieved, namely reflection. There was talk of planning, but the action phase remained incomplete with a resultant absence of the observation phase (McTaggart 1997:27). The research topic was not the topic chosen by the participants but embodied my own interests which were willingly accepted by my co-researchers. They may have chosen a different aspect of their experience of being gay Christians as a research topic, yet they were gracious enough to allow me to introduce them to this particular topic. I am also of the opinion that they were quite willing to *do* PAR but that the topic did not lend itself sufficiently to the particular methodology.

5.6.4 Effects of involvement in the research process

The enthusiasm with which my co-researchers took part in our conversations convinced me that they were strongly motivated to communicate their thoughts about their lives as

²² Participatory Action Research

gay Christians and their pain and hurt in this context. I am convinced that this exercise served various purposes, one of which is the sharing of their own stories of exclusion and listening to others' stories. Through this process they were able to make the ongoing process of developing an identity as a gay Christian easier. I also believe that another important result of these conversations was the strengthening of the convictions of the validity of their interpretation of Scripture, of the love of God and their concept of God as accepting of them as human beings who are welcomed in the house of the father, not as aliens, but as children.

5.7 OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

In chapter five I gave a brief outline of the search for possible co-researchers and the end result of this search. The six participants were introduced and they were given an opportunity to say something about their background and involvement with the pentecostal/charismatic movement and their spiritual journeys. The way in which new relationships were formed and the impact of these relationships on their lives were examined briefly. Finally the usefulness of the Participatory Action Research methodology for this particular project was examined. The conclusion to which I came after reflecting on the process of research was that although much else was achieved as I will discuss in chapter six, the PAR method was probably not the most suitable for this project.

5.8 LOOKING AT CHAPTER SIX

In chapter six the discourses that are currently held about homosexuality is put in perspective. Religion and its interpretation of the nature of God plays an important role in the discussion of the discourses surrounding gay people in the church. More is said about the construction of spiritual relationships that differ from those that existed previously in the lives of the participants in this project. The generally accepted ideas about spiritual relationships are reviewed and the spiritual relationships of gay men are re-interpreted.

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER SIX: STORIES OF GAY SPIRITUALITY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion in this chapter highlights gay spirituality as it relates to the church's currently held discourse of homosexuality. The need for deconstructing the discourses about God and homosexuality becomes important in the light of the harmful effects these discourses have had and is still having on the gay Christian. I will attempt to put the research group's personal experiences of God and of the effects of the discourses of the church in perspective as lived experience. It becomes clear that gay people who have embraced Christianity are in need of a spirituality that is not limiting but liberating. My co-researchers made it very obvious that their life experiences, whether consciously or not, were always related to God and their spiritual relationships. A beginning is made in considering some of the constructions of spiritual relationships of gay men in the pentecostal/charismatic tradition. I have only touched on some of these relationships in chapter five. Much more may be said in this regard in the light of the many facets of pentecostal/charismatic spirituality which encompasses the believer's entire being.

6.2 EXPLORING CHRISTIAN DISCOURSES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

During our times of conversation about spirituality, religion, the church and the position of the gay person as it relates to these matters, I started wondering about the similarity in experience expressed by my co-researchers. This led me to question the discourse about homosexuality and its influence upon gay men in general and these men in particular. I was especially interested in knowing to what extent the Christian discourse about homosexuality influenced, hindered, or helped these men to establish a gay identity.

Our current Western concept of homosexuality still seems to cling to the dualistic view of sexuality namely homosexuality or heterosexuality. The majority of the Christian church also appears to favour the same supposition and believes that the sexual expression of same-sex attraction is unacceptable within a Christian religious context. These concepts

are mostly found within the limits of Western Christian contexts. Thus the view of a binary construct of homosexual/heterosexual is supported. Brettell and Sargent (quoted by Augustine 2002:37) said that cross-cultural studies seem to indicate that a much more inclusive set of categories of sex and gender are used in other cultures.

It may be useful to consider that the meaning given to the concept homosexuality in some other cultures takes on a different character to that of the Western concept. In tribes in New Guinea male-male sexual bonds are seen as temporary expressions of an initiation rite, and in Imperial China the provision for male harems where male-male sexual and romantic relationships were considered an acceptable part of the culture of the time until the end of the Qing Dynasty. The difference between these occurrences of same-sex sexual and romantic relationships and the current form of the same relationships known to us as homosexuality is that people were not identified in terms of their sexuality. 'These same-sex bonds were seen as a perfectly acceptable and natural way of life in Imperial China' (Hinsch in Yee 2004). In fact, the concept 'homosexual' which is primarily identified as an exclusive sexual orientation and which is seemingly a contemporary Western concept, largely determines the lifestyle of people so self-identified (Duberman 1988:519).

The basic general contention held in the Christian church is that homosexuality is not compatible with the Christian faith. Many examples of this viewpoint held in most churches were presented in chapter one paragraph 1.1. This discourse is usually accepted by homosexual people at the initial stages of their discovery of their same-sex attraction. The answer to the question as to the reason for this acceptance lies in the recognition of the authority of the Church as the voice of God on earth, and the need for acceptance by God, the church and society. In the acceptance of this discourse, a conflict situation becomes a reality to gay people. Gay and lesbian Christians who identify themselves as Christian are confronted with the church's discourse of the binary opposition of Christianity on the one hand and homosexuality on the other. This discourse places the church in a powerful position regarding eternal salvation or eternal damnation. Maynard and Gorsuch (2001:60) refers to Wagner when saying that '[m]any gay men and lesbian women believe that they must abandon their religious faith to accept their sexuality'. Initially, most gay people accept that, as the church contends, homosexuality is something that is unholy, unacceptable to God, and punishable by

eternal damnation. The account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is one of the pillars upon which the discourse often depends. Emanating from the creation account the creation of man as male and female and the command to procreate indicates God's eternally valid will for man's sexual expression. Other pillars are those found in the *clobber texts* discussed in chapter four (4.4) above. The acceptance of the church's authority in its interpretation of these texts as being valid for the present time places a burden of guilt on gay people and forces them to suppress any form of attraction to people of the same sex. Through the acceptance of the church's discourse the gay person would avoid alienation from God and gain acceptance of the church and acceptance of society but the price paid in the course of this acceptance is high. The knowledge of his sexual orientation and the obligation to suppress it in compliance with the church's discourse about homosexuality may cause the gay man to suffer from heightened symptoms of depression, anger, anxiety, etc (Garnets, Herek & Levey in Maynard and Gorsuch 2001:60). Nicky's words related to this point were: I was there, I hid it away, I didn't want to be that person, I got told that I can't be that person, so I won't be that person. Because I feared God I didn't want to do anything to make what I was experiencing²³ to go away. All of the emotions of depression, anger, and anxiety were expressed by my co-researchers in relating their stories of struggle and conflict in their churches of origin. The conversations that we had as a research group also confirmed the conclusion of Weinberg and Williams (Yip 1998:41) that 'compared to their non-religious counterparts, they are more worried about the exposure of their homosexuality They also demonstrate more instability of self-concept and depression'. Similar observations were also made by Gigl and Greenberg (Yip 1998:41) who reported that gay men with a religious affiliation displayed a higher level of guilt about their sexuality and experienced a low degree of self-esteem and feelings of extreme alienation. Drawing some conclusions from studies done in this regard Yip concludes that:

