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CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE

1.1 Introduction

I envision a revolution that creates a community for broken people, united not by their problems or diagnoses, but by their hunger for God ... that frees people to fully participate in that community because they feel the safety of the gospel that embraces people rather than judges them, that joins hurting folks more than advises them on how to feel better, that supernaturally equips, people to pour life into one another (Crabb 2001:187).

In line with Crabb's thinking (2001:186–187) I too have a vision – a vision for the pastoral therapeutic community of charismatic counsellors that will bring about hope in the church and the lives of broken people. This chapter will introduce the inspiration or background to this vision/topic, along with its aim and underlying questions. It will introduce the reader to the research approach, the process, the participants and the relevance to practical theology, the church and the larger community and will conclude with an outline for the remaining chapters.

1.2 Background to study

As a background to this study I draw on my personal experience of growing up in a community in which different faith groups had to share a communal church building. The community was small and therefore no single faith group had a permanently employed minister. Every Sunday a different minister from a different faith group was invited as a guest speaker. At this time my parents were officially members of the Dutch Reformed Church, of which the closest was approximately one hundred kilometres away. We drove to church once a month and attended the local church every other Sunday. One week Catholic, then Baptist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God and so on. It is within the context of this rich cultural and spiritual heritage that I approach my research, feeling privileged to have had such a diverse experience in terms of how God is worshipped and experienced.

Two things stand out as I reflect on my childhood experience of church, the first being an apparent attitude of suspicion and mistrust between the different faith groups, all claiming

to be Christian, all claiming to have the full gospel, and all preaching love! Mahatma Ghandi once said: "I like your Christ but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ" (Maksiman 2001:7). Even as a young person this disunity confused and concerned me.

The second thing I remember well is that my parents instilled in me a respect for the work of the ministry and authority. Ministers were (I understood), anointed by God and to be respected as such. This respect had two effects in my life. The first being confusion since if ministers were God's representatives on earth and knew God better than ordinary believers, why was there so much division and mistrust? The second effect translated into an inability to question or challenge what I understood to be God's anointed authority. To give an example, some time during my youth I started to question the church's position with regards to apartheid but found it creating tremendous anxiety within, especially when voicing my questions or disagreements. Welch (1990:156) says of this inability to challenge or question truths as presented by authority, that ideas have effects of truth. "Whatever their intellectual credibility, ideas do shape the lives of those who are taught them". For me personally these ideas resulted in a silencing of my voice.

In *Country of my skull*, Antjie Krog (1998:55) describes the process of losing voice. According to her "the arteries of our past bleed their own peculiar rhythm, tone and image". She observes that by the second week of the truth and reconciliation hearings she was without language. A counsellor sent to address the journalists said: "You will experience the same symptoms as the victims. You will find yourself powerless – without help, without words". Kaethe Weingarten in a workshop entitled *Witnessing, Wonder and Hope*, held in Pretoria in February 2002, defined this process as one of common shock. One of the symptoms of common shock, according to her, is silence.

The last five years since going into private pastoral practice, these ideas around what makes us lose voice, gained momentum. More and more I heard the stories of people living with the effects of not being able to speak, not having a voice, not being heard. Sadly some of these stories include people fellowshiping in a charismatic context¹, a context that I share.

¹Charismatic – Emphasising "spiritual gifts" especially gifts of speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy, interpretation of tongues, and so on. These gifts are considered to come from divine inspiration and power.

One such story includes the story of Susan, married for 20 years to the man of her dreams but who has suffered from Lupus for the last 16 years. He has been unable to work and Susan is the sole breadwinner. They have two children and the whole family love and serve God. Susan however does not have a formal qualification and at the time of my meeting her, has been supporting her family and very ill husband on R4 000 per month. Of this at least half went toward medical expenses for her husband.

After years of trying to live victoriously as her church teaches, she is about to collapse from sheer exhaustion – emotionally, spiritually and physically. She has been unable to carry the burden of the family and experience victory in her finances and faith walk. The guidance and counsel she received was something to the effect of: If you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly. God can only multiply what you give. If you give nothing, and even if He multiplies it, it will still be nothing. You have not because you don't tithe. The church apparently was unable to help financially and added, "You are not a good steward" (someone saw her treating herself to a milkshake). If your husband wants to receive healing, he should check his life for unrepentant sin. She was unable to identify this counsel as abusive – from her perspective it would have been the same as to argue with God. After all her counsellors spoke the truth – quoted from the Bible – this translated into a heavy burden because of silence.

After years of this kind of abuse from the church, Susan was ready to throw in the towel. Where was God anyway? At our last meeting, Susan told me that her husband had died and that in spite of the loss and heartache she felt relieved of a very heavy burden. For this too she received harsh criticism from church members. At the conclusion of our sessions she realized that she had in fact been in mourning already for 20 years. Mourning the loss of a husband who was unable to share in creating a stable financial environment, the loss of physical intimacy, the loss of pride, the loss of joy, the loss of rest – and that it was okay now to enter into rejoicing and gladness and new financial possibilities.

As I reflected on these stories and my own experience in the light of postmodern thinking, I started wondering how voice silencing in any context contributes to violations and abuse taking place. This led to the deep desire to take a stand on this issue, especially in my faith context. I also started thinking and wondering what conditions were necessary to cause people to lose voice and whether it was possible to prevent this from happening. I started

talking to the leaders of our congregation to share these ideas with them and found some in the leadership concerned about similar issues (some even experiencing a silencing of their own voices).

We decided to do our own research since in coming together and trying to deal with the problem in an ethical way, we discovered that very little research has been done in charismatic contexts, and certainly none that could be found pertaining to abuse and discourses.

De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1994:11) say of theology that

There are times when theology has to speak a clear and necessarily definite word, as, for example, when some churches in South Africa declared 'apartheid a heresy'. But theology also has to wrestle with situations and issues where such a clarion call is just not possible or appropriate. Nonetheless, theology cannot avoid the need to understand its context, and to address the issues, which arise within it.

Therefore we (the participants and I) felt that for practical theology, a research project of this nature would be both meaningful and necessary. Necessary since the question could be asked how can the church ethically challenge abuse in the secular field, if we ourselves are at times guilty of being abusive? We have to find out if we are in fact involved in abusive practices and if so, we feel challenged to change.

1.3 Research questions

Since a research approach of a qualitative nature is preferred, an approach that is open ended; not all of the initial research questions were necessarily answered. New questions were formulated as the study progressed (See 5.9). There was no attempt to answer initial questions systematically or to present findings in a way that suggests a final solution to the problem posed. Instead, these initial questions should be seen as a reflection of the not-knowing approach as put forward by Anderson and Goolishian (1992).

Questions I asked at the outset of the study included:

- Can a narrative pastoral approach be useful in a charismatic context as a tool to deconstruct power and ensure transparency and ethics? (The reader should refer to chapter 2 for an explanation on what is meant by a narrative pastoral approach).
- Can a narrative pastoral approach facilitate a situation in which church members can identify, question and interview abusive discourses?
- How can pastoral narrative therapy help to make leaders in charismatic churches aware of abusive practices within the church?
- How can pastoral narrative therapy encourage and strengthen respectful practices in a charismatic context?
- How can pastoral narrative therapy facilitate a process whereby the charismatic church will be willing to take a critical look at her practices – discursive and otherwise, from within?
- How can pastoral narrative therapy contribute and play a role in understanding the consequences of spiritually abusive discourses and practices.
- Can pastoral narrative therapy make a contribution by acknowledging skills and knowledges that support respectful practices?
- How can these knowledge and skills be shared within the larger charismatic community?
- How can pastoral narrative therapy contribute in creating an awareness of voice silencing, and its effects?

Questions from participants included:

- How can pastoral narrative therapy help us as leaders to hear honest questions and not interpret it as rebellion?
- How can it become possible for leaders to be more transparent about own failings without causing the congregation to lose faith?
- How can pastoral narrative therapy contribute in helping church members to inform leadership regarding their experience of abusive discourses and abuse resulting from power relations, in a voice that can be heard?

1.4 Research aims

The aim of this study as agreed upon with the research participants was two-fold. At the start of the process we worked together to discover and challenge the power of discourses in the charismatic church, with the main aim of this research journey being to challenge disrespectful discursive practices in the charismatic context – and to co-create practices that are respectful, ethical and caring.

In order to reach these objectives it became necessary for us to identify those discursive practices that were not respectful, and we did so by deconstructing charismatic ideals (chapter 3). Myburg (2000:12) says that to deconstruct is not to undo or to destroy but to gently take apart and expose that which has been invisible to the naked eye. For us this meant giving ourselves the opportunity to critically reflect on our theology without feeling guilty, in order to see where or if, our discourses contribute to abusive practices.

1.5 A postmodern research approach

In line with the study's postmodern ideas (chapter 2) research was approached from a qualitative perspective. The approach was narrative, since it examined how local culture and knowledge could counteract objectified knowledge (Collins 1994:102). Weingarten (1998:3) explains how a narrative approach provides a context for attending to the small and ordinary. It also reflects an action research perspective. Action research according to Mc Taggart (1997a:1-2) is geared toward change and participation. These implications are in line with my narrative hermeneutic approach to practical theology and my postmodern epistemological and theological positions (chapter 2). In addition to these theoretical approaches, traces of feminist discourse will also be visible. I will now proceed with a discussion of the various discourses that have influenced the research process.

1.5.1 A qualitative research approach

Somehow we have lost the human and passionate element of research. Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people. This is the contribution of qualitative research.

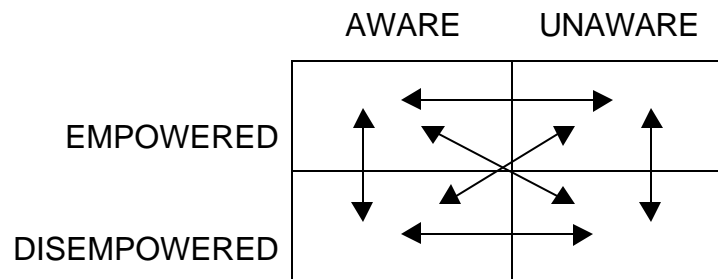
(Janesick 1994:217)

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:2), when the researcher chooses a qualitative research approach, that researcher should give reasons for doing so, if he/she wants to defend their work as a valued piece of scholarship. I would therefore give my reasons as follows:

A qualitative approach allows me space for accommodating the ethical concerns I bring to the research journey. These concerns include my remaining transparent in terms of my own biases (e.g. I am a member of the charismatic faith community) and making sure that the participants' voices are privileged and that they can be clearly heard. Another concern is ensuring that the research journey is a respectful one – respectful of the participants, but also of the larger faith context. It is also important for me, within my preferred research approach (participative action research), that the participants remain the primary beneficiaries of the research (Maykut & Morehouse 1994, Janesick 1994, Steier 1991).

My main ethical consideration has to do with what Weingarten (2000a) calls witness positions. She explains that it is easy for a privileged person to become empowered but remain unaware. As Marie, one of the research participants put it: "It is hard for me to believe that abuse can happen in a church context." Marie, according to Weingarten, would be empowered but unaware in relation to congregation members. Unaware that abuse takes place, but empowered due to being in a leadership position. However she may be disempowered and unaware in relation to senior pastors. Due to power imbalances and structures in the church, favouring senior pastors, Marie may lose power becoming disempowered – but unaware as to why.

My concern relates to the possibility of a movement of participants being unaware and empowered to becoming aware and disempowered. Once Marie becomes aware of the power imbalances, she may become aware of other issues relating to abuse. At the same time as none of the senior pastors stayed in the research process, she may become disempowered relating to the structures in the church and the inability to challenge those structures in her context. This disempowerment could result in feelings of mistrust, disillusionment, disbelief and despair. It could also result in anger or depression. Weingarten (2000b:397) explains Marie's position graphically as follows:



Since being introduced to a postmodern, social constructionist way of thinking, I have found myself in the cycle of moving witnessing positions. I was empowered as a counsellor and leader in the charismatic church yet I was unaware that my best efforts were sometimes abusive. Once I became aware, I found myself being disempowered by discourses in the church and this led to a personal faith crisis.

I cannot honestly say that I am now aware and empowered because there are still operational discourses in my life that leave me feeling helpless. I do however have the tools and support to gradually make that transition. Since I was still in this process of making this transition even after initiating this research journey, I was fearful for the participants as to whether I would effectively be able to assist them in that process towards empowerment and awareness. As the participants were to be the primary beneficiaries of the research this was a very real concern.

I shared this concern with the participants and supervisor, and we decided to take this journey anyway, based on my commitment not to abandon the participants until they have reached a place where they feel both aware and empowered.

Qualitative research as participatory action research challenges the traditional notion of the researcher having to be the expert, blurring the boundaries between the researcher and the researched (Bishop 1996:228). Once again this fits with my chosen epistemology and in particular the social construction discourse and the not-knowing approach (chapter 2) as put forward by Anderson and Goolishian (1992).

Qualitative research in line with my postmodern narrative epistemology moves away from an approach with the emphasis based on observations that are converted into units and compared to other research by using statistical analysis. According to Bishop (1996:230) quantitative research can result in the dismissal and marginalisation or maintained control over the voices of others due to its insistence on evaluation criteria, internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity.

For this research journey, moving away from quantitative research procedures was very valuable in the sense that it is open ended and allows participants to become more participative in the process. It also reduces power imbalances as proposed by Foucault in that it encourages local knowledge, in this way countering power imbalances by giving power and credibility to local knowledge as opposed to expert knowledge (chapter 2).

This qualitative approach was helpful to this research for the following reasons:

- A quantitative research procedure would have placed me, the researcher in the position of being the expert. In this context, I was clearly not the expert, since I was not an ordained pastor.
- A qualitative research approach validates local knowledge, and for this research journey it opened up a space for members' stories of abuse to be able to challenge taken for granted practices.

1.5.2 A narrative research approach

The narrative approach has its roots in the postmodern social construction discourse and the narrative metaphor as a therapeutic tool was developed by Michael White and David Epston (White & Epston 1990). This approach as developed by White and Epston is useful in a participative action research context as it concerns itself with the personal

histories of participants with a central construct being the notion of narrative unity. Clandinin and Connely (1987:131) writes that narrative unity is “the union in a particular person in a particular place and time of all that the person has been and undergone in the past and in the person of the tradition which has helped to shape the person.” This was an important aspect of this research journey, as it became necessary to deconstruct not only personal stories, but also the traditions that shaped both the participants and congregation members.

Haarhoff (1998:129) says: “for too long authoritarians, politicians, religious leaders, teachers and parents have told groups and individuals what their story is,” and for many charismatic church members this became abusive. Narrative research connects with the fundamentally human qualities of human experience and Connelly and Clandinin (1994:425) say of this “Personal experience methods are human methods” and for this reason, crucial to public debate.

The research participants and I decided as part of the public, to debate issues in the charismatic church context, but because of the sensitivity of the topic, we needed an approach that created room for personal experience. Experience in this view say Clandinin and Connelly (1994:415) “Is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones.”

Having selected a narrative research approach because of its personal stance, I also included an action research approach for its emphasis on resulting action. This discussion follows:

1.5.3 Action research

As stated in 1.4, action research is a form of qualitative research and is a term used to describe almost every research effort and method that attempts to inform action in some way (McTaggart 1997a:1). Webb (1996:147) quotes Kemmis and McTaggart when he defines action research as follows:

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the nationality and justice of their own social or educational practices.

In terms of this definition, our research journey may be called action research, as we owned the problem and we felt responsible and accountable for solving it. Since action research seems to be a very loose term used as stated above to describe any research effort resulting in action taking place, I prefer to use the term participatory action research. McTaggart (1997a:1) finds this helpful in terms of clarification.

1.5.4 Participatory action research

Authentic participation in research means that sharing takes place. Participants share in the way the research is conceptualised, practised, and brought to bear on the real world. It means ownership (McTaggart 1997b:28). Participatory action research is (McTaggart 1997b:28) a group activity in which people with different levels of power, status and influence work together on a thematic concern. It is concerned simultaneously with change in individuals as well as the culture of groups, institutions and the societies to which the individual belongs (McTaggart 1997b:31). In this sense, this research project can be considered a participatory action research effort, although it should be kept in mind that I was the one who approached leaders in charismatic churches with this research idea. In this sense not full participation took place. Yet participatory action research fits with my epistemological position in terms of my ethics as described in 1.5.1. Based on McTaggart's (1997b:39,40) views, I offer an outline of what I consider participatory action research not to be.

- It is not only research aimed at problem solving, it also involves problem posing, not seeing problems as necessarily pathological. This effectively means that the value of the research need not lie only in finding answers, but also in identifying problems. For this research it was important not to focus only on finding solutions, but to allow enough time to ask questions, as this lack of ability to question the status quo (chapter 4.5.1) was one of the central issues.
- It is not research done on other people, but by people on themselves in their own context. In the charismatic context I have always had the impression of two lasting effects of rejection by main line churches. The first effect translated into pride and

the second into an overdeveloped sensitivity to criticism. For this reason it was necessary to choose an approach that allows charismatic believers to reflect on their own shortcomings and to take responsibility for change. I don't think a research project of this nature would have been possible for someone outside of this context.

