

**WRESTLING HEART:  
THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC FAITH JOURNEY  
OF A DEVELOPING PSYCHOLOGIST**

by

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## Declaration

I declare that “Wrestling heart: The autoethnographic faith journey of a developing psychologist” is my own work and that all the sources that I used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. Moreover, this dissertation was submitted to “Turnitin” for a plagiarism/similarity assessment.



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## Abstract

This autoethnography tells the story of my faith journey with a special focus on my years as a Catholic seminarian and the change towards embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist. Pertinent childhood experiences are also shared to contextualise my story. The narrative, “Wrestling Heart”, is the centre and the produced data of this autoethnography. As an “evocative” narrative, it independently seeks to fulfil many of the goals of an autoethnography, such as being therapeutic for both writer and readers, and imbuing culture with critical thinking. The sharing of the narrative is augmented with a thematic analysis of it and Carl Rogers’ Person-Centred Approach is mainly used to comprehend the gleaned themes. The movement towards a comprehension of my experience is consistent with the philosophical foundation of this study: phenomenology. It is envisaged that the utility of this study lies primarily in its interrogation of the relationship between religion and mental health, its in-depth depiction of an individual grappling with their faith in relation to mental health, and the way in which the writing of this autoethnography therapeutically fostered greater congruence for me the writer, as I prepare to work as a clinical psychologist.

**Key Terms:** Autoethnography; Faith; Catholicism; Phenomenology; Carl Rogers; Person-Centred Psychology; Clinical Psychology; Catholic Priesthood; Seminarian; Self-actualisation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Risking Revelation

While on retreat in 2010, a week before Easter, I wrote, “terrible, terrible, no idea about vocation, doubt”, in my prayer journal. That Saturday had been surreal for me. I was on about the third day of an eight-day retreat and for the first time in my life, it seemed as though God had withdrawn all his grace from me. The emptiness led to feelings of angst as I reflected on my state in life as a seminarian on the way to the priesthood in the Catholic Church. I was in my fourth year of priesthood studies at the time, several years of disillusionment had already elapsed and the stark reality of the journey I was embarking on confronted me head on. I continued to discern as a seminarian and became ever more aware of my pervading incongruence. But, I was still reluctant to make a definite change.

The following year, I worked at a church in Port Elizabeth, which is a coastal city in South Africa, as part of a pastoral internship. This occurred midway through the course of my theology studies. I worked with diverse groups of people, was afforded greater freedom and socialised more than I had done while in the seminary. As might be expected, I gravitated towards the company of a young lady, whom I had met through a mutual friend, under the guise of joining her prayer group. This intensified my discernment process and it was after spending one night socialising with my favoured prayer group that I wrote in desperation:

*Lord, you have imprisoned me. I want Theresa (pseudonym), but I can't have her  
I am in prison! I can't have her because you will vex me. Lord Jesus, I feel like I have  
been knocked out and I am standing looking at the ref counting – should I get up? (14  
June 2011)*

My six-month internship came to an end a few weeks later. Instead of sending me back to the seminary at which I had been studying previously, my bishop decided to send me

to a Catholic college in Johannesburg. This was on account of me “rocking the boat” at the seminary and their reluctance to have me back.

Uprooted, I continued to discern with the help of a Jesuit spiritual director. During the September of 2011, I was able to make a final decision as I reflected on my lived experience as a seminarian. In the below excerpt, from a letter to my spiritual director, I reflected on the night of the 14 June 2011, discussed above, and I wrote the following:

*I think I finally made the decision one night when I was filled with great anxiety about my vocation. Unable to sleep I decided to pray “the agony in the garden” (Luke 22:39-44, New American Version). My hope was that I would be more willing to make the sacrifice that I felt I was being called to. But, I still experienced great inner conflict – many thoughts seemed to point towards priesthood and many to marriage. I therefore decided to stop thinking about all these thoughts and countless scripture passages and hand them all over to God. I then simply meditated on an ordinary day in the life of a priest and juxtaposed it with an ordinary day in the life of a married person. I came to believe that I would be more myself as a married person and much happier and that this is where God is calling me. Although my plan at the beginning of my prayer time was to embrace more sacrifice, I think God led me elsewhere. (9 September 2011)*

Six years prior to writing the above letter I had applied with great zeal to study towards the Catholic priesthood. At the time I had been reading for a Bachelor of Social Sciences degree (2003-2005) and I was in my third year of psychology studies. Following my September 2011 decision to discontinue priesthood studies I eventually continued with studies in psychology. After completing the first year of study towards a Master of Clinical Psychology degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa) I again went on retreat and wrote the following in my prayer journal as I reflected on a renewed sense of vocation,

*“To live. To experience life to the full. To become my best self. To love with intensity. To be loved dearly. To offer the world my humanity” (15 December 2015).*

## **1.2 Introducing this Autoethnography**

This dissertation is presented in the form of an autoethnography. Chang (2007) writes, “to me autoethnography is the process of trying to narrate one’s own voice – a voice coming from within, from one’s soul. It is the process of making that voice available to others” (p. 16). I shall, therefore, attempt to narrate the voice of my soul. Bochner and Ellis (2016) note the importance of this characteristic of an autoethnography and state that “you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out” (p. 81).

The preceding section provided a brief glimpse into my experience which is the focus of the research, the sharing of which, in the form of an autoethnography, strives “to show life’s complexity and fragility in depth and detail” (Tilman, 2009, p. 94). This is attempted with the use of a story imbued with “deep and intimate emotion that investigates life’s messiness” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 10).

The journey shared covers my faith journey. The experience involved me initially studying psychology, then embarking on and leaving studies towards the Catholic priesthood and, finally, settling on the path to becoming a clinical psychologist.

Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) propose that the purpose of an autoethnography is to “disrupt norms of research practice and representation; work from insider knowledge; manoeuvre through pain, confusion, anger and uncertainty and make life better; break silence/reclaim voice and write to right; make work accessible” (p. 32). In choosing this method, I realise that I have attempted to use a methodology that is in some sense still novel and pushes boundaries. I have indeed worked as an insider, as one who has personally experienced the phenomenon described. I have also endeavoured to use the research in a

therapeutic way – I attempted to integrate my faith which is an important task for one embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist. Some of what the research covers is not often spoken about, it does in a certain sense break taboo. I also hope that it will aid readers, as a parallel process to their own journey, and be therapeutic for them too.

That autoethnographies present with the opportunity to be therapeutic necessitates that they address a certain problem. This autoethnography attempts to address several problems.

### **1.3 Identified Problems**

In order to introduce the several problems the research attempts to address, it is necessary to highlight the context of the research. The research forms a component of a master's in clinical psychology degree. This needs to be kept in mind for it addresses issues relating to the development and work of clinical psychologists.

**1.3.1 Religion and mental health.** Critically reflecting on the culture from which one hails is put forward as one of the main goals of an autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As an integral component of culture, religion ought to be critiqued in a similar way. This is on account of the fact that within cultures, and specifically religions, good and bad components exist. In the context of this research it is noteworthy that certain aspects of religion are said to be healthy and others are not (Magyar-Russel & Griffith, 2016).

Cozzens (2000) and Sipe (2004) highlight the dearth of critical reflection on many issues within Catholicism. They point out that many people within the Catholic Church tend to turn a blind eye to many of the unhealthy teachings and practices within the church – there is an incongruence between the lived experiences and the facades that are presented, which has been linked to much ill-health within the church.

**1.3.2 Religion in clinical practice.** Many issues raised within a psychotherapeutic context are of a religious nature (Begum, 2012). Quite often these issues are complex and are related to processes that may take a lifetime to unfold (Fowler, 1981). Psychotherapists may

struggle with religious stories which are very foreign from their own worldviews, so different from that which they have previously come across in their studies, experiences or clinical practices (Begum, 2012; Plante, 2015). Fostering change, when it is necessary on account of the presence of harmful religious practices or ways of thinking, may be particularly difficult in such a context (Magyar-Russel & Griffith, 2016).

**1.3.3 Congruence of psychotherapists.** The congruence of psychotherapists, or the integration of their various experiences, such as their religious experiences, is important in ensuring that a therapeutic relationship is fostered within the psychotherapeutic setting (Rogers, 1961). As one who moved from studying towards the Catholic priesthood to training as a clinical psychologist, I believed upon embarking upon this research that I had not yet fully integrated my past experiences as a seminarian – I had not fully integrated my religion, a very important part of my identity. I, therefore, had past religious experiences which were not congruent with my awareness prior to embarking on the path to a career as a clinical psychologist.

#### **1.4 Aims and Significance of this Research**

The main goals of an autoethnography are to “purposefully critique culture, make contributions to existing research, embrace vulnerability with purpose and create a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 22). The aims of this research relate to these goals of an autoethnography in the following ways:

**1.4.1 The relationship between my own religion and mental health.** As an autoethnography, this research presents my own story of grappling with my own faith and how it relates to my own mental health. Thus, there was an attempt to offer an in-depth and rich descriptive story which also presented a critical examination of my Catholic faith.



**1.4.2 My own story as a resource for psychotherapists.** As was noted above, many of the processes that are related to the relationship between religion and mental health play out in psychotherapy. It was envisaged that my own story would offer a description of some of the complex processes that may unfold as one wrestles with the topics of religion and mental health in a personal way. Thus, there was an attempt to offer a unique story to professionals, which may offer assistance when they encounter a similar story in clinical practice.

**1.4.3 Working towards personal congruence.** Ellis (2004) emphasises that an autoethnography may be therapeutic for both the writer and reader of the story. The final aim of the research was to attempt to integrate my own religious experience with my chosen career as a clinical psychologist in training, to prepare me to work as a psychologist striving for congruence. The research, therefore, attempted to have a very practical utility, not only for me, but also for those who read the autoethnography while grappling with similar complexities.

## **1.5 Research Question**

What are the lived experiences of a person who has left a journey towards the Catholic priesthood in favour of embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist?

## **1.6 Conceptual Clarifications**

The title, “Wrestling heart: The autoethnographic faith journey of a developing psychologist”, includes several carefully chosen words which require some clarification at this stage.

***Wrestling heart.*** Bochner and Ellis (2016) emphasise the importance of rich stories or narratives when writing autoethnographies. They dissuade writers from veering towards the usual academic writing genres. This advice was followed in this research to a large degree.

Hence, “Wrestling heart”, relates largely to the narrative that is presented in this autoethnography, the meaning of which will be clarified as the story unravels.

***Autoethnographic.*** The research methodology that was employed was that of autoethnography. Ellis et al. (2011) emphasise that autoethnographers write critically about epiphanies that are made possible by being part of a particular cultural group. A critical representation of my experience as one who discontinued priesthood studies and embarked on a career as a clinical psychologist is therefore shared in this research.

***Faith.*** “Faith” primarily relates to my Catholic faith. The word “faith” was chosen here as opposed to religion or spirituality as it fits in better with the narrative which will be relayed. “Faith” emphasises the personal nature of belief, a trusting which is very personal and at times nebulous. The ambiguity of faith is portrayed in the scriptures, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). A concept relating to hope and not seeing was chosen as I believe it offered greater latitude for the complexities and vicissitudes of my autoethnography.

***Journey.*** “Journey” is related to the Rogerian idea that as actualising people we are in process, always developing and open to change (Rogers, 1961). It also relates to the narrative nature of the research – a story which unfolds as a journey.

***Developing.*** Herein, is the acknowledgment that the story which is told is far from one with an integrated ending. It is about one person’s struggles, still in process, and at times only just beginning. The autoethnographic methodology encourages one to embrace vulnerability (Jones et al., 2013). Hence, I am aware that in writing about myself I have revealed much of which has not yet been worked through, at times knowingly, but it is also acknowledged that I may have unknowingly shared with readers aspects of myself which are still beyond my awareness.

*Psychologist.* The discipline of psychology is vast, and the role of a psychologist may be viewed in innumerable ways. Owing to the fact that my autoethnographic story will be viewed from a Rogerian standpoint it will suffice here to note that according to Carl Rogers the role of a psychologist is one which fosters a relationship characterised by genuineness and transparency. He highlighted the importance of being “real” and of accepting and liking the other person as a separate individual. He also strove to carefully see the world and the client as they viewed the world and themselves (Rogers, 1957).

Relating more specifically to the context of this research, the Department of Health in South Africa delineates the scope of practice of clinical psychologists as: “assessing, diagnosing and intervening in clients dealing with life challenges, developmental problems, psychological distress and psychopathology; giving advice based on psychological theory; training and supervising; conducting research” (Department of Health, 2011).

In order to manage these tasks competently, a clinician ought to possess the necessary academic skills and because the clinician is the primary instrument, personal maturity. My striving for maturity will be viewed in a Rogerian manner within this autoethnography.

### **1.7 Outlining this Dissertation**

“Chapter 5: Wrestling Heart”, the narrative of my own faith journey, is the heart of this autoethnography. As a narrative it may be read alone - it fulfils many of the goals of an autoethnography as it is. This detail may benefit readers who do not wish to labour through the academic writing which fleshes out the remainder of this dissertation.

“Chapter 2: Literature Review”, proposes the literature that this research attempts to enter into a discussion with. There is a special focus on writings relating to: religion and mental health; processes that may be at play when one changes from a religious vocation; pertinent Catholic issues relating to this autoethnography; other autoethnographies and memoirs which relate to this research.

“Chapter 3: Theoretical Foundations”, focuses on the paradigmatic underpinnings of this research. It demonstrates how phenomenology is used as the philosophical basis of this dissertation, how this philosophy is coherent with the thoughts behind the methodology of autoethnography and how the philosophy and method are consistent with Carl Rogers’ Person-Centred Approach as a lens through which the narrative is analysed.

“Chapter 4: Methodology”, situates this autoethnography within the qualitative approach towards research. It is shown how phenomenology is consistent with the method of autoethnography and this method is elaborated upon. The way in which the narrative, the data, was produced is explained, followed by an elaboration on the data analysis. Finally, measures that were employed to enhance trustworthiness are presented, followed by the ethical considerations that were adhered to.

“Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion”, gives special attention to the themes gleaned through the analysis of the narrative. The themes are elaborated upon and discussed from a Rogerian point of view. They are also discussed in light of the literature reviewed in “Chapter 2: Literature Review”.

“Chapter 7: Conclusion”, shows succinctly how the research answered the research question and reached the goals of this dissertation. Special emphasis is given to the possible contributions that this autoethnography makes, its limitations and the recommendations for clinical work and future research studies that flow from it.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Religion and Mental Health

In Chapter 1 it was noted that the relationship between religion and mental health is a complex one, especially when it comes to psychotherapy. In this section, a brief introduction to what some writers have said about this relationship is offered. It is noted here at the outset of this exploration that the research on the topic is vast and intricate. Hence, an oversimplification of the topic, such as enquiring if religion in general leads to mental health or illness, is unwise. Focusing on very particular aspects of the relationship between religion and mental health is therefore seen to be more beneficial, which is briefly attempted below.

#### 2.1.1 Positive effects of religion on mental health.

**Meaning and purpose.** Frankl (1946/1988) is famous for highlighting the correlation between meaning and well-being. Contemporary psychologists too (Seligman, 2018) point towards it as being a key component in living a happy life.

It is postulated by many that religion fosters a life of meaning and purpose and that this contributes to positive mental health (Galek, Flannelly, Ellison, Silton, & Jankowski, 2015). Not only does religion give ultimate meaning, but daily strivings for holiness are seen by some to relate closely to purpose, on account of these endeavours involving the attainment of goals (Schnitker & Emmons, 2013).

**Belonging and social support.** Religious communities offer people a community to belong to. This belonging is closely associated with psychological well-being (Behere, Das, Yadav & Behere, 2013). There is therefore a very definite social dimension to religious belief and practice (Mievsky, 2017). Belonging to a community affords members the opportunity for emotional support (Ellison & Levin, 1998) and helps people cope more effectively with stress (Krause & Wulff, 2005).

**Gratitude.** Gratitude has been closely related to optimism and positive mental health (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Many researchers point to the strong relationship between being religious and intrinsic gratefulness (Moore & Leach, 2016; Tsang, Schulwitz & Carlisle, 2011). Other writers point towards prayer increasing gratitude (Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite, Graham, & Beach, 2009). It is also purported that religious involvement in general, and religious coping in particular, can help sustain gratitude in the face of negative emotions (Rosmarin & Pirutinsky, 2016).

**Positive religious coping.** Religious coping is seen by writers to either come in a negative or a positive form. Positive religious coping is seen to enhance mental health – it is characterised by a collaborative relationship and sense of connection with God, as well trust in God as a benevolent force in one’s life (Warren, Van Eck, Townley & Kloos, 2015).

Furthermore:

Positive religious coping involves behaviours such as: trying to find a lesson from God in the stressing event, doing what one can do and leaving the rest in God’s hands, seeking support from clergy/church members, thinking about how one’s life is part of a larger spiritual force, looking to religion for assistance to find a new direction for living when the old one may no longer be viable, and attempting to provide spiritual support and comfort to others. (Behere, et al., 2013, p. 1)

Positive religious coping often leads to better psychosocial adjustment, less depression and anxiety, and heightened self-esteem (Warren, et al., 2015). The negative effects of trauma are seen to be lessened by positive religious coping (Krause, Pargment, & Ironson, 2017). Psychiatric patients frequently use religion to cope and positive religious coping may ameliorate suicide rates (Koenig, 2009).

**Healthy lifestyles.** In some instances, religion may be related to healthier lifestyles. Some religions forbid the uses of harmful substances, such as drugs, and encourage positive

practices such as meditation and prayer which have been associated with psychological well-being (Behere, et al., 2013). Having examined some of the positive effects of religion, it is also important to highlight some of the negative effects.

### **2.1.2 Negative effects of religion on mental health.**

*Cognitive dissonance.* The discomfort or psychological distress that may follow an individual holding contradictory or opposing beliefs at the same time was coined “cognitive dissonance” by Festinger (1957). This occurs when someone begins to appropriate information which challenges their strongly held beliefs. Quite often the distress is heightened because the beliefs that are challenged are religious beliefs (Bae, 2016).

Juma, Van der Merwe, and Du Toit (2017) highlight the cognitive dissonance experienced by African seminarians in a Roman Catholic seminary. The writers highlight that the seminarians quite often enter the seminary with an African worldview which comes into conflict with Catholicism. The writers also emphasise that African seminarians are expected to adopt values which are averse to those of their own cultures, such as embracing celibacy and poverty. They point towards their resulting confusion and discomfort, and their identity being marginalised. The researchers highlight that ignoring the differences between the African and Western worldview may impact the psychosocial and spiritual well-being of the seminarians.

*Dependence.* It is also postulated that religious involvement may foster a culture of dependence on religious communities and the support they offer. This may hamper individuals attaining their own sense of mastery, independent of their faith communities. Being dependent is closely connected to stifled freedom and immaturity which can at times adversely affect psychological development (Speed & Fowler, 2017).

Oladipo and Onuoha (2014) have noted how this dependency may play out for those who enter seminaries in the hope of becoming priests. Working from an existential paradigm

they discovered that seminarians scored low on measures that measured their purpose in life. The writers hypothesised that individuals who lacked a sense of purpose or meaning in their lives had entered the seminary because they could not foster it themselves. They were therefore dependent on the church. The writers questioned if seminarians entered the seminary as an escape from their lack of success outside of it.