[T]he pressure of leading the life of a gay Christian is colossal. The lack of religious affirmation and acceptance generates great tension and adjustment difficulty among gay Christians. Being in such a stigmatizing environment might even lead to internalized homophobia, through which gay Christians incorporate into their self-concept the negative views about

²³ In saying this Nicky was referring to his experience of the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon his life.

their sexuality and lifestyle. Research evidence suggests that this results in adverse effects on the psychological health of gay people.

Yip (1998:42)

In the course of accepting the church's discourse about homosexuality, gay people appear to resort to various spiritual exercises to fully embrace this discourse. Some of these actions that were identified in our conversations are intense prayer, fasting, studying the Bible, especially the texts referred to by the church as condemning homosexuality. Some other ways referred to by Goss (2002:203) include having communities pray over them for deliverance from the sin of homosexuality and turning to ex-gay ministries or seeking out reparative therapy. All of the men in this study have indicated that they followed this route and performed most of these actions, and some have also resorted to counselling and submitted to the attempted exorcising of the demons of homosexuality. Nicky related that he had resorted to exorcism on seven occasions, but that it only left him disillusioned and hurt. André also submitted to exorcism which also was unsuccessful resulting in his questioning the church's discourse regarding the activity of demons and homosexuality.

In accepting the church's discourse about homosexuality the gay men in our research group did not find freedom to express themselves as valuable human beings created by God, but on the contrary found themselves to be placed under constant feelings of isolation, repression, spiritual conflict and psychological distress. In place of freedom they were put in bondage to rules as demanded by the church. The internalization of homophobia seems obvious from the actions that these men took to deny their form of sexuality and to adapt their lifestyle to reflect a 'normal' heterosexual Christian. For this group of men the re-looking at the discourse about God and homosexuality was essential in their search for ultimate fulfilment as human beings and in order to realise their need for meaningful spiritual relationships.

6.3 DECONSTRUCTING DISCOURSES ABOUT GOD AND HOMOSEXUALITY

In the process of establishing a gay Christian identity, a combination of the importance of the Scriptures, church tradition, personal experience, logic, and science plays an important role as the gay person formulates a personal theology (Maynard & Gorsuch 2001:61). A re-reading of the specific texts applied against homosexuality is probably

one of the most important things a gay Christian does. 'It is vital that those of us who are sexual minorities (and I mean here *les-bi-trans-gay*, a term created by Mollenkott [1999] to include lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and gay people) learn to empower ourselves by reading the Bible from low and outside'²⁴ (Mollenkott 1999). The *unpacking* of these texts serves to create an apologetic discourse in which the church's discourses are challenged and re-evaluated. An apologetic discourse does not imply a negative value judgment, but the use of the term should rather be seen as being used in the sense of 'reasoned defence' (Boisvert 1999:61). In the process of re-interpreting texts traditionally used negatively in religious teachings on homosexuality, texts are now interpreted in context and in the case of all the texts concerned with 'homosexuality', put in the form of alternative interpretations. The discovery of the context in which these texts were used becomes valuable and freeing as the difference in the current life situation of the homosexual becomes apparent. Walton (2006:5-6) describes the re-interpreting of texts by the eight subjects in his study as a strategy for identity integration which entailed the realisation that for them 'selective Biblical literalism is an inappropriate way to interpret the Bible'. Walton's research shows a similarity to the stories of my co-researchers. Some of the *unpacking* of the 'troublesome' texts was discussed in paragraph 4.4 above. A characteristic of the apologetic discourse is that it is foundational in terms of other discourses in gay male spiritual discourses. Some authors who have been engaged in such apologetic writing are John Boswell (1980, 1994), David Greenberg (1988), Dale Martin (1996) and John McNeill (1976).

The church's discourse about homosexuality impacts directly on the gay person's spiritual experience. The personal spiritual experience of gay men becomes one of splitting sexuality from spirituality, something which is 'painful and destructive to the spirit because it requires the suppression of the erotic, and because the erotic provides a source of power, self-knowledge, and spirituality. To closet oneself is to closet God and the full potential of one's spirituality, for such closeting is destructive to the human spirit and its potential for faith development' (Goss 2002:204). In deconstructing the negative individual spiritual experience of gay people, a type of therapeutic discourse of gay spirituality is followed in which the 'individual experience of being a gay Christian is

²⁴ 'From low because in the church of my youth, where women always wore hats to signify their submission to male authority, my status as female was secondary. From outside because my being a lesbian took away from me even the humblest of insider status' (Mollenkott 1999).

placed in a positive, legitimate, celebratory and psychologically healthy context' (Boisvert 1999:63). The discourse among my co-researchers regarding this aspect of their lives confirmed what Boisvert (1999:63) expressed as a re-interpreting of God as the creator of sexuality in its variety of forms; that what is created is good; and that as a gay person, you are good. In incorporating this discourse, the experience of self-hatred and rejection, especially from God, is deconstructed. The close affinity between religion and therapy is emphasized by Boisvert (1999:63) who states that each of these 'can function in many similar ways at the level of the individual psyche'. In deconstructing the traditional pentecostal/charismatic discourse about homosexuality a discourse of spirituality which bridges religion and therapy can prove to be most effective in restoring a sense of wholeness and the sense of *redemption* to the gay person.

An important feature of gay spirituality concerns salvation or redemption.

Such a discourse operates at several levels simultaneously: at its most basic and individualistic, in the imagery of coming out (i.e. self-acceptance) as a form of personal redemption; on the collective plane, in the notion of the gay community (the tribe) as an historically meaningful moment and movement; on the universal, in the language of the unique "calling" or "vocation" of gays which is not tied into the biological act of procreation; and even in the theological realm, with a sense of gays being the carriers of a special spiritual consciousness of revelation.