- It is not research done in order to implement new policy. The research aim is not to manipulate and further strengthen power imbalances, but indeed the opposite. Once again an important point as one of the problems in the issue of abusive discursive practices relates to power imbalances (chapter 4.5.1). A research process resulting in further power differentials would defeat the whole object.
- It is not a scientific method involved in testing hypotheses or using data to come to conclusions. Instead it is an evolving living process, which changes the researcher, and the context in which he or she acts. A scientific, modernist approach would not lend itself to an enquiry that is open ended or allow for change to take place in the person of the researcher and context, it is important that the process be an evolving one.

1.6 The research process

1.6.1 Introduction

The discussion that follows will guide the reader to an understanding of the context, introduce the participants and inform the reader of the procedures used in the research journey.

1.6.2 The context

I am presently a member of the River of Life Family Church in Vanderbijlpark and as such represent this section of this specific charismatic church. However, the other participants of this research journey are leaders from a number of charismatic churches, and not all from the Vaal Triangle.

At the start of the study they wished to remain anonymous – not wishing for their personal opinions to be constructed as necessarily typical of all charismatic churches.

1.6.3 Introducing the participants

Before I introduce the participants that embarked on this research journey with me, I would like to reflect a little on the process of selection. All the participants approached to join in on this journey were leaders in charismatic church context with which I had earlier conversations regarding the problem posed. All were participants eager to discuss discursive practices in our contexts.

What happened as discussed in the next few paragraphs, underscores the very deep influence of charismatic discourses and power imbalances. Please bear in mind that all participants were leaders.

At our first group meeting something strange but profound happened. Participants, who in the past had freely discussed problems in the charismatic context, clammed up. They spoke in generalities, avoiding taking a stand on issues. I can remember feeling a little confused at one point, wondering whether I had outlined the process well enough. Our first meeting lasted two hours.

The following day all but two participants phoned to withdraw from the process. Initially there were two black male pastors, two black female pastors, an Indian male pastor, two white female pastors, two white male pastors and one white female counsellor, excluding myself. The couple that stayed in the process was Hendrik and Marie. I will introduce them shortly.

Upon asking for reasons for withdrawal I got answers that ranged from time management to illness. One white male pastor told me he didn't feel comfortable talking in a group and implied it could be used against him later. One black pastor said that he was ill informed and didn't realise that discussions could include abuse in the church context. He felt abuse in church was impossible and therefore felt it a waste of time talking about the issue.

Seven participants eventually journeyed with me, only two from the original group. The other five participants joined with us on this research journey, by personal invitation from me. I phoned different congregations in Gauteng until I felt I had found a sufficient number of participants to make the research journey credible in terms of the number of participants. The condition they made when deciding to participate was that we did not meet in groups. Peter and Elana specifically stated that they had been hurt by the church and others in leadership and did not trust the group context. Four participants were white female pastors and three were white male pastors. It was my intention to include the research process members of different ethnic groups. In the initial group this was the case before their withdrawal.

Please note that all quotes by participants will be printed in italics from here on and that the names reflected here are not the real names of the participants involved in the research journey. Individually each participant decided on the use of pseudonyms in order to avoid being identified. For me at least this underscores the very real fear that even charismatic leaders have, of challenging the status quo for fear of being labelled divisive.

The research participants introduced themselves as follows:

Thalita

Hi, the name I have chosen to be known by is Thalita and I chose this name because this is what God has done for me. As in the Bible, Jesus raised me from the dead – not physically but spiritually. I believe that his power is still available for believers today. I believe in the supernatural power of God to change, heal and deliver from bondage.

I am a white Afrikaans female pastor with a counselling ministry. I have chosen to take part in this research in order to reflect with Esty on my practice in counselling. I want to be respectful of all my clients.

Hendrik

Hi, I am a white male pastor, and I have chosen to participate partly because I like to philosophise and partly because I have seen abusive practices operate in church and want the chance to reflect on these things.

Marie

Hi, I am Marie and I'm married to Hendrik. We have recently been appointed to the pastoral team. I am not that involved in ministry yet, but I am here because I want to support my husband, and possibly learn from this research, some of the dos and don'ts. I have this advantage, and I believe it to be an advantage that my parents were in the pastoral ministry. I did not really see abuse taking place or even practices that were disrespectful. I have been raised to respect others and their opinions, and therefore it is hard for me to believe that abuse can happen in church.

Peter

Hi, I am a white Afrikaans male pastor and am married to Elana. We have been in the ministry for many years, and are currently on a sabbatical after having been hurt in the ministry. This journey will be a difficult one for us, since we are still in recovery. 'Why am I taking part?' I hope that it will contribute to our healing. I know my reasons sound selfish, but there you have it.

Elana

Hi, I'm Elana and am married to Peter. Yes, we have been hurt, but we still love God and the church. In God's time we will return to ministry but for me, this is a time for reflection and healing.

John

Hi, I'm John, an Afrikaans male pastor. I am also not currently involved in a church as pastor, but I did pastor for many years, and may return to the ministry soon.

Mary

Hi, I'm Mary and I'm married to John. I'm not really sure if I will be able to contribute but am willing to try. Thank you for inviting us.

1.6.4 Research procedures

The fact that some of the participants were living geographically far apart and the fear of research participants of meeting in group-sessions ensured a multi-method approach in terms of procedure. Such an approach is supported by feminist researchers:

Feminist descriptions of multi-method research express the commitments to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, data gathering and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks.

(Reinharz 1992:197)

All the participants come from the Johannesburg / Pretoria or Vaal Triangle area. Non-structured conversations took place on a one to one basis, not in a group. Some conversations were done via the telephone and e-mail. Most were done face to face. In total I had 23 conversations. The conversations were of a generative nature and sometimes evolved into therapeutic conversations as in when Thalita experienced a crisis in her spiritual walk (see 4.2.1).

John and Mary's conversations often evolved into therapeutic conversations as a result of their being hurt in a "toxic" church environment. The letter that John wrote to me (see 4.5.1) can be seen as reflecting outcomes of our therapeutic process.

Due to the sensitive context it was also necessary to create support for the participants until they were able to hear and see things from a different perspective without feeling threatened. Michael White (2003) refers to this type of support as scaffolding. The scaffolding structures used in chapter 4 include a literature search, membering conversations (Morgan: 2000:77), externalising conversations and a search for unique outcomes, as well as attention to case studies of people abused in the charismatic context and outsider witnesses.

Please refer to 4.2 for a more detailed discussion on how I set about creating the necessary support for participants, to enable discussions of this important, yet highly sensitive topic. Please note that all but two of the first group of participants withdrew from the research project as a result of not being able to deal with the research topic. Not all participants verbalised the sensitivity of the topic as the reason for withdrawal, but this was definitely the impression that I got.

I did not get to meet all the participants every week, and did not have an equal number of conversations with each participant. I had most discussions with Hendrik and Marie, and at our final meeting we invited my supervisor, Dr. Johann Roux, to reflect with us on the meanings of our discussions up to that point. We plan to continue our discussions next year. An outline for the rest of the study follows.

1.7 Outline of the study

The following is an overview of the remaining chapters in this project.

- Chapter 2: Epistemology, practical theology and pastoral therapy. This chapter will introduce the reader to the theoretical underpinnings of this research journey. It will include a discussion on postmodern discourse; social construction discourse, language and social construction discourse; power and knowledge discourse, postmodern theology, a narrative hermeneutic approach to practical theology and pastoral care as well as narrative pastoral therapy.
- Chapter 3: But life ought to work! Although it is my intention to privilege the voices of the participants, chapter 3 will attempt to help the reader understand the charismatic church context via some literature voices.
- Chapter 4: Care not cure. This chapter describes the journey of the participants from a position of empowerment and unawareness to a place of awareness and partial empowerment.
- Chapter 5: Reflections. This chapter offers personal reflections of the research journey and includes aspects such as confidentiality, accountability and transparency, as well as implications and recommendations and concludes with an open ending.

CHAPTER 2 : EPISTEMOLOGICAL, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL THERAPY

2.1 Introduction

For this study I have chosen a postmodern social construction discourse as the constitutive epistemology of this research. Since I want to remain accountable for my epistemological presuppositions, a deconstruction of my chosen epistemology and theology will follow. These include descriptions of the postmodern discourse, of social construction and postmodern theology, which inform my preferred narrative hermeneutic approach to practical theology and narrative approach to pastoral therapy.

2.2 Postmodern discourse

The term postmodern has been used to refer to many things: sometimes an intellectual or artistic movement (e.g. in discussions of literature, painting, cinema, etc.), while others distinguish it as a period after modernism. Lave (1991:42) uses the term in terms of a radical rethinking of philosophical, social and political discourse. This view will be the focus in this chapter and since a discourse is not objective truth, preference will be given to a variety of descriptions instead of a fixed definition.

Freedman and Combs (1996:42) quote Hare-Mustin as follows: "A discourse is a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values", whilst Madigan and Law (1992:33) add that "discourse can be viewed to reflect a prevailing structure of social and power relationships". Kogan and Gale (1997:102) argue that discourse refers to any related system of thoughts or ideas as manifested in language, oral or written, and the associated practices that accompany that system of meaning. Meaning and social systems are created in and through dialogue (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988:375). Accordingly meaning is created through language.

From these descriptions I would give a description of discourse as follows: Discourses are cultural messages, drenched in assumptions, invisible to us, but present in everything we say and do. Freedman and Combs (1996:43) claim that discourse powerfully shapes a

person's choices about what life events can be storied and how they should be storied. Neal (1996:74) goes further to say that dominant discourses can become so powerful as to constitute and shape self-narrative and personal discourse.

Perhaps I should point out that here lies one of the reasons why I feel at home within this epistemology, since as Weingarten (1991:289) states, discourses can change and evolve when conversations between people affect culturally available narratives, i.e. local knowledge can influence larger dominant discourses. Thus, for me as a pastoral narrative therapist, I see my role partly as trying to help locate and articulate marginalized discourses within the lived experience of the research participants that already exist with the dominant discourse. Upon doing so, it is possible to change the dominant discourse.

At this point I would like the reader to note my preference for the term postmodern discourse rather than postmodernism. This is an attempt to avoid becoming exclusive. Herholdt (1998:216–217) states that the most obvious thing the term *postmodern* suggests, is that it can be distinguished as a period after *modernism*, which indicates possible progress in aiming to go beyond modernism and to seek a new way of doing science. In many ways it can be seen as the opposite approach to that of modernism, in that the split caused between subject and object due to the Cartesian legacy of basic doubt and objectively determined truth is recognized. In line with this kind of thinking it would be a pity for a postmodern discourse to become yet another metatheory, and hence the preference for the term postmodern discourse, which leaves room for other discourses.

Herholdt (1998:215) defines postmodern discourse by its endeavour to move away from modernism's fragmentary perspective of reality and its reductionism which attributes to a loss of meaning and continues by saying that postmodern discourse is a serious effort to restore the loss of meaning that is attributed to modernism. A postmodern discourse seeks to move away from modernist assumptions like a belief in absolutes and attempts to objectify knowledge. What is confronted is "the traditional, western conception of objective, individualistic, historic knowledge – a conception that has insinuated itself into virtually all aspects of modern institutional life" (Gergen 1985:272).

It is this objectivity of the modernist worldview, with its emphasis on facts, replicable procedures and generally applicable rules, says Freedman and Combs (1996:21), that easily ignores the specific, localized meanings of individual people. When this happens in research, we are in fact inviting research participants into relationships in which they are passive and powerless recipients of our “expert” knowledge.

Criticism against this modernist view includes the arguments that too many local meanings are excluded by the positive position (Guba & Lincoln 1994:100). As a result of this criticism we are seeing a move away from modernist approaches to postmodern discourses such as the social construction discourse and that of constructivism. As I position myself within a postmodern worldview, I have to agree with Gergen (1992:57) when he states that the postmodern argument against modernism is not against the various schools of thought, only against their posture of authoritative truth.

A summary from a postmodern view of reality would include that:

- Realities are socially constructed, constituted through language and organised and maintained through narrative. There are no essential truths. Freedman & Combs (1996:22). This is important in the context of this research as church members are counselled in language and if their realities are constituted in language, then the particular use of language can be either uplifting or abusive.

I agree with Parry and Doan (1994:10) when they say that our postmodern world is a place without any single claim to truth universally respected, with a growing realization that no single story sums up the meaning of life. Therefore, also in the light of my own experience with outside “expert” knowledge subjugating my own local knowledge, I prefer a discourse that emphasises the constitutive effects of stories. I believe that the social construction discourse does exactly that. Once again this is very important for this research process, as clients in my private practice seem to be saying that they are often counselled as if only one truth is valid, as if life is as simple as saying what you sow you reap. The converse being if you want to stop reaping negative experiences, stop sinning or if you are reaping negative experiences, it means you are sinning. The participants did not accept this

message from clients regarding the counselling being too simplistic. They felt that the abuse was experienced due to lack of relationship and not doctrine. Please read 4.4 for feedback on this point.

2.2.1 Social construction discourse

The social construction discourse is only one of many postmodern discourses. Another postmodern discourse often confused with the social construction discourse, is that of constructivism as developed by Maturana and Varela in the 1950's. Both social construction discourse and constructivism focuses on language but constructivism was developed from a biological and individual perspective (Simon 1985:34) while social construction discourse seems to place its focus more in the social domain. Lynn Hoffman (1990:2) puts it this way: "I realized that social constructionists place far more emphasis on social interpretation and the inter subjective influence of language, family and culture, and much less on the operations of the nervous system as it feels its way along." Yet in spite of the differences, both discourses hold common ground – one of which is that in both cases the idea of an objectively knowable truth is banished (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:29).

Lynn Hoffman (1990:3) quotes Gergen as saying "that the move from constructivism to social constructionism is from an experiential to a social epistemology". Freedman and Combs (1996:27) explain it as follows: "There is a shift from focusing on how the individual person constructs a model of reality from his/her individual experience to focusing on how people interact with one another to construct, modify, and maintain what their society holds to be true, real and meaningful." It is this social epistemology that attracts me to the social construction discourse.

Furthermore it should be noted that the social construction discourse does not claim a privileged voice in the conversation of humankind, only a voice in a critical dialogue with others, and it emphasizes the importance of language as a social phenomenon, through which individuals as relational beings live (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:30-37). This is important for this research for two reasons. The first reason lies in the challenge of critically evaluating charismatic discourse that is often presented as if it is the only truth. A modernist approach to this type of research would not leave room for new outcomes and would in fact strengthen power imbalances. Secondly, it is important for research that

researchers and “researched” realize that change, “whether it be a change of belief, relationship, feeling or self-concept, involves a change in language” (Freedman & Combs 1996:29).

2.2.2 Language and social construction discourse

According to Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:31) dominant discourses within the social construction discourse include knowledge, language and the way in which meaning is constructed through conversations.

2.2.3 Language and the way meaning is constructed

From a modernist perspective there is a clear distinction between the objective and the subjective world and language is seen as an accurate link between these worlds. According to Freedman and Combs (1996:28) “we focus on how the language that we use constitutes our world and beliefs. It is in language that societies construct their views of reality.” Therefore language does not accurately represent an objective world, but reality is constituted in language. Seen from the social constructionist point of view, the emphasis is not so much on language as on discourse – “the various discourses in society have a constitutive or shaping effect on the personal discourse and lives of people” (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:33). Or in the words of White and Epston (1990:10):

In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them. Specific experiences of events of the past and present, and those that are predicted to occur in the future, must be connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account. This account can be referred to as a story or self-narrative.

Within this narrative or social constructionist worldview, and since reality cannot be known objectively, all we as pastoral therapists can do is to interpret experience. We have to be aware that no person's story can be captured by a single dominant narrative, but that some narratives become part of a person's life and shape it while others, although part of the person's life experience, never become part of a shaping narrative (White & Epston 1990:10).

Through the stories people have about their lives, they make sense and give meaning to their experience. Once this happens, this story becomes the dominant story and other stories and knowledge become marginalised and never told (White 1991:21-40). When dominant discourses/knowledge marginalise some voices whilst privileging others, power/knowledge relations are constituted (White & Epston 1990:19). Once again this is important for this research process, as it is precisely the use of Scripture, of "expert knowledge" for counselling, that results in abusive practices when this counselling is done outside of the counselee's context. Sevenhuijsen (1998: 140) says of this that if the specific needs of the receiver of the care are disregarded, "we run the risk of ending up in a position of moral arrogance".