***Guilt.*** Several authors emphasise the role that religions play in accentuating the guilt experienced by the religious. Some note that this is because religions enhance self-criticism (Behere, et al., 2013). By fostering guilt some religions increase anxiety and depressive symptoms – adherents worry about their sins and develop a negative image of themselves because of them (Peterman, Labelle, & Steinberg, 2014). That Catholicism is one such religion that fosters guilt, with an emphasis on sin, is noted by researchers (Sheldon, 2006).

***Negative religious coping.*** It was noted above that positive religious coping leads to greater mental health, however the opposite is also true, negative religious coping hampers well-being. Negative religious coping involves a sense of abandonment by God or a generalised disappointment in religion (Warren, et al., 2015). “Negative religious coping includes passive waiting for God to control the situation, redefining the stressor as a punishment from God or as an act of the devil and questioning God’s love” (Behere, et al., 2013, p. 91).

Connected to negative religious coping, Lun and Bond (2013) emphasise that psychological well-being is negatively affected when the religious lose faith in their religious leaders. It has also been discovered that highly religious people, who believe their lives lack purpose and meaning, are prone to ill-health (Galek, et al., 2015).

***Cults.*** Pathological religious communities are labelled as cults in certain situations. These communities place an inviolable focus on their leader, dissuade critical thought and coercive persuasion is the norm. They cut themselves off from the “out group” members,



even family members, and are often associated with shared delusions and sexual exploitation (Freckelton, 1998). They may even encourage suicide (Dein & Littlewood, 2005).

Therefore, although being religious may foster several positive effects, there are also several negative aspects to consider. These negative aspects necessitate change, change which may be fostered within a psychotherapeutic setting.

### **2.1.3 Religion and psychotherapy.**

*Intervention is necessary.* Magyar-Russel and Griffith (2016) highlight the importance of intervening with maladaptive thoughts and behaviours rooted in the religious beliefs of a presenting client. They note that religion is not necessarily unhealthy, but rather harmfulness is often related to how religions are implemented. This is especially the case when outgroup members are treated as “other” and there is the differential treatment of others. The writers emphasise the importance of not being too direct in a therapy, but rather to focus on the existential, such as the meaning of life, rather than directly opposing harmful religious practices.

Koenig (2008) disagrees with the above approach and advocates for the direct challenging of beliefs. He proposes that when religious beliefs foster psychopathology, a respectful but neutral stance is best at the beginning. But, it may be required to gently challenge beliefs that are being used defensively to avoid making important life changes or attitudinal shifts. This is difficult work and should not be tried until a secure therapeutic alliance has been established, a full spiritual history has been taken, and numerous attempts made to alter the client’s attitude and behaviour in other ways (Koenig, 2008). Intervention is therefore necessary, but it should be done respectfully.

*Respect is essential.* Respecting the religious views of a client while intervening is a fine balancing act for mental health professionals. Several writers note that this may be fostered when there is collaboration between mental health professionals and the faith

communities clients come from (Magyar-Russel & Griffith, 2016; Koenig, 2008). Being cognisant of the very particular developmental journey a client may be on, may also foster respect. Moreover, attempting to understand the client's very unique grasp of their faith and being aware of the great diversity within religions is also important (Milstein, Manierre, & Yali, 2010). Plante (2015) gives an example of how being aware of this diversity may play out when working with Catholic clients.

Plante (2015) suggests various principles to keep in mind when working with Catholic clients: being aware of the great diversity within the Catholic Church, that this diversity is often related to cultural differences and that these differences may include the degree to which a Catholic agrees with the church hierarchy or official teaching. He also highlights how the selective coverage of certain themes by the media could influence psychologists in developing stereotypes about the kind of Catholic client they come across, especially with regards to matters of sexual ethics.

Aware of the great diversity of views within South Africa, the Department of Health (2006) stipulates that "a psychologist shall respect the rights of a client to hold values, attitudes, beliefs and opinions that differ from his or her own" (p. 18). Moreover, it is stipulated in the same document that unfair discrimination is prohibited and that a psychologist should not enforce their own values, faith, and beliefs and should not be biased against those who may have different beliefs or belong to a different cultural group.

Government policies, therefore, encourage this respect. However, it can also be a hindrance. Although, some professionals believe in the importance of religion and its use in therapy, the actual implementation of its use is hampered by beliefs around separation of religion from secular professions. Many religious professionals may overly rely on clients to take the lead when matters of religion arise, lest the client be offended. Professionals are more likely to pray privately before a psychotherapeutic session than with a client

(Wagenfeld-Heintz, 2008). The unease of professionals in working with such matters, therefore indicates the necessity for the development of their competencies.

*Competence is required.* In her work, Begum (2012) noted that many developing psychologists show a lack of awareness about topics relating to religion and spirituality. The trainee psychologists in her study found it difficult to think and talk about religion and spirituality. Many spoke about becoming anxious when religious and spiritual issues were raised in their work as therapists. She, therefore, highlighted the importance of these topics being covered in training, a sentiment which several others agree with.

Aten and Hernandez (2004) speak about the utilisation of a model which focuses on “Addressing Religion in Supervision”. The model includes eight key aspects: (1) being introduced to religious and spiritual interventions; (2) using assessment tools to determine the influence and impact of religion on the client and on the client’s presenting problem; (3) the promotion of multicultural sensitivity; (4) understanding how professionals themselves influence the assessment of religious issues and clients; (5) supervisors encourage supervisees to know what their chosen theoretical orientation assumes and teaches about religion; (6) the promotion of case conceptualisations that include religious issues and themes; (7) developing treatment goals and plans that are compatible with a client’s religious beliefs, values, and practices; (8) familiarisation with ethical guidelines and codes that pertain to religious clients and issues.

Vieten, Scammell, Pierce, Pilato, Ammondson, Pargament, and Lukoff (2016) focus on developing competencies for psychologists in the domains of spirituality and religion. The authors focus on 16 competencies under three main headings: attitudes and beliefs; knowledge; and skills. For example, their third competency is, “Psychologists are aware of how their own spiritual and/or religious background and beliefs may influence their clinical

practice, and their attitudes, perceptions, and assumptions about the nature of psychological processes” (Vieten et al., 2016, p. 100).

Bodenstein and Naude (2017) note how culturally, and, therefore, also religiously and spiritually, diverse South Africa is. They also note that there is a direct link between the psychologist’s professional level of “multicultural competence” (MCC) and the outcomes of therapy. The researchers worked with developing psychologists and noted that when speaking about multicultural competence there should be a focus on cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal factors.

Bodenstein and Naude’s (2017) research with trainee psychologists postulated that MCC occurs across the lifespan and is influenced by various factors, such as exposure to diverse environments, the kind of family one is raised in, religious differences, experience at school, voluntary work, and previous careers. They note that breaking through biases may occur through curiosity and a willingness to learn. They also note that the development of MCC also occurs during the training of psychologists as they encounter diverse people. The research suggested that MCC could be further fostered by the availability of diverse lecturing staff, and for the availability of experts in the field during the training. This was also because the development occurred largely when experiences were reflected upon.

Whitely (2012) also emphasises the importance of MCC. But, highlights that, “cultural competence by definition includes religious competence, as individual religious orientation infuses patients’ beliefs, values, attitudes, and conventions” (p. 250). He goes on to emphasise the importance of adequate training in order to foster religious competence.

***Integrated psychologists are needed.*** Religious competence was noted above to not just include the learning of a particular set of skills to be implemented, but also the self-development of the psychologist. Hence, Frame (2001) focuses on the “Spiritual Genogram in Training and Supervision”. Here, psychologists are encouraged to explore their own

religious and spiritual influences and beliefs and are encouraged to consider how this influences their work with their presenting clients. Frame (2001) encourages developing psychologists to integrate their own religions with themselves. This integration is paramount for a psychotherapeutic relationship, “The therapist should be, within the confines of this relationship, a congruent, genuine, integrated person. It means that within the relationship he is freely and deeply himself” (Rogers, 1957, p. 97).

Having noted that the relationship between religion and mental health is complex and may require psychotherapeutic intervention, it follows then, that for some, change is necessary in order to move towards positive mental health. Therefore, some of the matters relating to changing from a religious vocation, or changing from what is not deemed healthy, is noted in the next section.

## **2.2 Processes of Change**

### **2.2.1 Changing a religious vocation.**

*Former religious.* In “Ministering to Madness”, Crawford, Nolan, and Brown (1998) share various aspects of the narratives of people who have left religious orders to work in the caring professions. In their work they show how there is a congruence between the ethics of care and those of religious life, they also highlight the importance of contemplation and self-examination in both Christianity and psychotherapy. In describing their change of vocation, respondents shared about their profound changes and moments of uncertainty, similar to other stages of change, such as grieving or unemployment. They discovered that for some, caring for others was part of caring for self. The way in which respondents experienced disillusionment with religious life and isolation upon leaving their order or religious community appears to have allowed a special empathy to develop for those who suffer from mental illness.

Crawford et al. (1998) point towards loss of faith and subsequent disillusionment with the religious life, feeling stuck and needing to move forward, feeling isolated and unsupported, and finding religious life too restrictive as reasons as to why respondents left their communities or religious orders. The writers highlight that because many respondents felt insecure with taking up life in the world, they were drawn to that which they were familiar with: pastoral care. They were, however, drawn to pastoral care with the need for “self-healing, to be fixed, to understand and to be understood” (p. 217).

***Former priests.*** Pietkiewics (2016) explored the experiences of ten former priests. The former priests spoke about the stress of breaking community norms, their anxiety around stigma, and their lack of confidence in functioning as a lay person outside the church. The writer goes on to show how the change of the former priests was similar to the stress of changing a career. He highlighted that a precursor to their change was that the priests experienced higher levels of psychological distress, depression, and burn-out than the general population. Despite these high numbers, there is a lack of psychological research relating to factors affecting their decision. The writer goes on to provide suggestions of what could be covered in therapy: issues relating to separation and autonomy; issues related to personal and cultural factors on the decision to leave; emotional support, and the development of strategic plans.

***Spirituality outside Catholicism.*** In “Spiritual Yearnings: An Autoethnographic Inquiry”, Johnston (2010) shares her own experience of attaining a sense of spirituality subsequent to leaving the Catholic Church. She also interviewed five co-researchers who were in a similar position to her. The co-researchers were mostly students at her university. Their shared experiences related largely to them struggling with their relationship with the Catholic Church, while forming a spirituality of their own, outside the church. In the research, the writer spoke about the formation of hybrid discourses as being important, along

with the freedom to share them. She also focused on how she herself sought meaning with the new discourses.

The processes of change briefly covered in this section relate to the idea that faith is quite often dynamic and ever-changing. This is emphasised when one considers how a person's faith may grow and change – perhaps in stages.

**2.2.2 Stages of faith.** *Stages of Faith* by Fowler (1981) is a seminal work on faith development which highlights faith development as a process. It is covered in depth here because of its relevance to this autoethnography. Fowler, a theologian and expert in human development, proposed a number of broad stages which can be viewed in a similar way to the stages of development proposed by Piaget and Kohlberg. Like other stages of development, they may not occur in the neat chronological order proposed and many people of deep faith may not progress to the latter stages.

***Intuitive-projective faith.*** During early-childhood fantasy and reality blur together. Our religious knowledge is drawn from our families or cultural groups. The child is very impressionable at this stage. Fowler noted that quite often experiences and images that take root at this stage still play a role in later life, both positively and negatively (Fowler, 1981).

***Mythic-literal faith.*** Primary school children at this stage quite often accept the stories of their faith, but tend to understand them very literally. Fowler highlights how important narrative is at this stage and that the stories learnt so enthusiastically offer great meaning to the developing child (Fowler, 1981).

***Synthetic-Conventional.*** Adolescents at this stage begin to encounter differing people. They are at a stage of identity formation. They have a tendency to try and bring together their new experiences, to synthesise them, to bring together an identity. Quite often this synthesising means that an all-encompassing belief system is adopted which gives coherence when complexity in the life of the adolescent is increasing (Fowler, 1981).

***Individuative-reflective faith.*** Young adults begin to critically evaluate their faith. Fowler (1981) highlights how this newfound critical thinking is closely related to the formation of boundaries between the individual and the religious groups they belong to. He also notes that it can be burdensome to begin to think of oneself as separate from the group that has given sustenance for so long. Fowler (1981) also notes that this stage is more difficult to negotiate if it occurs later in life, because an adult life has already been built and relationships have to be reworked.

***Conjunctive faith.*** During mid-life, people begin to accept the paradoxes of life, the mysteries of life. There is the reconciling of previous parts of faith development. There is a greater openness to persons of other faiths. The stories of faith are quite often revisited at this stage without the need to tie them down literally, in other words, with a greater openness to their complexity (Fowler, 1981).

***Universalising faith.*** During late adulthood some may reach a universalising faith. Their faith expression is beyond self-interest and is truly liberating. These people have a mystical, vibrant character and are imbued with simplicity – many of the deep concerns of previous stages are of no concern. These people are said to have integrated their faith (Fowler, 1981).

Having noted Fowler's (1981) stages of faith development it is also necessary to consider a possible alternate process that could develop in the life of the believer – a change toward irreligion.

**2.2.3 Changes toward irreligion.** Fisher (2017) suggests various stages an individual may experience as this process plays out: questioning, doubt, reconfiguration, switching, de-conversion, disaffiliation and opposition.

***Questioning.*** Fisher (2017) notes that questioning people of faith quite often question subjects related to religion and science, social concerns and suffering in the world. As these



concerns are pursued and pondered, some changes in their belief may occur. However, a person may never venture beyond minor questioning and the implementation of small changes to their belief structure. Nevertheless, if the questions are numerous and worrying feelings of doubt may develop.

***Doubt.*** Doubt is energy sapping and robs the questioner of a resource that had previously provided structure and meaning when prior troubles had been faced. It may be linked to a crisis of faith which involves a thorough alternation to a person's identity, worldview and a belief that had previously been trusted. With regards especially to persons changing from a religious vocation:

Psychological distress may accompany doubt along with poorer sleep quality, and lower wellbeing. These effects may be particularly salient for those with more religious commitment or those who have formal roles in their churches; such individuals may experience lower health satisfaction and more symptoms of depression related to their doubts (Fisher, 2017, p. 360).

***Reconfiguration.*** If the doubt is sufficiently powerful, the doubter may endeavour to reconfigure their beliefs or practices and remain affiliated to their faith community in some way. A further crisis of faith may be experienced by some individuals, which could lead to more reconfiguration efforts (Fisher, 2017).

***Switching.*** The attempt to reconfigure their faith may involve the switching to similar faith communities. For example, Christians may move from one Christian denomination to another in the hope that their reconfiguration and switching will answer their questions and doubts (Fisher, 2017).

***Deconversion.*** Deconversion may follow if the existential angst is further increased as a result of confusion about what is real in the world. Such a person may inwardly have relinquished their beliefs, but continue to participate outwardly (Fisher, 2017).

**Disaffiliation.** Individuals may take years to disaffiliate and may remain a believer in terms of identity even if they stop participating in religious activities. This often depends on the degree to which the person's life had been integrated with the faith community. A great deal of personal strain may go with disaffiliation, including a high degree of ambivalence. Moreover, the disaffiliate loses the social support they had previously enjoyed (Fisher, 2017).

**Opposition.** The individual may also endeavour to resolve their ambivalence by taking up an oppositional attitude to their previous beliefs and faith community. The individual may also experience so much resentment toward the previous religion or its beliefs that what was previously seen as good is now viewed as bad – an evil that can only be criticised or demolished without the hope of repair (Fisher, 2017).

Having considered various aspects of faith development, which could involve a move towards irreligion, it is beneficial at this stage to consider some very particular aspects that the faith journey of a Catholic seminarian would likely include.

## **2.3 Pertinent Catholic Issues**

**2.3.1 Becoming a priest.** “Priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1563). Official Catholic teaching maintains that priests have a very special vocation, completely different from ordinary believers – they act in the “person of Christ”. Cognisant of the immensity of such an undertaking, Hankle (2010) illuminates this process in his “The Psychological Processes of Discerning the Vocation to the Catholic Priesthood”.

Hankle (2010) delineates various stages of discernment on the way to becoming a priest: the acquisition of the idea of sense of self as a priest, testing alternative senses of self,

transitioning into a sense of self as priest, affirmation of sense of self as priest and persistent disposition of discernment.

Hankle (2010) underlines that discerning a call to the priesthood is akin to other forms of identity development. He underscores that becoming a priest is not simply about function, but that there are deeper ontological issues, such as the priest's standing in society. He also emphasises how the formation of an identity as a celibate has similar ramifications to that of identifying as heterosexual or homosexual, how one relates to others and who a person is.

Catholics believe that an ontological change takes place during the ordination of a priest, in being configured to Christ something of their very being is changed for all eternity. Because of the permanency of this change, priests cannot cease to be priests, even if they stop fulfilling the functions of a priest. This has significance for the way in which Catholics view priests, how priests view themselves, and, of course, is significant for a trainee priest's identity (Hankle, 2010).

Hankle (2010) emphasises that how well a man has begun to integrate priestly identity with his sense of self is therefore seen to be very important for his sense of well-being. As one discerns priestly identity there is therefore a twofold grappling: discovering what it will mean to be ontologically different from lay people; and coming to terms with an identity as a celibate.

**2.3.2 Celibacy.** Although not an immutable discipline, Catholic priests are generally obliged to live a celibate life, they make this promise at their ordination. The practice has not always been so, but today its continuation is supported by assertions that celibacy allows a priest to give himself fully to the community he serves after the example of Christ (Weafer, 2013).

Studies point towards both the joys and sorrows of living a celibate life. Some priests talk about how they experience it as a great gift and how it brings them closer to God and to

His people. However, others also point towards themes of loneliness and depression. There is also contestation by priests themselves whether it is of pragmatic value (Weafer, 2013).

McGavin (2011) proposes that insufficient focus has been given to the complex processes at play in the journey towards celibacy. This can give rise to a great deal of suppression of development, as there is only a focus on perfect chastity as an end result and not much focus is given to the developmental stage that young priests and seminarians find themselves in. He, therefore, highlights the importance of the “law of graduality” (McGavin, 2011, p. 3) when working with trainee priests, an idea that recognises that development is gradual. He emphasises that the Catholic Church’s continued teaching that masturbation is a mortal sin is one such example of neglecting an awareness that people are developing and in process. He sees “the ordinary experience of sustained struggle not as pathological, but as integral to vocational intimacy with Christ and his Church” (McGavin, 2011, p. 3).

Weafer’s (2013) thesis demonstrates that celibacy is typically understood and experienced along a continuum, ranging from total acceptance to total rejection, with most priests somewhere in between. This highlights that many priests do not in fact live celibate lives. The psychotherapist, Richard Sipe (2003), notes in his research that about 50% of Catholic priests in the United States of America do not live celibate lives. This was corroborated by others, such as Donald Cozzens (2004) who emphasises that one cannot take for granted that a man will simply receive the gift of celibacy on account of his ordination.

There is thus an incongruence between official church teaching on celibacy and the reality of many priests’ lives. This incongruence also plays out when the church talks about homosexuality.

**2.3.3 Homosexuality.** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that homosexual acts are “intrinsically disordered” and that homosexual tendencies are “objectively disordered” (Catholic Church, 1994, paras. 2357 & 2358). Although, there is an exhortation to show such

individuals respect, these few short lines in Catholic teaching have caused great hurt and worry to many Catholics, including seminarians and priests (Martin, 2017).