(Boisvert 1999:66-67)

This could imply that a special role or vocation exists for gay people as beneficial to the development of a more inclusive spirituality. One could place this *role* in the context of the religious imagery of having been *chosen* or fulfilling a divine purpose. In deconstructing the traditional discourses the gay person may now accept the *calling* placed upon his or her life to make a difference on the religious as well as other levels of his or her existence. The acceptance of one's sexual orientation may now be seen as 'an act of faith in the goodness of the godhead' (Boisvert 1999:68).

The type and level of conversations that we had as a research group did not allow or progress to opportunities for discoveries in this sense. Given time and ongoing therapeutical interaction I would expect much evolutionary (perhaps revolutionary) movement on an individual and group level to become obvious.

The following excerpt from an article entitled 'Coming Out as Spiritual Revelation' relates to the possible special role or vocation that exists for gay people:

...we see a special role for gay people. In revealing that what looks weird, unnatural, queer or freakish is in fact another natural part of an unlimited and complex universe, don't gay people in coming out provide a key to a spiritual maturity for themselves and for others? What could be less useful in a soulless Darwinian world than individuals that don't procreate? Why in the world *are* we in the world? I believe we are here to reveal a further dimension of the diversity of life, and, in so doing, jolt our fellow human beings into celebrating life's differences. Moreover, I believe that gay people are here to witness to the truth that human life is not just about procreation, as magical and wonderful as it is. Reproduction is not the only mission for women and men. Just as God gave us a soulful dimension that binds us like a spiritual umbilical cord to the mother of creation and to each other, so she has created gay people to reveal this spiritual dimension.

(Tim McFeeley in Boisvert 1999:67)

The special role that is referred to above, speaks of promise of value in terms of self and this role also speaks of the existence of a positive niche that is available for gay people as they fulfil a beneficial function in human history. Boisvert (1999:67) rightly says that what we are referring to in speaking of such a new *role* or *vocation* for gay people is a far cry from 'the view of homosexuals as "unnatural" or "threatening" to the social and biological orders of reality'. My view of this *role* or *vocation* is that by using religious imagery one could say that it refers to the belief that one has been *chosen* and that it follows that one has made a choice to *accept* the calling. These ideas resonate with much of the current gay spiritual writing which 'reflects the wider essentialist-constructionist debate about the origins of homosexuality.... it echoes the importance of the coming out process as both self-actualization and public statement' (Boisvert 1999:67). These thoughts take us to the next paragraph in seeing this role as tied both to the natural world and to the spiritual realm.

6.4 CONSTRUCTING SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Spiritual relationships do not take an isolated form as may be seen from the discussion in the previous paragraph. Gay spiritual discourse seems to be characterised by its all-encompassing nature. It has to deal with oppression from all angles but especially with the discourses of exclusion and condemnation in their churches of origin. In response to

these challenges, and as an instrument of survival as individuals and members of the social community, religious gay people have to find religious ways of being and thought that would allow them to form spiritual relationships through the Spirit with God, humanity and self (with who) that would be ultimately meaningful.

In following on from the previous paragraph (6.3) the life of the gay charismatic is lived in terms of both the natural and the spiritual realms. However, the natural is intertwined with the spiritual in the formation of the identity of the gay Christian. The importance of the Scriptures, church tradition, experience, logic and science in this process have to be taken account of in this process as well as the many discourses of society (Maynard & Gorsuch 2001:61).

On the surface these forms of spiritual relationships may not appear any different to those of other Christians in the pentecostal/charismatic environment. However, in constructing these relationships a personal journey of new discoveries, pain, trauma, and reconciliation must be undertaken. In the process of forming new spiritual relationships a re-evaluation of our understanding of God must be made, something which may be unique in traditional Christianity. Indeed, Tan (2005:141) found that discrimination against homosexual people by their religious communities may have challenged them to look beyond the beliefs as communicated by their churches and to seek more strongly for meaning of existence and faith out side of the constricts of the theology of their local communities of faith. In our discussion as a group the negative component of God, or who God *is not*, often came to the fore. Some of these thoughts were of God who *is not* judgmental, unkind, unfair, and rejecting. The most common positive thought expressed by my co-researchers is that God is love. Other thoughts about God are that God is accepting, caring, compassionate and that God is present for us in real way in our daily struggles. The re-evaluation of our understanding of God takes place within this space of love, acceptance, compassion, respect, dignity and humanity and responsibility. Within this space new relationships may be nurtured with values that make life purposeful and with meaning to the gay person and to others whose life he or she touches. This is the type of relationship that seems to be the ideal of the gay men in our group and possibly in the wider context of gay men in other pentecostal/charismatic settings. From our conversation in the research group it was quite clear to me that gay Charismatics engage

in establishing a new spiritual relationship with God in the process of re-interpreting who God is.

As part of the formation of a gay Christian identity and establishing new spiritual relationships, the re-interpretation of the Scriptures relevant to homosexuality plays an enormously important role. One may pose that a new spiritual relationship is established with the Scriptures as they are enlightened with the help of the Holy Spirit. Re-interpreting the Scriptures, and especially those texts that have been used to negate the relationship that the gay man has with the Holy Spirit, revitalises this experience. The so-called *clobber texts* are now interpreted in a more realistic context thus freeing the gay man from its previous negative implications and thereby creating an opportunity for enhancing the relationship with the Scriptures. The gay man is now able to re-experience the positive and renewing value of the Scriptures for him in his newfound identity as a gay Christian.

One of the results of creating a new relationship with the Scriptures is that church tradition is also re-evaluated and seen in a different light. A new relationship begins to be constructed with the gay man's church of origin as he begins to understand the hermeneutic context within which the church interprets Scripture. Establishing a new relationship with church tradition does not appear to heal the wound that was inflicted but rather opens up possibilities of letting the gay Christian's voice be heard in spite of this. The challenge becomes one of recovering a voice within religious institutions where the gay person's voice was previously silenced (Mollenkott 1999). Once the gay men in our research group and all other Christian gay men out there discover the possibilities to voice their position, even if it wasn't that openly and clearly, the relationship with their churches of origin will take on a new character. The suggestion of subversion as discussed by Mollenkott (1999) could be useful in this regard. In referring to the Church she says the following: 'In occupied territory, subversion is necessary for two reasons: to survive and to move society toward justice'. Her reference to an article by Carole Fontaine entitled 'Tricksters in the Bible' is made to show that God uses those with less power to address power imbalances. 'Those who find themselves disadvantaged, on the "outside", in the margins, make use of trickery and other forms of manipulative behavior (like gossip, misinformation, nagging, distractions, and deceptions) because they do not have what sociologists refer to as 'assigned power' (Fontaine in Mollenkott:1999). Would

it be possible for gay men in the pentecostal/charismatic church to recover their voice by 'reading the Bible from low and outside' (Mollenkott 1999)?