Leaders in this research process have said that they often experienced they were forced into this "expert role" by parishioners who felt their pastors must have the answer. As a result they often counsel as if they do have all the answers in order to inspire faith in the parishioners and to avoid being seen as incompetent. It seems that in this case parishioners and pastors feel that knowledge (especially of the Bible) creates expectations that gives power to those in leadership. It is therefore necessary to look at discourses relating to power and knowledge.

2.2.4 Power and knowledge discourses

The work of Foucault plays an important role in the discourse of power relations and family therapy. According to Fillingham (1993:32) Foucault was a French intellectual who studied how people have been categorised as "normal" and "abnormal". In order to do so he examined madness, sexuality, illness, and criminal behaviour. To Foucault, language is an instrument of power, and people have power in a society in direct proportion to their

ability to participate in the various discourses that shape the society (Freedman & Combs 1996:38). For Foucault power is knowledge and knowledge is power.

Being suspicious of any universal truths, Foucault rejects any external position of certainty that is beyond history and society. According to Du Toit (1997:947), Foucault knows that “truth claims are always inescapably bound up with the epistemic drive for mastery and control, even (or especially) where it is masked behind a rhetoric of liberal – humanist values or emancipatory critique”.

Three themes run throughout Foucault's work, namely:

- How we understand or constitute bodies of knowledge, and what demarcates one subject from another.
- The relationship between power and knowledge.
- How we come to have knowledge of ourselves, and how we conduct our relationships with others (Townley 1994:1).

This is important for this specific research journey as the issue of power and the abuse of power is directly related to the questions that inspired this research project.

For Foucault power is not the focus, but rather relationships of power, which is associated with practices, techniques and procedures. Power is relational (Townley 1994:7). Power is also not to be seen only as negative and repressive, but is also positive and creative (Townley 1994:8). The fact that power is relational is important since it appears that the cycle of knowledge and power is operational in the charismatic church, and this power becomes abusive because of the particular knowledge the church proclaims (For examples of how power and knowledge lend to abuse, read 4.5).

White (quoted in Freedman & Combs 1996:39) writes that we tend to internalise the dominant narratives of our culture, easily believing that they speak the truth of our identities. In this way, when clients seek help from a narrative pastoral therapist, the deconstruction of the dominant discourse will help break power over the lives of people.

In the case of this research project, the challenge and focus was to investigate and deconstruct abusive discourses, which live in the charismatic context. This does not mean that there are not discourses of love, support, freedom, worship and renewal. For this reason a social construction approach was very useful.

Furthermore, I choose the social construction discourse because of the following emphasis:

- Social epistemology (Freedman & Combs 1996:27).
- That power/knowledge relations are acknowledged and deconstructed, contributing to the decentering of a meta-narrative regarding therapy/pastoral care, leadership and power (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:42).
- Transparency ensures ethical behaviour on the part of the therapist/ researcher (Anderson & Goolishian 1990:30).
- Local knowledges are validated (Freedman & Combs 1996:21). The relevance for this study is that, as a researcher I don't have to have all the answers, I don't have to be the expert but can adopt an approach of "not knowing" where the church leaders and members are considered the experts with regards to the research process (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). It also means that the leaders can be freed from the pressure of having to function as experts in relation to members.

In this way I privilege the knowledge of co-researchers, their experiences and voices. To me this is what it means to be an ethical pastoral therapist and researcher. The idea of the not knowing approach as put forward by Anderson and Goolishian (1992) links well with my preferred approach to research, namely, a qualitative approach (1.4.1).

Obviously this scientific philosophical position will also influence my choice of practical theology and pastoral therapeutic approaches.

2.3 Postmodern theology

Adopting a postmodern social constructionist view of reality has also influenced the way in which I view theology, in the sense that it is a “rediscovery of the value of human participation, a quest for wholeness and meaning, a perspective on the continuity between all levels of a multi-level reality”. (Herholdt 1998:218)

In terms of this research project this rediscovery of human participation encouraged discussions about God, between the participants and myself, that were not limited to academic perspectives but included the voices of church members via case studies. (See 4.3.2).

Herholdt (1998:223-224) senses a return to a contemporary literary role for the Bible, resulting in an epistemology as a different/new way of knowing. This new way of knowing includes personal experience, teaching that theological truth in a postmodern context is not fixed but that the onus lies with each generation to discover their own meaning (Herholdt 1998:224). This means that the experience of the church member now becomes valid and that truth becomes relative to the particular social context.

The focus on personal experience is very important for the research project as it lends power to the often-powerless church member. Leaders adopting a postmodern theology will result in a more even power balance and in my opinion will ensure accountability and in this way possibly avoid or decrease instances of spiritual abuse. A postmodern view of theology will necessarily result in a postmodern view of practical theology. This discussion follows:

2.3.1 Practical theology – A narrative hermeneutic approach

I prefer to use Gerkin's (1984) narrative hermeneutical approach in this study since this approach links closely with the narrative approach to counselling as put forward by Michael White and David Epston (1990) and Gene Combs and Jill Freedman (1996).

Gerkin (1986:22) uses the term narrative-hermeneutical practical theology, assuming two things as being of primary importance.

1. Meanings attached to situations involving humans and human actions in situations are *always* grounded in some *narrative* structure. They emerge from some story or cluster of stories as to why things happen and what they mean.
2. Questions concerning how those situations and humans in those situations are being interpreted are therefore of primary importance in understanding and responding to any situation involving humans. Interpretation not only precedes human action; human actions are themselves expressions of interpretations. The theory is that all human beings are in some sense rooted in, or find their deepest structural framework in a narrative or story of some kind (Gerkin 1986:26).

He adds furthermore that to be a Christian means for us to see ourselves, the world about us and human purposes within the interpretative vision provided by the metaphors and themes of the Christian story, and that reflection, wherever and whenever it occurs, always begins within an immediate social context (Gerkin 1986:37). Participative action research done in this practical theological context will create space for re-interpreting old interpretations of truth within the current social context of each church member seeking help from pastors. In effect this means that one size does not fit all. Interpretative truth cannot be applied to all people, across cultures and languages as if the context does not apply.

This last point is particularly relevant for this study as it was exactly this refusal to reinterpret truth that resulted in abusive practice. A new look at the concept of truth helped many participants to a move away from abusive counselling practice toward a more ethical caring, respectful approach (for an example highlighting this point, read 4.2.4).

The notion that practical theological thinking consists in the fusion of horizons of meaning implies not only utmost respect for the horizon embodied in the Christian story, but also respect for other horizons, other ways of seeing the world and its human activity (Gerkin 1986:62,63). Gerkin continues to say that respect includes respecting not only different points of view, but also cultures and language metaphors. During the research process I often pondered on the idea of respect or lack of respect. From clients in my private practice as well as other researchers (Troskie 2003), I have heard stories of non-respectful practices by pastors. I have also experienced members/clients treating themselves in a non-respectful way by not wanting to take responsibility for their own lives, preferring the counsellor/pastor to be the expert.

Respecting others and ourselves include respecting other ideas that differ from ours, and this seems to be a fundamental problem experienced by both leaders in the charismatic church and its members (see 4.4). Since one of the aims (1.3) was to challenge disrespectful practices, the choice of a narrative hermeneutic approach to practical theology seemed natural.

Whilst I have strong preferences to both the contextual as well as the narrative hermeneutic approach to practical theology, I choose for this research journey to position myself with the narrative hermeneutic approach because this approach allows room for and respects all people regardless of culture, language or religion. Local knowledge is seen as valid – even each individual's subjective experience and interpretation of God and the world in which he/she lives. Therefore, to bring about change in the situation in which the person seeking help experiences, the helper/therapist/counsellor begins with the client's own meanings and understanding of his/her experience. Within this approach it is possible to go into discussion with other discourses, theologies and experiences, and in this way new interpretations, ideas and relationships can be established, making change possible.

This is important for this study because if leaders can begin any counselling process by accepting that each church member has his/her own context and meanings of any given situation, they will not proceed with counselling as if one solution fits all problems, and they

will be less inclined to ascribe problems to sin. For an example of how discourse relating to sin can become abusive, please read (4.3) a case study entitled, sex and a wheelchair. Discussions around this sexual topic were very sensitive and the participants concerned did not feel free to allow me to write about them. Perhaps it would be sufficient to say that they subscribed to an approach to counselling as put forward by Adams (1973). The nouthetic approach as put forward by Adams (1973) ascribes all of life's problems to either sin in the life of the believer or demonic activity. Belief in this discourse made it difficult for my clients to look for alternatives that could lead to a more preferred life-style.

From discussions with both leaders and members an approach that allows for difference in context and opinion would result in a more respectful counselling practice.

One of the reasons why I include Gerkin's approach to pastoral care as one of my preferred approaches for this research journey is due to his focus on pastors or church leaders' roles as interpreters. This discussion follows.

2.4 Pastoral care and therapy – A narrative hermeneutic approach

The computer makes us fantastically more able to calculate and analyse; it does not help us to meditate. We have instruments to enable us to see everything from the nebulae to the neutron – everything, except ourselves. We have immeasurably extended our gift of sight, but not of insight. For that we have the same equipment as the eighth-century prophets. Potentially the same, but actually for poorer, for while we have been so busy extending one aspect of the knowing and telling self, we have allowed other aspects to atrophy. We have built ourselves up into powerful transmitting stations, but as receiving sets we are feeble.

Taylor (Reference unknown)

If, as Taylor points out in the quote above, we have neglected in the developing of our receiving sets, and I believe that it is the case, it implies that we will have neglected in developing our listening skills. In order to interpret and re-interpret, a role Gerkin (1986)

ascribes to pastors, they will need especially well-developed receiving sets. How can they interpret if they cannot hear?

According to Gerkin (1986:109) every meeting between the pastor and parishioner, whether a parish meeting, hospital visitation or telephone conversations, all provide occasion for interpretative pastoral care. Pastoral counsellors are "more than anything else, listeners to and interpreters of stories" (Gerkin 1984:26) and the interpretative stories are embedded in a language world that the teller of the story takes for granted. To this end Gerkin admonishes pastoral workers:

To listen to stories with an effort to understand means to listen first as a stranger who does not yet fully know the language, the nuanced meaning of the other as his or her story is being told. Needless to say, one of the first lessons of life on the boundary is that it is important to avoid, at all costs, the temptation to stereotype or take for granted.

(Gerkin 1984:27)

In addition to the role of interpreter, Gerkin (1986:11-127) discerns a variety of tasks for which the pastoral worker is primarily responsible.

- Issues of personhood and life cycle.
- Issues of relational responsibility and interpersonal conflict.
- Issues of vocation and work in the world.
- Issues of corporate responsibility, social justice, peace and the future of humankind.

Since the main focus of this research on pastoral care will be on narrative pastoral therapy (see 2.4.2), I will only highlight one aspect of Gerkin's approach namely: Issues of corporate responsibility, social justice, peace and the future of humankind.

The reason I include this aspect has to do with the focus on structures in organisations, and since one of the questions of this research has to do with how the structure of the charismatic church may influence unethical or non respectful practice, it seems prudent just to mention it briefly.

2.4.1 Church structure and respectful practice

Many of the daily activities that people are involved in, are corporate activities. These corporate activities are made up of small and larger groups of individuals working together. These groups are then corporately responsible for implementing decisions made by the group. Often decisions are made which effect those not in the group. Yet, according to Gerkin (1986:119), the larger the group, the less the individual person experiences responsibility for group actions. Gerkin (1986:119) gives this example:

If the company decides to open a factory in Thailand in order to exploit the country's cheap labour, the individual employee, whether a lower-level factory worker or an upper-level management executive, experiences the decision as somehow removed from individual responsibility.

The implication of this removal of individual responsibility for this research project is clear. Charismatic churches are growing very quickly and some in South Africa and worldwide have thousands of members. Gerkin's (1986:119) statement in the previous paragraph implies that due to its size, it would be difficult for individuals to take responsibility for solving a problem like abusive practice. During this research we realised that the larger churches with large pastoral leadership teams do battle to take a stand on ethical issues. This could be due to issues of corporate responsibility as suggested by Gerkin (1986) but could also be due to the hierarchical structure of many charismatic churches. Please refer to 4.5.1 for an illustration of how the structure of the leadership can affect a pastor's ability to take individual responsibility.

Welch (1990:157) views "liberation (as) a process in which oppressive groups acknowledge their responsibility for structures of domination and name the forces that lead to repentance and conversion". In the light of the above I was glad that during the course of this research project, we, the research participants, talked about structure in the charismatic church in order to understand the role church structure played in the perpetuation of abuse (See 4.4).

Concerning pastoral care and therapy, I choose for a narrative pastoral therapeutic approach. This approach envelops the narrative hermeneutical approach to pastoral care and counselling by Gerkin (1984, 1986) and White and Epston's narrative therapy (1990).

2.4.2 Narrative pastoral care and therapy

For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love in narrative. In order to live, we make up stories about ourselves and other, about the personal as well as the social past and future (Gerkin 1986:29).

According to Gerkin (1997:112) pastoral care is located in the centre of the dialogue between the Christian story and life stories. This suggests that its most fundamental caring purpose is to facilitate the process of connecting life stories to the Christian story and vice versa. Based on this definition and within the narrative hermeneutical approach, care and therapy would take on the form of dialogue between a pastoral therapist and a believer.

The narrative approach to therapy as put forward by White and Epston (1990) suggests a therapeutic approach that can be joined with Gerkin's narrative pastoral ideas. Although the narrative approach to therapy (White & Epston 1990) did not evolve from within the field of theology, it is the closest fit in terms of my practical theological epistemology. I prefer the narrative approach to therapy, because within this framework I was able to give the participants an opportunity to tell the narratives within the context of their own peculiar language and cultural contexts, and I do not have to be the "expert" of their lives. I therefore played the role of an "interpretative guide" (Gerkin 1997:114). Narrative

therapy (White & Epston 1990:83) takes the following form:

- It privileges the person's lived experience.
- Encourages a perception of a changing world through the plotting or linking of lived experience through the temporal dimension.
- Invokes the subjunctive mood in the triggering of presuppositions, the establishment of implicit meaning, and in the generation of multiple perspectives.
- Encourages polysemy (multiplicity) and use of ordinary poetic picturesque language in the description of experience and in the endeavour to construct new stories.
- Invites a reflective posture and an appreciation of one's participation in interpretative acts.
- Encourages a sense of authorship and re-authorship of one's life and relationships in the telling and the re-telling of one's story.
- Acknowledges that one's stories are co-produced and endeavours to establish conditions under which the "subject" becomes the privileged author.
- Consistently inserts pronouns "I" and "you" in the description of events.

Doing research in light of this approach freed me as researcher and pastoral therapist from having to be the expert. It allowed me to listen to the participants in a way where I could take a step back and create space for meaning as experienced by the participants, instead of having to interpret and provide final meaning. More importantly this approach resulted in empowerment in that it encouraged a sense of ownership. The use of this approach allowed for the involvement of researcher and participants, resulting in a multi-voiced text.

This implies that when persons seek help in the narrative context, an acceptable outcome would be "the identification or generation of alternative stories that enable them to perform new meanings, bringing with them desired possibilities – new meanings that persons will experience as more helpful, satisfying and open-minded" (White & Epston 1990:15).

2.5 Conclusion

The research topic and aims as identified in chapter 1 called for an approach that would be sensitive, acknowledging the role that language, context and power play in relationships. It also called for an approach that would facilitate a reinterpretation of knowledge whilst privileging local knowledge. All these aspects were catered for within a postmodern, social construction approach, fitting easily with the postmodern approaches to theology.

CHAPTER 3 – BUT LIFE OUGHT TO WORK

3.1 Introduction

I'm drowning
in my own lake of despair.
I'm choking.
My hands wrapped around my neck.
I'm dying.
Quickly my soul leaves, slowly my
body withers.
It isn't suicide,
I consider it homicide.
The world you created has led to my death.

(Scott 2000:9)

A few days before the Columbine High School shootings, a teenager whose name will always be associated with the tragedy wrote this poem. Had the poem been written by one of the shooters we would have easily concluded that the author was troubled and in need of help. However, it was written by a 17-year-old girl who, by all reports, seemed well adjusted and normal. The problem, it seems, is our definition of what is normal. Rachel Joy Scott's poem challenges our unrealistic ideas of what is normal and abnormal. Deep down we believe that normal people are untroubled, experiencing no real pain. Basically they're doing great.

From participants in the charismatic church I hear that they feel called to use spiritual resources to improve the quality of people's internal lives. The Bible is used as a map to show people how to please God. If we know that we please God we can be sure of his blessing, and if we are blessed, *life is good*. Life is as it should be ... normal.

Yancey (2000: 21) quotes a friend whom he does not name as saying the following:

I have no trouble believing God is good. My question is more, What good is He? I heard a while back that Billy Graham's daughter was undergoing marriage problems, so the Grahams and the in-laws all flew to Europe to meet with them and pray for the couple. They ended up getting divorced anyway. If Billy Graham's prayers don't get answered, what's the use of my praying? I look at my life, health problems, my own daughter's struggles, my marriage. I cry out to God for help, and it's hard to know just how He answers. Really what can we count on God for?