Kappler, Hancock, and Plante (2013) note that internalised homophobia, which is fostered in part by church teaching, plays a negative role in that it hampers psychological well-being and is associated with depression, it is also related to less integration of sexual identity. This was exacerbated by the sexual abuse crises in the Catholic Church, in that homosexuality was used as a scapegoat by many in the Church, including the previous pope.

In 2005, in response to the sexual abuse scandal, a document was released by the church which emphasised that those with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” should not be allowed to study towards the priesthood (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2005). Following this, guidelines were even issued for the apt assessment of these tendencies (Kleponis & Fitzgibbons, 2011). A great deal can be said about the psychological effects of the church teachings, but like with celibacy, some figures relating to the actual number of homosexual priests are important.

Cozzens (2000) suggests that approximately 23-58% of Catholic priests in the USA are homosexual and Kappler et al. (2013) suggest that between 30-50 % of Catholic priests in the USA are homosexual. There is therefore an incongruence between church teaching and the experience of so many within the church. Having a church document suggest that homosexuals cannot be priests is incongruent when there is already a significantly high percentage of homosexuals within the Catholic priesthood.

Cozzens (2000) notes that this dissonance also has ramifications for heterosexual seminarians and postulates that the Catholic Church’s incongruent dealings with homosexuality in the Church can quite often affect heterosexual seminarians in a unique way.

On account of the Church not acknowledging the large number of homosexual priests and seminarians, some may enter the seminary not expecting to come across a high

percentage of homosexuals. It can therefore come as a shock as a new unfamiliar world is entered into:

Self-contained communities like seminaries with substantial gay populations present significant difficulties for the straight seminarian, often on an unconscious level.

Unaware that his psyche senses a challenge to his own integration and identity – and therefore is standing on alert – he notices only a vague feeling of discomfort and a loss of psychic energy (Cozzens, 2000, p. 135).

Some moral theologians have moved away from the ancient Catholic practice of being overly concerned about the detection and categorisation of sin and prefer to speak about a “fundamental orientation” (Gula, 1996). Hence, for some there has been a move away from minuscule nit-picking towards the consideration of whether or not a Christian is fundamentally orientated towards the good, towards the truth. This is mentioned here in that it relates to the issues of celibacy and homosexuality.

Whether or not a priest or seminarian lives a celibate life or not, or is straight or gay, is not as important as the way in which the Catholic Church approaches these issues – its fundamental orientation towards these issues. It would seem that in approaching these issues the Catholic Church has not taken a fundamental orientation towards the truth, but rather towards denial. This orientation towards denial has had diabolical consequences. For with this orientation the Catholic Church has approached other issues – such as the Child Sexual Abuse Scandal.

**2.3.4 Child sexual abuse.** Although sexual abuse of children by the clergy is an age-old scourge, it was only in 2002 that it became widely publicised. This was in no small part because of the *Boston Globe's* publications of news of the sexual abuse in 2002. The journalists threw light on the extent of the scandal in Boston, USA. They illuminated the degree to which those in authority knew about it and the way in which the cases were not

dealt with professionally. These reports produced a snowball-effect: soon other stories broke all over the world of the scandal, particularly in North America and Western Europe (Guido, 2008).

A great deal has been written about the effects of sexual abuse of children elsewhere - this will not be covered here. What is of interest for my autoethnography is how Catholics dealt with the news that so many priests had abused children.

For example, Kline, McMackin, and Lezotte (2008) discovered four main themes that arose in response to the abuse scandal as they conducted focus groups in Catholic parishes in the USA: many parishioners felt a deep sense of hurt in being betrayed by the leaders in the church; many felt that their past pains inflicted by clergy were reawakened; many tried to cope by separating their relationship with God from their relationship with the church; many were concerned about the faith of their family members as a result of the scandal.

Scheper-Hughes and Devine (2003) highlight that the Catholic hierarchy often responded in such a way as to avoid scandal and focused on the reputation of priests rather than on the primary victims. They also highlight how various defence mechanisms were at play in the response to the abuse scandal: quite often it was denied all together. Many used rationalisations and noted that Catholic clergy abused children at the same rate as clergy in other churches and at a rate similar to the general population. The writers also note how gay clergy and seminarians were scapegoated by the church.

In explaining the effects of the abuse scandal by the clergy, Guido (2008) notes that the Catholic worldview exacerbated the damage. Catholics believe that a priest is given special spiritual gifts which enable him to represent Christ in a special way and which aid him in reaching for holiness, “the sacrament of Holy Orders confers an indelible spiritual character and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily. The priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Order, acts in *persona Christi*” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1548). This

means that Catholics believe that the very nature of a priest changes for all eternity when he is ordained and when he acts during religious ceremonies, it is as though Christ himself is acting. This points directly to a very specific ontological belief in Catholicism, that a priest's very being is different and will continue to be so even in heaven. To have such a person abuse others is perplexing to church members and challenges the foundation of such a worldview.

A man on the journey towards the priesthood would therefore need to either prepare himself for life as a celibate, or for life with the secret that he is not celibate. He will need to grow accustomed to the fact that the percentage of homosexual priests is much higher than the general population, and that the Catholic Church does not acknowledge this fact. He will also need to grow accustomed to being viewed as a potential child predator by the general population, all the while being aware that the Church has not adequately dealt with this sinister scourge.

The issues raised thus far in this literature review highlight something of the underlying complexity a psychologist may not be aware of when working with a religious person. The training of psychologists in such matters is therefore of fundamental importance, which this autoethnography hopes to illuminate. As a dissertation this autoethnography hopes to add to, and enter into a conversation with the existing literature, especially the autoethnographies and memoirs of others who have experienced similar stories.

## **2.4 Autoethnographies and Memoirs**

### **2.4.1 Faith stories.**

*Growing up Catholic.* I first read Frank McCourt's (1996) *Angela's Ashes* during my second year in the seminary (2008). Coming across the way in which he humourlessly presents his lived experience of Catholic beliefs was quite novel for me – previously I had believed that one ought to always be serious about such hallowed matters. His memoir could



be deemed autoethnographic in that: through his humour he presents a critique of the pompousness of Catholic dogma; and, his story provides a glimpse into a Catholic worldview which outsiders may not have previously encountered.

Personally, I find his parallel story therapeutic. For example, he illuminates how Catholics viewed Protestants:

*Catholic Superiority.* On Sunday mornings in Limerick I watch them go to church, the Protestants, and I feel sorry for them, especially the girls, who are so lovely, they have such beautiful white teeth. I feel sorry for the beautiful Protestant girls, they're doomed. That's what the priest tells us. Outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation. Outside the Catholic Church there is nothing but doom. And I want to save them. Protestant girls, come with me to the True Church. You'll be saved and you won't have the doom. (McCourt, 1996, p. 172)

*Catholicism and sexuality.* McCourt also underscores the way in which matters of sexuality were viewed by his Catholic faith at the time, something not completely dissimilar to my own upbringing:

I can't stop interfering with myself. I pray to the Virgin Mary and tell her I'm sorry I put her Son back on the cross and I'll never do it again, but I can't help myself and swear I'll go to confession and after that, surely after that, I'll never do it again. I don't want to go to hell with devils chasing me for eternity jabbing me with hot pitchforks. (McCourt, 1996, p. 292)

*Seminary life.* In his memoir, *Seminary Boy*, John Cromwell (2006) tells the story of his time as a seminarian. He gives an in-depth exposition of the culture of the seminary, he shares his family's struggles with poverty, the illness of his father, and his parent's marital discord. He tells of the challenges of seminary life, which include him struggling to learn Latin initially until he begins to excel academically.

*Relationship struggles.* He openly tells the story of battling with human relationships: he idealising some of the priests who were his mentors and then his following disillusionment when one attempted to abuse him. He tells the story of the complex nature of the friendships in the seminary, with several gay friends making advances and his ambivalent feelings to such advances (Cromwell, 2006).

*Clericalism.* What stood out for me was the great turning point in his vocation. He had been instructed to enter a room reserved for priests in order to fetch a table and then was reprimanded severely by another superior for doing so. However, he did not back down, he confronted his superiors and was severely disciplined for his insubordination. This encounter played a huge role in the unravelling of his own vocation (Cromwell, 2006).

*An ex-nun's parallel story.* Karen Armstrong's two memoirs, *Through the Narrow Gate* (1981) and *The Spiral Staircase* (2005) share her experience of convent life as a nun and her experience of leaving the convent respectively. It is perhaps her story, more than any other that resonates with me, especially with regards to her enduring religious life even though she was not happy. Several themes particularly resonate:

*Suppression of desire.* Armstrong writes evocatively about the way in which she was encouraged to deny herself. She longed for friendships – but these were forbidden in her convent. She endured extreme poverty and forced herself to eat food which made her feel nauseous:

Well, we're not supposed to pay any attention to our likes and dislikes. It's a way of getting the better of our bodies so that we govern them, not vice versa. That's how we become absolutely centred on God's will, instead of our own." (Armstrong, 1981, p. 80)

*Unhappiness.* Armstrong tells the story of her, along with many other young nuns, crying themselves to sleep night after night. She was willing to endure the pain because she believed it was part and parcel of her vocation. Her family was allowed to visit her only a couple times a year and only for a few minutes. One family visit played out as follows:

“Are you happy, Karen?” asked my father dubiously as we all sat down. “Oh yes!” I said emphatically.” How could I convince them? And anyway, what did the word happiness mean? Mother Albert had redefined the concept for us: happiness, she had said, was doing God’s will. Nun’s didn’t enter a convent to be happy; they came to do God’s will. (Armstrong, 1981, p. 110)

*Terribleness.* Armstrong often endured harsh treatment from her superiors, especially, when she was a novice. She had accepted that the harshness was part of the process of sanctification. On one occasion a senior of hers visited her convent and the two stole a quick conversation:

We sat silently. She was lost in that room of twenty years ago. At last she spoke. “It was terrible,” she said. That was all. She turned and looked at me and our eyes shared a knowledge. “Do you find it terrible too?” I nodded. It was hard to speak. “I thought you would,” she said. “But you’re all right, aren’t you? You still want to stay?” “Oh, yes,” I said emphatically. “Mother Walter tells us that it’s got to be hard – it has to be.” (Armstrong, 1981, p. 142)

*Questioning.* After Armstrong had finished her novitiate, she was tasked with teaching children at a nearby church their catechism. But, she was beginning to think critically about her faith:

What was the church asking me to do? Here I was, pumping these children with the Catholic mechanisms of guilt that would probably haunt them all their lives! Was that what the love of God was all about? (Armstrong, 181, p. 198)

*Protest.* As a student of literature at Oxford University, she lived between the two worlds of university and convent, between critical thought and resolute obedience. On one occasion, she rushed back from university and sat down to listen to a lesson from a senior nun:

“There is the great blessing of loneliness...it gives you a chance to realise your dependence on God, to rely on Him alone.” I had heard it so many times before, but something in me now was exploding in protest. (Armstrong, 1981, p. 220)

*Dissonance.* Armstrong was one of only two Oxford University students in her convent. This accentuated the disjuncture she felt. On one occasion, she voiced her concern to her fellow student.

I sighed despairingly. “I feel I’m two people. Two parts of me are dragging me apart and any day I’ll burst! Sister, how can they do this to us? Send us to Oxford to develop our minds and then, when we go home, expect us to stop using them?” (Armstrong, 1981, p. 240)

*A unique experience.* Following her leaving her religious order, she embraced the world of academia and her previous life seemed a distant bad memory, an experience she battled to share:

However hard I try, I’ve never been able to explain adequately what it was really like, and that means that I’ve never been able to explain the most important part of my life, not even to the people who’ve been closest to me. (Armstrong, 1981, p. 278)

*Limbo.* Although, her experience of leaving her religious order may have appeared to others as liberating, the process of change left a void:

Beliefs and principles that I had taken so completely for granted that they seemed part of my very being now appeared strangely abstract and remote. In fact, I reflected uneasily, I did not seem to think or feel anything very strongly anymore.” (2005, p. 33)

*Timeous process of change.* Armstrong struggled to integrate an experience which was permeated with both religious passion and hurtful trauma:

The decision to leave my order had been very difficult, and for about six years I existed in a state of grief and depression probably not dissimilar to the experience of a bad divorce or a major bereavement. But when I sat down to write this memoir in 1979, some twelve years after leaving the religious life, I felt that I was beginning to recover. (Armstrong, 1981, p. xiii)

She, thus, highlights the precarious position one may be in as the two worlds of religious and secular life are bridged. She also describes how her view of religion changed for the better, “In the past, my own practice of religion had diminished me, whereas true faith, I now believe, should make you more human than before” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 271).

*Finding spirituality outside Catholicism.* In her autoethnography, “Spiritual Yearnings”, Johnson (2007) shares her in-depth journey towards a spirituality outside of the Catholic Church with her formation of new hybrid spiritual discourses. She highlights how, for her, the meaning-making process fostered her own spiritual identity. She saw the purpose of her research as being to “develop a more comprehensive understanding of my own process of my spiritual identity development by connecting with others who were also raised within the Catholic Church and found a need to renegotiate their spiritual identity” (p. 4).

Johnson’s (2007) research highlights how the writing of an autoethnography is a process in itself and not simply about writing about a detached past experience, “I am learning to make room for newer narratives and slowly through this autoethnographic process

I am learning to let the inner discourse of my spiritual self-speak too” (p. 83). Along with the motive of embracing vulnerability in an autoethnography, she shared, “I felt that I was betraying the church by wanting to discover my spiritual self outside of it” (p. 85). This struck a chord with me.

***Faith and academia.*** In his autoethnography, Baesler (2017) describes his spiritual and religious influences on his way to becoming a professor. He describes the path that led him as a communication expert to focus on prayer research. Very importantly for this proposal, he described how his initial field of interest was commerce, but that for him was not the “real me” (p. 94) and led to him becoming depressed. True to the nature of an autoethnography, he highlights epiphanies in his life and notes that “these grace filled affirmations can become moments when we recognise the divine spirit speaking through other people to call forth our gifts and talents, bringing out the best in us for the service of humanity” (p. 93). Enjoying the freedom that the autoethnography methodology brings, he punctuates his research with a series of questions for reflection, such as the following one which resonates with the call of Bochner and Ellis (2016) to live an autoethnographic life: “Does your scholarship reflect your heart’s desire, your deepest passion, your true path?” (p. 10).

**2.4.2 Stories of developing psychologists.** Clarke (2009), Van der Merwe (2013), and Wichman (2012) wrote their autoethnographies as they trained as clinical psychologists at the University of South Africa. As a student at the same institution their research is, therefore, of particular interest and pertinence.

***Uncertainty.*** In her autoethnography, Clarke (2009) explains how her assumptions about psychotherapy changed during her training as a clinical psychologist. She describes how that which she had previously been certain about was dismantled, and how it was a struggle for her to learn to live with ambiguity and vulnerability. She says she felt

“anchorless, powerless, rudderless and helpless” (p. 40). She goes on to explain how this led to raw emotions which she tried to fight against. She also explains how her training influenced her many close relationships and most poignant, for me she noted that, “I was no longer sure of anything and I was questioning everything, including my core beliefs. Did God even exist, I asked myself. I was becoming cynical and disillusioned” (p. 44).

***Differentiation.*** Van der Merwe’s (2013) autoethnography highlights the importance of a psychotherapist being self-differentiated and how this partly took place during her training. She explains differentiation as balancing individuation and emotional connection or being able to enter into intimate relationships while remaining autonomous. Her research is summed up with her assertion:

One of the most significant inner experiences that I had during this process was the realisation that the psychotherapist is also a human being, a unique human being with a set of assumptions and their own share of unfinished business and unmet needs. I was confronted with my own unfinished business and I was given the opportunity to begin to work through my personal conflicts in order to reduce the amount of blind spots I had. (p. 118)

***Finding authenticity.*** Wichman (2012) approached his autoethnography and training as a clinical psychologist as an opportunity for healing. He describes how the process allowed him to find his authentic voice. He asserts that the methodology of autoethnography provides an avenue for reflexivity which is highly needed in a career as a clinical psychologist and even recommends that the methodology be used more extensively in the training of clinical psychologists so as to facilitate maturity. The highly personal nature of his autoethnography reaches a climax when he shares with his father that he had recently acquired a tattoo with the phrase, “Where angels fear”. His dissertation provides a rich description of his process of differentiation.

The information presented in this literature review was chosen because of its pertinence – the material covered is directly related to the subject matter of this dissertation. The particular way in which the reviewed literature is regarded in this research is directed by the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of this autoethnography – these are, therefore, next presented.



### 3. Theoretical Foundations

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter elucidates the three key interlinked approaches which form the basis of this dissertation. Phenomenology is first covered as the philosophical paradigm which influences the way in which knowledge is viewed in this research. Next, the intrinsic ideas behind the methodology of autoethnography are explained and they are linked to the philosophy of phenomenology. Finally, the Person-Centred Approach of Carl Rogers, the psychological theory used to analyse the data of this autoethnography, is presented and it is shown how his theory is consistent with the ideas of phenomenology and autoethnography.

#### 3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology may be simply explained as the study of experience. *Phainomenon* literally means appearance, or that which shows itself, philosophers therefore define phenomena to mean the appearances of things, as contrasted with the things themselves as they really are. In phenomenology there is a focus on how experiences appear to the persons who experience them (Spinelli, 2005).

From the framework of phenomenology then, the world as we experience it, is a phenomenal world (Spinelli, 2005). Heidegger highlighted that adopting a phenomenological view means, “to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 30). There is also the constant refrain in the work of Heidegger, “to the things themselves” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 30).

However, even though there is a focus on “the things themselves”, or the “appearance of things”, phenomena are not studied in isolation, for there is always someone who is taking part in the experience. As will be elaborated upon below, this interplay of experiencer and experience is of fundamental importance in phenomenology. Phenomenology, therefore, also

involves the careful study of how phenomena are made sense of by the experiencer – the subjective structuring of experience (Spinelli, 2005).

Although, Husserl is the primary name mentioned when considering the genesis of phenomenology, in this section his predecessor, Franz Brentano, and two of his protégés, Martin Heidegger and Edith Stein are also considered. Then the way in which phenomenology is most often applied in modern psychology is also presented.

**3.2.1 Franz Brentano (1838-1917).** Brentano studied and taught at various German universities and at the University of Vienna, Austria. In Vienna he taught and had a considerable impact on Husserl and Freud. His influence in the fields of philosophy, theology, and psychology is therefore profound. In 1864, he became a Catholic priest, but left the priesthood and the church owing to his great struggle with various dogmas. His thought within the Catholic milieu of the time is important to consider in attempting to understand the way in which he influenced Husserl and phenomenology (Schaefer, 2007).

Brentano followed the lead of the scholastic philosophers, such as St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who had attempted to use Aristotelian thought as a framework to analyse modern concerns. Brentano's great concern was that philosophy be truly scientific, based on observation and experience. This was in direct contrast to what he deemed the speculation of philosophers, such as Hegel, who were rooted in idealism, something Brentano asserted made him mad (Schaefer, 2007).

Earlier, Brentano, as a Catholic scholar, found himself right in the middle of two opposing modes of thinking: modern secular sciences which claimed to be free from external constraints and presuppositions; and the Catholic Church, which was trying to hold onto its hegemony in the face of the rise of European nationalism, which eventually led to the loss of the papal states (Schaefer, 2007).