In our conversation regarding the mask being worn by gay men I was disturbed by the fact that some members of the group was not yet willing to consider *coming out* to everybody including their original communities of faith, something which would clearly influence their relationship with their church or origin. However, I am in the process of becoming more respectful of their position and of acknowledging the possibilities this position may create. I now tend to agree with Mollenkott (1999) when she says that '[t]he widespread assumption within the contemporary lesbitransgay²⁵ Christian community is that all community members should--must--proclaim (sic) their identity openly. I question this ethic because it neglects the diversity of our contexts'. I was almost certain that the openness regarding sexual orientation would also be encouraged by the church as a whole, yet I am reminded of Jeanne Audrey Powers (Mollenkott 1999) who were in lifelong ministry in the Methodist Church. She only came out as a lesbian just before she retired and made it clear that she had been working for gay and lesbian liberation all her life but that she was forced by the church to remain in the closet because of its statement of the incompatibility of homosexuality with the Christian faith. This again reminds me of the power position of the church in its discourse about homosexuality.

The effects of the pentecostal/charismatic discourse about homosexuality may be seen on the spiritual and emotional levels of these men's experience. André related his experience of guilt and remorse over his 'unacceptable' sexual orientation within his church of origin. His is the typical experience of the gay Christian man. Subsequent to the re-interpretation of the *clobber texts* as they are traditionally used by the church my co-researchers appeared to be liberated from this guilt and remorse and have begun to re-interpret their experience in the light of the love of God as their creator and in the light of their experience of the healing power of the Holy Spirit. These men's negative view of their sexuality is thus being transformed into a positive spiritual relationship of acceptance and becomes a celebration of their identity as gay Christians. Indeed one has to remember that '[d]ifference and diversity are not antithetical to God, whom we worship as Trinity and in whose image we are made, who takes historical contingency

²⁵ '[A] term created to include lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and gay people' (Mollenkott 1999).

into the heart of the divine being' (Stuart 2004:77). In terms of homosexual behaviour the men in our research group now seem to have constructed a spiritual relationship in which it would be against the indications of Scripture in Romans 1 to behave sexually in a heterosexual manner, simply because they would then be acting *against their nature* of being homosexual. This strongly reinforces a beneficial bodily spiritual relationship. This reinterpretation of one's sexual nature can be seen against the acceptance of the viewpoint that the men who demanded to have sex with Lot's visitors in Genesis 19:4 were heterosexual men who were acting against their own nature. According to König (*Beeld* 22 Sept 2006) this text is not referring to homosexual men but rather to the sin of violent behaviour towards the visitors. In the same sense the reference to 'natural relations' in Romans 1:24-32 may be seen as referring to sexual behaviour against the nature of the individual concerned. König (*Beeld* 22 Sept 2006) makes an important observation regarding the reference made in Romans 1:26 to 'their women'²⁶. This, he maintains, would indicate that there are married men and women who would have homosexual relationships at night when they go to the public baths. It is against these men's nature, because they are heterosexual, and therefore also against "their women's" nature' (König 2006). Acceptance of the fact that for gay people the sin that is being referred to is in reality the sin of acting heterosexually, against nature. This type of expression appears to have become typical in the gay Christian discourse (Harris 1997).

'If there is a near consensus among Christian thinkers regarding spirituality, it is that the term is essentially another way of speaking about what is generally termed "the Christian life" (Grenz 2002)'. However, in the pentecostal/charismatic setting, spirituality is considered as the 'spirituality of the spirit of God. In other words, the Spirit of God is believed to be operational in every sphere of their spirituality' (Abraham 2003:9). It may be seen as 'personal relationship with the Holy One. A spiritual person is aware that "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me". Spirituality is one's internalizing of a religious tradition that is at once true to the tradition and also uniquely true to the individual. Spirituality lives from the inside out. It is primarily a personal relationship with the Holy One' (Collins 1997). It is precisely this action of making the experience of being gay and spiritual in the sense of living through the Spirit of God a unique individual journey that differentiates the gay charismatic Christian believer from the heterosexual person in the

²⁶"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones." (Romans 1:26) NIV

same tradition. The difference lies in the view of the inclusive nature of God who commands Peter to not consider anything impure that God has made clean (Acts 10:15). The gay charismatic believer as the receiver of the gift of the Holy Spirit may rightfully expect to be part of the family of God in the same way as Peter accepted the gentiles who had received the gift of the Holy Spirit by baptising them in water (Acts 10:44-48). If one takes these differences into account it becomes clear why it would be essential for the gay Christian to construct new spiritual relationships. It may also be beneficial in this regard to remind ourselves that spirituality for the gay pentecostal/charismatic individual is one of 'the *lived experience* which actualizes a fundamental dimension of the human being, the spiritual dimension, namely "the whole of one's spiritual or religious experience, one's beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, one's emotions and behavior in respect to what is ultimate, or God"' (Albrecht 1996).

6.5 OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

The importance of becoming aware of the discourses about homosexuality and Christianity held by the wider church and specifically the pentecostal/charismatic movement became apparent to me as I thought about the effects it has on Christian gay people and on the gay men that were involved in this research project. Without this awareness it is impossible to start to deconstruct some of the widely held discourses that are harmful to gay Christians. Discourses about homosexuality in the pentecostal/charismatic movement are founded in a Western cultural perspective of sexuality, something which has been discussed earlier in this work, and are viewed in the context of gay spirituality as not universally applicable. On that basis these discourses may be deconstructed and a re-interpretation of a gay man's spirituality may be initiated. The construction of such spirituality remains individualised and cannot be generalised to the entire gay pentecostal/charismatic male population.