In our daily lives we are all in relationship with other people, be it husband/wife, teacher/preacher, friend, brother/sister and many more, and in all these relationships we have an idea of what we can expect in the relationship. What can they count on us for, and what can we count on them for.

In my own personal experience, as well as from stories with clients in private pastoral practice, I know that the church teaches us that we can count on God to keep his promises. The churches teaches very specifically what God promises and what the conditions are, leaving one with the idea that having met Gods prescribed requirements and conditions, we can expect Him to come through for us, in any time of need.

Sadly I know too many born-again Christians, desperately trying to do all that is required, and who remain poor, struggling financially, emotionally and most especially spiritually. Life does not always work out. Sometimes, very often actually in spite of our relationship with God, we are no better off. The charismatic church teaches that love without action is worthless, and therefore, even if unconsciously, we also ascribe this to God. If He loves me, He will do something about my situation, after all, He did it for biblical characters on many occasions. In addition our church teaches that it is God's will that we be healthy, prosperous and successful. If we do our part, God will do His.

This is precisely where abuse takes place. If, as the church teaches, God wants good things for us, but despite our best efforts our lives stay in a mess, then the fault must lie with us. It can never be God's fault, and I have yet to see a spiritual leader claiming

unchanged circumstances as his/her fault. This creates a big problem resulting in broken people who seemingly cannot depend on God or leaders for answers or change and this plunges many a Christian in a bottomless pit of spiritual despair.

In agreement with Crabb (2001: 144) I have concluded as a result of this research that whilst it is hard to hear, it is important to know that “God is not committed to supporting our ministries, to preventing our divorces, to preserving our health, to straightening out our kids, to providing a livable income ...”. This however is exactly the opposite of what most charismatic churches teach.

For the remainder of this chapter I will briefly discuss some teachings of the charismatic church, and how an incorrect application of these teachings can and does lead to abuse. The specific teachings/doctrines were selected by the participants, as the particular discourses that may most easily lead to abusive practice, whether deliberate or not. Please bear in mind that the doctrines are discussed very briefly and is meant only as an introduction and to create a context in which the reader may understand the research as described in chapter 4.

3.2 How things should be versus how things are

During the many research conversations that the research participants engaged in, talking about problems in the charismatic context, we found ourselves continually moving between how things should be and how things are. This led to many discussions on how things should be, and was later named charismatic ideals. Not all of our ideals will be discussed here, only a few in order to illustrate how problems can occur when “the ideal” is held up as the example of how things are, especially when people’s lived experience does not match the ideal. During our research journey we found that these ideals as held up by the church are very often the cause of people losing their voice. Please refer to chapter 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 for an explanation of how voices are silenced.

3.2.1 The tongue – what you say is what you get!

Since the topic of this research regards the discursive practices in charismatic contexts, it seems prudent to look at discourses in this context with regard to how we should speak, and what we should speak. It is ironic in many ways that the focus on what and how believers should speak in the charismatic context has exactly the opposite effect. Instead of encouraging dialogue it often results in silence – the silence of the very people that leaders in the charismatic context are sincerely trying to help. I will try to highlight some of the particularly relevant areas as we go along. From the scriptures quoted it will become clear how important the tongue is in the charismatic context, bearing in mind that the tongue (and the belief of speaking in tongues) is the defining difference between charismatic Christians and mainline churches.

I will use as a source for this topic, a book written by Derek Prince (1986) called *Does your tongue need healing?*

3.2.1.1 Death or life

Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep
your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.

Psalm 34:11-13 (NIV)

By implication says Prince (1986:7) that “life” and “many good days” go hand in hand with the fear of the Lord. And, says the psalmist, the fear of the Lord, practically speaking, begins with the tongue. Other scriptures include Proverbs 13:3; Proverbs 21:23; Proverbs 15:4.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it
will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 18:21 (NAS)

For the charismatic believer the alternatives are clear – either death or life! – The power lies in the tongue, in the way we speak and the language we use. From a social constructionist position with its emphasis on language, this view is very exciting. From this position change begins with the language we use. Charismatic Christians already know this truth hence the teaching to guard our lips. Closely connected to this is the idea that our words determine our destinies.

3.2.1.2 Words determine destiny

Derek Prince uses an example from Numbers chapters 13 and 14. The Israelites had come out of Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land. God told Moses to send twelve spies ahead to explore the land. One leader was chosen from each of the twelve tribes. They spent four days walking through the land and then returned to give their report, found in Numbers 13:26-28:

And they (the twelve spies) went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran to Kadesh, and brought back word to them and they said, we came unto the land where thou hast sent us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great, and moreover we saw the children of Anak (the giants) there. (K.J.V).

Charismatic Christians are taught to receive God's promises at face value and not to add to that. Adding would be considered a negative attitude.

In Numbers 13:30-31 we read that two of the spies refused to go along with the negative attitude of the other ten spies. We read this:

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, we are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.

According to the charismatic interpretation each group got exactly what they said. Each group's destiny was settled by their words. By his positive confession, Caleb settled his destiny for the positive. According to charismatic discourse, destinies are settled according to the way we speak.

There are many other scriptural examples of how speech and our tongues affect our lives, which will not be discussed here, since the idea of this chapter is to introduce the reader to introductory concepts or discourses in the charismatic church. The lack of depth should not be used in the argument that charismatic Christians use one or two verses to build a doctrine. The reader is asked to accept this study as one of limited scope, of which one of the downsides is inability to fully look at and explain the origins of beliefs and discourses.

Many of the problems I have encountered in private practice when working with charismatic believers, have its roots in this teaching. It is extremely difficult for believers in this context to tell their story, especially if their lived experience does not line up with correct speech patterns. An example could include a believer seeking counselling after having been told that they have a terminal illness. Two discourses collide and the person is in a crisis that the average pastor does not seem able to cope with. The medical discourse with its death sentence and the discourse of divine healing are on opposite ends of the spectrum with the believer in the middle. Having been prayed for in the past and have other illnesses not healed, how can the charismatic believer speak positively, believing God for healing, whilst feeling the symptoms in the body.

The teachings of the charismatic church bring hope for many people, where before they had none, but when disappointed and finding that God did not meet their needs as taught and expected, they feel betrayed, and not only lose voice but many times lose faith. As Crabb (2001:114) put it:

When God does so little about things that matter so much to me, I have no categories for understanding God's statement that He loves me. I know Calvary is God's supreme expression of His love. I'm grateful that my sins are forgiven and I'm going to heaven. And I know all these troubles are somehow useful for good purposes, maybe necessary for making me a more godly person. But I can't get past the thought that real love wouldn't let me suffer like this.

It is at this point that a silencing of voice often occurs. Not wishing to speak negatively, the believers withdraw and do not speak. He/she loses voice at a time when it is most critical for them to be able to voice concerns and fears. On this point verses such as "perfect love casts out all fear" are often quoted enforcing the believer's inability to voice their needs/doubts/ fears.

A discussion of divine healing follows:

3.3 Divine healing

The content of point 3.3 has been taken from a sermon preached by Kenneth Copeland and printed in a booklet called *Welcome to the family* (2001:29-39). Most of what is written here is attributed directly to Kenneth Copeland and where other voices are added, the reference will be made.

3.3.1 How to pray for healing

Copeland (2001:13) says the following:

Healing belongs to you. Jesus purchased it by going to the cross.
You have just as much right to be healed as you do to be saved and
filled with the Holy Spirit.

At this very point I have a problem. Many clients coming for pastoral counselling in my private practice crash spiritually because of teachings such as these. If the right to be healed is put on the same level as that of salvation, then what happens if a believer is not healed? The conclusion that many of my clients come to is that they are therefore also not saved, and this for me is where discourse becomes abusive. I have actually worked with people in a deep personal faith crisis due to counsel received based on this teaching and similar teachings. Yancey (2000:31) says of this: "The same evangelical tradition that spurs us on to greater intimacy, also invites abuse." He continues (2000:32): "Do we, like billboards for Pepsi, fan a thirst we cannot quench?" Is our theology not perhaps abusive? Do leaders not create expectations that are often not met, in an effort to inspire faith?

For example, in our church we often sing songs like "I want to know you more, I want to see your face, I want to touch you Lord". Nowhere in the Bible do I find promises that we will touch God, or see his face, at least not in our life time on earth. It is not that I think I have all the answers, quite the opposite. I have more questions now than before the research journey began, but like Frederick Buechner (1973:14), I offer the perspective of an individual pilgrim as "one who is on the way, though not necessarily very far along it, and who has at least some dim and half-baked idea of who to thank".

According to Matthew 8:17 Jesus 'took our infirmities and bore our sickness'. He bore them in His own body so that you and I would not have to. We are redeemed from sickness and disease. (Galatians 3:13-14) Jesus bore a curse so that we could receive a blessing. What is the blessing of Abraham? Read Genesis 17:1-7.

(Copeland 2001:18)

The covenant God made with Abraham was sealed with the blood of Jesus. According to Galatians 3:29, when you belong to Jesus Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heir according to promise. You are an heir to the blessing that God gave to Abraham. This blessing, found in Deuteronomy 28, covers every area of your existence: spirit, soul, body, financially and socially.

One of the blessings in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 is physical healing. You have the right to live free from sickness and disease. In 1 Peter 2:24 Peter said of Jesus, "Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed." The stripes dealt on Jesus's back by the Roman soldiers stood for your healing. By those stripes, you were healed. Past tense. You were healed 2000 years ago, but have to receive it by faith today. Healing is part of your inheritance, part of the blessing of Abraham, but in order to receive your inheritance you have to believe it for yourself and accept it as a reality in your own life.

It is a very simple thing to pray for healing. You just say: Father, I am your child. I am filled with your Spirit. I believe that Jesus bore my sickness and carried my diseases, and I believe that by his stripes I was healed 2000 years ago. Right now, I accept that fact by faith and I believe that I am healed now, in the name of Jesus.

As a child of God, you have the right to command Satan to leave your life. He has no right to lay sickness or disease on your body, because Jesus bore all sickness and disease on his own body. For Satan to put any of that on you would be a miscarriage of justice. You

are God's property and Satan is a trespasser. He has no right to touch your spirit, your soul and your body.

All the books on healing – including the New Testament – emphasize the role that faith plays in healing. Francis Mc Nutt (1980:99) says of this: “Jesus asks of us the strongest kind of faith – a faith that admits of no doubt or hesitation.” Adds Bosworth (1973:106): “To the extent that we base faith on our improvement, or are affected by our symptoms, or by what we see or feel instead of by the word of God alone, just to that extent ours is not real faith.”.

Once again I would ask the reader to pause and reflect with me the profoundness of the above statement by Bosworth. He says if we are trusting God, we have to believe in spite of feeling the symptoms of disease in one's body, in spite of having the clerk of the court come and repossess all your furniture, due to unpaid debt – and to keep believing and confessing it.

When someone has been prayed for to receive healing of depression (for example), it can be expected that next time that person is in a service, he/she may be called to testify. Some are genuinely healed (I am not questioning God's ability to heal or deliver), but for those that are not, very few have the courage to admit no change in symptoms. The brave few may do so a few times, and then simply withdraw, as Bosworth (1973:106) implies – if it doesn't get better, the faith is not real!

3.4 Faith

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1 N.I.V.)

3.4.1 Seed faith

In the beginning (Genesis 8:22) God said that as long as the earth remains, there will be “seedtime and harvest”. Paul refers to the eternal law of sowing and reaping in Galatians 6:7. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked – for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap also”. Jesus also likened faith to a seed being planted (Matthew 17:20).

Oral Roberts (1970:6) argues that if you have faith as a seed or if your believing becomes seed faith, no matter how small, that faith will meet needs and problems that appear like mountains before you. In his book, *Miracle of seed-faith* (1970), he explains three key principles of seed faith namely:

- God is your source
- Give that it may be given to you
- The law of sowing and reaping

To these principles he adds: “Remember, only what you give, can God multiply back. If you give nothing, and even if God were to multiply it, it would still be nothing!” (Roberts 1970:27). Please refer to Susan’s story in chapter 1.2.

Kenneth Hagin (1991:14) adds to this argument when he encourages believers to trust God’s word and not their senses:

I believe what the Bible says, not what I see and hear. My faith is not in what I can see and hear. My faith is based on what God says. You see, when we develop our faith to the place where we believe what the word says regardless of our circumstances and physical symptoms, then we are believing the right thing, and that’s what brings results.

In my own private practice I have had many believers come for counselling because their faith did not seem strong enough. Whether they believed God for a broken marriage, healing or finances, sometimes their circumstances did not change. Hagin says of this, (1991:15) that there is a difference between hope and faith. “Faith is laying hold of the unseen realm of hope and bringing it into the realm of reality.”. He adds that too many times people simply hope they will receive – and not really believe it and therefore they do not receive. The formula for faith that pleases God, he says, is:

- Have a word for what you desire to receive from God
- Believe God’s word
- Consider not the contradictory circumstances
- Give praise to God for the answer.

How you speak (see previous section on the tongue 3.2.1.1 & 3.2.1.2), is directly tied to putting your faith in action. This is why charismatic Christians suffering from disease will continually confess to being healed in spite of their unchanged circumstances. The reader should please note that although these ideals are discussed separately, they operate together in practice. For example, we could add “praise” to our list of ideals, but this is connected to the tongue and also being led of the Spirit, and also faith and so on.

Pastors that were part of the research said the following: “How then can we inspire/teach faith without creating doubt? If we are to be transparent about our own doubts and fears, our people will not be pointed to faith but to fear.”.

Yancey (2000: 41) offers an interesting alternative. He says: “Doubt is the skeleton in the closet of faith, and I know no better way to treat a skeleton than to bring it out into the open and expose it for what it is – not something to hide and fear, but a hard structure on which living tissue may grow.” Doubt always coexists with faith, for in the presence of certainty, who would need faith at all?

The discussion on faith is in no way complete. As with the rest of this chapter, the ideas reflected here are merely introductory. A short discussion on the gifts of the Holy Spirit follows in order to provide a framework within which to understand the research.

3.5 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Charismatic believers believe in the following supernatural gifts that are received not at salvation but at a separate baptism of the Holy Spirit after conversion. McCauley (1992:32) lists nine gifts of the Holy Spirit according to 1 Corinthians 12. These gifts are:

- Word of wisdom
- Word of knowledge
- Discerning spirits
- Faith
- Working of miracles
- Gifts of healing
- Prophecy
- Gift of unknown tongues
- Gift of interpretation of tongues

These gifts are divided into three categories. See diagram below.

Diagram: Nine gifts of the Holy Spirit



McCauley (1992:32) says there are three ingredients necessary for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to operate, namely:

- Unity
- Love
- Desire for them

Therefore it is clear that the gifts fall into categories of revelation gifts, power gifts and inspiration gifts. For better understanding of the gifts of the Spirit and how they operate, read Ray McCauley's (1992) book, *The gifts of the Holy Spirit*, and a book by Harold Horton (1975), *The gifts of the Spirit*. For the purpose of this study I will briefly discuss the gift of prophecy and what we in the charismatic church believe about this gift. The reason why the participants included the gift of prophecy into the ideals to be deconstructed has to do with its particular propensity to abusive practice. However, it should be noted that all supernatural gifts lend themselves to the practice of abuse. That does not mean that we should prevent prophecy; just that we should be on our guard, and as the Bible puts it, test all things.

3.6 Prophecy

3.6.1 What is prophecy?

Prophecy in its simplest form is divinely inspired and anointed utterance. It is entirely supernatural. Speaking in tongues is a supernatural utterance in an unknown language; prophecy is a supernatural utterance in a known language. Says Horton (1975:159): "It is a manifestation of the Spirit of God, and not of the human mind. It has no more to do with human powers of thought and reasoning than walking on water has to do with human powers of equilibrium. It is a miracle."

Prophecy will always accomplish three things, says McCauley (1992:53).

- It will edify ... or build up.
- It will exhort ... or encourage.
- It will comfort ... or console (1 Corinthians 14:5) that the church may receive edification.

McCauley (1992:53) cautions believers concerning prophecy: "The devil would try to counterfeit that which God is doing and it is essential that none of us is led into error by false doctrine." Horton (1975:159) describes this danger as:

Such a lovely gift we may be sure will provide much occasion for the cunning manipulations of the enemy, since he cannot dam so rich a stream ... he will divert it or violate it or slander it or exalt it, or in some other way reduce its authority or attractiveness or usefulness or appeal.