In the late 1860's the Catholic Church enquired from local churches if it would be advantageous to proclaim the dogma of Papal Infallibility. As a close advisor to a German Bishop, Brentano was able to convince the German bishops that it would not be wise. He maintained that in contrast to Roman thought, it would involve imposing something from above on the ordinary people of Germany which did not match with the lived experience of their faith. He also highlighted how contentious it would be for German peoples who mixed so readily with Protestants. Owing to Brentano's arguments, 11 out of 14 German bishops suggested that the dogma not be imposed. But in 1870, the First Vatican Council declared the dogma – Brentano eventually left the church (Schaefer, 2007).

This tension between ideals, or deductive reasoning, coming into conflict with lived experience, or inductive reasoning, had an impact on Brentano. And, his favouring of lived experience, over deductive reasoning, is evident in his philosophy.

***Intentionality.*** Brentano's greatest contribution to phenomenology was the concept of intentionality, a concept which Husserl was enamoured with. Brentano had adopted the concept from the medieval scholastics, and it is important to clarify its meaning. Although, in everyday usage we may use it to mean "willing" or "purposefully doing something", this is not how it is used in philosophy. The Latin word *intendere*, means to stretch forth. When one becomes conscious of an object there is a mental representation in the mind of the observer, an understanding develops. There is a stretching forth from observer to the object. And, this process of intentionality occurs with all people (Spinelli, 2005).

Brentano's concept of intentionality rendered philosophical what was most often not even considered of value to philosophy – the everyday rationality of ordinary non-academic peoples. This was in contrast to the usual 'ivory tower' mode of philosophising. Brentano thus generated a way of reconnecting philosophy with the human condition in its every day

lived experiences (Schaefer, 2007). It was the concept of intentionality which formed the foundation of Husserl's phenomenology.

**3.2.2 Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).** Edmund Husserl was from Moravia and initially studied mathematics at the Universities of Leipzig and Berlin in Germany before changing to philosophy in Vienna - being so impressed by the philosophy of Brentano. Husserl believed there was a crisis in the philosophy of his time as it had departed from its true goal, which was for him to provide the best possible answers to people's deepest concerns (Stumpf, 1993).

The modern philosophy of the time has been largely influenced by Rene Descartes (1596-1650), and Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804). In order to build a philosophy free from the presumptions Descartes had set about doubting and questioning everything in the endeavour to arrive at something he could not doubt, which would form the basis of his philosophy. Eventually, he realised that although he could doubt almost everything, he could not doubt that something or someone was doubting, someone was thinking, hence he famously proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am." Upon these premises he built his rational philosophy (Enslin, 2008).

Kant continued where Descartes had left off and also approached his philosophy from a rational standpoint – using reason as his starting point. But he also spent a great deal of time considering the means by which we perceive the world. He noted that we use ready-made internal schema or categories which influence our perception greatly. Coming into direct contact with reality is hampered by our imperfect perception (Enslin, 2008).

It is important to highlight at this stage that the modern philosophers were considering if we can study reality directly, if we can really know the truth. In this endeavour, Husserl believed that there needed to be a departure from Descartes and the rationalists who were caught up with thinking and quite often used rationalism as a presupposition – which

Descartes had specifically attempted to avoid. Husserl was also critical of the psychologism of the time which embraced relativity – it was postulated that we cannot get in touch with reality, the best we can do is study the minds of those who are attempting to perceive (Stumpf, 1993).

It is therefore interesting to note that the erstwhile mathematician, enamoured by Brentano, sought objective truth not in mathematics or rationalism, but in experience. He really believed that we could arrive at the essence of things themselves through experience. Thus, Husserl professed that we can study reality, we can study truth and not just our perception of truth (Stumpf, 1993).

***Husserl's intentionality.*** Adopting Brentano's concept of intentionality Husserl asserted that the foundation of all our meaning-making lies in the close connection between consciousness and reality. For Husserl, consciousness is always consciousness of something; humans experience objects or things. Therefore, although there is a difference between the psychological and physical world, there is also a close connection (Spinelli, 2005).

For Husserl, then, our access to the real world is always gleaned through an interpretation which forms part of the process of intentionality. There is therefore an irrevocable relationship between subject and object – neither exist independently (Spinelli, 2005). Husserl elaborated on this with two concepts.

***Noema and noesis.*** Every act of intentionality is made up of two experiential poles, which Husserl called *noema* and *noesis*. *Noema*, refers to the object of our experience, *noesis* to the interpretation of the experience. These two are inseparable. All experiences are therefore only partially shareable – each individual will have a different way of interpreting an experience. Sharedness and uniqueness of experiences are therefore fundamental themes in phenomenology (Spinelli, 2005). But, Husserl was in search of objective truth, not just interpretation. To aid him in this search he developed a particular process.

***The phenomenological method.*** This process was developed by Husserl in order to arrive at the essence of experience. He noted that our experiences of the world are unique – the phenomenological method relies on stripping away our interpretational layers in order to arrive at the invariants (Spinelli, 2005).

The phenomenological method relies on three rules: the rule of *epoché*; the rule of description; the rule of horizontalisation. *Epoché* involves bracketing out our biases – to focus on immediate data of experience – a suspension of our presuppositions. The rule of description means that one ought to describe experiences, not explain them. The rule of horizontalisation is akin to an equalisation rule, there is no hierarchy in that which is experienced (Spinelli, 2005).

Husserl applied the phenomenological method to arrive at reality. It is, however, important to note at this stage that the method and paradigm are not the same thing. This research embraces the paradigm – not the method outlined above. As will be elaborated upon below, the *noesis* which Husserl noted, will not be stripped away, but rather embraced as an irrevocable component of experience. Husserl's focus on experience was continued in the work of his most famous follower, Martin Heidegger.

**3.2.3 Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).** Heidegger was Husserl's assistant from 1920-1923. He had begun his studies in theology at the University of Freiberg, Germany, but was so impacted by Husserl that he changed to philosophy. Heidegger was eventually chosen as Husserl's successor at the University of Freiberg and then outstripped his teacher achieving much greater prestige in the philosophical world (Stumpf, 1993).

***Being.*** Since his youth, Heidegger had been concerned about what it means “to be” – this interest was instigated when he came across the work of Brentano as a teenager. As a philosopher he was concerned that many of his confreres had forgotten to ask what it is to be, for it is in working out what it means to be that we can discover better ways of living. This

concern is highlighted in his seminal work *Being and Time* (1927/1996), “But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression ‘being’. Not at all. So first of all we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 1).

For Heidegger the way in which humans exist is unique in that we need to make decisions, we have the ability to interpret ourselves, and we care about the way in which we relate to the world (Stumpf, 1993). That we care so much about how we exist, how we be, and that this care is related to many of our struggles is highlighted by Heidegger, “That for which we have angst is our potentiality-for-being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 178).

***Being in the world.*** In contrast to the rationalists who had seen humans as detached minds from the world, Heidegger asserted that being is “being in the world – *Dasein*”. His famous concept is also translated as “being there”. Reality is, therefore, experiential for Heidegger, in the world, not in our minds. To be a person is not primarily about thinking, it is about experiencing (Stumpf, 1993).

The very essence of who we are as humans is related to our experiences, as beings in contact with reality; as subjects inseparable from objects, “The compound expression ‘being-in-the-world’ indicates, in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a unified phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 49).

To emphasise this point, Heidegger gave the example of how humans use tools. When a tool is working correctly, we hardly notice it – in a sense we become one with a tool. It is only when it malfunctions in some sense that we start to take notice of it, we consider why it is not working, we objectify it and think about it. An authentic existence for Heidegger involves not objectifying others, not rationalising about them, but experiencing them in the world in relationship (Enslin, 2008).

Heidegger noted that we generally operate as “*das man*/mass man” – inauthentically giving voice to already established discourses, and conventional ideas appropriated by us through mediums of mass communication, such as radio and newspaper. To live authentically means to heed the call of your own conscience, “Conscience calls the self of *dasein* forth from its lostness in the they” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 293).

One of the great critiques of Heidegger is that he collaborated with the Nazi Party – and as a result he did not so carefully consider his way of “being in the world”. Interrogating his motives is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it is simply mentioned here because his life and career trajectory may be starkly juxtaposed with Husserl’s other close collaborator, Edith Stein (Stumpf, 1993).

**3.2.4 Edith Stein (1891-1942).** Edith Stein was born into a devout Jewish family, but later became an atheist before embarking on a successful career as a philosopher – becoming an assistant of Husserl. She converted to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun. In 1942, she died at Auschwitz. Owing to her martyrdom and rich spiritual life she was canonised as a saint by the Catholic Church (Svenaesus, 2017).

Stein’s career was handicapped by her sex and ethnicity – thrice she attempted to gain professorship status at the University of Freiberg. On the first two occasions, her attempts were thwarted largely because she was a woman and on the third occasion because she was a Jew. Moreover, Heidegger worked with her as an assistant of Husserl and as a man was able to take greater credit for the editing of his work than Stein could, even though it would seem that at times she laboured more intensely than Heidegger (Svenaesus, 2017).

As a follower of Husserl, Stein made use of much of Husserl’s phenomenological ideas. However, she augmented his phenomenology with her own unique ideas. In 1916, she wrote her doctoral dissertation, “On the Problem of Empathy” which was later published in book form. In it she concurs with the phenomenological method, “the goal of phenomenology



is to clarify and thereby to find the ultimate basis of all knowledge. To reach this goal it considers nothing that is in any way ‘doubtful, ’nothing that can be eliminated” (Stein, 1916/1989, p. 3). But, she approaches her search for truth via a slightly different angle.

***Being and empathy.*** Stein notes that when we encounter another person, we are able to experience in some way what they are experiencing through our feelings. If someone is joyful, we are able to experience their joy, if they are downcast, we have access to those feelings of sadness through our own feelings. In her search for being, for reality, for truth, Stein postulates that we are able to conclude that our interactions with others are real, precisely because of the feelings that are invoked within us through empathy (Maichrowicz, 2009).

Hence, Stein explains empathy as “inner participation in foreign experiences” (Stein, 1916/1989, p. 12) And, she highlights that we can come into contact with being, with reality, the outer world, though an “intersubjective experience” (Stein, 1916/1989, p. 63). Our experience of other people allows us to recognise them as persons, as a seat of experience (Maichrowicz, 2009).

Stein converted to Catholicism primarily on account of two experiences: she empathically experienced how a Christian widow dealt with the death of her husband, a colleague of Stein’s. And while visiting Christian friends she read the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila – the experiences of the saint so resonated with her that Stein concluded that what she had read was true (Maichrowicz, 2009). It would, therefore, seem that her conversion was tied up with her phenomenological worldview – a worldview that has subsequently been embraced by many social scientists in their research.

**3.2.5 Phenomenological research and psychology.** Using a phenomenological paradigm in psychological research has become increasingly popular over the past few decades. Researchers are able to investigate and make sense of experiences that are of interest

to them, perhaps because they have experienced them themselves (Lindegger, 2006). A number of aspects characterise psychological research utilising a phenomenological basis.

***Lived experience.*** Phenomenological research in psychology focuses on lived experience – in fact quite often titles of research projects begin with the phrase, “The lived experience of...” Here the focus quite often is on how people makes sense of their major life experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009). Phenomenological research in psychology does not align itself closely with the methods used in the natural sciences, where empirical methods are embraced, rather what is focused on is the “world of personal experience within which each person lives” (Lindegger, 2006, p. 463).

***Understanding and Reflecting upon Experience.***

Phenomenology, as applied to psychological inquiry deals with the attempt to understand more adequately the human condition as it manifests in lived, concrete, experience ... phenomenological investigation includes all possible experiences available to human reflection. (Spinelli, 2005, p. 131)

Key in phenomenological research is the idea that learning from experience is fostered. As the above quote suggests – an understanding of experience develops owing to the deep reflection upon the experience. It is also important to note that much of the way that experiences are understood relates to the meaning that they are given. And, the meaning given to experiences, in turn, relates to the structuring of experience. Hence, psychologists using this paradigm are particularly interested in how experiences are made sense of, how they are integrated and how they are given coherence (Spinelli, 2005).

***Universality in Experiences.*** Phenomenological researchers most often involve several participants in their research, this is because “its focus on the subjective is only a stepping off point for its exploration of the more universal structuredness of experience” (Spinelli, 2005, p. 132). By comparing and contrasting the experiences of several individuals

who have had similar experiences, phenomenological researchers, attempt to arrive at what is core in the pertinent experience.

**Objective Researchers?** Psychological researchers using phenomenology quite often make use of meticulous descriptions whereby there is the suspension of the presumptions of the researcher in order to understand the way in which the objects of research make sense of their world (Lindegger, 2006). This process of attempting to suspend their own worldviews is often augmented by involving other researchers in the coding processes. It is however questioned whether or not these unbiased views are truly possible. Can the researcher, who has especially chosen a particular paradigm, methodology and research question really remain objective when they themselves are most often the primary instrument of research – interviewer, coder, writer, etc.? (Spinelli, 2005).

This quandary is part of the reason why this phenomenological research, has taken the course of not embracing Husserl's phenomenology method, but rather the method of autoethnography. This will be elaborated upon below. But, first it will be good to give the key paradigmatic aspects extracted from phenomenology that will form the foundation of this research.

**3.2.6 Summary of phenomenology.** Brentano introduced the concept of intentionality – there is a stretching forth from the object of our experience to our awareness and a making sense of that experience. Husserl emphasised this idea and called the object of our experience *noema* and our structuring of that experience, *noesis*. Very importantly, Husserl's enterprise was centred on an exploration of truth, in opposition to the relativity of the psychologism of the time. Heidegger highlighted that we are “beings in the world”, that we care how we exist and that a conscious mode of existence, critically reflected upon, allows us to live an authentic life in opposition to the “they” – “mass man”. Edith Stein's phenomenology was grounded in our empathy – reality is inextricably linked to our feelings.

Psychological research making use of phenomenology is currently very interested in the way that people form a coherent understanding of experiences and what is common in this structuring. These key aspects of phenomenology are important to consider in relation to the underpinnings of autoethnography.

If one were to take the reasoning of the phenomenology to its logical conclusion, one ends up with the validation of autoethnography. This is because phenomenology values human experience. Moreover, there is the belief that individuals are able to make sense of their own experiences and communicate this. Most often, individuals who experience and make sense of a phenomenon are interviewed by researchers. But, if their experience and meaning making of it is truly valued, then those who experience the phenomenon should be able to tell it themselves, as is the case with an autoethnography.

### **3.3 Autoethnography**

**3.3.1 Introducing autoethnography.** As its name suggests, autoethnography makes use of elements from both autobiography and ethnography. Autobiography is a particular genre whereby an individual tells their own life story aesthetically. Readers not only enjoy the information portrayed, but also the careful way in which it is conveyed. Ethnographies are a traditional form of social science research whereby a particular culture or ethnic group is studied by an outside researcher. Autoethnography therefore combines these two genres (Ellis et al., 2011).

**3.3.2 The history of autoethnography.** Although a case could be made that humans have been telling their own stories and critically reflecting on them for millennia, the rise of autoethnography as an accepted methodology of social science research only took place towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many currents of thought in various disciplines coalesced at a similar time resulting in the blossoming of autoethnography. Some of these currents of thought include the following:

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism held sway in many disciplines. However, with the advent of postmodern ways of thinking during the second half of the previous century, many thinkers questioned previous ways of doing academic research. Novel ways of constructing truth through narrative were introduced. There was a pull towards the realisation that social science research may be more beneficial when it aligns closer to literature than to physics. Narrative approaches in disciplines such as psychology therefore arose (Ellis et al., 2011).

At about the same time, anthropologists and sociologists were beginning to reflect more deeply and critically about the role researchers play when they conduct their field research. In 1975, Karl Heider used the word “autoethnography” in a study which looked at a how a particular community in Grand Valley, USA, understood their own world. In 1979, David Hayano equated autoethnography with insider studies in which the researcher was a native, or became a full insider (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

The narrative turn in the social sciences and a greater understanding of the role of researchers therefore coalesced over the following decades and produced fertile ground for the flourishing of autoethnography as an accepted methodology over the next few decades. Its continued use lies in the fact that the methodology of autoethnography is underpinned by several theoretical characteristics.

**3.3.3 A glimpse into veiled cultural experiences.** Autoethnographers write about their own experience as a member of a particular culture or group. Their writings give outsiders a special glimpse into experiences that could quite easily be inaccessible to the wider population. Quite often this is because outside individuals battle to understand the intricacies of another group and because many topics that are written about in autoethnographies are often seen to be taboo and are therefore not ordinarily written about (Jones et al., 2013). Autoethnography is therefore an approach to research and writing that

seeks to “describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1).

This characteristic of autoethnography is especially pertinent for this dissertation. One of the main goals was to give outsiders, especially psychotherapists, a glimpse into the complexities involved in changing from a religious vocation towards becoming a psychologist. And being phenomenologically based, the special glimpse that readers glean from reading this research, also highlights how Husserl’s *noesis* is inextricably tied up with the experience shared (Spinelli, 2005).

**3.3.4 Permeating culture with critical thinking.** What distinguishes the writing about culture in an autoethnography from forms of casual writing is that in an autoethnography, the writer is encouraged to write critically about their culture. Thus, the critical thought-provoking mindset of an academic is added to experiences that are quite often beyond the scope of much other academic research (Ellis et al., 2011).

This research has endeavoured to add a critical reflection to several issues within Catholicism, such as the discipline of mandatory celibacy for those in religious life and in the priesthood. This key component of autoethnography ties in well with Heidegger’s phenomenological concept of living consciously, not as the great masses do without critical thought (Heidegger, 1927/1996).

**3.3.5 Autoethnographies are therapeutic for writers.** Many scholars highlight that writing an autoethnography is just as much about the process as the finished product – the process of writing can itself be therapeutic (Ellis et al., 2011). The embarking on a therapeutic process has led some to characterise the process of autoethnography as embracing “vulnerability with purpose” involving a process of writing which may involve “manoeuvring through pain, confusion, anger and uncertainty” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 32). Writing

vulnerably means that autoethnographers attempt to write authentically and strive “to show life’s complexity and fragility in depth and detail” (Tillman, 2009, p. 94).

That autoethnography has the ability to be therapeutic for writers is connected to the fact that autoethnographers write about experiences of great personal significance, such as Graham’s (2015) account of married life after her spouse suffered a traumatic brain injury, Baesler’s (2017) account of his spiritual and religious influences on his journey to becoming a professor of communication, and Johnson’s (2007) account of renegotiating her spirituality outside her previous Catholic faith. Writing about experiences and reflecting critically about them gives the writer the opportunity to move towards integrating their experiences.

It is important to note here that the therapeutic nature of the integration of experiences is closely connected to the aforementioned characteristic of phenomenology – the ability for people to structure their experiences into a coherent understanding of them (Smith et al., 2009).

Chang (2007) poignantly highlights a key component of the therapeutic process of writing an autoethnography, “To me autoethnography is the process of trying to narrate one’s own voice - a voice coming from within, from one’s soul. It is the process of making that voice available to others” (Chang, 2007, p. 16). This availability to others also makes autoethnography therapeutic for readers.