6.6 LOOKING AT CHAPTER SEVEN

In the next chapter we will start to reflect on the stories of the men in this project's as it relates to their spiritual relationships. How can we make sense out of their stories when we view it from the perspective of pentecostal/charismatic spirituality? We also have to review our goals, purposes and questions in setting out on our research journey. We

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may then be able to come to some conclusions with respect to our discoveries on the journey. The extent to which we succeeded in discovering traditional discourses regarding the spirituality of homosexual people and our responses will be highlighted in this chapter. In conclusion the journey forward may be put in perspective. The implications of the conversations we had and the research we completed together in terms of my co-researchers will then be considered. Finally I will reflect on the lessons that I learned in my involvement with these men and the participatory action research project that we started on. I believe that the project cannot be seen as completed but that it is still in a evolutionary phase which will continue for some time. I will also share with the reader the benefits that I gained from the time I spent on this project until now.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTING ON SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this closing chapter we will reflect on the participants' narratives about their lives and how their spiritual relationships have been and are currently affected. How the initial objectives of this journey were reached and to what extent alternate preferred stories have been constructed will be discussed. This chapter also examines how the goal of communicating gay men's preferred spiritual relationships within the pentecostal/charismatic movement may be reached. In the light of the extent to which these goals were achieved some preliminary conclusions will be made and some ideas about the journey forward will be shared with the reader. To conclude this chapter I will share some of my own thoughts on the effects of this research journey on my views of gay men in the pentecostal/charismatic setting. I will also consider the extent to which I benefited from the project and review the knowledges that I gained and the lessons that I learned from my interaction with them.

7.2 REFLECTIONS ON PARTICIPANTS' STORIES AND SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The narratives of my co-researchers cannot be fully expressed in writing through this work. In reflecting upon the stories of these men, their pain, struggles, heartache and frustration, I cannot but respect them for every step they have taken to make their lives have meaning. One of these steps has to be their participation in a research project such as this where they were willing to expose themselves to other people, some of whom they had never met before. Their perseverance and courage has inspired me in my journey through life and I am confident that others on their lives' journeys will experience them in similar ways.

The interrelatedness of religion and spirituality became very real to me while my co-researchers discussed their lives and their concepts of God and their own spirituality. Something that became clear to me in our conversations was that my co-researchers did not experience a crisis with spirituality, but rather with religion and usually with the

homophobic aspects of the religious settings in which they were raised. What then is the difference between religion and spirituality? I found that my co-researchers were *in* a relationship with God while at the same time being *out* of relationship with their church or with religion as practised by their respective churches. Although linked to religion, spirituality is partly reflected by the way in which meaning is given to a person's life through a personal relationship between God and the individual, creating a sense of purpose and an awareness of morality. Personal experience gained through this relationship is seen as a prime indicator of that which is true and important (Louw 2003:210; Martinson 2002; Tan 2005:136). In looking back at the conversations that we had as researchers, I was acutely aware of the important level of spirituality as expressed through a personal relationship by my co-researchers and I accept that this may have been engendered by their religious affiliations.

7.3 REVIEWING THE RESEARCH PROJECT IN TERMS OF THE GOALS, PURPOSES AND QUESTIONS IN CHAPTER ONE

The collaborative research project that we embarked upon involved Christian gay men who practice their spirituality within the pentecostal/charismatic frame of reference. My initial intentions with the study as specified in chapter one (1.4) were to discover whether certain societal discourses had any impact on Christian gay men; to explore whether power/knowledge relationships, especially concerning those between these men and the church, had an influence on their spirituality; to discover dominant discourses that are having a negative effect on these Christians' well-being and to deconstruct these discourses and co-constructing alternative preferred stories; to communicate these stories of the spirituality of Christian gay men in a pentecostal/charismatic setting to anyone who cares about the spiritual well-being of gay people.

7.3.1 Societal discourses that influence gay Christians

The aim of discovering the influence of some socially constructed discourses on the well-being of Christian gay men was on the one hand to reveal some hidden or unsaid discourses but on the other hand to be able to come to some understanding of the construction of the spirituality of Christian gay men. Some of the discourses that I wished to explore were those about sexuality, gender, Christianity, spirituality, the church, sin and salvation. In considering these discourses I was confident that I would be doing

practical theology within a postmodern discourse by specifically contextualising the spiritual relationships of Christian gay men in a South African setting and rejecting the grand theory concerning the sinfulness of homosexuality.

I became acutely aware of the inseparability of these generally held societal discourses and I was intrigued about the way in which these discourses were intertwined. If we are to limit our discussion to the context of the church, we discover that gender is seen as determinative of sexuality and that if a person does not conform to the social construction of sexuality he or she would be in violation of the laws of the Christian church, unable to have a meaningful spiritual life and considered be seen as living in sin and therefore placing his or her salvation and the promise of an eternal life in the hereafter in jeopardy.

7.3.2 Power/knowledge relationships

The extent to which power/knowledge relationships affect the relationship between gay men and the church became very obvious as we discussed daily living whilst hiding their sexual orientation. The church clearly has the power to alienate the gay person once the knowledge of his or her orientation becomes known. The power to accept or reject, to admit into fellowship or to disallow fellowship with the body of believers is in the hands of the church. In the sense of the theology of the church this power over the gay Christian may be yielded to the detriment of these believers. The discourse held by the pentecostal/charismatic movement is that a person who has a gay orientation and who practices homosexuality is excluded from the Christian community and is seen as outside of the family of God. It is this view in particular that is mostly the deciding factor in the gay person's decision to sever his or her relationship with the traditional church. The men in our research group were some of those gay people who valued their relationship with God as important enough to find another spiritual home outside of the traditional church.

7.3.3 Deconstructing negative discourses

An important part of the research process was to identify and deconstruct some of the discourses that had a negative impact on Christian gay men's spirituality.

In ignoring the popular Christian discourse of the sinfulness of homosexuality I was able to allow the generally silenced voice of my gay co-researchers to be heard on the subject of God, spirituality and their experience of and in the church. This made me aware of the possibility of multiple versions of what used to be called the 'truth' in modernistic terms. In going into the local setting of gay Christian men I was privileged to share in their experiences as they were related in our conversations about their lives as lived in the context of the traditional church. I heard about their yearning for 'normality' in terms of the social construction of sexuality by the heterosexual society. There was no doubt in my mind that all of them internalized the homophobia as expressed in the discourses of society and the church. For a man to be emotionally and/or sexually attracted to another man was not only unacceptable but was considered as 'sick' in terms of the modern psychiatric discourse. The diseased person had to be treated in an effort to heal him and this 'healing' could be achieved by various religious means such as fasting, praying, studying of the Scriptures and the casting out of demons. The discourse that is still widely held in the pentecostal/charismatic movement is that the 'sick' person can be helped by psychiatry/psychology together with conversion to Christ and religious practices.