The five basic guidelines to test prophecy, according to McCauley (1992:56), are:

- True prophecy must centre on Jesus Christ
- True prophecy must come to pass
- True prophecy never brings you into bondage
- True prophecy must agree with scriptures
- True prophecy can be judged by its fruits

I am in full agreement with McCauley in terms of what constitutes true prophecy. My problem lies in his point that true prophecy always comes to pass. How is it possible to test this? People in the charismatic church, basing crucial decisions in their lives – about whom to marry, where to work, etc. – only on the word of a prophet, are often bitterly disappointed. Chapter 4 will share with the reader some of the hurt of both leader and member, caused by prophecy and the power of prophecy in the life of the charismatic believer.

McCauley (1992) adds that there are three possible sources of inspiration namely:

- The spirit of God
- The spirit of man
- An evil spirit

The reason why it is important to take note of this, is the following: Every time I have tried to discuss abusive practice relating to prophecy with leaders, I have been told that the prophecy must have been inspired by an evil spirit or man's own spirit as opposed to the Spirit of God, hence the abuse. Whilst this is most certainly true, the point I tried to make is that regardless of the spirit doing the inspiring, this practice can lead to abuse. Safeguards have to be put in place to avoid abuse.

3.7 A context for ideals to become abusive

In one of my therapeutic discussions with Thalita, a counselling pastor at a local assembly, she explained that there is a potential for abuse to take place in any church fellowship – especially with regards to the supernatural.

When leaders in the church have areas of undealt hurt, or are performance orientated, they tend to project a failure of healing taking place onto the person being prayed for. Many leaders see, believe and teach the ideal, but they forget that God is sovereign.

The church (due to silencing and power relations – see chapter 2) often becomes a place of pretence and therefore a place without hope. “When brokenness is disdained, where the real story is never told, the power of God is not felt. Where brokenness is invited and received with grace, the gospel comes alive with hope” (Crabb 2001: 66).

3.8 Conclusion

Most of the discussions with church leaders in chapter 4 focus on abuse taking place in the areas of the charismatic church ideals as discussed in chapter 3. There are, however, a few exceptions that were not discussed in chapter 3, as with one of the case studies I presented to the leaders, regarding the practice of labelling in charismatic churches (for example the Jezebel Spirits). However, charismatic Christians will not call it labelling, we call it discernment.

Chapter 4 will begin with a literature study and a discussion of abuse throughout church history and will then follow to include testimonies from abusers (see 4.5) and survivors (see 4.3) of abuse in the charismatic context. It will include themes like the abuse of leaders in the church and conclude with a discussion with an outsider witness.

CHAPTER 4: CARE NOT CURE

4.1 Introduction

For every gracious, kind-spirited, forgiving Christian, I can point to a proud, mean-spirited, judgmental one. In my own experience, those who strive the hardest, and believe the most fervently are sometimes the least attractive persons. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they get caught up in competition and end up self-righteous rather than righteous ... how do I resolve the tension between the ideas of the gospel and the actuality of those who profess it?

(Yancey 2001:116)

In chapter 3, I discussed some of the charismatic church ideals, and the question could be asked ... how is it possible for an ideal to become a tool for abuse? This chapter tries to find answers to questions like the one above. The research participants and I co-created new meanings and interpretations of previously taken-for-granted knowledges, as we deliberately set out to deconstruct what we believe and what we do, and to re-evaluate its usefulness in new contexts.

Chapter 4 is the heart of this research journey. A journey that some participants described as follows: Peter describes it as "the most daunting, perilous yet liberating journey of my life". John follows with his description as "difficult but necessary". Hendrik experienced it as "constructive" whereas Marie confessed it to be an "eye opener". I found this journey to be both energizing and depressing, enlightening whilst most times creating tremendous anxiety. To say it was a difficult journey seems to be an understatement. Yet the measures of newly found meanings generated for my own personal faith walk made it worth the while.

For the remainder of chapter 4 I will attempt to recreate for the reader the multi-layered and multi-storied treasure that resulted. Please note that due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, much of the "said" remains yet "unsaid" in this text. In order to make

more sense of the journey that had many, many detours, I decided to place the retelling within the following units of meaning.

- Does abuse in fact happen in the charismatic church context? (4.2)
- Testimonies from abusers and survivors (4.3)
- Resonating and reflecting with leaders on the testimonies from survivors (4.4)
- A letter from an abuser (4.5)
- An outsider witness reflects with participants (4.6)

4.2 Abuse in the charismatic church context

The most difficult part of this research journey was for us, the participants to get to that place where we could say, Yes, it is possible for abuse to take place in our context, and yes, at times we are all and have all been responsible for the abuse. At the beginning of this research journey many original participants decided to withdraw from the research due to the fact that they were unwilling or unable to even discuss this possibility.

Du Pont (1997:24) explains why this is so difficult when he says:

An inherent part of the problem with spiritual abuse is that, we are hesitant about having negative thoughts towards church leaders that we believe in. Usually, those who are involved in abusive churches are somewhat trapped because of isolation. They are afraid to think out loud, or ask questions regarding any concerns they may have, for fear of being viewed as critical or divisive. This isolation, much like the sexual abuse of children, robs one of the ability to put the picture into true focus. Instead, a hazy religious lens tainted by guilt, manipulation and shame, dulls our understanding.

I already knew as a result of previous participants' withdrawal from the project (see 1.6.4) that the topic was highly sensitive. Reading Du Pont's explanation (1997:24) helped me understand some of their fears and concerns. It also helped that I am a member of a charismatic church, and thereby have first hand experience of the context.

I realised it was going to take extra care to work and ask questions about the topic of spiritual abuse in the charismatic church context.

In addition to my pastoral work, I am also a teacher at a local high school. During my training year to qualify professionally as a teacher, I came across literature regarding the support of learners with learning disabilities. The Russian psychologist Vygotsky criticizes Piaget's constructivist theories relating to cognitive development preferring a mediational point of view (Vygotsky 1962:IX). Vygotsky's principles include the concept of scaffolding as mediation, and the instructional method known as reciprocal teaching (Vygotsky 1978:86-91). These theories of Vygotsky were later expanded by Feuerstein, an educationist, who had also come to believe (like myself) that meaning is socially constructed. According to Feuerstein, "learning and cognitive development are affected by the interactions that an individual has with others that are more skilled and knowledgeable" (Education professional studies, Vista study guide (EPS 5502:6).

It occurred to me that I would have to support the participants in the same way as I would support a child with a learning disability. I felt they would need support in their efforts to name their fears and to be free to participate in the discussions that followed. Vygotsky (1986, 1978, 1997) and White's (2003) ideas regarding mediation and scaffolding began to take on new meaning for me, and suggested a framework of support for the participants.

The following scaffolding/support strategies evolved:

- Literature search for experience far (as opposed to experience near) stories relating to spiritual abuse and "re-membering" conversations (read 4.2).
- Case studies from former clients who gave me permission to share their stories. These case studies brought the topic a little closer to home, as all the participants in the case studies were members of a charismatic church (read 4.3).
- Allowing leaders to talk of their own experiences of abuse (read 4.4).

I decided to begin the process with the focus off the here and now and began with experience-far stories and assigned each participant reading material from periods out of church history. I did this to take the initial focus off each individual, thereby creating a support mechanism.

This mechanism resulted in courage to look at leaders in our church history and critically evaluate the church in terms of the abuse it perpetuated. This process resulted in enabling participants to later take a close look at themselves.

In addition to these experience-far stories via a literature search, and in line with narrative therapy ideas (Morgan 2000:77-84), I tried to engage in "re-membering" conversations with each participant. I felt that if participants could "member" leaders during their literature search, they might feel more supported and understood in their stand against all abusive practices. According to Morgan (2000:77) "re-membering" conversations involve the deliberate choosing of life club members. :

When people are faced with a problem, they often experience isolation and disconnection from important relationships. The dominant story may be successful in minimizing or making invisible certain partnerships or histories in the person's life. Re-membering conversations are intended to re-dress this and powerfully incorporate and evaluate significant people's contribution in the lives of those consulting the therapist.

(Morgan 2000:77)

Since Du Pont (1997:24) already explained that spiritual abuse by its nature isolates and traps, I wanted to avoid this experience at all cost. I felt that leaders throughout church history, who stood against abuse, might be useful agents in supporting the participants in their own stand against abuse. I felt this to be true especially in the light of the secrecy and fear experienced by the research participants. Morgan (2000:77) includes people alive and those no longer living, as possible candidates for "life club membership". Leaders from history therefore became supporters to participants and were "membered" because they presented no risk for exposure.

This type of scaffolding became a very necessary part of the process, as the biggest problem relating to the discussions on spiritual abuse is that people are hesitant about having any negative thoughts about their leaders (please note that due to the hierarchical structure of the charismatic church, some participants were junior and some senior pastors). This is especially true in the charismatic context where we are taught not to touch the Lord's anointed, a principle taken from David's refusal to harm king Saul.

In trying to get to the place where we could acknowledge the part we play in abuse, specifically in the church, I felt it necessary to engage in conversations which would richly describe the church's alternative story, namely the story of abuse, and from there work to the individual and then back to the community. Each participant/couple chose a time in history or a specific event or person to research.

Thalita reported back her findings on abuse perpetuated by the church during the Second World War. Hendrik and Marie reflected on the life of Martin Luther King Junior and the abuse he suffered at the hands of the church. Peter and Elana looked at the life of Ghandi, whilst John and Mary decided upon Henri Nouwen. As one of the eight participants and since I was on a personal level battling with the issue of grace and legalism, I chose to delve into the writings of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky. All of us, with the exception of Thalita, found our research effort beginning in a book by Phillip Yancey (2001) called *Soul survivor*. For any leader or member trapped in spiritually abusive cycles, this book is a must.

My journey in search of grace is reported separately under the heading "Personal faith reflections" in chapter 5. What follows is a summary of each participant's story as they tell of their literature research journey and "re-membling" conversations with me as a co-researcher.

4.2.1 Thalita's journey towards awareness

I began my research by reading the few history books I had at home, but honestly found it quite boring albeit horrific. I kept thinking, so what does this have to do with me, why am I doing this anyway? During one of my one-on-one discussions with Esty, she suggested that I move from the clinical review to a more personal one. She suggested biographies and a few movies, which she felt would tell the story on a different level. For some time I resisted the idea as I find it difficult to cope with the emotions when confronted with real life stories as portrayed in books or movies.

However, once I started on this course of action, it all but consumed me. I hated every moment, but could not pull myself away.

Of course I had read books and seen movies relating to the Second World War before (and was always suitably horrified) but it never really touched me so deeply, as to last longer than a day. Looking at it in this context was a totally new experience; every abusive event was a cause for reflection ... "Is this who I am?"

Weingarten (2000:393) describes something of Thalita's trauma:

Witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic of trauma. It is difficult for an observer to remain clear-headed and calm, to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, to retain all the pieces, and to fit them together. It is even more difficult to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen. Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their own credibility. To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims.

Sometime during the process, I started reading books reflecting South Africa's history of apartheid. Esty lent me a book written by Desmond Tutu called No future without forgiveness. One thing leads to another and somehow I had made this huge jump from the Second World War to our own recent history.

I was overcome by horror and grief. Why had my own history touched me so little? Had I been deaf and blind? Was I a part of this too? I read some literature of holocaust survivors, one of which was Elie Wiesel, still an advocate for its survivors. In an address to the USA president Ronald Reagan, Wiesel said of passivity that he had learned the danger of indifference, the crime of indifference. For the opposite of love, he said, is not hate, but indifference. Jews were killed by their enemy but betrayed by their so-called allies, who found political reasons to justify their indifference or passivity. He says that he has learned that when there is obvious injustice and principles are violated – when human lives and dignity are at stake – when your allies find reasons to justify their silence or indifference – neutrality is a sin.

Thalita seemed to be all-consumed by what she had learnt, and for long periods took detours on her own. At one point she explained it as follows:

I don't have words to tell you where I am or how I feel. All I know is that I am lost, I am miserable. I am stuck. I want to move forward, but cannot and no effort on my part seems to erase the shock of realizing what has happened – really happened. Where was I? I am the abuser – I did nothing ... I am nothing.

Antjie Krog (1998:66) in *Country of my skull* tells of her own experience as a witness in the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. She says: "I can talk of nothing but the Truth Commission. Yet I don't talk about it at all...." Her dilemma arises from the job she was required to do, i.e. reporting back what she has heard. Thalita, in a similar dilemma, has to decide how she will move forward with what she has witnessed, what she will do differently. Krog (1998:66) explains this dilemma:

No poetry should come forth from this. May my hand fall off if I write this.... So I sit around. Naturally and unnaturally without words. Stunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for their words. If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don't, I die.

Thalita faces another dilemma besides reporting back via me to the rest of the group. What is she to do with this newfound knowledge? Weingarten (2000b:397) elaborates on the changes in witness positions (please refer chapter 1.4.1). What happened to Thalita is reflected in Weingarten's witness positions, as Thalita moves positions of witnessing – from being empowered and unaware, to becoming very aware but now disempowered. The disempowerment comes, she says, *from the realization that I now have to live a different life and I don't know where to begin. Should I stop counselling, what should I do?*

Fortunately Thalita stayed in the process, and was able to get to a place where she once again felt empowered enough to help people with personal problems (not due to any further training but due to a definite change in her outlook). Von Foerster (1984:290) explains: "If I don't see, I am blind; but if I see I am blind, I see."

4.2.2 Hendrik, Marie and Martin Luther King

Hendrik and Marie felt connected to Martin Luther King for different reasons. Marie felt especially drawn to the fact that the newly married Kings had to spend their first night as

husband and wife in a funeral parlour. This because resorts in Alabama did not serve black people and the closest thing to public accommodation available was a funeral parlour owned by family friends (Yancey 2001:13).

She says of this:

I don't really know why I felt so sad about this particular event in King's history, especially in the light of our own history. Somewhere in my mind I know this was happening even more recently in our own country, and yet it never seemed real. After our discussions and my own research into King's life, I cannot believe that I said I was not a racist. I so hoped that I was not, but the fact that I was never moved beyond sadness must mean that I was. Is it possible to really love and not do?

Hendrik was moved by King's ability to remember that no matter how things appeared at any given moment, God was in control and reigning. He says the following:

Martin Luther King made many mistakes, and the church crucified him for it. Yet in spite of the abuse from the church he remained true to his goal. He did not strike back, when others called for revenge, he called for love and forgiveness.

He tells of the Southern Baptist Church's repentance for their long-term support of racism almost 140 years after its inception, about the issue of slavery and how it reminds him of our own personal history as a church in South Africa. Neither his church nor he as a person ever supported racism, but he did very little to oppose it actively.

King's statement about the church (Yancey 2001:38) resonates with his views:

Well, the most pervasive mistake I have made was in believing that because our cause was just, we could be sure that the white ministers of the South, once their Christian consciences were challenged, would rise to our aid. I felt that white ministers would take our cause to the white power structures. I ended up, of course, chastened and disillusioned.

It bothers, saddens and angers him that the church has been part of abusive practices in the past, and he is personally challenged to take a definite stand against all forms of abuse in his own congregation. Like Yancey (2001:39) he feels that there is only one thing that

haunts him more than the sins of his past: *What sins am I blind to today? It took the greatness of Martin Luther King to awaken the conscience of a nation in the previous century. What keeps us in this new century from realising the beloved commodity of justice, peace and love for which King fought and died? **On the wrong side of what issue does the church stubbornly stand today?***

4.2.3 Peter, Elana and Ghandi

Stoning prophets and erecting churches in their memory afterwards has been the way of the world through the ages. Today we worship Christ, but the Christ in the flesh we crucified.

(Yancey 2001:170)

Peter and Elana tell of their reflective journey as follows: They read the history of Ghandi and bought a documentary DVD on Ghandi's life. The question they ask is this:

What made it possible for Ghandi (a single solitary and in our understanding unsaved man), to have such a profound impact on society? If we compare our church history, we fall so far short. How is it possible that one unsaved man could live the life of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, so much better than anyone in recent church history?

Yancey (2001:168) tells how Stanley Jones might have had the same high regard for Ghandi when commenting on Ghandi's experience in South Africa: "Racialism has many sins to bear, but perhaps its worst was the obscuring of Christ in an hour when one of the greatest souls born of a woman was making his decision."

Elana was especially drawn to a statement by Ghandi that we must be the change we wish to see (www.gandhi.institute.org). Having been a survivor of abuse by the church she sees hope in the study of Ghandi, but not just hope, also the challenge to make a difference in spite of the violence of her own abuse. When I asked her what change she wanted to see, she replied:

I want to renew my mind, change the way I think. She quotes Ghandi: When in despair, I (want to) remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won; there have been tyrants and murderers I (and abusers), and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall (M K Ghandi quoted by Arun Ghandi. *Terrorism*

and non-violence. www.ghandi.institute.org). She adds that she wants to forgive her own tormentors, but that she also would like a chance in a non-judgmental environment to question herself to make sure that she is respectful of others and not fall into the trap of becoming an abuser.