**3.3.6 Therapeutic for readers.** Those who read autoethnographies may also experience the therapeutic value of reading a story parallel to theirs as they relate to the struggles and complexities conveyed (Jones et al., 2013). “By offering stories that show the struggles of ordinary people coping with difficult contingencies of lived experience – replete with characters, scenes, plots, and dialogue – our research stories can help people put themselves in the place of others” (Bochner, 2012, p. 6). This invites readers to enter the

author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives (Ellis, 2004).

And, once again, we think how closely this relates to Edith Stein's phenomenology - the feelings invoked in us, as a result of empathy, are where reality lies (Stein, 1916/1989).

**3.3.7 Positive change.** An autoethnography also involves "breaking silence/reclaiming voice and writing to right" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 32). Because autoethnography imbues culture with critical thought, autoethnographies may be linked to the fostering of social justice. This is because autoethnographers foster a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response (Jones et al., 2013) which changes the world we live in for the better (Ellis et al., 2011). Thus, autoethnographies ought to be truly dynamic:

If our research is to mean something to our readers - to be acts of meaning - our writing needs to attract, awaken, and arouse them, inviting readers into conversation with the incidents, feelings, contingencies, contradictions, memories, and desires that our research stories depict (Bochner, 2012, p. 4).

This directly relates to phenomenology. Recall that the passion of the early phenomenologists was to produce a philosophy with pragmatic purpose, in search of real truth, which would help people live better (Stumpf, 1993).

**3.3.8 Narrative autoethnography.** The search for real truth championed by phenomenology obviously did not begin with phenomenology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nor did it begin with formal philosophy. For millennia, humans have been learning from their experiences, extracting truth from them, and communicating this. And, the age-old universal method of doing this has been through story (Peterson, 2018).

Although there are several kinds of autoethnographies, this research took on the form of a Narrative Autoethnography. This evocative method is championed by Bochner and Ellis (2016). Their rationale for embracing narrative is that stories in themselves have huge



pragmatic value. Readers are able to learn about their own lives as they experience the story of others (Ellis, 2004). Narratives are related to our very being as humans:

As human beings, we live our lives as storytelling animals. We are born into a world of stories and storytellers, ready to be shaped and fashioned by the narratives to which we will be exposed. The stories we hear and the stories we tell are not only about our lives; they are part of them. One of the goals of autoethnography is to put meanings into motion, and the best way to do that is to tell stories. (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 76)

**3.3.9 A summary of autoethnography.** The key ideas behind the method of autoethnography are that it gives a glimpse into veiled cultural experiences, it is able to permeate cultures with critical thinking, autoethnographies are therapeutic for writers, they are therapeutic for readers, they instigate positive change, and they are able to make use of stories – so intrinsic to humanity.

This sharing of personal experience and it being highly valued is very consistent with the psychological theory that was used to analyse the data of this dissertation – Carl Rogers’ Person-Centred Approach.

### **3.4 Carl Rogers’ (1902-1987) Person-Centred Approach**

**3.4.1 Introducing Rogers.** Carl Rogers was born in Chicago, USA, into a strict Christian Evangelical home with a focus on hard work. He was seen to be an over-sensitive child who focused on reading, studies, and later experiments on his family’s farm. He described himself as “aloof” (Rogers, 1980, p. 29). Following his schooling, he initially studied agriculture, but during his first year of studies he felt called to be a minister and changed the course of his studies (Thorne & Sanders, 2013).

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, the form of Christianity he encountered was less strict than that which he was brought up in – here, he encountered Jesus

more intimately and experienced greater freedom in his religion. Soon after marrying his wife and completing his first degree, he continued studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York, a very liberal seminary. Even at this liberal seminary, however, he did not feel that he could stay in a vocation where he was required to believe a specific religious doctrine. This led him to the field of psychology (Thorne & Sanders, 2013). In his own words, “I wanted to find a field in which I could be sure my freedom of thought would not be limited” (Rogers, 1961, p. 8).

His reluctance to adhere to the norms continued into his psychology career where he did not follow that which was deemed orthodox at the time, “Stubbornly I have followed my own course, being relatively unconcerned with the question of whether I was going with my group or not” (Rogers, 1961, p. 12). He did not always accept the most prestigious posts, working initially with troubled children before going onto university work and international acclaim (Thorne & Sanders, 2013).

Rogers’ Person-Centred Approach may appear completely unique and novel. However, in his thinking he was primarily influenced by three other great thinkers, which he himself often acknowledges: Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, and Otto Rank.

**3.4.2 Søren Kierkegaard’s (1813-1855) influence on Rogers.** Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher and theologian who was a primary figure in the development of existential philosophy. In opposition to the Hegelian philosophy of his time, which for him was very abstract, he chose instead to focus on existence, “To exist, he said, implies being a certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who, above all, makes a commitment” (Stumpf, 1993, p. 483).

To think existentially is to recognise that one is faced with personal choices, choices which cannot be made by simply relying on what others have taught. For Kierkegaard, truth is subjectivity. Hence, any following of the crowd is particularly troublesome. And, this is

especially with regards to the way one relates to God, which ought to be a unique and subjective experience (Stumpf, 1993).

Kierkegaard was particularly critical of the Danish Church of his time and its members. He saw in Christians a great deal of apathy and the absence of resolute commitment. This for him led to dullness, boredom, and the lack of vitality in Christianity. (Stumpf, 1993).

These then are some of the key thoughts of a thinker Rogers so often refers to. Rogers himself notes in a personal way how he appropriated the thought of this great existential thinker:

While there is much in Kierkegaard to which I respond not at all, there are, every now and then, deep insights and convictions which beautifully express views I have held but never been able to formulate. Though Kierkegaard lived one hundred years ago, I cannot help but regard him as a sensitive and highly perceptive friend. Reading his work loosened me up and made me more willing to trust and express my own experience (Rogers, 1961, pp. 199-200).

Rogers was especially fond of Kierkegaard's idea that not choosing to be oneself leads to despair and that the greatest despair occurs when one chooses to be someone else. Hence, Rogers often highlights the importance of Kierkegaard's exhortation, "To be that self which one truly is" (Rogers, 1961, p. 166).

Kierkegaard's idea that "an existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming and translates all his thinking into terms of process" (Rogers, 1961, pp. 170-171) also resonated with Rogers, along with the conviction that it is of great value to foster the conditions for another individual to learn through their own experience, rather than to teach them as an "expert" (Rogers, 1961).

Personal choice, subjectivity, vitality, freedom, process, and authenticity are therefore just some of the many themes espoused by Kierkegaard which resonated so deeply with Rogers.

**3.4.3 Martin Buber's (1878-1965) influence on Rogers.** Buber was a Viennese born Jew who wrote extensively in the overlapping fields of philosophy and theology. His studies took him to Germany, but following the rise of Nazism he settled in Jerusalem. His philosophy has been characterised as existential and his religious writings as mystical – focusing a great deal on union with God. He also wrote extensively on dialogue. His most famous work, *I and Thou* (1937/1986), covers many of his most valued themes (Bieman, 2002).

In *I and Thou* Buber asserts that there are two primary ways in which we relate to people and things in the world: the “I-It” way or the “I-Thou” way. When one relates to something or someone as an “it”, one relates to it as an object, as a means to an end, only a certain part of the “it” is recognised for its utility. However, when one relates to someone as a “thou”, the other is viewed as a subject, an end in themselves, and they are viewed as a whole. These seemingly simple thoughts have profound ramifications (Buber, 1937/1986).

It is only by treating another as a “thou” that we truly become an “I” – a subject and not an object. For Buber then, this primary way of relating is fundamental for his ontology – being is all about relationship. Hence, he says, “I become through my relation to the Thou, as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting” (Buber, 1937/1986, p. 11). Although he admits that there are times when we need to relate to others because of their utility, he still asserts very strongly, “he who lives with ‘It’ alone is not a man” (Buber, 1937/1986, p. 34).

Buber also highlights that in order to treat a person as a “thou”, one not only needs to be aware of them as a whole, but one also needs to be wholly present in the relationship, not just partially, “I” always involves one’s whole being (Buber, 1937/1986).

Very importantly for Buber, the “I-Thou” relationship is a relationship of togetherness, there are no ulterior motives, such as trying to understand the other, or trying to analyse them, or seeing them as a bundle of specific qualities. Being is about encounter, a moment of grace (Buber, 1937/1986).

With regards to growth, Buber emphasised that it is in relationships that human potential is fully actualised. Thus, he asserted that “the inmost growth of the self is not induced by man’s relation to himself, as people like to suppose today, but by the confirmation in which one man knows himself to be made present in his uniqueness by the other” (Friedman, 1965, p. 6).

In 1957, Buber and Rogers discussed many poignant topics relating to confirmation, and relationship in a recorded conversation. In much of Rogers’ work he notes that he was greatly influenced by Buber (Rogers, 1961).

During the 1957 discussion, Rogers asked Buber, “I have wondered whether your concept – or your experience of what you have termed the ‘I-thou relationship’ is similar to what I see as the effective moment in the therapeutic relationship” (Ross, 2009, p. 18). Buber disagreed and noted a therapeutic relationship is always unequal (Ross, 2009). It is therefore interesting to note that although Rogers relied heavily on Buber, especially with regards to the “I-Thou” relationship, he did not use Buber’s concepts as they were understood by Buber.

It is Buber’s concept of the “I-Thou” relationship which so impressed Rogers. He may not have understood it in the same way as Buber, but it nevertheless influenced him. Buber’s ontology notes that our very being is influenced by our relationships. This clearly resonates in the thought of Rogers:

When I am not prized and appreciated, I not only feel very much diminished, but my behaviour is actually affected by my feelings. When I am prized, I blossom and expand, I am an interesting individual. In a hostile or unappreciated group, I am just not much of anything. (Rogers, 1980, p. 23)

**3.4.4 Otto Rank's (1884-1939) influence on Rogers.** Rank was trained as a psychoanalyst and had been a student and close collaborator of Freud. Initially, he was very much in favour with Freud, but subsequent to his publication of *Trauma of Birth* in 1929 tensions mounted between him and Freud. Rank focused on the early relationship between the child and the mother, rather than oedipal conflict which was favoured by Freud. Eventually, he parted ways with Freud. His views developed so markedly that Rollo May and Irvin Yalom credited Rank as the most important precursor of existential psychotherapy (Kramer, 1995).

Rank's thought was deemed existential because he moved away from deterministic ways of thinking towards a greater emphasis on freedom. This freedom leads to creativity and for Rank creativity is fundamental in psychological health, "Neurosis is not a failure in sexuality, according to Rank, but a failure in creativity: a refusal to affirm oneself as an individual, to accept the strange and unfathomable existence forced on us at birth" (Kramer, 1995, p. 60). For Rank the neurotic was someone who denied his own will (Kramer, 1995).

Rank emphasised that humans have a tendency to fear death and in so doing forget to live. We also fear separating and becoming individuals, but even when the separation occurs there is accompanying guilt. This conflict is lessened in relationship:

The problem of human suffering cannot be solved in and by the individual himself, but only in relation to a second person, who justifies our will, makes it good, since he voluntarily submits himself to it, in other words, accepts us as we are. (Kramer, 1995, p. 72)

Rank emphasised that real psychotherapy has to be centred around the client and that the therapist is not to play the role of authority. Rank noted that if a relationship of equality can be formed between the client and therapist, it may be therapeutic itself. The therapeutic relationship accompanied by empathy will allow the client to accept himself, his own will, because the other does (Kramer, 1995).

When Carl Rogers worked with children at a Rochester Clinic, New York, he came across many social workers who had been trained by Rank in Philadelphia. Rogers recalls a Rankian social worker on his Rochester staff who helped him to learn that the most effective approach was to listen for the feelings, the emotions. It was the social worker who steered Rogers away from an interpretive form of psychotherapy towards the reflection of feelings (Kramer, 1995).

Having been impressed by the work of the social workers, Rogers invited Rank to Rochester in June 1936, and he gave a three-day workshop. Rogers noted the effect:

I became infected with Rankian ideas and began to realise the possibilities of the individual being self-directing...I was clearly fascinated by Rankian ideas but didn't quite adopt his emphases for myself until I left Rochester. But the core ideas did develop. I came to believe in the individual's capacity. I value the dignity and rights of the individual sufficiently that I do not want to impose my way upon him. (Kramer, 1995, p. 77)

Rogers was therefore deeply influenced by Rank, "The spirit of Otto Rank, from whom Client-Centred therapy originated, lived on in the mind, heart and soul of Carl Rogers" (Kramer, 1995, p. 54). The Rankian themes of creativity, freedom, and being person-centred were truly appropriated into the thought of Rogers, which will next be examined.

### 3.4.5 Carl Rogers.

Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour, these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided. (Rogers, 1980, p. 115)

In the above succinct quote, Rogers, nearing the end of his professional career, summed up the core of his Person-Centred Approach. It places great faith in the individual person, faith which is actualised when a Buber-like “I-Thou” relationship is present. That relationship is key is also highlighted by Rogers:

In my early professional years, I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth? (Rogers, 1956, p. 9)

This presentation of Roger’s work will, therefore, begin with what he characterised as being necessary for an effective relationship, a relationship which could foster the self-actualisation he so resolutely championed: genuineness, acceptance, and empathy.

**3.4.5.1 Genuineness (*authenticity and congruence*).** Rogers believed that “it is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him” (Rogers, 1961, p. 33). Genuineness, or authenticity, means that one has no facades, is open to the feelings and attitudes they have and that one takes to heart Kierkegaard’s exhortation, “To be that self which one truly is” (Rogers, 1961, p. 166.)

Rogers also likened genuineness to transparency (Rogers, 1980), and congruence (Rogers, 1961). His concept of congruence requires some clarification at this stage.

Rogers seems to use the word congruence in three interrelated ways, the concept is therefore understood according to the context in which it is used. Pertaining to genuineness, when



relating to other, Rogers asserts that a psychologist is congruent when “his words are in line with his feelings rather than the two being discrepant” (Rogers, 1961, p. 49).

However, elsewhere he also uses “congruence” somewhat differently, “I have used the term congruence to refer to this accurate matching of experience with awareness” (Rogers, 1961, p. 282). This matching of experience with awareness may relate to the therapeutic context, but also to life in general, where Rogers encourages “openness to experience” (Rogers, 1961).

And finally, Rogers refers to the importance of there being congruence between the image one has of one’s self, one’s self- concept, and one’s experiences. Moreover, one’s ideal self should not be unrealistic, there should be congruence between experience, self-concept, and the ideal self (Rogers, 1951). This will be elaborated upon later.

#### ***3.4.5.2 Acceptance (unconditional positive regard).***

I find that the more acceptance and liking I feel toward this individual, the more I will be creating a relationship which he can use. By acceptance I mean a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth – of value no matter what his condition, his behaviour, or his feelings. (Rogers, 1961, p. 34)

Rogers uses the concepts of “acceptance” and “unconditional positive regard” interchangeably and relates it to accepting a person as they are without possessing or requiring personal satisfaction, for Rogers it demonstrates care. Acceptance involves not judging when a client expresses that which is ordinarily deemed bad or abnormal, and having as much acceptance of the bad as for the good (Rogers, 1961).

#### ***3.4.5.3 Understanding (empathy).***

It is only as I understand the feelings and thoughts which seem so bizarre – it is only as I see them as you see them, and accept them and you, that you feel really free to

explore all the hidden nooks and frightening crannies of your inner and often buried experience. (Rogers, 1961, p. 34)

For Rogers, empathy involves perceiving the feelings of the client from the inside and communicating that understanding, this enables the client to listen to themselves and fosters therapeutic change. For Rogers, listening empathically does not just entail “reflecting back”, but also involves seeking implicit meanings in the words and concepts the client uses and then communicating the deep understanding gleaned (Rogers, 1951).

**3.4.5.4 Conditions of worth.** Rogers refers to a condition of worth as an “introjected value” and explains that a condition of worth is formed when the positive regard of a significant other is conditional, when the person believes that in some situations they are valued and in others they are not. Slowly, but surely, this attitude is appropriated and the individual values an experience positively or negatively, only because of the conditions of worth which have been taken over from others, not because the experience is self-enhancing (Rogers, 1959).

An individual may therefore seek out experiences as if they lead to self-actualisation when in fact, they merely serve to obtain the conditional positive regard. Rogers refers to a condition of worth as disturbing the organismic valuing process and preventing an individual from functioning freely and effectively (Rogers, 1959).

**3.4.5.5 Self-actualisation.** For Rogers, self-actualisation relates to a person’s tendency to actualise themselves, to become their potentialities. He noted that this is evident in all organic and human life and involves “the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature” (Rogers, 1961, p. 351). It involves the expression and activation of all of one’s potential. Rogers does, however, note that this tendency may be hampered by psychological defences and be hidden by facades, but if the necessary conditions are present it will lead to an individual endeavouring to be themselves (Rogers, 1961).

**3.4.5.6 Self-concept.** Rogers refers to the “self-concept” or “self-structure” as being that which an individual thinks about when they use such terms as “I” or “me”. The concept refers to the whole self which can be further divided into: self-image, self-worth and ideal self. Self-image refers to how we see ourselves, self-worth, refers to how we esteem ourselves and the ideal self is the person one would most like to be (Rogers, 1959).

Rogers notes that having an image of oneself which is far from, or even opposite to the person one would like to be produces distress and tension (Rogers, 1959). This distress and tension may be amplified when there is an incongruence between how one views oneself and the experiences one has had. Hence, the concept of incongruence shall again be turned to and it shall be shown how it relates further to psychopathology.

**3.4.5.7 Incongruence.** Rogers refers to incongruence as being a discrepancy between self as perceived and the actual experience of the individual. Thus, an individual may believe that they have certain characteristics and feelings, but in reality, their experiences which have not been appropriated, point to other characteristics and feelings. This produces tension, confusion, and neurosis (Rogers, 1959).

Rogers refers to the state of incongruence between self and experience and the individual being unaware of it as being in a state of “vulnerability” – the individual is vulnerable to anxiety, threat, and disorganisation, “If a significant new experience demonstrates the discrepancy so clearly that it must be consciously perceived, then the individual will be threatened, and his concept of self disorganised by this contradictory and unassimilable experience (Rogers, 1959, p. 203).

Further elaborating on vulnerability, Rogers proposes that anxiety is a state in which the incongruence between the concept of self and one’s experience, is slowly approaching awareness. Anxiety is partly fostered because the discrepancy between self and experience

may force a change in an individual's self-concept. The incongruent experience is, therefore, viewed as a "threat" (Rogers, 1959).

Worse than anxiety is psychological maladjustment which occurs when an individual denies or distorts significant experiences which are therefore not appropriated into the self-concept, leading to an incongruence between self and experience. The denial or distortion represents defensiveness. Rogers uses one last concept in his understanding of maladjustment, which he terms "intensionality" (Rogers, 1959).

Intensionality refers to rigidity. It also involves seeing experiences in absolute and unconditional terms, to rely on abstractions rather than reality testing. This rigid way is the way in which a maladjusted person views the world for Rogers (1959). The maladjusted person is in direct contrast to Rogers' idea of the fully-functioning person.

**3.4.5.8 The fully-functioning person.** In "Toward becoming a fully function person" (1962) Rogers highlights that for him the optimal human person is one who is able to freely choose his or her own direction with a focus on what they are striving for and what they want to be. Rogers related being an optimal human person with personal or psychological health and involves the following:

*Increasing openness to experience.* This involves being able to listen to oneself and to experience what is going on with oneself. Such an individual is open to their vast array of feelings and to live them. Such a person is able to fully live their experiences rather than block them out of awareness - the exact opposite of defensiveness (Rogers, 1962).