The binary construction of gender clearly presents a problem to gay men. According to this construction there is no room for someone to be somewhere in between the two opposite ends of heterosexual and homosexual. A person can only be fully male with all the discourses of society that go together with that position or the person can be fully female and fit in with society's discourse of a female person. When thinking of this binary and the discourse that supports it the temporality of these 'truths' became real when I once again remembered how many traditional roles of both male and female have changed in our own society in South Africa. For example men are no longer necessarily the breadwinner while the woman is nurturer and homemaker. In our current South African society and also elsewhere in the world the female has more often become the main provider of economic security while the man has, in many instances, become the emotional supporter in terms of his female partner and his family. Some men have even adopted the socially constructed role of the traditional housewife. This reality has a strong impact on the discourse of the superiority of the man which is often, still today, being espoused by the church if not overtly, covertly through reference to the role of the man and woman in the hierarchy of authority (1 Cor 11:3). The accommodation or acceptance of the changed societal realities in many pentecostal/charismatic churches

makes me wonder on what grounds these allowances may be made to women to become the 'head' of the man, even if only in a financial sense, and whether other societal/cultural influences may also likewise influence the church's view of these previously unacceptable practices. In the same sense I would ask whether any other allowances would be made at some point when the church realises that the present fundamentalistic interpretation of Scripture concerning homosexual orientation is not valid in terms of our present culture and that the accepted discourse should be one of inclusion and not exclusion.

Deconstruction of dominant discourses that affected my co-researchers' spiritual well-being negatively, started through their own investigations even before we got involved in the research project. The most important deconstruction took place in the sphere of the fundamentalist pentecostal/charismatic hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures. A thorough study of the Scriptures in the context in which they were written together with the current scientific information on sexuality helped these men to come to more acceptable views of sexuality and the value of the Scriptures in this regard. The views of my co-researchers were guided by the principle of the love of God and the general indication in the Scriptures of the acceptability of sexual relationships within the context of love. A change in this basic viewpoint now makes it possible for these men to live a life free from condemnation, both in the past, present and future.

7.3.4 Communicating preferred stories

When we started our journey together, I asked questions of the men regarding the existing relationships with their faith communities of origin and the possibilities of having a voice in those communities, even though they were no longer actively involved in these communities. My purpose in doing this was to open doors, if possible, to communicate their spiritual realities or put differently, to communicate the preferred stories of their spiritual relationships, to the pentecostal/charismatic movement. I was also wondering what the effect would have been or could be, if they would, through their life testimony of faith in Christ and commitment to the broad principles of love, remained in their churches of origin? Would this not serve as a call to justice and an appeal to the motivating love force of the church to be expressed in the current situation of more than only one form of sexual expression? My co-researchers did not appear to view these ideas as a viable option at the present time, at least not in so far as pentecostal/charismatic churches are

concerned. Nicky expressed some thoughts in this regard when he said that they don't want to listen. In the traditional churches, they want to hear. They want to hear the whole story, they want to know everything. Methodist, Dutch Reformed, they want to know. They don't want to know just about your spiritual experience, they're so hungry to know more about you! They will even say, 'tell us what happens in your home, what happens in your bedroom'? Because they're hungry to know. The possibility of being a witness to the fact that gay people are accepted by God and that the Spirit of God dwells in the gay Christian did not seem to be an option to these men within the 'confines' of the traditional pentecostal/charismatic church. Both Nicky and André revealed that they had had conversations with prominent leaders in the Pentecostal movement who appeared to be aware of the fact that the interpretation of the *clobber texts* were in some instances questionable, but who were not prepared to 'expose' their membership to these facts. This was apparently necessary to 'protect' members. In the light of speaking the 'truth', something that my co-researchers and I discussed on more than one occasion, and the need to be honest about their sexual orientation, these men were convinced that more harm than good would come from exposing themselves to their original communities of faith and attempting to fulfil a prophetic role in these communities. We had conversations about the wearing of a mask on various occasions and in specific instances especially when they found themselves with people within the pentecostal/charismatic movement, and when I discovered a website about gay friendly churches, it confirmed to me their feelings in this regard. The sight is called *BEHIND THE MASK A website on gay and lesbian affairs in (southern) Africa* (<http://www.mask.org.za/SECTIONS/HelpLine/index.html>).

Even though this aim has not yet been achieved, I am confident that, given time, opportunities will present itself for gay people to communicate their preferred stories of spiritual relationships to the pentecostal/charismatic movement especially in the light of the current debates about homosexuality taking place within, and also outside of, churches in South Africa.

7.4 COMING TO SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

7.4.1 My personal observations

In my involvement with this research group I came to a personal conclusion that these men were serious about their spiritual relationships and that they had aligned themselves with the basic principles of Christianity. Living a meaningful life as a Christian was more important to them than becoming advocates for the acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle. In time, and given the opportunity, they would be willing to share their love of Christ and their experience of being a Christian whilst being gay, with those who would be prepared to listen. However, while there remains a large degree of reluctance to even attempt to listen with an open heart to gay Christians, there remains no alternative but to align themselves with a peripheral Christian community.

7.4.2 The fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture

It was clear that, given the recent discussions in the popular press about the church and homosexuality, a long journey lies ahead on which some churches have embarked, but on which others, including the pentecostal/charismatic movement in South Africa still decline to be involved. A fundamentalist attitude to the interpretation of Scripture still appears to be the chosen way to go in the pentecostal/charismatic movement and conditional salvation is preached. The reigning discourse of the church resulting in the exclusion of openly gay Christians is supported by the leadership and an exclusive theology of the possession of the ultimate truth is maintained.

7.4.3 Using a Participatory Action Research approach

The research project that I embarked upon with gay Christian men was intended to take the shape of a participatory action research approach. From the initiation of the research project I aimed to involve all the participants in the process of defining the problem as they perceived it and to continuously, throughout the entire project, take part in planning actions that could improve the present problematic situation as they saw it. At the outset of the project I made it clear that the project was not mine but ours and that the participants were free to reconstruct or reinterpret the actual research methodology (see paragraph 3.3.1). Although it seemed to me that this invitation was not accepted, in retrospect my co-researchers did in fact accept the invitation but chose to construct the