I asked her why she would call it "a trap"? She replied as follows:

As leaders we are expected to perform at a certain level of spiritual maturity – it is expected of us to know the answers. Many times I don't, so I pretend. At first it seems harmless but now as a result of our discussions I can see that if I continue in this pattern, I too will or may become abusive. She opens her Bible and reads from Proverbs 30:22-23. "The earth cannot bear it when a servant/slave becomes a king."

She explains her understanding as follows: *If leaders are still slaves wanting to be accepted by people at all costs and are slaves to the fear of people's opinions, then they will cover up and lie to protect themselves. If someone in the congregation has problems and no answer is found, they will look for the fault in that person, not themselves and will definitely not question God – that would be blasphemy. That is why I say it is a trap, we don't suspect a thing, and once caught we are unable to free ourselves, at least not without a price. Therefore the change I want to see must begin with me. I want people to be free to be themselves and still know that they are loved and accepted, but it has to start with me.... Honestly, I really don't know if I can accept people just as they are and that's a scary thought but I want to try, and if I battle I want to be free to express it.*

Peter is of the opinion that it is possible to live this way as a human being. *I always looked to Jesus, but then added, yes but ... He is God not just a man. Now I have the example of Ghandi, who failed at many things, but remained true to his pursuit of non-violence, in spite of what it would cost him. If he could do that as a non-Christian, I too can do it with the spirit of Christ in me.*

4.2.4 John, Mary and the Wounded Healer

Earth is crammed with heaven and every bush aflame with God. But
only those who see take off their shoes.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The quote above has great meaning for John, who speaks of his relationship with Henri Nouwen and how this relationship has touched his life. *So often I am asked ... so where are all the miracles that you preach of, the healings, and deliverance? Most times when asked this question, I feel forced to defend God, I don't want people to lose faith, even when I can't believe myself. Yet this quote from Elizabeth Browning and a question that you (Esty) asked me, has changed the way I think. Elizabeth Barrett Browning turns the question around, so that it's no longer "Why are there no burning bushes?" but rather "Why do so few see?"*

I asked John to tell me more about the question I had asked that had meaning for him, to which he replied: *We were talking about truth, and I think I quoted you the scripture from John that says: "You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free." You replied something to the effect of: And if it doesn't set you free, could that mean that what you thought was truth, was in fact not?*

Up to that point I always argued in line with God's word, and never ever questioned that when the truth that I preach doesn't set free, that it may not be the truth after all. That question for me was the beginning of a re-evaluation or reinterpretation of everything I have ever believed. It was at this point that I began to consider how my ideas of Christianity may have been abusive, even while I thought I was doing /being right. I feel a little like the apostle Paul who had to face up to his sin, and all the time he was murdering Christians in the name of Christ.

By inviting Henri Nouwen as a member of my life-club as you suggested (see 4.2), I have made a huge jump in perspective. Firstly because I have always openly disliked homosexuals, something that Henri Nouwen claimed to be, albeit a non-practicing homosexual. I have always believed that homosexuality is the highest form of rebellion against God, and that it's a choice. To be confronted with the person of Henri Nouwen through his writings, has been a revelation. How can this man be rebelling against God? His whole life seems to reflect Christ. I cannot say I am no longer homophobic, but rather that I am rethinking my position on this.

Secondly, his life became for me a testimony about living an imperfect life in a godly way. Often a pastor is forced into a position of having to provide answers and in the words of Yancey (2001:290), being the spiritual authority, the dispenser of grace and not its

recipient. Nouwen wrote openly about his failures and yet people were still drawn to him. "Membering" him has become for me a way to allow people to know me, John the man, not only John the Pastor. Strangely I find as I am less judgmental about myself, I also find it easier to dispense grace to others.

Mary, as the pastor's wife, often assists John in counselling and for her this is where she connected with Henri Nouwen. As a priest, he also was a listener of stories. She tells of his work amongst gay men, dying of Aids and quotes Nouwen from Yancey (2001:291): "... those young men were dying – literally dying – because of their thirst for love". It comments on Yancey's response (2001:292) that as she reflected on all the stories she had heard in counselling she, like Yancey, realized that all the stories had one thing in common, a search for a safe place, for a safe relationship, for a home, for acceptance, for unconditional love and for forgiveness.

I have tended to see sin only in black and white terms, and in terms of sowing and reaping. Now I still see the effects of sin, but through the eyes of compassion. What have I learned from my association with Henri Nouwen? Once again she quotes from Yancey's book (2001:296)

[T]o keep my eyes on the one who refuses to turn stones into bread, jump from great heights or rule with great tempered power. To keep my eyes on the one who says, Blessed are the poor, the gentle, those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **blessed** (italics mine) *are the* merciful, the peacemakers.... [K]eep my eyes on the one who is poor with the poor, weak with the weak and rejected with the rejected.

Mary tells how she now sees how she was abusive by counselling from a morally superior position and commits herself to what narrative therapists call a not-knowing position (Morgan 2000:2) – a position that seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach.

4.2.5 Reflection

At this time all the participants felt ready to acknowledge that the church throughout history had at times been abusive. Up to this point it had always been easy to conclude that abuse ascribed to the church in the past, had not in fact been "the church" i.e. those involved in pogroms, crusades and witch hunts were not the "real church". Now as a result of "re-membling" conversations and literature studies, participants could acknowledge that the church at large has been responsible for abuse right throughout history.

4.3 Testimonies from abusers and survivors

4.3.1 Creating space to hear silenced voices

In line with Dixon (1999:122) I believe in the healing power of talking freely with clients that seek my help about the abuse suffered. For this reason and because it is precisely in this context that clients lose their voice (Weingarten 2002), I chose to deliberately create a space in the research discussions with leaders, where they could be exposed to the voices of people who have suffered spiritual abuse.

Since I had been working with charismatic believers in counselling for some time, I decided to share some of those stories. Once I had received permission from those clients to share their stories, I did so and since we did not meet in group-format, I shared different stories with different leaders. The telling of stories from our own charismatic context led to the acceptance of the fact that leaders in charismatic churches were sometimes abusive. Case studies from my private practice reflecting abusive discursive practices follow:

4.3.2 Stories from the abused

4.3.2.1 Sex and a wheelchair

Included in these stories was the story of Jo (38), a man who had been hijacked and shot through the neck. This resulted in him becoming totally paralysed from the neck down. At the time of being hijacked he had been married for five months. He was referred to me for counselling two years later when his wife wanted a divorce.

Briefly, she could not cope, especially with the issues of sexuality. The couple ended up getting divorced, as Jo was unable (among other things) to discuss alternative ways of sexuality. She had suggested that they try oral sex which he totally rejected. The discourse of his church around this kind of sexuality was that it was a sin and shameful. In addition a second discourse namely the one of supernatural healing, further hampered any counselling effort. Jo had been taught that it is always God's will to heal, and with enough faith it would happen, providing that he was tithing and there was no sin in his life.

The "sin" of shameful sex in his mind would prevent his healing, which he was desperate for. The couple ended up getting a divorce.

In no way do I mean to suggest that the "sexuality issue" was the only contributing factor to the divorce, or even the most important one. I shared this story to illustrate how discourses can sometimes be conflicting and abusive. Joan's story follows.

4.3.2.2 Joan the Jezebel

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman
Jezebel.

(Revelations 2:20)

The following account took place in the Western Cape (Joan now lives in Pretoria). This is a summary of Joan's construction of what happened to her almost ten years ago. Bearing in mind that my preferred pastoral therapeutic approach is narrative by nature and

that epistemologically I work from within a postmodern social construction discourse (see chapter 2). I worked with Joan's perception of what happened.

She never did go back to Cape Town to try to resolve the issue as would be a common way of dealing with hurt in the charismatic context, although she did in counselling choose to forgive those whom she felt had hurt her so badly.

Joan tells her story

I am a thirty-something divorcee with two children. I am a teacher and I really loved children. When I first started attending this church, I found that the children's church was almost non-existent. I felt strongly that this should be rectified and made an appointment to speak to the pastor within the first month of attending this particular congregation.

The pastor gave me his blessing and gave the go-ahead to become involved in the children's church. At this time around five other people were taking turns to "keep the children busy" and I tried to change this from keeping them busy to ministering to them. The worship leader was asked to assist us in getting a worship team together to minister to the children. We quickly became friends.

I also started a Bible study prayer group at my own home for single moms. It was here that the trouble first began. One woman attending the Bible study was separated from her husband. She was currently receiving counselling from a professional counsellor who had advised her to divorce her abusive husband. Her husband begged her to come back and joined the church. He felt they should go for counselling together, and suggested they went to the local pastor. After the first consultation, the pastor advised this woman to forgive her husband and move back in with him. When she told me this, I became angry, having come from an abusive marriage myself. I shared with her my own experience of men who beat their wives and advised her to stick to her original counsellor.

Somehow this became public knowledge. I was then called in by the leadership and reprimanded. They said I was promoting non-biblical teaching and put a stop to my single parent's cell meetings. I was devastated and shared my feelings with the worship leader (John) and colleagues at the children's church.

What happened next blows my mind. I still cannot believe what happened. I was called to a meeting in which I was told that in a multitude of counsellors there is much wisdom. They said they were following the scriptural formulae of dealing with problems in the church. The charges against me ranged from encouraging divorce, to having an unbridled tongue. I was said to be having a problem in the area of submission and trust in leadership, and that I was trying to cause disunity in the church. I was bringing about division through flattery and manipulation. As such I was labelled a "Jezebel". I was subsequently asked to leave the church and John was advised to break all ties with me. I heard later that it was thought that I also had a multiple personality disorder.

This day changed me forever. I could never trust the leadership again. In fact it was a long time before I ever trusted anyone, especially a Christian, again. In the place of trust I experienced fear and isolation. I tried to join another church, only to find that the first pastor had phoned this church and warned them about me. I felt so alone. Our community was small and overnight I became a leper. Reflecting on this I understand why my friends broke ties with me. After all, who wants to be in a relationship with a Jezebel – even pronouncing the word sounds evil. Jezzzubel. I think maybe I would have also reacted in the same way – out of fear of having the same treatment come down on me. I forgive my friends but I don't know if I will ever get over what happened.

When I asked her about the effects of this abuse she said: *I have been divorced for 15 years and have never been able to sustain a positive long-term relationship since then. I still cannot believe how John (who knew me better than anyone), could have believed all that he heard.*

Du Pont (1997) tells a similar story of Suzy, also accused of being or having a Jezebel spirit. Suzy in Du Pont (1997:34) explains: "The most confusing aspect of this entire nightmare, was that I just didn't understand it. I didn't have the language to describe spiritual abuse. I never knew it even existed."

Joan gave me permission to share her story, hoping that it "would create an awareness of spiritual abuse and its symptoms". She added that it was her prayer that her story would bring hope to other abused, hurting people.

4.3.2.3 Affairs and forgiveness

Louise came to see me for marriage counselling for the first time about a year ago. She has been married for ten years and they have two daughters. Her husband had an affair with his secretary at work for a period of two years. He constantly denied that anything was wrong in spite of constant tension. He told Louise that she was paranoid and that she should get a life. Louise was a homemaker.

After the period of two years, Louise accidentally found out about the affair, something she had feared all along. At this point her husband said he would break off the affair if she would give him another chance. In spite of the devastation she agreed and so began a long period of counselling. Over a period of 18 months they went to three different counsellors. Her husband seemed to be having problems with each counsellor and blamed their inability to overcome the effects of the affair on the counsellor's incompetence. It was at this time that a local church referred her to me.

During the 18-month process of counselling, Louise's husband had on several occasions lapsed back into the affair with his secretary. However, it seemed as if six months prior to seeing me for the first time, he really had broken off this relationship and started attending prayer meetings and Bible studies. He really seemed to be growing in the Lord and this is where things became difficult for Louise.

Overnight it seems her husband became a celebrity, with offers for them to take up leadership responsibilities. Her husband had a very likeable charismatic personality and people were easily drawn to him. However Louise had not yet recovered from the extra-marital affair and did not feel they should take up a leadership position when their own marriage was not yet on track.

At that time she started receiving frequent visits from pastors, all encouraging her to forgive her husband and to move on to the good things God had prepared for them as a couple. Louise was unable to do this, and after six months of further counselling with me, sued her husband for a divorce. Leaders in the church were quick to point out that unless she would forgive, God would not forgive her, and rallied around her husband.

At this point she withdrew from the church altogether but still comes for counselling on a bi-weekly basis. She experienced leadership and the demands for forgiveness as unreasonable and abusive, but at that time did not have the language to describe her feelings. This led to her divorce and a deep depression, out of which she is now beginning to come. She has been in counselling with me for two years.

4.4 Resonating and reflecting

At first leaders were hesitant to comment on the stories I shared, as they felt that they did not have all the facts. However, as it became clear that I was not trying to "blame" but rather reflect on what made it feel like abuse to the clients, and what could have been done differently, the discussions got back on track.

The unanimous feeling in the group was that abuse would creep in when relationships are not what they should be. All felt that had the leaders been more intimately involved in the lives of the members, misunderstandings could have been identified or prevented. Reflecting on the church ideals (as discussed in chapter 3) I asked the question whether they thought that some of our ideas of who God was, and how He functioned in the life of believers, needed re-evaluation?

At this point our conversations became rather difficult. In a conversation about healing and faith, Peter said: *You cannot have it both ways; you cannot inspire faith by doubting. What is the alternative?*

Most of these leaders had more theological training than I have, and I therefore found it difficult to steer clear of senseless arguments.

I felt strongly about the issue of discourses, but the leaders looked at developing relationships to develop a more caring, respectful practice. Pastors felt that wrong interpretations of "teachings" were leading to people feeling abused and that a better pastoring model was needed.

John gave the following example: *Let's say we had a service where the gift of prophecy was operational. It seems to me that we as leaders should try to pastor individuals after they have received a word of prophecy. We perhaps take it for granted that our members*

know how to test the spirits, and that they have knowledge of the "seasons" in terms of prophecy becoming fulfilled. I can see that lack of this knowledge could lead to abuse. Marie felt that even prophetic words were open to interpretation, and that this could be the source of abusive practices. She said of the receiver: *The more desperate believers are for a word of prophecy in any given situation, the more likely it is that they will interpret it wrong.*

Hendrik added that many times leaders felt abused, that the congregation should release the pastor so that he/she did *"not continually have to perform"*. Again the problem of too much work, and too little time to build relationships was raised as the culprit.

Thalita pointed out that the charismatic church does try to meet this need via "cell meetings". Hendrik commented that "cells are not really working, but we are not sure why". Peter added that the problem was the cell multiplication. He said: "We have not taken into account that people have different temperaments, and that it is not equally easy for all people to connect. Just when they start feeling comfortable, the cell multiplies and we are back to square one." This, he said, "leads to isolation and silence".

He felt the charismatic church should move away from being large churches with thousands of members, and remain small and communal and that pastors should be made more aware of people's differences. "Sometimes the task seems too daunting, so we do nothing," he added.

From these discussions we concluded that it was not only members that feel trapped and abused, but that many leaders were trapped in the same abusive cycle. Another problem that surfaced seems to be rooted in the structures of charismatic churches, with its idea of senior and junior pastors.

Once again the whole issue of power and knowledge (see chapter 2) comes into operation. The senior pastors have the expert knowledge, which often invalidates knowledges from junior pastors. In the charismatic church everyone follows the vision of the senior pastor, almost as Joshua and the Israelites did with Moses.

Hendrik very sadly commented to a lack in his life pertaining to this very issue: "I have always dreamed of being in a sort of Elijah/Elisha-relationship with our senior pastor; that

the relationship would be a mentoring one. Sadly however we do not have pastors who have been mentored and therefore they don't mentor."

Elana concluded that the church would have to figure out a new language to describe the problem. She said it was like new Christians whose "knowledge of the problem is very limited, to the extent that you don't know that you don't know, and you do not have the language to ask the questions".

She proposed a whole new research study asking more questions, so that a common language could be developed to find answers. All agreed that there seems to be a problem in terms of abuse in the charismatic church that needs to be addressed. Abuse of power, abuse of members but also abuse of leaders. All the participants agreed to keep talking until they were able to take a sensible stand against abuse. Elana concluded: "We need to keep talking, even if we don't see change. We cannot keep quiet. Silence only sanctions others to become abused."

Even though we had different views on the roots of abuse, all felt able to acknowledge that abuse does take place. Thalita agreed that trying to force Louise (4.3.5) to forgive before her hurts had healed was abusive and supporting the adulterer at the price of the victim, was unforgivable.

At this point John and Mary shared their story as seen through John's eyes. I refer to the letter John sent me as a result of five therapeutic discussions that helped John and Mary work through the pain of having been part of abusive leadership (read 1.6.4).

4.5 I am the abuser

4.5.1 John and Mary's story (a letter from John)

Dear Esty

We were serving in a small congregation of around 300 members as assistant pastors. Our senior pastor was visionary with a very charismatic personality, and his ministry anointed, with many conversions and healings taking place.