*Existential living.* To live existentially is to live fully in each moment without rigidity, being able to adapt, and being open to change. It means being able to "open one's spirit to what is going on now, and to discover in that present process whatever structure it appears to have" (Rogers, 1961, p. 189).

*The move toward becoming a process.*

Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed. In my clients and in myself I find that when life is richest and most rewarding it is a flowing process. To experience this is both fascinating and a little frightening. I find I am at my best when I can let the flow of my experience carry me, in a direction which appears to be forward, toward goals of which I am but dimly aware. In thus floating with the complex stream of my experiencing, and in trying to understand its ever-changing complexity, it should be evident that there are no fixed points. When I am thus able to be in process, it is clear that there can be no closed system of beliefs, no unchanging set of principles which I hold. Life is guided by a changing understanding of and interpretation of my experience. It is always in process of becoming (Rogers, 1961, 27).

*An increasing trust in his organism.* Rogers notes that many people rely on guiding principles, groups, or others to make decisions. However, a fully-functioning person is able to trust themselves and do what feels right. This is because they are fully open to what their experience teaches them, and because they are open to themselves entirely. This relates closely to having an internal locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1961).

*The process of functioning more fully.* This involves using all of one's potentialities to sense the internal and external. It involves using all of the information afforded by experiences and even recognising that the total self is often even wiser than awareness. Such a person is able to select a course of action that will be truly self-enhancing. Such a person is able to trust themselves, not because they are infallible, but because they will be open to the consequences which may involve learning from them (Rogers 1961).

*Creativity.* Creativity will emerge on account of being open to experiences and the world and because such an individual is able to trust themselves. Rogers believed that such a person would almost certainly not be a conformist (Rogers, 1961).

*Trusting human nature.* When a person is freed from defensiveness and open to experience, their actions are trustworthy. Rogers noted that he did not agree with the belief that people are irrational and destructive, “Man’s behaviour is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals his organism is trying to achieve” (Rogers, 1961, pp. 194-195).

*Greater richness in life.* Richness in life involves living with wide variety as opposed to constricted living. Such a person is able to live closely with their feelings of pain, ecstasy, anger, and courage. Rogers notes that the reason such people are able to live more fully is because they are able to trust themselves (Rogers, 1961).

He also notes that the fully-functioning person moves away from facades, moves away from ought’s, expectations, and pleasing others. There is a move towards self-direction, to the acceptance of greater complexity, and towards the acceptance of others. He also found that such a person would have an internal locus of evaluation and a greater richness in life (Rogers, 1961). For Rogers, this can be facilitated in psychotherapy and may mean that the client:

Will experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he has repressed; will find himself becoming better integrated, more able to function effectively; will become more similar to the person he would like to be; will be more self-directing and self-confident; will become more of a person, more unique, and more self-expressive; will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably. (Rogers, 1957, pp. 66-67)

These then are the Rogerian concepts which were used to analyse my narrative with

special emphasis given to: genuineness, acceptance, understanding, conditions of worth, self-actualisation, self-concept, incongruence, and the fully-functioning person. Rogers' ideas are characterised as Person-Centred. However, because the use of his ideas is core in this dissertation, it may also be useful to illuminate other possible ways of viewing Rogerian thought. This is because the way in which a theory is viewed influences how it is employed.

**3.4.6 Rogers and existentialism.** A cursory glance at those whom Rogers was deeply influenced by, at the beginning of this section, reveals that all three were deemed to be existential thinkers. It is, therefore, not surprising that he may be viewed as an existential thinker (Merrill, 2008).

Existential philosophy's genesis owes a great deal to the thought of Kierkegaard, who has already been mentioned. Other great existential thinkers include Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Albert Camus (1913-1960). Existential psychology is synonymous with Rollo May (1909-1994) and Irvin Yalom (1931-).

Nietzsche is most famous for espousing critical thinking, especially a critical analysis of our hidden motives, for his opposition to thinking with the crowd and for championing a full embrace of life (Stumpf, 1993).

Sartre's name is so synonymous with existentialism that his definition of it, is quite often taken as *the* definition, "existence precedes essence" (Stumpf, 1993, p. 511). In other words, we first exist and then we decide freely who we are to become – our essence. For Sartre therefore, freedom is paramount – "man is condemned to be free" (Sartre, 1943/2003, p. 652). Our freedom is so absolute that we cannot escape it, and it is our responsibility to use it.

Camus expressed most of his ideas through works of fiction. He highlights that for him people are constantly in search of meaning, but this search is futile, there is no inherent

meaning in life. The realisation of this fact enables one to embrace life with greater freedom and to live a life of vitality (Camus, 1942/2013).

In line with the thoughts of the existential philosophers, Rollo May, the existential psychotherapist, taught that “anxiety is the state of the human being in the struggle against what would destroy him (May, 1983, p. 33). Living an anxious life for May (1983) is paradoxical because it involves the person accepting a greater degree of non-being in order to preserve some degree of being.

American psychiatrist Irvin Yalom is famous for using the existentialism of the philosophers in psychotherapy. He proposes that there are four givens of existence, or four ultimate concerns: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. For Yalom, anxiety occurs when one becomes aware of the givens of existence, but this may lead to the individual employing a defence mechanism. For Yalom, psychotherapy involves confrontation of the givens of existence, this is “painful but ultimately healing” (Yalom, 1980, p. 14).

A current expert in existential psychology, Spinelli (2007) notes that for him, core in existential psychology are issues involving: relatedness, existential uncertainty, and existential anxiety.

Rogers, therefore, shares a great deal with other existential thinkers – he emphasises freedom, embracing life, and that anxiety quite often occurs when we do not admit reality or our experiences to our awareness. The quote in the extract below, from one of his later works, highlights how “in tune” with existential thinking he was. One can quite easily imagine that this quote could have come from Camus or Yalom:

Ten or fifteen years ago I felt quite certain that death was the total end of the person. I still regard that as the most likely prospect; however, it does not seem to me a tragic or awful prospect. I have been able to live my life – not to the full, certainly, but with



a satisfying degree of fullness – and it seems natural that my life should come to an end (Rogers, 1980, p. 87).

Although he has much in common with so many existential thinkers, there are stark differences. For example, nowhere does Rogers emphasise the existential theme of meaninglessness. Perhaps this is because he is first and foremost a humanist, a label most often given to him, as one of the founders of Humanistic Psychology.

**3.4.7 Rogers and humanistic psychology.** Along with Rogers, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was another key thinker in the development of Humanist Psychology. Maslow is best known for his concept of a hierarchy of needs which need to be met first in order for a person to then focus on meeting their needs in self-actualising. The necessary needs include physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs (Maslow, 1968).

Along with Rogers, Maslow proposed that human nature is not intrinsically evil, “The basic needs, the basic human emotions and the basic human capacities are on their face either neutral, pre-moral or positively good” (Maslow, 1968, p. 3).

Maslow highlighted that a person who has self-actualised experiences more peak experiences, moments of intense awe, love, and happiness. Akin to Rogers’ fully-functioning person, Maslow also points to eight characteristics of an actualised person: integration, completeness, aliveness, richness, awe-fulness, goodness, uniqueness, effortlessness, and humour (Maslow, 1959).

Rogers affirmed his humanistic way of thinking constantly, “Yes, there are all kinds of evil abounding in the world, but I do not believe this is inherent in the human species any more than I believe that animals are evil” (Rogers, 1980, p. 202). “The innermost core of man’s nature is positive in nature – is basically socialised, forward moving, rational and realistic” (Rogers, 1961, p. 91).

Rogers is therefore truly a humanist, and along with Maslow, one of the great forerunners of a positive psychology, which involves a movement away from an emphasis on pathology towards an emphasis on human flourishing. Rogers may therefore be viewed as both existential and humanistic in his thinking. But, owing to the philosophical basis of this dissertation, it is also necessary to take note that his thought is truly phenomenological.

**3.4.8 Rogers and phenomenological psychology.** Phenomenological psychology focuses on applying the phenomenological method to concerns in psychology so that a person's conscious experience may be rigorously observed and described. "Any conscious act – such as perception, imagery, memory, emotion and so on, falls under the scrutiny of the phenomenological method, the focus of such a psychology is placed on the description of current experience" (Spinelli, 2005, p. 32).

It has already been noted that for Rogers' "congruence" relates primarily to an awareness of experiences (Rogers, 1959). He, therefore, encourages a phenomenological way of living. He himself goes further and notes that his way of thinking was fostered according to his experiences, "I found I began increasingly to formulate my own views out of my everyday experience" (Rogers, 1961, p. 8).

Therefore, in using Rogers's Person-Centred Approach and its accompanying concepts in the analysis of my narrative, it was constantly kept in mind that the concepts being used could simultaneously be viewed through existential, humanistic, and phenomenological lenses.

### **3.5 Concluding the Theoretical Foundations**

The goal of this chapter was to show that phenomenology, autoethnography, and Rogerian thought are consistent with each other. It was, indeed, shown that phenomenology is ultimately concerned with gaining insight into truth through a thorough interrogation of personal experience. The early phenomenologists also emphasised that the lessons learned

through such an endeavour were to have pragmatic value – influencing people’s lives for the better.

Autoethnography was shown to be a methodology grounded in ideas which give great credence to personal experience, so much so that it encourages researchers themselves to present a critical study of their own experiences – which autoethnography also sees as having a very practical utility.

Rogerian thought was shown to be entrenched in a thorough appreciation of experience. Core in Rogers’ thought is the importance of an increasing awareness of all the facets of personal experience – a process fostered in this research precisely because the methodology of autoethnography and philosophy of phenomenology was embraced. It has, therefore been shown that phenomenology, autoethnography and Roger’s Person-Centred Approach are indeed consistent with each other.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The main aim of this chapter is to present the key components considered in the design of this research. Of particular importance will be to demonstrate the research's design coherence, this will be achieved if it can be shown that the various dimensions of the research design fit coherently (Durrheim, 2006). It will further be fostered if the data production and analysis steps of the research are carefully explained (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

The research question, "What are the lived experiences of a person who has left a journey towards the Catholic priesthood in favour of embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist?" presupposes that the research has a descriptive goal: "Descriptive studies aim to describe phenomenon accurately through narrative type descriptions (Durrheim, 2006, p. 44). Furthermore, the research may be characterised as basic. Basic research is used to advance our "fundamental knowledge of the world" (Durrheim, 2006, p. 45).

It will also be shown why the research question, with a descriptive goal and basic utility, was best answered with a qualitative design, the use of the phenomenological paradigm and the employment of autoethnography as its methodology. The collection and production of data, along with the analysis of the data will also be shown have been apt processes. Finally, it will be demonstrated that the research attempted to enhance its trustworthiness and endeavoured to be ethical.

### **4.2 A Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research is readily compared with quantitative research. The quantitative style is evidently characterised by its name – it involves quantifying, with numbers and statistics. This is because quantitative research is closely tied to modern empiricism or positivism. Although the term "quantitative" describes exactly what it is about, the term "qualitative" may only lead us to conclude that qualitative research is about the qualities of a

particular phenomenon under investigation, this is only partially true. The qualitative approach was adopted for this research for several other reasons which are list below (Durrheim, 2006).

**Depth and richness.** The research question, with a descriptive goal, was best answered with an approach that favoured the collection of rich or thick data, a key characteristic of qualitative research. This is partially fostered because qualitative methods often make use of detailed descriptions with meaningful language. This depth and detailed approach allows for phenomena to be studied holistically, thus allowing for the “complexity and contradictions of participant’s stories of their lives” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 24) to be illuminated, as was the goal with this autoethnography.

**Contextuality.** Qualitative researchers pay particular attention to the unique context of phenomena or participants, these are studied in their natural setting, as opposed to sterile laboratories. This allows for the use of inductive reasoning, a continuing theme in this research, for knowledge to arise “from the ground up” as it is discovered in its context. Because knowledge is not imposed deductively, qualitative methods often allow for greater flexibility, for the research to adapt as new information is discovered, and thus process is valued (Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2006).

Because of the contextuality of qualitative research, there is the attempt by qualitative researchers to understand and interpret more local meanings in particular settings, rather than attempting to reach that which can be generalised globally (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

**Subjectivity.** In qualitative research, personal involvement is valued and often partiality is acknowledged and even valued. The very unique meanings that participants share is also prized (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In qualitative research the researcher, with all their own idiosyncrasies, is seen as the “instrument” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 276). This is

because of the particular ways that qualitative researchers view knowledge, which is illuminated by the particular qualitative paradigm chosen for this research – phenomenology.

### 4.3 The Phenomenological Paradigm

Many of the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology were mentioned in Chapter 3. This short section's primary purposes are, therefore, to briefly show how phenomenology is truly a qualitative approach and then to show how this paradigm relates to the method of autoethnography – the link between the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology and autoethnography were shown in Chapter 3.

Phenomenology values the unique experiences of individuals and how they make sense of their experiences. The sharing of these experiences epitomises qualitative research as being *rich and in-depth*. Phenomenological researchers quite often allow participants to freely tell their stories and encourage as much details as possible (Lindegger, 2006).

Because phenomenology focuses on unique experiences, it is very *contextual*. The rich worlds of participants often illuminate the natural context of their phenomenal worlds (Spinelli, 2005).

And, finally, phenomenology places great value on the unique experiences of individuals, as it is postulated that people are able to make sense of their own experiences, *subjectivity* is, therefore, valued (Spinelli, 2005).

It was postulated in Chapter 3 that phenomenologists emphasise the inextricable link between the *noema* and *noesis*. Reasoning phenomenologically then, a careful illumination of one person's *noesis* is therefore of great value – for this too will lead us closer to the truth, what it means “to be” (Spinelli, 2005). The decision to use autoethnography as a method, therefore, involved a thorough presentation of my own *noesis*.

#### 4.4 Autoethnography as Method

Much has been written about the ideas behind using an autoethnography in Chapter 3, here there is only a brief reflection on the method.

“Autoethnography might be more of a philosophy than a well-defined method, so there remains considerable creative latitude in the production of an autoethnographic text” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 39). Thus, there are a vast array of particular methodologies employed by autoethnographers.

Bochner and Ellis (2006), however, champion the method of narrative autoethnography and highlight this method’s ability to be evocative. Elsewhere, Bochner (2012) concurs, “Our method of representing and expressing lived experiences should be narrative as well – stories about experience” (Bochner, 2012, p. 2). Thus, this method, of narrative autoethnography, was used in this research and was employed in the way outlined below.

#### 4.5 Producing the Narrative – Producing the Data

In writing the narrative, entitled “Wrestling Heart”, the theoretical underpinnings of an autoethnography (Chapter 3) were kept in mind. When it came to what exactly ought to be written about, two pivotal concepts from the literature were used as guides: epiphany and emotional recall. These concepts were augmented with my own diary extracts.

**4.5.1 Epiphanies.** It was kept in mind that autoethnographers write about epiphanies, moments in their lives of great significance which are often directly related to new insights. Sometimes epiphanies relate to very positive experiences which alter the trajectory of the autoethnographer’s life (Ellis et al., 2011). Epiphanies are also seen to be times of existential crises that force a person to attend to and analyse lived experience and events, after which “life does not seem quite the same” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 3). Thus, I sought to particularly write about epiphanies from my own experience, but with the use of a particular tool.

**4.5.2 Emotional recall.** Bochner and Ellis (2016) advocate the use of “Emotional Recall” when writing an autoethnography. This involves imagining being back in the scene that was experienced, both emotionally and physically, and then writing evocatively about it. This was attempted in the writing of my narrative.

**4.5.3 Diary extracts.** Wall (2008) notes that quite often diary extracts are used to augment the narrative of autoethnographers – this too was the case with my autoethnography. I quoted verbatim from my diaries leading up to my seminary experience, during my seminary years, and post my decision to leave my studies towards the priesthood. This is further elaborated on below as a technique to enhance the trustworthiness of the dissertation.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis – Analysing my Narrative**

**4.6.1 Introducing the data analysis.** Although a narrative may stand alone as an autoethnography, Bochner and Ellis (2016) note that an autoethnographer may choose to illuminate their research by analysing their narrative, “When we use narrative analysis, we treat stories as data, and we analyse them to arrive at themes, types, or storyline” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 85). Special emphasis was given in this research to the development of themes. This is because, “without thematic categories, investigators have nothing to describe, nothing to compare, and nothing to explain” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 86).

That the writing of a narrative autoethnography may require more than just the writing of a narrative is acknowledged by Bochner (2012) elsewhere:

Reflection is at the heart of autoethnographic storytelling. Stories revolve around trouble, presenting feelings and decisions that need to be clarified and understood. This is what renders autoethnography as inquiry; something is being inquired into, interpreted, made sense of, and judged. (Bochner, 2012, p.7)

The process of reflecting, clarifying, understanding and inquiring into my written



narrative was intertwined into the data analysis. Moreover, this process, which was initially just envisaged as a superfluous academic requirement, became core in the journey of this autoethnography.

The process of data analysis drew on several sources to develop a “quality” method of analysis. However, the method of analysis primarily drew on one suggested by Smith and Osborne (2008). The decision to principally draw on them was based on the fact that their method was developed primarily for interpretive phenomenological analysis, which has as its foundation the same paradigm as this research (Lindegger, 2006). Smith and Osborne’s (2008) method roughly involves the following steps: searching for significance inductively; developing themes; connecting the themes; continuing the analysis; and writing up the research.

In the previous chapter, Roger’s Person-Centred Approach was presented, and it was noted that his theory would be used to make sense of the data. This process was only employed during a second phase of data analysis. It was decided during the course of this research process, that it would be better to initially complete an inductive process of data analysis prior to the employment of a theoretical lens. This was influenced by an emerging theme in this research: that of a strong appreciation for inductive reasoning, learning phenomenologically and paying careful attention to experience.

By using a theory right from the beginning of analysis, the freedom to arrive at rich and, perhaps, even surprising themes could have been stifled. It was also reasoned that this process would be more in line with the rationale of phenomenology and be more in tune with a true representation of my own *noesis* operant in this autoethnography. Hence, it was decided to divide the analysis of the data of the narrative into two distinct phases. This is not a novel idea, but rather one already suggested by several authors.

Alexander (1988) suggests two main phases which could be employed when analysing personal data: the first involves letting the data speak for itself; the second involves asking the data specific pertinent questions related to the research question and the psychological theory that the researcher is employing. Furthermore:

Themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an *a priori* approach). *A priori* themes come from the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, common sense constructs; and from researchers' values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88).

These two distinct phases are carefully elaborated upon below. Starting with the inductive phase.

**4.6.2 Searching for significance inductively.** Following Smith and Osborn's (2008) suggestion, my narrative was read several times and significant matter was noted in a margin drawn on the left side of the page. As suggested, notes involved summaries, paraphrasing, associations, connections and interpretations (See Appendix A, for one such example of this process).

Many researchers do not elaborate extensively on this process and this influences the trustworthiness of their research. Therefore, I now mention in detail the criteria that were used to arrive at what was seen as significant. Being explicit about research processes means that the particular method employed does not remain mysterious (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). It is also a key component of trustworthiness.

Du Plessis (2017), writing specifically on the method of psychobiography, suggests that the seminal text of Alexander (1988) is still a valuable tool that may be used when

analysing personal data. Du Plessis also points towards the method of Schultz (2005) which may be used in conjunction with Alexander's.