research project on their own terms without making this obvious. It consisted of a re-looking at their spiritual heritage and their present and future spiritual relationships showing that contrary to my initial perceptions they were quite willing to be involved in an effort to make sense of their lives and in incorporating a new sense of practicing spirituality. I was also aware of the willingness of the participants to let go of perceived boundaries between themselves and me as initiator of the project, something which enhanced the possibilities of having meaningful relationships as co-researchers and thereby creating opportunities for opening new perspectives of spirituality. In retrospect I consider the participatory action research approach to have been used in a different manner to my initial understanding of the approach which I saw as a process clearly identifiable in terms of its cyclical character of reflection, questioning, fieldwork, evaluation and further action (see chapter 3 paragraph 3.3.1). I would like to suggest that my co-researchers were empowered through this process to re-author themselves and to view their own agency and ethical approaches from a new perspective. The participants chose to follow a non-problematic approach to the research as far as identifying and discussing their spiritual relationships are concerned. I respect their views in this matter. As co-researcher I did not wish to manipulate them into embarking on any course of action with which they would not be comfortable. My co-researchers initially thought that the problematic relationships they encountered in their original faith communities was something that they could not change and they were satisfied that the route they wished to follow by aligning themselves with an alternative community of faith was the solution to their problem of a spiritual relationship with religion. They did not feel that their relationship with God could benefit more by any other course of action than the one they had taken. Despite these observations I have to take into account the process of social construction and the re-evaluation of relationships, both past, present, and future that was taking place during and after our conversations. I was satisfied that we attempted to identify a general area of concern in terms of the cyclical research process (McTaggart 1997; Wadsworth 1998) relating to the participants' spiritual relationships and that sufficient opportunities existed for any such a difficulty to surface through our conversations. Due to no definite concern emerging, I assumed that the process of *action research* as described by McTaggart (1997:27) as consisting of a spiral of steps consisting of planning, acting, observing and evaluating the action taken on a problem, was not realised. However, although no definite planning in terms of the process of reacting to a perceived undesirable situation was apparent, and my initial thoughts were that the PAR research process was therefore not followed, I came to a different

conclusion upon reflecting on my co-researchers' engagement in the development of our conversations about their spiritual lives. I had to adjust my thoughts on this matter and accept that they did act upon, observed and evaluated the fresh ideas that presented itself during the research process. The way in which the research process proceeded reminded me that I also had to keep in mind that my focus was on doing *ordinary theology* (Astley 2002:56) with a group of marginalised men and that I needed to listen to their voice in the context of their lived experience of being gay and Christian. I was also reminded that in this way contextual practical theology was served in doing theology *with* Christians who, mostly, did not receive theological education of a scholarly, academic, or systematic kind, and by *doing* theology rather than speaking of theology.

By employing a narrative pastoral therapeutic approach in our conversations, the opportunity to deconstruct the elements of guilt and shame was made possible through the storying and re-storying of the men's lives and created opportunities for personal and social growth. In our conversations together I discovered that similar opportunities to be involved in reconstructing an alternative story of their lives were not often available and that this project served them in having a closer look at their beliefs, their fears, their practices and their spiritual needs. As such a space was created to make meaning of gay spirituality through my asking of therapeutical questions from a perspective of not knowing. I do not conclude that the journey in constructing new life stories is completed and I accept that the process has only begun. The opportunity to voice their experiences in this way has given them the prospect to develop thick descriptions of cultural and religious discourses regarding their spiritual relationships.

7.5 WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?

If this research project is to mean more than just an academic exercise we have to be aware of the challenges that are part of being a gay pentecostal/charismatic Christian. We have already looked at some of the societal and religious discourses and the harmful effects thereof. This fact prompted me to think in terms of the deconstruction of these harmful discourses and how transformation may be served. My co-researchers were perhaps in a more fortunate position than many other gay Christians who are not aware of the destructive power of some of these discourses and are being marginalised in or excluded from the church as a result of this. Is it not our responsibility to be available to people in this position in some way or another?

My question in this regard to the research group was about the practical use of this research. Their response was mainly limited to two actions namely first a personal commitment of being a clear witness to all people in their work environment as well as those in the social arena of their lives, and second to perhaps having a book published with first-hand stories of the lives of gay Christian men who experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in the context of the pentecostal/charismatic context and who continue to have meaningful spiritual relationships. Whether the latter project will be pursued is not clear but I realise that the voice of the gay Christian and the liberating message may be heard by many more people in this way. Popular literature about gay Christianity is still limited in South Africa. Works such as those written by Pieter Cilliers (1997) and Dina Joubert (1998) are generally well received by both gay and heterosexual people.

When I take note of the involvement of gay participants in the discussions about the Dutch Reformed Church's position on the matter of homosexuality, I realise that these gay men have made an enormous contribution to the visibility of the gay presence in that tradition and is able to let their voice be heard. In that way they are able to break the silence originally imposed by the church and by telling their stories the dominating power of the problem story is broken (Otto 2003:133). I am wondering whether such an involvement would ever be possible in the pentecostal/charismatic movement or whether the silence will be maintained.

I would welcome any sign of acknowledgment from the pentecostal/charismatic movement in South Africa of the existence of practicing homosexual people in its midst and I would be encouraged by the establishing of structures that could meet the spiritual needs of gay people in this movement. Neuger and Poling (1997:21), with reference to gay men in the church, said that gay men either left the church due to prejudice and discrimination or remained closeted while hiding their identities and needs and that '[i]n either situation, adequate pastoral caregiving and spiritual nurture for gay men is unavailable'. Unfortunately I have to say that the current situation in the pentecostal/charismatic movement in South Africa still appears to fit this picture. This is the reason why I maintain that the pentecostal/charismatic movement has to face the realities concerning homosexual people in their midst and have to begin to rethink how these people may be cared for in the church without continuing with a discriminatory line of action. In writing about the powerful effects of fundamentalism, Peter Craffert (2005)

maintains that the border between healthy religion and fundamentalism is vague because fundamentalism uses elements from religion in a fanatic and literalistic manner. In terms of a pentecostal/charismatic discourse about homosexuality I can relate to the opinion of Craffert (2005) that 'racism, sexism, homophobia or other hurtful discriminations (like those between pure and impure, believing or unbelieving), may easily be presented as acceptable under the pretext of being pious' (my own translation). I sincerely believe that if the pentecostal/charismatic movement is to retain any credibility in its claims to entertaining a special openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it will have to become more sensitive to the needs of those people in its midst who need the Church's compassion and support in coming to terms with their sexuality.

7.6 SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNT AND BENEFITS GAINED

The power relations between the church and these men became very clear to me when I listened to their stories and shared in the emotions that the re-telling of these stories evoked. Concerning the concept of power I became aware of the existence of power as something that is not necessarily owned by someone but that it is rather exercised. As such power is not only found at the top of a hierarchy but everywhere local (Fillingham 1993:143). This made me question the paralysing effects that I assumed the gay person was subject to due to the church exercising its power. My question in this regard was answered by Champagne (1995:5) who, with reference to the work of Foucault, said: 'We are never trapped by power, we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy'. This made me think that perhaps gay people in the church are not as powerless as I thought and that they do not necessarily have to accept the discriminatory practices of the church but that they have power to resist if they so wished. This opened a new avenue of exploration to me in working with gay people in future.