Everything was great, the services were anointed, and God seemed to be moving in powerful ways. However things are not always as they appear. Slowly over a period of months things started going wrong. Some in the leadership were having disagreements with the senior pastor, but it all seemed so hush-hush. I remember a few outbursts, but never thought much of it.

After this it seemed as if we were under attack because one by one leaders were taking sabbaticals, sick leave and so on, which put more pressure on us and the senior pastor.

Things really started taking a turn for the worse when our senior pastor started labelling those who withdrew as "unfit for service" and "rebellious". Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that I also disagreed with the senior pastors' decisions on occasion, I never voiced my concerns. As a result of this research, I now realize that I was unable to do so, due to the discourse that I held dear, namely one of submission at all cost. I had been taught that God will not allow anyone to touch his anointed, and pastor Peter was definitely anointed.

Peter was beginning to show signs of taking strain, and withdrew more often, leaving those of us left in leadership to make decisions, and then, in bouts of anger, he would reverse all the decisions we had made. More and more new people involved in the leadership seemed to try and get more power. This led to a split taking place in the leadership. At this time we had similar incidents to the story you shared with us about Joan. It seems every week someone was labelled as something. Women were told not to wear certain styles of clothing and it almost became obsessive, and because of the constant change in leadership, the new leaders vying for favour and power always backed the senior pastor. There was a lot of blame shifting and pointing of fingers.

Over a period of two years, Mary and I struggled to find a sense of purpose or meaning in that ministry. Neither of us felt like quitting, and I suppose we didn't want to be labelled either. The worst of it all was that there was no real forum to discuss these issues. Every disagreement was met with hostility and labels of being divisive, rebellious, not submitting to authority, "Jezebel" etc., were part of the daily routine.

My marriage to Mary broke down to the point where we almost got divorced. Apparently she could see what I could not, and we had many arguments about it. Anyway, after two years the church had become so poisoned that even I got it, and we left. Looking back, it

is painful to admit and realize that I was part of that abusive power, and that I was hurting people, all the while thinking that I was helping and doing God's will.

Thank you for helping us to work through this hurt. After we left, I felt as if I would never return to the ministry. Now perhaps I will, who knows, but one thing is sure, we are now armed with a new knowledge. The knowledge of humility and grace, and because of the stories you shared, Mary and I will really try to live our lives in awareness of how easy it is to become prey to the cycle of abuse. I know you don't feel that you have contributed all that much, but for Mary and I, you made healing possible.

Blessings in Christ,

John and Mary

Hendrik said of John's inability to challenge the senior pastor "we do not really have the freedom to question, and it comes from a long tradition in the mainline churches. We grew up hearing things like: 'The pastor has many years of training behind him. He knows what is right (Die dominee het baie jare geleer. Hy weet altyd wat is reg).' After all, he could read Greek and Hebrew."

To this Marie added: "This is true of all positions of power. Afrikaans people will not challenge any authority figure, parents, teachers, pastors or government. This is perhaps why even Christians did not challenge the previous government."

I agree with Maturana and Varela (1987:245) when they say:

The knowledge of knowledge compels. It compels us to adopt an attitude of permanent vigilance against the temptation of uncertainty.... It compels us to see that the world will be different only if we live differently. It compels us because when we know that we know, we cannot deny that we know.

What was encouraging to realize was that there was always hope. Wade (as quoted by Kotzé 2000:298) argues, "alongside each history of violence and oppression there is a parallel history of spontaneous creative, and prudent resistance".

It is not possible in a research project of this limited scope to give attention to each of these parallel stories, but it seems prudent just to mention that there are many, many stories not discussed here, which would reflect pockets of resistance on all sides of this "abusive coin".

In small ways each of the participants have taken steps of resistance against the problem of abuse, and one of those steps included a participation in this research project. One thing became clear to all of us in this research journey. In the words of Weingarten (2001:124) "that care not cure will keep us floating in the ocean".

4.6 An outsider witness and leaders reflection

In line with the narrative practice of using witnesses to strengthen newly created preferred ways of living (Weingarten 2000, Morgan 2000), I tried to strengthen the participant's new positions regarding spiritual abuse by inviting an outsider witness (Dr Johann Roux) to a conversation. Morgan (2000:121) describes these meetings with outsider witnesses as "powerful rituals ... assisting people in the reclamation or redefinition of their identities". Unfortunately, only Hendrik and Marie were willing to meet with anyone outside of the immediate research context. I really tried to encourage the other participants to participate in this process, but their fear of exposure proved too strong.

A transcript of parts of that conversation between Dr Roux, Hendrik and Marie and myself follows:

Dr Roux started off by welcoming Hendrik and Marie, and thanking them for their willingness to participate in the discussion.

Dr Roux : Why did you decide to become part of this research journey?

Hendrik : *Well basically I had some concerns about abusive practices in the church, even before Esty approached us, and I felt this would be an opportunity to think out loud about these concerns.*

Dr Roux : What kind of concerns would those be, and tell me more about

the 'thinking out loud' thing.

Marie : *We have felt some of the effects of abusive practices in our own lives and ministry. Due to prophecy, my husband and I are caught in a web. We want to develop into a different field but we are kept where we are, basically because of a prophecy over our life, which was heard by the senior pastors.*

Hendrik : *In our context prophecy is very powerful, especially if the prophet is well known for his integrity and ability to prophecy.*

Dr Roux : What kind of prophecy did you receive?

Hendrik : *I am currently a junior pastor working mainly with youth and children. A year ago a prophet came to our church and prophesied that I would minister to millions of children. Since then I have been known / labelled as the kiddies / youth pastor. This is not where I want to be exclusively, but in spite of talking about it, this is where I'm told to stay.*

Dr Roux : Just now you mentioned wanting a context in which to think out loud. Do you want to say more about that?

Hendrik : *Yes, in our context not much questioning is allowed or encouraged. Questions are mostly seen as challenging the status quo and labelled as 'rebellion'. Off course very few will admit to this, we preach equality and unity but it seldom works like this in practice.*

Marie : *The charismatic church (I don't know about other churches) is very structured, in a hierarchical way. We have a senior pastoral couple and then junior pastors called assistant pastors or youth pastors and with this hierarchy comes power. This is not often talked about. I mean I didn't even think about it before*

this research, but its true. Hierarchy causes power imbalances and it is very difficult for a junior pastor to challenge the senior pastor

Hendrik : *The idea is that when you disagree or challenge the vision or view of the senior pastor, you are challenging God's authority, so we don't.*

Esty : What then, Hendrik, is the effect of this silencing of your own voice on you personally, and what could be the effects on the congregation?

Hendrik : *For us, one of the effects is disillusionment, anger against God, and isolation. I reckon that's pretty much the same for other members as well.*

Marie : *Some even desert the faith.*

Hendrik : *Johann, if one effect of abuse is that people are silenced, how can we as junior pastors create space for people to tell their stories?*

Dr Roux : Hendrik, I try usually to decentre myself, and not to spit out answers. One of the reasons for this is that I have no entitlement to make remarks about the charismatic context, because I don't participate in that context. However, what I could suggest is that you start off with small pockets of resistance, what I mean is in small ways take small acts of resistance.

Marie : *Like just being here for this discussion is resisting.*

Dr Roux : Yes. Anderson and Goolishian said we must bring about change by being different, but not too different. If you are too

different, people cannot hear you. It's too foreign.

Hendrik : *So just by listening to our juniors, and encouraging openness and discussion, we are making a difference.*

Dr Roux : Yes, on a daily basis create space in your conversations with people, empower other people. Surround yourself with people who also ask questions. It takes practice and skill.

Hendrik : *We call it politics.*

Dr Roux : You will never get away from it. Try to be involved in other contexts too, where you can be challenged and also challenge. In what ways, for example, have you changed the way that you think, or the way you are, as a result of this research context?

Marie : *Well, I've realized that not all people are respectful towards other people. I have determined in my heart to be sensitive and respectful no matter the cost. This research has created awareness for me of how people get hurt, and honestly I don't know where the church will start to bring about healing.*

I have just remembered an incident that I thought little of at the time. A friend of mine's husband died and a few years later, as she was about to get remarried (I think at the kitchen tea), one of the leaders reproached her for still wearing her old wedding ring, and forced her to remove it. She was devastated. Now for the first time I begin to understand this as abusive.

Hendrik : *For me the biggest change came in terms of heightened awareness. Now we know differently and can begin to think differently. Before we sort of felt bad about things, but were powerless to change. Our leaders are not secure enough to allow themselves and their decisions to be questioned.*

- Dr Roux : That is why leadership and developing leadership is so important. We must create contexts that allow people to question.
- Hendrik : Martin Luther King said something about that. He said something to the effect of no form of "absolution" could be acceptable without opening oneself to hypocrisy.
- Marie : *Yes, I think he also warned that we should be conscious of "paralyses of analysis." For me, that means we must just (in his words) be the change we want to see. That is what I'm going to work at.*

4.7 Conclusion

I have started working with some of the research participants to journey forward from this "place of knowing", to a "place of doing", from a place of fear to forgiveness, restitution and freedom. This story will be told elsewhere. We concluded our discussions with a general agreement that abuse takes place in our church context, and made a commitment towards working on the disrespectful ways we often speak of/to those who seek our help. We were all challenged by Kaethe Weingarten's (2001:124) idea that it is care, not cure that sustains, hence the title of this chapter. We realised that we have often been pressured into an "expert" role and that this has led to abuse.

Two couples from other congregations have agreed to meet with John and Mary and I to discuss further ways of strengthening this commitment to respectful pastoral practice. This story will not be told here. Please refer to chapter 5 for a reflection on the research process.

Chapter 5: REFLECTIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I would like to reflect on how empowering this journey has been for me as a woman in a charismatic context, taking a stand against those discourses in my faith context that are at times abusive. I will also reflect on the personal difficulty I experienced in relation to gender issues throughout the research process. In addition, included in this chapter are reflections on the research aims, procedures and approach, and the conclusion.

The participants and I reflected on the context of our conversations throughout our study, and some of the participants reflected with me on the report as written in chapters 1 – 4. Due to time constraints not all participants were able to do this. I want to stress that the time constraints belonged to them, and not to me.

Each participant will get a full copy of the research report. The opportunity for reflection was given once again to ensure that the information as written in this document is what they wanted to convey and not based on my own agenda. As co-authors they edited the texts applicable to them by including and deleting information that they felt did or did not reflect their experience. Please note, due to the sensitive nature of this study, many portions of the originally "said" was deleted and left "unsaid".

This was done, in my opinion, due to fear and feelings of guilt, both feelings I am very familiar with. Both these feelings have accompanied me throughout this journey, and therefore I don't note this as a form of judgement, merely as an observation.

The research journey will continue as a therapeutic process with some of the participants, even though the research is officially over. I feel a deep responsibility to keep journeying with those who wish to continue, until they feel both empowered and sufficiently aware of the relationships of power and the effects of abusive discourse, each in their own faith context. I would now like to share my reflections on specific aspects of this research.

5.2 Personal empowerment

In line with Poling (1991:13), I wanted to challenge our church leaders to decide to be prophetic critics of the way power is distributed rather than to act as sanctioning agents of abusive power. However, this was difficult for me as a woman, as the charismatic church is not immune to patriarchal discourse. The participants concerned deleted the discussions relating to gender issues. These discussions would have reflected a denial of the claim (Keane 1998:124) by reformist feminist theologians that patriarchy is a universal political structure privileging men at the expense of women.

I voiced no verbal reaction suggesting that I had no place as a woman to challenge male leaders in the church. However, the way the other women in the research project related to the men, deferring their opinions when challenged by the men, suggests that gender issues are a concern in the charismatic church context. For me it was a scary process, but a process that left me feeling good about my effort at least to speak about some of the sensitive issues to the predominantly male leadership. The women saw themselves predominantly as being in a supportive role.

The discussion that follows will reflect on the aims of the research in hindsight.

5.3 Reflecting on the aims of the research

The aim of the research (chapter 1.3) was to deconstruct charismatic ideals (chapter 3) in order to identify discourses that were not respectful, and to co-create more respectful discursive practices in the charismatic church context. In my opinion we managed to deconstruct many discourses, finding the application of these discourses to be disrespectful. Personally I found many to be not only disrespectful of members, but also of God. Not all the participants agreed on this point, however, all agreed that more respectful practice was possible. During the journey, the leader members were able to re-author their stories, including small pockets of resistance to discourses that they felt were indeed oppressive.

Although the research journey ended on a positive note, I feel that the outcomes were below my personal expectation. It was a difficult process throughout, having had a difficult start with leaders withdrawing after the first group session. However, I managed to find a

new group of participants who agreed to meet with me, but not in a group format. These sessions were challenging but hopeful. At the conclusion of the research, some participants were feeling quite vulnerable and chose to delete a great deal of the discussions that took place. These discussions included reflections on the correlation between “not being healed” and “sin” in the lives of believers as well as personal confessions. This left the final report looking very thin and me feeling very low.

However, it made me take note again of one important issue. This issue has to do with the time factor. These participants are involved in their problem-saturated context daily, and were exposed to an alternative context once a week. For me it reinforces the idea that more discussions are needed, and it reminded me to take note of this fact when in therapeutic discussions with other clients. In a modern society we expect things to happen quickly. What happened here underscores a need for patience and a move away from an “instant solution”-mindset. A discussion on some of the research accountability practices follows.

5.4 Confidentiality

For the research participants, this issue was crucial. In spite of the assurances of confidentiality none of the participants were willing to trust each other and meet in a group context. Please note the initial group fell apart after the first meeting because of this issue (see 1.6.3). For this reason, new participants had to be found, of which only one couple (Hendrik and Marie) was willing to share in a group context. Obviously, as none of the others were open to this, it did not happen.

For my part, I assured the participants that their real names (they chose pseudonyms) would never be disclosed, neither would any information be given about the churches they represented. Once again only Hendrik and Marie were willing to meet with an outsider witness (Dr J P Roux). Problems were never discussed outside of the research context, except with my supervisor, for which permission was given.

5.5 Accountability and transparency

In the charismatic context accountability could mean to submit one's impressions to a leader member for approval. Charismatic Christians will often speak of accountability and submission in the same way. From this perspective, I have not been accountable, except for the fact that my co-supervisor, professor Jacques Theron, will evaluate this research report. I had one discussion with him concerning the research topic. Prof. Theron too is a member of a charismatic fellowship.

However, I tried to find other ways of being accountable. One way is by not viewing this research as just a means to acquire information, but in the words of Swan (1998:37) to commit to "ongoing learning and changing". I take this commitment seriously, since I am also committed and accountable to the co-researchers. At the end of the first draft of chapter 4, I made copies of the draft available to participants. As the primary author of this report I wanted to ensure transparency and privilege the voices of the participants, rather than my own. The participants had the opportunity to edit the text as indicated in 5.3.

Cochrane et al (1991:16) say that in order to make things explicit to oneself is not only to become self-aware, but also allows for self-criticism and opening up of questioning from others. In order to obtain an outside opinion Hendrik, Marie and I invited dr Roux as an outsider witness. His comments were experienced as valuable to all three of us, and contributed to our ability to take steps against spiritually abusive practices.

I will now offer reflections on the qualitative research process and discuss implications and recommendations for practical theology and pastoral therapy.

5.6 Reflections on qualitative research

Wolcott (1992:52) is of the opinion that we only really become competent at research by engaging and reflecting on it. Although I was required to do a dissertation for my honours degree, my experience while doing this research project was completely different. In this section I will reflect on what I learnt about doing qualitative research.

In the first place I found that the participants and people that I spoke to regarding the topic of the research, all asked the same question: "So what was your conclusion?" Whilst I tried to explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative research, I found a tendency in human nature to want clear-cut answers. It seems we want things nice and tidy, with answers to all our questions. The open-ended nature of qualitative research does not sit well with most people. I was often left with the impression that this type of research was not really considered valid or regarded as a contribution.

Secondly, whilst reflecting upon the initial research aims and questions, I realised that indeed this type of research was anything but tidy. Indeed, many times I felt that instead of finding answers to our questions we actually ended up with more questions. In addition, and in spite of my epistemological position, as put forward in chapter 1, I became increasingly aware that although it was in my heart to privilege the voices of the research participants, that the writing up of the process was really my interpretation of their stories. Limerick (1996:458) confirms this view when he explains that the final text is a production of interpretations of earlier conversations.

5.7 Implications and recommendations for practical theology and pastoral therapy

I asked a number of questions in chapter 1 (1.2) relevant to practical theology and pastoral therapy and explained in chapter 4 the views of charismatic members regarding their experiences of the church in times of personal crises. Many found their experiences of the church to be abusive. Pieterse (1996:61) proposes that the role of the church is linked to an appreciation of the power of difference and to the re-discovery of our religion's legacy namely of listening, learning and loving unconditionally.