I, therefore, used the tools of Alexander (1988) and Schultz (2005), as suggested by Du Plessis (2017). However, I also took into consideration Ryan and Bernard's (2003) suggestion on what ought to be considered when conducting data analysis. These three articles, therefore fundamentally orientated the first phase of data analysis suggested by Alexander (1988) which involved the data speaking for itself. They are outlined below:

*Alexander's identifiers of psychological salience.* During the first phase of data analysis, Alexander (1988) proposes using nine principle identifiers of psychological salience: primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, omission, errors or distortion, isolation, and incompleteness. I therefore began by reading my data, searching for the following in my narrative:

*Primacy.* That which is mentioned first is often of high importance. Psychologists often consider early experiences of great significance. That which is mentioned first, often lays the foundation of what is to follow (Alexander, 1988).

*Frequency.* Repetition often shows importance. This is vital because quite often as frequency of something increases there is the possibility that awareness of its importance may decrease. However, even seemingly mundane monotony should be noted (Alexander, 1988).

*Uniqueness.* Uniqueness may be pointed out by a respondent, or it may be subtly inferred by a departure from usual language which may appear suddenly. This may be true of a departure from usual content too (Alexander, 1988).

*Negation.* Negation statements may point towards a respondent being in a process of slowly acquiring awareness about something they have not yet fully realised. That which is negated may, therefore, be true (Alexander, 1988).

*Emphasis.* The respondent may deliberately emphasise. Overemphasis, under emphasis and misplaced emphasis may all be of significance (Alexander, 1988).

*Omission.* This may relate not only to content but also to effect. To make a judgement about whether something is missing involves being aware of cultural norms and having an overall picture of what has been presented (Alexander, 1988).

*Error or distortion.* These may point to hidden motives of importance (Alexander, 1988).

*Isolation.* In detecting isolation, one may ask if something “fits”. If something seems out of place it may communicate important personal material (Alexander, 1988).

*Incompletion.* This often involves the introduction of a sequence of events which ends before closure is reached. This may be noted implicitly – for example, a distraction may be employed to disrupt the flow of the narrative and the pertinent material is not returned to (Alexander, 1988).

***Shultz’s identification of prototypical scenes.*** Schultz (2005) suggests that by using Alexander’s (1988) concepts, the researcher can identify a large number of outstanding motives in personal data. In order to know which of these holds the keys to comprehending a person’s life, Schultz (2005) suggests the identification of “prototypical scenes” in which numerous motives and conflicts are compressed. Every prototypical scene would be “salient” from Alexander’s perspective, but not every salient event would be “prototypical”. Schultz (2005), therefore, identifies five keys to identifying prototypical scenes. These are: emotional intensity; interpenetration; developmental crisis; family conflict; thrownness – a scene which places the subject in a situation which violates the *status quo*.

*Vividness, specificity, and emotional intensity:* These parts are never mundane emotionally, the emphasis is strong, colour is highlighted, conversations are narrated with accuracy and characters are meticulously placed (Schultz, 2005).

*Interpenetration:* These sections infuse or flow into several different settings or events (Schultz, 2005).

*Developmental crisis:* These scenes involve a pivotal encounter between an individual and a specific kind of struggle, for instance identity vs. role confusion or initiative vs. guilt (Schultz, 2005).

*Family conflict:* Such sections place emphasis on tension within the family (Schultz, 2005).

*Thrownness:* These parts place the subject in a condition that disrupts the norm. Something uncharacteristic or astonishing emerges, creating a sensation of volatility. The usually taken-for-granted abruptly can't be; old ways of making sense do not suffice (Schultz, 2005).

***Ryan and Bernard's techniques to identify themes.*** Ryan and Bernard (2003) give a list of techniques that may be employed to identify themes. These were employed in this research process, in conjunction with Alexander (1988), and Schultz (2005), in the attempt to not overlook important significant matter which could have been fundamental in the illumination of my experience being investigated. Therefore, the following was sought:

*Repetitions* – the more the same concept occurs in a text, the more likely it is a theme; *Indigenous typologies or categories* – looking for local terms that may sound unfamiliar or are used in unfamiliar ways; *Metaphors and analogies* – people often represent thoughts, behaviours, and experiences with analogies and metaphors; *Transitions* – naturally occurring shifts in content may be markers of themes; *Similarities and differences* – searching for similarities and differences by making systematic comparisons across units of data; *Linguistic connectors* – these may indicate causal relations; *Missing data* – researchers have long recognised that much can be learned from qualitative data by what is not mentioned (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Alexander's (1988) "identifiers of psychological salience", Shultz's (2005) keys to the identification of "prototypical scenes", and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) "techniques to identify themes" were, therefore, used in the search for significance in the data. Once that which was significant was noted, the process of developing themes took place.

**4.6.3 Developing themes.** Following the suggestion of Smith and Osborne (2008), the process of noting significance was followed by the process of developing themes. This process involved returning to the beginning of my narrative and noting developing themes in a margin constructed on the right side of the page. At this stage, the whole narrative and the notes in the margin on the left side were treated as data (Smith & Osborne, 2008). A key aid in the development of the emerging themes noted in the right-side margins was a constant repetition of the refrain, "You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, 'What is this expression an example of?'" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). Having established an extensive list of developing themes, a further step in theme development was employed.

**4.6.4 Connecting and finalising themes.** Following the lead of Smith and Osborne (2008), connections between the listed themes were then sought. This was aided by carefully noting how many times particular themes were noted, followed by the construction of a list of all the themes in alphabetical order for each chapter. Some themes were then clustered together, and some were noted as sub-themes of others (See Appendices B and C for an example of how themes were developed). As themes were grouped together, there was the referring back to the original data to ensure that they were still applicable. The final themes were especially chosen according to the way in which they illuminated the experience under question (Smith & Osborne, 2008).

While the process of grouping themes together began, a list of phrases from the narrative that linked with the themes was compiled. Coherent tables of themes and sub-

themes were then produced and displayed in Chapter 6. Each theme and sub-theme was then linked with a phrase from my narrative in the findings section and then discussed (Smith & Osborne, 2008).

**4.6.5 Analysis using *a priori* theory.** It was noted above that Alexander (1988) proposed that a second phase of data analysis could involve ‘asking’ the data specific pertinent questions related to the research question and the psychological theory being employed. Smith and Osborne (2008) also note that themes may draw on psychological terminology. Furthermore, Ryan and Bernard (2003) note another key to identifying themes, is that of looking out for theory-related material or how the data will illuminate questions of importance in social science. This second step was, therefore, carried out in this research in the following way:

My research question, “What are the lived experiences of a person who has left a journey towards the Catholic priesthood in favour of embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist?” was foremost in mind when the extracted data, in the form of themes, and the linked quotes from the narrative were being viewed. In other words, it was enquired how the extracted data, in phase one, answered the research question. Special consideration was given to how the themes could be viewed in light of the theory being employed, Roger’s Person-Centred Approach, discussed extensively in Chapter 3.

**4.6.6 Themes in discussion with the literature.** Following the lead of Smith and Osborne (2008), the final stage of the analysis of the data involved linking the developed themes with the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2.

**4.6.7 Summary of data analysis.** The narrative was read several times and noteworthy matter was noted with the aid of several guiding principles. Themes were then developed and honed. Themes were then discussed, especially in relation to the research question, Rogerian theory, and the literature that had been reviewed.

In order to highlight the attempted rigour of the above process, the three appendices were referred to. However, rigour was attempted throughout the whole research process through various measures to enhance trustworthiness.

#### **4.7 Measures to Enhance Trustworthiness.**

Qualitative research, like positivist methods, ought to seek trustworthiness with rigour. However, in doing so, there is also the acknowledgment that the paradigms, methods, and goals of qualitative research differ from that of the quantitative approaches. Therefore, where positivist approaches have focused on the two key concepts of validity and reliability, some qualitative researchers have suggested using concepts more apt to their particular approach. Hence, Shenton (2004) suggests that there be a focus on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in order to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. These four key concepts were focused on in this research in the following ways:

**4.7.1 Credibility.** Shenton (2004) notes that credibility refers to a truthful representation of the phenomena being researched. This concept is used instead of the quantitative research concept of internal validity, which seeks to ensure that what is intended to be tested, is in fact tested. There is therefore a focus on matching the findings with reality. Shenton (2004) suggests a number of approaches which may be employed to aid the researcher in seeking the credibility of their research – these were used in this research project and included the following:

*The adoption of well-established research methods* (Shenton, 2004). The method of autoethnography, particularly as taught by Ellis and Bochner (2016), has been well established over the past few decades. Moreover, the data analysis techniques, covered above, relied on several seminal texts widely used in psychological research (Alexander, 1988; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Shultz, 2005; Smith & Osborne, 2008).



*The development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations/individuals* (Shenton, 2004). This suggestion was made with other forms of qualitative research in mind, such as ethnography. However, it is perhaps interesting to note that this is precisely what an autoethnography is about – an elucidation of a particular aspect of a culture that the writer is already familiar with (Jones et al., 2013).

*Triangulation, the use of different methods* (Shenton, 2004). The core methodology adopted was that of narrative autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2016). Augmenting the narrative with the analysis was conducted precisely with the goal of triangulation in mind. Furthermore, the results were viewed in conversation with the literature that had been reviewed.

*Thick descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated* (Shenton, 2004). A qualitative approach was chosen precisely because it champions thick descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). And, the method of narrative autoethnography, with the use of “emotional recall”, especially fostered this (Ellis & Bochner, 2016).

*The examination of previous research findings in relation to the research* (Shenton, 2004). The presentation of an extensive literature review in Chapter 2 and the discussion of the research findings in Chapter 6 in relation to the literature reviewed show that this was, indeed, attempted.

When considering credibility, especially with regards to an autoethnography, many writers primarily refer to the importance of verisimilitude, “Our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 10). This was especially attempted in the narrative by specifically naming the places where experiences occurred and at what time in my life. Moreover, diary extracts were used extensively in the narrative and several copies of the original entries are included in Appendix D.

**4.7.2 Transferability.** Shenton (2004) advocates providing enough details of the context of the research for readers to be in the position to ascertain whether the context of the research is similar to their own. Transferability is used instead of the quantitative concept of external validity, whereby the researcher endeavours to ensure that the research findings of their study, may be used in another context.

Shenton (2004) focuses on ensuring that the details of the research, especially with regards to methodology and design, are extensively elaborated upon so that the context of the research is illuminated. This was focused on in the above sections of this chapter whereby each step of data production and analysis was clarified.

Transferability is very important in an autoethnography and is spoken of as generalisability:

In autoethnography, the focus of generalisability moves from respondents to readers, and is always being tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know; it is determined by whether the specific autoethnographer is able to illuminate unfamiliar cultural processes.

(Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 10)

Although it is difficult to independently assert that transferability was attained in this autoethnography, it was however most definitely sought and forever in mind while this autoethnography was written.

**4.7.3 Dependability.** Dependability refers to the possibility of a future researcher being able to repeat certain aspects of the research, such as the methodology, in comparable research. This is utilised instead of the quantitative concept of reliability. Shenton (2004) once again focuses here on the research design and method being elaborated upon extensively to facilitate dependability. This facilitates its repetition.

As an autoethnography, this research project is not repeatable. However, the design of the research has been explicitly explained so that the methodology at least may be repeated.

**4.7.4 Confirmability.** Shenton (2004) notes that confirmability relates to the researcher taking steps to show that their findings emerge from the data and not their own predispositions. This may be facilitated if the researcher admits their predispositions. However, as an autoethnography, this research was imbued with predispositions. This was not seen to be problematic as it was explicitly acknowledged and shown to be appreciated within the methodology of autoethnography.

## **4.8 Ethical Considerations**

**4.8.1 Introducing ethics.** Although an autoethnography primarily revolves around the personal story of the researcher, there are still some very pertinent ethical concerns that warrant careful consideration. This was highlighted by Wall (2008) who noted that for her there was great anxiety around balance and ethics because the “intimate and personal nature of autoethnography can, in fact, make it one of the most challenging qualitative approaches to attempt” (Wall, 2008, p. 39). Ellis et al. (2011) note that of key importance in an autoethnography are matters relating to relational ethics, in that autoethnographers, “not only implicate themselves, but also close, intimate others (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 9). Hence, ethics in general is next addressed, followed by specifics relating to social science research.

**4.8.2 Ethics in general.** The field of ethics is vast. However, three modes of thought succinctly elucidate the approach to ethics which was kept in mind during the development of this research: virtue ethics, Catholic teaching on morality, and Emmanuel Kant’s basic ethical teachings.

Virtue ethics has its roots in Ancient Greek thought when the virtues of prudence, courage, temperance and justice were esteemed. The virtues are viewed as characteristics which need to be practiced. Hence, living ethically may become second nature if it is

practiced. What is important is not so much a careful consideration of the rightfulness or wrongfulness of an act but rather one may ask, “What kind of person do I become by performing a particular act” (Gula, 1996, p. 41). Therefore, in choosing what to include in my narrative, prudence, courage, temperance, and justice were guiding principles.

Catholic teaching on morality emphasises that in order for an act to be considered a good one, three pre-requisites need to be present: a good intention, a good act, and a good end (Catholic Church, 2004, p. 391). Hence, in always striving to do good, the ends do not justify the means and acts cannot be considered to be good if they are performed with bad intentions. Good intentions, good means, and good ends were sought in the writing of this autoethnography.

Immanuel Kant, considered by many to be the “Father of the Enlightenment”, sought an ethical teaching apart from the givens of the Christian faith, using only reason. He proposed his categorical imperative and taught that one should only act according to “that maxim which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction” (Stumpf, 1993, p. 317). Hence, when acting, one ought to imagine what the world would be like if everyone behaved in such a way. Only if one can truly say that the world would be better if everyone performed a particular act, should it be performed. He also proposed, “treat yourself and others as ends in themselves and never as a means to an end” (Stumpf, 1993, 318). Hence, research participants ought always to be treated as ends in themselves and never as a means.

Taking Kant to heart, I can honestly affirm that it would be fitting if everyone in the world wrote an autoethnography in the same spirit as this one. And, as the main subject of this, I truly believe that I treated myself as an end and not just as a means to the completion of this research. This endeavour was further fostered by carefully paying attention to several other ethical principles.

**4.8.3 Ethical principles.** The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) proposes three principles to keep in mind as one conducts research: the principle of best interest or well-being; the principle of respect for persons; and the principle of justice (HPCSA, 2008).

*The principle of best interest or well-being.* Researchers are, therefore, exhorted to “place the life, wellbeing, health, privacy and dignity of their research participants before all other interests” (HPCSA, 2008, p. 3). This is akin to Kant’s exhortation to always treat people as ends in themselves, hence this was astutely remembered throughout the research as it related to those I wrote about and myself. Other writers elaborate on this further.

Wassenaar (2006) highlights that this principle involves non-maleficence, ensuring that during the research process no harm is done, no one is wronged and that there is no deception. Not only should this bare minimum of non-maleficence be ensured, but there should also be a benefit to the participant – beneficence. This involves maximising the benefits the research participants acquire, such as gaining better knowledge of the topic in question. Once again this primarily related to my own journey – I believe that I have, indeed, benefited from the research process.

Wassenaar (2006) points out that when participating in the research there should be a favourable risk/benefit ratio and that contingencies should be developed to deal with foreseeable harm, or discomfort associated with research, such as access to counselling facilities. I therefore remained in close contact with my supervisor as I navigated the vicissitudes of writing an autoethnography and I ensured beforehand that I had access to a psychologist if the need arose.

*The principle of respect for persons.* This second principle which the HPCSA (2008) highlights relates to respecting the autonomy of research participants and respecting their dignity. This is connected to ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. This research

ensured that the dignity of persons discussed was maintained by using pseudonyms. Moreover, other identifiable information was disguised. The dignity of my own family members was also considered. Very little in the narrative relates to my family, beyond my own perceptions, it primarily involves experiences, such as experiences in the seminary, outside of my family.

*The principle of justice.* Justice, which was described as one of the cardinal virtues above, involves ensuring that people receive what is due to them. This relates to fairness, impartiality, and equity during all stages of the research. Quite often the burden of the research falls on the participants while the researchers receives all the benefits, this should not be so (Wassenaar, 2006). In this research, as the prime participant, I believe that I benefited greatly by participating in it.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The main goals of this chapter were to demonstrate design coherence and to explicitly explain how the data was produced and analysed. The qualitative approach was shown to be coherent with phenomenology and the method of narrative autoethnography. It was, indeed, shown how the data was produced and analysed. This contributed towards the trustworthiness of the research and in turn fostered an ethical research process, a research process which primarily revolves around the narrative which is next presented.

## Chapter 5: Wrestling Heart

### 5.1 Prologue: It's All About the Human Stuff

“It’s all about the human stuff”, I finally confess. Fr O’Sullivan and I are standing at the entrance to St John Vianney Seminary, a colossal building. Several decades previously the Protestant government had not allowed the *Roomse Gevaar* (Roman Danger) to build the seminary within Pretoria, a hallowed city. Instead, it had to be built outside the perimeter on rural property. In typical Catholic defiance, it was built on a grand scale, with a towering steeple so that it could clearly be seen by the suspicious, right from their places of safety.

We look out over the gardens and see the Union Buildings in the distance. Slightly to the West, a huge soccer ball is being taken down from a radio tower. We have known each other for four years now. Two years previously, he had enquired whether I was happy. His question had brought on tears – I had not really considered happiness a priority. And his words were now germinating – I have experienced seminary life for four years now and I have phenomena to reflect upon as opposed to the simple lure of ideals.

“Yes, it is, the motivation to become a priest is all about the human stuff. The truth is Luke, we could fill this seminary ten times!” Fr O’Sullivan laughs and continues, “There is nothing special about wanting to be a priest in South Africa. There are many reasons why a person may want to become a priest. In South Africa we are stricken with poverty and young men don’t have other ways of attaining such a privileged status and living in such security.”

The sun is setting. The ball is gone. We depart. I ponder. I consider my own human stuff.

## 5.2 Childhood

### East London (1984 - 1988)

“Daddy, how much longer?” I whisper.

“Not much longer now.”

My father is standing with me in his arms. We then pray the “Our Father”. Mass is long when you are three years old. At least I now know that when we stand to pray the “Our Father” the marathon Mass is almost finished. The primary goal at Mass, if accomplished, is to remain quiet and still for a very long time. If the task is achieved, I will be deemed good.

I look up and see Jesus on the cross. Jesus is dead. God, Jesus and the priest in front are confusing concepts to grasp. I’m not sure if they are the same or different persons. Words in general are confusing and I’m not very good at them – I attend speech therapy, which is for children who are not good, at speaking. If I am good and don’t cry when the scary lady disappears with me, then I am rewarded with little toy animals. Having something wrong with me is embarrassing, especially when words stream from my elder brother’s mouth with such ease.

We live close to the beach in East London. My brother is six years old. My parents love me very much and so do my grandparents, aunties and uncles. I have a friend who lives down the road. I can swim and ride a bicycle all by myself. I’m at a new school, because I cried too much at the old one. I’m about to go to a bigger school for four-year olds.





*Figure 1: My baptism – the beginning of my faith journey. I was baptised by my uncle, Joseph, who had recently been ordained a priest – he is now an abbot of a monastery in the USA (1984).*

### **Stutterheim (1988 - 1990)**

“Mommy, why are you crying?”