In terms of the research methodology I learned that the participatory action research approach opens the way for participants to enjoy the freedom of being as much a part of the decision-making and planning process concerning the research project as the originator of the research. The results of such freedom may steer the research journey in an entire different direction to the one intended, but that is exactly how the PAR approach may develop in practice.

I consider myself as privileged to have been involved with the project together with this group of men. A number of lessons that I learnt came to mind when I started thinking

about the time that I spent with my co-researchers. One was the obvious internalization of the church's discourse of condemnation and abhorrence by the men in the project. At the outset of the study I was fairly confident that through the knowledge I gained from preliminary reading about homosexuality in context of Christianity I knew most of what was needed to conduct the study. However, when I started out on this journey with my co-researchers I became aware of my need to learn more from them than I could from textual material. The lived experience of my co-participants thus became an important source of information for the research journey which is related in this dissertation. Not all of the benefits that I gained are obvious to me at this stage. The positive experience of the pastoral narrative therapeutical approach to the problems of gay Christian men left me enriched. Through the conversations we had I came to appreciate the validity of the opinions expressed by Carlson and Erickson (2000:67) that 'social constructionist theories provide a natural framework for incorporating the religious and spiritual beliefs of clients' lives'. Some of the discourses about homosexuality that I became aware of have benefited me insofar as helping me to become more aware of my own attitude and actions toward gay Christian men. At the same time, while I was willing to become a participant in a study with gay men I also became more aware of the risks involved in writing this dissertation in terms of my own membership of a charismatic church.

After having been involved with this project for at least three years, I have come to realise that it may be important to also examine the influence of the current gay discourses about roles, relationships and sexual expression on pentecostal/charismatic gay men. My personal observations were made based on the times we spent together as a research group and attending a church meeting at the Agallia congregation. The question that I could perhaps ask gay Christian men is whether they have thought of exploring a unique lifestyle that would accommodate the fact that they are male and remain so even when in a relationship with another man or whether their lifestyle simply mirrors that of the straight community. I was also wondering to what extent their spiritual relationships were influenced by the gay community's discourse about sexual behaviour and whether a deconstruction of some of the gay social constructions could benefit these relationships.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: Information sheet for invited participants

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read the following information carefully before finalising your decision to participate. Should you have any questions about the content of this information sheet, please feel free to discuss them with me.

The purpose of the project

I am currently completing a Masters degree in Practical Theology at the University of South Africa. I am specialising in Pastoral Therapy and in order to meet the requirements set for this course I need to write a research thesis. My research focus concerns the spiritual relationships of Christian gay men in a charismatic context.

Why do I need you?

I need about six men who are willing to become research partners in this project. Gay men who are Christians and who ideally have had an encounter with the Holy Spirit are especially welcome to participate. The context of my study is pentecostal/charismatic spirituality. I am looking for people who are willing to tell me the story of their joy and pain as a gay charismatic Christian.

What will you have to do?

If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to take part in conversations about your spiritual relationships. During our conversations I will explore with each participant the various religious and cultural ideas that are influencing his spiritual relationships. Should you be prepared to join me as a participant in this project, you will be expected to attend group discussions at arranged dates and times, but not more than once a week. These meetings will take place over a period of about three months.

Annexure A

You will be asked to give written consent for the information obtained during our conversations to be used in the research project. Strict confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained with respect to each participant's personal identity in the report.

Withdrawal from the project

You will be free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Thank you

John Bosman
Cell number
Telephone Home

Annexure B

ANNEXURE B: Consent form for invited participants

I have read the Information Sheet concerning the research project and understand its purpose. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.
3. A copy of the final research document will be retained by the University of South Africa and by the Institute for Therapeutic Development.
4. I understand that the information given during the research project may be used in article format for publication. I also understand that should I decide that I do not wish the information to be published, I am able to withdraw my permission at any stage of participation in the project.
5. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
6. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential and anonymous throughout the project.
7. I prefer that the following name (own name or pseudonym) be used in the research project:

I hereby confirm that I am willing to participate in this research project.

.....
Name in Capital Letters

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Date

ANNEXURE C: QUESTIONS TO ASK OF THE REFLECTING TEAM

1. Identifying the expression

What touched or moved you in what you heard? As you listened, which expressions caught your attention or captured your imagination? Which ones struck a cord for you?

- *Wat het jou geraak of beweeg in dit wat jy gehoor het? Terwyl jy geluister het, watter uitdrukkings het jou aandag getrek of jou verbeelding aangegryp? Watter uitdrukkings het jou geraak?*

2. Describing the image

What images of the person's life, of their identity, and of the world more generally, did these expressions evoke? What did these expressions suggest to you about these people's purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams and commitments?

- *Watter beelde van die persoon se lewe, of van sy identiteit en van die wêreld in die algemeen, het hierdie uitdrukkings vir jou na vore gebring? Wat sê hierdie uitdrukkings vir jou van die persoon se doelstellings, waardes, dit waarin hy glo, hope, drome en verbintnisse?*

3. Embodying responses

Do you have a sense of which aspects of your own experiences of life resonated with the images evoked? What is it about your own life or experience that meant that you were touched in this way?

- *Het jy 'n gevoel van watter van die aspekte van jou eie ervarings van die lewe met hierdie beelde resoneer (saamstem)? Wat is dit van jou eie lewe of ondervinding wat beteken dat jy op hierdie manier geraak is?*

Annexure C

4. Acknowledging transport

Where have you been moved to in your thinking or experience of life? How is your life different for having been moved to this new place?

- *Waarheen is jy verskuif in jou denke of ervaring van die lewe? Hoe is jou lewe verskillend, of sal dit verskillend wees met hierdie skuif na 'n ander plek?*

ANNEXURE D: Reflecting Questions

- Is there any connection between my own story and the story I have just heard? If there is, what is it?

*Is daar enige verband tussen my eie storie en die storie wat ek nou net gehoor het?
As daar is, wat is dit?*

- In what way does the way the storyteller lives his story touch me, encourage me, inspire me?

Op watter manier raak die manier waarop die verteller sy storie leef, my, of bemoedig of inspireer dit my?

- Can I identify any values, intentions and principles in the unfolding of this story that I would like to appreciate more or even use in my own life?

Is daar enige waardes, bedoelinge en beginsels in die ontvouing van hierdie storie wat ek graag meer sal wil waardeer en miskien in my eie lewe wil inbring?

- In what way does this story challenge me or move my life forward?

Op watter manier daag hierdie storie my uit of laat dit my lewe vorentoe beweeg?

- Has there been a shift in my thinking?

Het daar 'n skuif in my denke plaasgevind?