I believe that the stories voiced in this study supports an effort to develop this role of the church and practical theology. Still in line with Pieterse's ideas I agree that the church should provide a supportive environment where theology is renewed, enabling people with different experiences to meet and work to bring about change. Pieterse (1996:60) says that being in the world means that we need to get involved in the every day politics. A narrative approach to pastoral therapy makes it possible to reflect with leader members on their own abusive practices.

5.8 Personal faith reflections

Whilst pondering a conclusion to two years of research, I met Denise, a client referred to me by a friend. Denise came to me in dire straights, homeless and very ill. She had a five-year-old daughter whom she was unable to look after and whom she had been unable to feed. After many tears she told me how she had allowed her boyfriend to have sex with her daughter – before the social welfare found out and removed the child from her custody.

Hearing this story was extremely difficult for me, and inside me a battle was raging. I felt physically ill, but I tried desperately in line with narrative pastoral therapy (Morgan 2000:2) to remain respectful and non-blaming. Eventually I asked her why she had never thought to go to the church for help. I will never forget her expression as she cried, "Why would I ever try to get help from the church? Don't you get it, I already felt so bad about myself, and they would just make me feel even worse."

The more I reflected on this story, and especially in the light of the nature of this research journey, the more I saw the dissimilarities between the church and Jesus. Today it seems that the church repels sinners, whereas Jesus seemed to be friends with prostitutes, tax collectors and the like. The more I thought about this whilst also reflecting on literature by Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Henri Nouwen, the more I came to realize the importance of the word *grace* (Please read Annexure 1. *Babette's Feast*: A story to highlight this point).

I remember the battles I had as a student in 1997/8 during the two-year internship for my honours degree in Narrative Therapy. My supervisor then, as now, was Dr. Johann Roux. Ever so often he would ask questions like "What made you ask that question?" At first I thought he meant it was a good question, but as time went by he would ask more plainly: "Why are you so judgemental?" I remember crying many tears over this, as I tried so hard not to be like that.

At that time I came to the conclusion that my profession as human resources manager was responsible for my judgmental attitudes. In terms of industrial relations, I had learnt to discern lies from truth, and therefore easily felt that those in counselling were lying about affairs. I had a very suspicious nature.

Now, partly as a result of four more years of working with Dr. Roux and as a result of my private practice and the stories I am witnessing and partly due to this research journey, I realise that my biggest problem was in my relationship with "Christian discourses and more specifically charismatic church discourses".

Raised to believe that truth could be found, and growing-up in a context where right and wrong were clearly demarcated, I became sort of black and white in my thinking and also in terms of my relationships with other people. It became my responsibility to convince others of their sin and to show the difference between right and wrong. I imagine as a result of this research, that many charismatic pastors find themselves in a similar position. God after all is not just about love but also holiness, where justice must prevail.

I learnt from Tolstoy the difference between Christ's approach to religion and that of other religions:

The test of observance of external religious teachings is whether or not our conduct conforms with their decrees. Observe the Sabbath. Get circumcised. Tithe. Such conformity is indeed possible. The test of observance of Christ's teachings is our consciousness of our failure to attain an ideal perfection. The degree to which we draw near to this perfection cannot be seen; all we can see is the extent of our deviation.

(Tolstoy quoted in Yancey 2001:125)

Whereas Tolstoy sets a standard of living, a standard he could never attain, Dostoevsky communicates grace and forgiveness in his novels, and vehemently opposes power or the abuse of power. In his novel *The brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky (2001:229-239) recreates the Temptation-scene from Scripture. The agnostic brother Ivan Karamazov writes a poem called "The grand Inquisitor" set in Seville at the height of the Inquisition. In the poem Jesus disguises himself and visits the city at a time when many are burned at the stake.

A cardinal (the Grand Inquisitor) recognizes Jesus and has him thrown into prison, where he visits Jesus in a scene reminding one of the Jesus' temptations in the desert. The cardinal makes an accusation and tells Jesus that by turning down the temptations He forfeited the three greatest powers at his disposal namely, "miracle, mystery and authority". He asks Jesus if he had not realized that people want more than anything to worship that which is beyond dispute. He argues that, although the church recognized that error and corrected it, the church has been relying on miracle, mystery and authority ever since. He decides to execute Jesus (again), in case He might hinder the church's work.

My experience of this research journey, and one of the conclusions that I have come to, is that many in the charismatic church rely on the same three principles – miracle, mystery and authority. It may not be done overtly, but this is my impression anyway. Having said this, I must add that I don't think this is exclusively a charismatic problem, and in spite of this, I have nowhere else to go.

Says Yancey (1998:23): "Christianity is not a purely intellectual, internal faith. It can only be lived in community." I have found no better spiritual home in all my wanderings, and will therefore say with Yancey (1998:26).

This is a big old ship, Bill. She creaks, she rocks, she rolls and at times she makes you want to throw up. But she gets where she's going. Always has, always will, until the end of time with or without you.

5.9 Critical reflections

I agree with Pieterse (1996:60) that the open-ended and tentative character of postmodern research should compel one to appreciate:

the contradicting, ambiguous, conflictual, risky, insecure, peripheral and creative dimensions of everyday life. In short, it allows space for my humanity and simultaneously injects restlessness into any moment of contentment, because any configuration of people, environment and resources usually excludes or marginalises someone's voice and / or identity.

This report should not be read as a final answer to the questions as put forward in chapter 1, but should rather be used to inspire more discussions which would hopefully lead to more questions about knowledges that we take for granted. New questions arising as a result of this research project could be:

- ♦ What would make it possible for leader members to be more open to group discussions in relation to a topic such as this one?
- ♦ How can the stories as generated in this journey be taken further to benefit other congregations and church groups?
- ♦ How can postmodern theological and epistemological discourses assist the charismatic church in developing more concrete and action defined understandings of our roles in society and also, in a differentiated community of believers (Pieterse 1996:60)?

5.10 An open ending

Although I will have to end my writing here, the story continues. The large volume of stories shared in this study could not be adequately reflected here, partly as a result of the limited scope of this research, but also due to the lack of trust between church leader members, who were able (as co-researchers) to delete large portions of discussions that they felt rendered them vulnerable. I have to hope that in every reading the stories will be continually challenged and changed, as every telling and retelling takes place.

In conclusion, and in the words of Nouwen as reflected in Yancey (2001:285):

Most students think that writing means writing down ideas, insights, visions. They feel that they must first have something to say before they can put it down on paper for them writing is little more than recording a pre-existent thought ... but with this approach true writing is impossible. Writing is a process in which we discover what lives in us. The writing itself reveals what is alive.... The deepest satisfaction of writing is precisely that it opens up new spaces within us of which we were not aware before we started to write. To write is to embark on a journey whose final destination we do not know!

ANNEXURE 1

(Short story included in Isak Dinesen, *Anecdotes of destiny and Ehrengard*, New York: Random House / Vintage. 1993)

Babette's Feast : A Story

Karen Blixen, Danish by birth, married a baron and spent the years 1914 – 1931 managing a coffee plantation in British East Africa (her *Out of Africa* tells of these years). After a divorce she returned to Denmark and began writing in English under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen. One of her stories, "Babette's Feast," became a cult classic after being made into a movie in the 1980s.

Dinesen set her story in Norway, but the Danish filmmakers changed the location to an impoverished fishing village on the coast of Denmark, a town of muddy streets and thatched-roof hovels. In this grim setting, a white-bearded dean led a group of worshippers in an austere Lutheran sect.

What few worldly pleasures could tempt a peasant in Norre Vosburg, this sect renounced. All wore black. Their diet consisted of boiled cod and gruel made from boiling bread in water fortified with a splash of ale. On the Sabbath, the group got together and sang songs about "Jerusalem, my happy home, name ever dear to me". They had fixed their compasses on the New Jerusalem, with life on earth tolerated as a way to get there.

The old dean, widower, had two teenage daughters, Martine, named for Martin Luther, and Philippa, named for Luther's disciple Philip Melanchthon. Villagers used to attend the church just to feast their eyes on these two, whose radiant beauty could not be suppressed despite the sisters' best efforts.

Martine caught the eye of a dashing young cavalry officer. When she successfully resisted his advances – after all, who would care for her aging father? – he left to marry a lady-in-waiting to Queen Sophia instead.

Philippa possessed not only beauty but also the voice of a nightingale. When she sang about Jerusalem, shimmering visions of the heavenly city seemed to appear. And so it happened that Philippa made the acquaintance of the most famous opera singer of the

day, the Frenchman Achille Papin, who was spending some time on the coast for health reasons. As he walked the dirt paths of a backwater town, Papin heard to his astonishment a voice worthy of the Grand Opera of Paris.

Allow me to teach you to sing properly, he urged Philippa, and all of France will fall at your feet. Royalty will line up to meet you, and you will ride in a horse-drawn carriage to dine at the magnificent Café Anglais. Flattered, Philippa consented to a few lessons, but only a few. Singing about love made her nervous, the fluttering she felt inside troubled her further, and when an aria from *Don Giovanni* ended with her being held in Papin's embrace, his lips brushing hers, she knew beyond doubt that these new pleasures must be renounced. Her father wrote a note declining all future lessons, and Achille Papin returned to Paris, as disconsolate as if he'd misplaced a winning lottery ticket.

Fifteen years passed, and much changed in the village. The two sisters, now middle-aged unmarried women, had attempted to carry on the mission of their deceased father, but without his stern leadership the sect splintered badly. One brother bore a grudge against another concerning some business matter. Rumours spread about a thirty-year-old sexual affair involving two of the members. A pair of old ladies had not spoken to each other for a decade. Although the sect still met on the Sabbath and sang the old hymns, only a handful bothered to attend, and the music had lost its lustre. Despite all these problems, the dean's two daughters remained faithful, organizing the services and boiling bread for the toothless elders of the village.

One night, a night too rainy for anyone to venture on the muddy streets, the sisters heard a heavy thump at the door. When they opened it, a woman collapsed in a swoon. They revived her only to find she spoke no Danish. She handed them a letter from Achille Papin. At the sight of his name Philippa's face flushed, and her hand trembled as she read the letter of introduction. The woman's name was Babette. She had lost her husband and son during the civil war in France. Her life in danger, she had to flee, and Papin had found her passage on a ship in the hope that this village might show her mercy. "Babette can cook," the letter read.

The sisters had no money to pay Babette and felt dubious about employing a maid in the first place. They distrusted her cooking – didn't the French eat horses and frogs? But

through gestures and pleading, Babette softened their hearts. She would do any chores in exchange for room and board.

For the next twelve years Babette worked for the sisters. The first time Martine showed her how to split a cod and cook the gruel, Babette's eyebrow shot upward and her nose wrinkled a little, but she never once questioned her assignments. She fed the poor people of the town and took over all housekeeping chores. She even helped with Sabbath services. Everyone had to agree that Babette brought new life to the stagnant community. Since Babette never referred to her past life in France, it came as a great surprise to Martine and Philippa when one day, after twelve years, she received her very first letter. Babette read it, looked up to see the sisters staring at her, and announced matter-of-factly that a wonderful thing had happened to her. Each year a friend in Paris had renewed Babette's number in the French lottery. This year, her ticket had won. Ten thousand francs!

The sisters pressed Babette's hands in congratulations, but inwardly their hearts sank. They knew that soon Babette would be leaving.

As it happened, Babette's winning the lottery coincided with the very time the sisters were discussing a celebration to honour the hundredth anniversary of their father's birth. Babette came to them with a request. In twelve years I have asked nothing of you, she began. They nodded. But now I have a request: I would like to prepare the meal for the anniversary service. I would like to cook you a real French dinner.

Although the sisters had grave misgivings about this plan, Babette was certainly right that she had asked no favours in twelve years. What choice had they but to agree?

When the money arrived from France, Babette went away to briefly make arrangements for the dinner. Over the next few weeks after her return, the residents of Norre Vosburg were treated to one amazing sight after another as boats docked to unload provisions for Babette's kitchen. Workers pushed wheelbarrows loaded with crates of small birds. Cases of champagne and wine soon followed. The entire head of a cow, fresh vegetables, truffles, pheasants, ham, strange creatures that lived in the sea, a huge tortoise still alive and moving his snakelike head from side to side-all these ended up in the sisters' kitchen now firmly ruled by Babette.

Martine and Philippa, alarmed by this apparent witch's brew, explained their predicament to the members of the sect, now old and grey and only eleven in number. Everyone clucked in sympathy. After some discussion they agreed to eat the French meal, withholding comment about it lest Babette get the wrong idea. Tongues were meant for praise and thanksgiving, not for indulging in exotic tastes.

It snowed on December 15, the day of the dinner, brightening the dull village with a gloss of white. The sisters were pleased to learn that an unexpected guest would join them: ninety-year-old Miss Loewenhielm would be escorted by her nephew, the cavalry officer who had courted Martine long ago, now a general serving in the royal palace.

Babette had somehow scrounged enough china and crystal, and had decorated the room with candles and evergreens. Her table looked lovely. When the meal began all the villagers remembered their agreement and sat mute, like turtles around a pond. Only the general remarked on the food and drink. "Amontillado!" he exclaimed when he raised the first glass. "And the finest Amontillado that I have ever tasted." When he sipped the first spoonful of soup, the general could have sworn it was turtle soup, but how could such a thing be found on the coast of Jutland?

"Incredible!" said the general when he tasted the next course. "It is Blinis Demidoff!" All the other guests, their faces puckered with deep wrinkles, were eating the same rare delicacy without expression or comment. When the general rhapsodised about the champagne, a Veuve Clicquot 1860, Babette ordered her kitchen boy to keep the general's glass filled at all times. He alone seemed to appreciate what was set before him. Although no one else spoke of the food or drink, gradually the banquet worked a magical effect on the churlish villagers. Their blood warmed. Their tongues loosened. They spoke of the old days when the dean was alive and of Christmas the year the bay froze. The brother who had cheated another on a business deal finally confessed, and the two women who had feuded found themselves conversing. A woman burped and the brother next to her said without thinking, "Hallelujah!"

The general, though, could speak of nothing but the meal. When the kitchen boy brought out the *coup de grâce*, baby quail prepared *en sarcophage*, the general exclaimed that he had seen such a dish in only one place in Europe, the famous Café Anglais in Paris, the restaurant once renowned for its female chef.

Heady with wine, his senses sated, unable to contain himself, the general rose to make a speech. "Mercy and truth, my friends, have met together," he began. "Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another." And then the general had to pause, "for he was in the habit of forming his speeches with care, conscious of his purpose, but here, in the midst of the Dean's simple congregation, it was as if the whole figure of General Loewenhielm, his breast covered with decorations, were but a mouthpiece for a message which meant to be brought forth." The general's message was grace. Although the brothers and sisters of the sect did not fully comprehend the general's speech, at that moment, the vain illusions of this earth had dissolved before their eyes like smoke, and they had seen the universe as it really is. The little company broke up and went outside into a town coated with glistening snow under a sky ablaze with stars.

Babette's Feast ends with two scenes. Outside, the old timers join hands around the fountain and lustily sing the old songs of faith. It is a communion scene: Babette's feast opened up the gate and grace stole in. They felt, adds Isak Dinesen, "as if they had indeed had their sins washed white as wool, and in this regained innocent attire were gamboing like little lambs". The last scene takes place inside, in the wreck of a kitchen piled high with unwashed dishes, greasy pots, shells, carapaces, gristly bones, broken crates, vegetable trimmings, and empty bottles. Babette sits amid the mess, looking as wasted as the night she arrived twelve years before. Suddenly the sisters realize that, in accordance with the vow, no one has spoken to Babette of the dinner.

"It was quite a nice dinner, Babette," Martine says tentatively. Babette seems far away. After a time she says to them, "I was once the cook at the Café Anglais."

"We will all remember this evening when you have gone back to Paris, Babette," Martine said, as if not hearing her. Babette tells them that she will not be going back to Paris. All her friends and relatives there have been killed or imprisoned. And, of course, it would be expensive to return to Paris. "But what about the ten thousand francs?" the sisters ask. Then Babette drops the bombshell. She has spent her winnings, every last franc of the ten thousand she won on the feast they have just devoured. Don't be shocked, she tells them. That is what a proper dinner for twelve costs at the Café Anglais.

In the general's speech, Isak Dinesen leaves no doubt that she wrote *Babette's Feast* not simply as a story of a fine meal but as a parable of grace – a gift that costs everything for the giver and nothing for the recipient. This is what General Loewenhielm told the grimfaced parishioners gathered around him at Babette's table:

“We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite.... But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude.”

Twelve years before, Babette had landed among the graceless ones. Followers of Luther, they heard sermons on grace nearly every Sunday and the rest of the week tried to earn God's favour with their pieties and renunciations. Grace came to them in the form of a feast, Babette's feast, a meal of a lifetime lavished on those who had in no way earned it, who barely possessed the faculties to receive it. Grace came to Norre Vosburg as it always comes: Free of charge, no strings attached, on the house.

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