“Because I am sad.”

My mother is sitting on her bed in her pink gown and she is wearing her pink slippers. I know she is sick. She has been chatting and crying to a friend on the phone, but I’m too young to completely follow the conversation. I can only see that now she is crying a lot. I have a vague idea about what has happened: the baby that we were waiting for so eagerly has died because my mommy has been sick.

We’ve been in Stutterheim for some time now and I have moved from the play school to Sutterheim Pre-Primary. It’s play time. Our massive playground has huge trees, countless toys and massive jungle gyms. I’m having lots of fun, but all of a sudden something funny happens, I make a big poo in my pants. I’m five years old. How can this possibly happen? The teacher rings the bell for the end of play time, and I panic, I’ve never been so embarrassed in my whole life. I quickly run to the toilets. I take off my shorts and my

underwear and try to wash them in the toilet. Eventually my clothes are soaking, and I ascertain that most of the poo is gone. I put my shorts and my underwear back on.

What am I to do now? My clothes are soaking! I run to the sandpit and sit down in the sand – perhaps everyone will think I just sat in some mud. One of the gardeners is now watching my antics – as an adult he probably thinks that five-year olds are pretty childish and prone to doing stupid things anyway. I just smile at him and make as if I am having a whale of a time in the sand, he smiles back. I then venture into the classroom.

When I arrive back in my class room everyone is singing a song and the teacher is at the piano. I try to slip in as inconspicuously as possible. The song stops. One of the damn girls says, “Teacher, something stinks”.

My teachers says, “Luke, please stand up. And turn around.” In a fraction of a second I have been caught out. “Go wait for me in the bathroom.” Everyone stares at me. Full of shame I leave everyone. I then wait, alone, in trepidation in the bathroom. “It could happen to anyone”, she says when she arrives, trying to make me feel better. My teacher then washes me properly and gives me clean clothes.

Stutterheim is a great place to live in. The Amathole Mountains with their indigenous forests and waterfalls are close by. I’m an altar boy, well more correctly, an apprentice of an altar boy – I simply follow my elder brother around on the sanctuary on a Sunday. Following the passing of my sister, I do not know how old she had been, we pray resolutely every day for another baby. I’m absolutely amazed when my little brother is born – God answers our prayers. Along with the coming of my baby brother, comes the news that we will be moving again, to Port Elizabeth.

**Port Elizabeth (1990 – 1992)**

We drive through rushing traffic, through an infinite number of traffic lights – Stutterheim did not have a single traffic light. We take turn after turn and arrive at my new school. There is a soccer field, a huge playground and a sandpit as big as the beach itself. I'm introduced to my new teacher – a young plump lady. There are four classes and thousands of children.

My mother leaves. She walks off with my baby brother in a blue baby-carry-bag. She drives off. The sound of my dad's blue Volkswagen Beetle fades and then disappears. Fear sets in. I have absolutely no idea where I am, and I have no idea where my mother is going – I am all alone. I start to cry. My whole body cries. My teacher places me on her lap and I carry on crying. My new school is an abyss. The young teacher is at a loss and concocts a desperate plan, "Perhaps your mother has not left yet. Let's go and have a look." A glimmer of hope arises. Upon inspecting the entrance to the school my hope dissipates and the darkness engulfs once more, her sinister ploy serves only to subside the torrent of tears which reappear unabated.

I'm challenged to stop crying at school and my big brother is encouraged to stop picking his nose. I make a few new friends. I learn how to play soccer. I go to swimming lessons so that I can learn how to swim strokes properly before I start big school. I wrestle the tears away.

The smell of toxic lead and wood shavings emanating from sharpened HB pencils fills the air. These new smells indicate that big school is a whole new world, a serious one, we are here to work – there is no time to play. I sit quietly at my miniature chair with a red book bag hanging over the back of it. The bag contains my "Kathy and Mark" reader and a box of extremely expensive wax crayons. I've never used wax crayons before and I'm not sure if I'm keen to, because of their lofty price. The back corner of the classroom has a miniature

library. Opposite the windows to the playground there is a long black board with lines on for us to practice our writing. The teacher writes on the big black board at the front of the class, above which the alphabet is displayed. At the front of the classroom there is a carpet, we come up in groups and practice our reading on it. The best reading group is made up of four girls, one of which is Karen, whose mother is also a teacher. Karen could read when she arrived. We are all now practicing our writing.

“Okay girls and boys, now write cat.” The teacher walks around the classroom looking for a victim. She is tall, wears a long light pink dress and her hair is permed. “No Luke, not c-e-t, write c-e-t!” I’m confused, everyone is looking at me, so I try my best and write down cat again. She screams, “I just told you how to spell the jolly word and you have made the same mistake again!!!”

I’m in serious trouble. So serious that my teacher arranges a meeting with my mother and my mother finds out what I did. They arrange for me to attend “phonics” with the remediation therapist at school. A couple times a week, while the rest of the class are busy with something else, I leave alone, and go off to phonics.



*Figure 2: Completing phonics – I was very proud when I received a medal from the remedial therapist (1991).*

I, eventually, make it to Grade 2. My new teacher likes me a lot. On one occasion she leaves the class and says, “Okay Luke, sit on my chair and keep asking the class the sums we are doing.” I sit on her chair with great delight and test my classmates. I’m amazed to see that some are adding on their fingers like a bunch of four-year olds. “Just look at the numbers in your head” I think to myself, but I don’t say anything nasty.

Before school I attend special swimming training for a select group of swimmers who are training for the biggest gala of the year – trials for the provincial swimming team. I dream of swimming for Eastern Province and being able to wear the red and black tracksuits. I also quite like arriving slightly late to class in the morning, because I was at swimming.

On the Friday before the big gala, our swimming coach calls me aside, “Luke, you won’t be going to the trials. There isn’t actually an under-eight age group and you would have to swim against children a whole year older than you.”

I’m absolutely distraught, so I reply, “that’s okay.” I walk off.

I carry on enjoying swimming. I love rugby and play fullback for the under-eight A team. My favourite rugby player is Theo Van Rensburg, who plays fullback for Transvaal and the Springboks. My friends' names are Donovan, Christopher and Allan, we all play rugby together in a team made up mostly of Afrikaans boys. Towards the end of the third term in Grade 2 we hear that we will be moving to Knysna, another coastal town, 200 km west of Port Elizabeth.

### **Knysna (1992 - 1995)**

We arrive in Knysna as the swimming season is just beginning. There's no school swimming so we have to join a club with mostly bigger children, some even in high school. On the first day of training the lady coach bellows, "That boy can't swim properly!" She then tells my mother that I can't swim with her group and that I will have to attend stroke correction with the "Franky Frog" group. My mother tries to make light of the matter and jokes with me about the name. I'm eight years old and embarrassed to be swimming in a group called "Franky Frog", especially when my brother's club has groups with names like "intermediate", "expert" and "professional".

I try my best at "Franky Frog" and eventually I'm swimming with my brother again. I swim harder and harder with the bigger kids. And I'm eventually chosen for the provincial swimming team – South Western Districts. I get to wear a white and green tracksuit.

When rugby season begins, I realise I am the only English boy in the team – English boys play soccer and Afrikaans boys play rugby. My brother tells me to play soccer, but I want to be a Springbok and it doesn't bother me too much that I'm an outsider in the team, so I train really hard. Then one day I discover my team had just played a match I knew nothing about. I realise that my stubbornness in attempting to go against the grain had not paid off. I change to soccer, like my brother had suggested, and play goalie in Grade 3.

I'm therefore settling in quite well at school and because I am in Grade 3 it's time for my First Holy Communion at church. But I first need to prepare for it.

Fr Gummersbach teaches those who are preparing for the most august sacrament himself. His office is like a mystery on earth, filled with books and perhaps most importantly, there is a picture on his desk of him and his seminary soccer team. He is a German missionary priest. He serves the white, coloured and black churches in Knysna, he even built one of the churches in the location himself. I'm certain that when he dies, he will go straight to heaven.

My Catechism classes are highly stimulating. Fr Gummersbach explains to me the meaning of the questions and answers I am learning off by heart:

“Who made you?”

“God made me.”

“Why did God make you?”

“To love Him and to serve Him and to be happy with Him in this world and the next.”

“Who is God?”

“God is the eternal, infinite, living Being.”

“Where is God?”

“God is everywhere.”

“Do you know what eternal means?”

“No, Father.”

“It means that God has no beginning and no end, He has always existed. And, do you know what infinite means?”

“No, Father.”

“It means that God is all powerful. There is no limit to his power.”

I am amazed. I learn the answers to hundreds of questions from the Catechism. My mother says that you aren't supposed to learn things like a parrot these days and that the German priest is old fashioned. I don't care, it's much more interesting than the boring stuff we do at school. Before I receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, I need to be pure. So, the day before I make my First Holy Communion, I make my First Confession.

The church smells like incense and candle wax. I kneel down at the back of the church and ask God to help me make a good confession. My thoughts wonder to the list of sins I was furnished with in preparation for this most holy day and I ponder the meaning of "watching blue movies" and wonder why it's so bad to attend a Protestant church service.

I enter the confessional and kneel on a wooden kneeler. The small cubicle smells like varnish and as I lean forward to begin my confession, I smell the straw screen obscuring my vision of Fr Gummersbach.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Bless me father, for I have sinned, this is my first confession, and these are my sins: I fought with my brothers; I wasn't kind to a friend at school; I didn't listen to my mother."

"I see, we must try to be good like Jesus, who obeyed his parents. Now make a good act of contrition."

"O my Lord Jesus, I am truly sorry that I have sinned against You, because You love me so much, with Your help and grace I will try not to sin again."

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For your penance, please say one Our Father and three Hail Marys."

"Thank you, Father."



Following my first confession I receive my First Holy Communion. It's so important that my dad's parents travel for five hours to celebrate it with me. Instead of a Catechism class on the following Friday I am escorted by an old lady from the parish into the church. "You are now going to learn to be an altar server!" She then spends a few Fridays teaching me all about the Mass and how to perfectly serve at the altar. It's amazing to learn all about the sacred vessels and vestments and it is especially cool to practice hitting a gong which will be rung at the most sacred time during Mass, by me.

Throughout Lent, the intense period of fasting and prayer leading up to Easter, I not only serve at Holy Mass on a Sunday, but also on Fridays. And before Mass on Fridays we pray the Stations of the Cross when we remember how much Jesus suffered for us. It feels especially edifying to process around the church as an altar boy with candles, led by Fr Gummersbach, and to stop at a carving of a special moment leading up to the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Before each of the 14 stations we genuflect and begin a prayer and reflection with, "I adore You, O Christ and I praise You, because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world."

There is surely nothing more holy and sacrificial than praying the Stations of the Cross on a Friday afternoon, when worldly people are just outside having fun and don't care at all about being close to Jesus.

It's now the end of the Lenten season, Holy Thursday, and the Easter celebrations are beginning. My elder brother and I have been practising for this most auspicious occasion for weeks. Holy Thursday has special importance – at a certain moment in the celebration Fr Gummersbach kneels in front of the tabernacle. He is known for being especially holy and we know that he will kneel there for a long time. It's a time that symbolically represents Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, in anguish, the night before he died. So, one can't make light of it.

My brother and I are now kneeling with our candles next to Fr Gummersbach in front of the tabernacle, in front of Jesus. We kneel for five minutes and then ten and I can imagine how holy I am becoming. After 15 minutes, I discretely gaze over my shoulder and note that Francesca, an Italian girl in my class at school, has relented and is now sitting with her family. We carry on kneeling in prayer, just like Jesus. After 30 minutes most of the congregation are sitting, except for Fr Gummersbach, my brother, me and a few of the other strong ones. We are surely just like Jesus now, and everyone in the church can see how amazing we are, kneeling there in front of all the people. After 45 minutes we stand, and the Easter celebrations continue. Fr Gummersbach gives my brother and me a bag full of sweets and chocolates on Easter Sunday for serving so well. I'm thrilled and realise how much I love church and being holy.

I'm in Grade 5 now at Knysna Primary. I'm a holy altar server. Francesca and I write letters to each other. I am the captain of the under-eleven A soccer team and the top goal scorer. My favourite soccer player is Romario, the Brazilian. I'm a provincial swimmer. I'm the best at maths in my class. I'm a leader at cubs, junior scouts. And then one day my dad fetches my brother and me from school and casually says, "We are moving back to Port Elizabeth". Nothing.



*Figure 3: Swimming awards – proudly displaying a shield alongside my brothers (1995).*

### **Port Elizabeth (1995)**

We are staying in the King Edward Hotel, in an apartment with two rooms and a lounge. When I was young it was great to stay in a hotel, but now that I am eleven, I am tired of the food and it pretty much sucks. Although I am back at the same school I started at, everything seems new and scary. And to make matters worse, the class I am in has been doing fractions in maths for the whole year. At my old school in Knysna we had not yet even heard about fractions. I have always been the best at maths, but now I'm a complete imbecile. I tell my mother who is busy with my younger brother that I don't understand fractions. She shouts, "Justin, teach Luke about fractions!"

My brother is in Grade 8 and traumatised by his new high school. He says, "It's all about the top number being divided by the bottom number, easy peasy." I have no idea what he is saying so I go and stare at my homework by myself. I've never been so worried about my future. The greatest problem in my life is that I don't understand fractions and I am worried I might be doomed to the special class for all eternity. And then I suddenly have a thought.

I realise that we will all soon die and go to heaven. And if we don't die the world will end eventually anyway. And I am gratefully comforted by the fact that in heaven God is not going to be concerned about fractions, in fact, they will be of no concern at all. I'm able to comfort myself with the reminder that time is passing by quickly and that everything will be over soon.

Fortunately, I don't have to wait for the world to end to be comforted. My teacher gives me a private lesson during PT and pretty soon I'm the best at maths again. Winter has passed, summer begins. I obtain provincial swimming colours again and get to wear the red and black tracksuit I had longed for in Grade 2. And when I need to go on a dreadful swimming tour away from home, I again comfort myself with the reminder that it will pretty soon be over anyway.

It's the end of Grade 5 and I am blessed again. This time with the news that we will be moving back to East London. Blurriness.

### **East London (1996-2002)**

I stand under the huge conifer with my back to its towering trunk, it's a bit safer not exposing one's vulnerability. It's break time and I am standing with my lunch box. I look inside and as expected, like my other first days of school, my mother has placed a chocolate in it beside the cheese sandwiches. Everything happens in slow motion and it feels as if I am floating. I feel thankful that I feel nothing and don't need to fight back tears like I had to

when I was young. I'm eleven and quite easily feel nothing. I eat my tasteless sandwiches. The chocolate makes me feel nauseous.

I survey the scene. Under some of the other trees, boys in my grade are throwing pine cones at each other – this is their game. I think to myself that it's a bit demented for Grade 6's to be running around throwing things at each other. I look towards the tuckshop and another group of boys and girls in my grade have assembled – the cool group. It does not cross my mind to approach anyone. I just stand there dead-still with my lunch box at every break for a few days until eventually, a boy with bandy legs approaches me. He kindly asks, "Would you lll-like to come and ppp-play with us? We are ppp-playing hand tennis over fere."

On account of his gait and speech impediment I classify him as a nerd. I realise my answer could have serious consequences for my resulting social stature at my new school. But beggars can't be choosers. I respond in the affirmative and have a break-time place of safety, an activity and friends.

I swim for my new province, Border, and some in my family think it's impressive that I have represented three provinces and I'm only eleven. There's no soccer at my new school, so I play the closest thing to it, hockey. I have to play in a "B" team for a while before I make the "A" team, but at least I'm not in the "C" team, that would be embarrassing. At the end of Grade 6 I am chosen as a prefect and I don't even realise that one day I will think it was pretty resilient to be chosen as a prefect after a few months at a new school.

In Grade 7 I have a girlfriend for a few months, but she then breaks up with me. I have a best friend and we enjoy fishing and playing sport together. At the end of Grade 7 he tells me he is going to boarding school in another town for high school. I suddenly realise I will be starting high school the next year with no good friends. For a fraction of a second I realise I am scared, but I manage to think of something else.

Its assembly time in high school, girls sit on the left side of the hall and boys on the right side. The senior boys sit at the back of the hall and push all the juniors forward. We are packed like sardines, squashed against the stage in front. Some of the senior boys at the back are sitting with their legs stretched out like they are on a beach. We stand to sing the school song, which ushers in some comfort by affording us the opportunity to stretch out legs. When the school song stops, we sit down as quickly as possible, otherwise you will be one of the two or three boys left standing without a place to sit and everyone will laugh at you, a skinny Grade 8 boy standing in front of the school with nowhere to sit. There are however some benefits to be had from sitting right up against the stage.

When a senior girl comes on stage to receive an award or make an announcement, which the captains of the girl's hockey team and netball teams do quite often, we are able to look right up their skirts. Its glorious to be filled with more testosterone than any steroid could offer and be able to, with a giggle, gaze at the legs of the most beautiful girls in the school. But something else can also be clearly seen from upfront, the honours board.

The honours board is filled with the names of those who have previously excelled at the school. I don't really care about the academic or cultural sections, I just stare at the names of those who have received honours for sport. And I am especially drawn to the names of those who have received honours for water polo. My high school is one of the best water polo schools in the country and over the past several years has produced several national representatives, whose names I am examining in front of me, while the principal blabbers on about something trivial. I dream of playing water polo for the school's first team.

Grade 8 passes swiftly. At the end of Grade 8 I receive the highest mark in the Grade for maths, something my mom is pretty chuffed about because there are more than 200 children in my grade. I swim and play hockey. I am passionate about water polo.

In Grade 9 I visit the school's Student Christian Association. The teacher in charge explains to me that Christianity is not a religion, it's about a relationship with Jesus, and that Catholics aren't Christians. One of the girls asks me why we worship Mary. I don't go back.

In Grade 10 I begin to prepare for my final sacrament of initiation at church, Confirmation. My teacher is a pretty cool old dude – he allows me to arrive late after water polo practice. In preparation for Confirmation, which will mean that we will become adults in the faith, we all go to confession to ensure that we are without sin so as to be open to the graces we will receive from the Holy Spirit.

As we nervously wait for our turn, preparing our souls and examining our consciences, some of the boys are giggling outside the church. One of the boys has a book containing everything one needs to know about Catholicism. And he is reading from it,

“Masturbation is a mortal sin and must be immediately confessed”. I laugh too. But internally I am worried. I'm 15, almost 16, testosterone has been pumping through my blood at a rate all the windmills in the Free State, perhaps in the whole of the Netherlands, would not be able to keep up with. The inevitable result of all the pumping testosterone, more pumping. For many a person such antics are a humorous part of adolescence. But if you are Catholic and believe in the evil of mortal sins, they are nothing to laugh about.

Catholics distinguish between mortal and venial sins, with venial sins being less serious. As its name suggests, a mortal sin results in death. The idea is that if you were to die having not confessed a mortal sin you would go straight to hell. Mortal sins don't just damage our relationship with God, they completely sever it.

Following the realisation that Jesus, who died for us on the cross, is quite concerned about hedonistic hand jobs and that such deplorable deeds separate us from him and could land us up in hell, the remainder of my teenage years are spent wrestling against the temptation from the devil to masturbate. Times of holy strength and grace are followed by

stumbles into cesspools of sin. I feel good about myself and then I feel bad about myself. I go to confession and I am close to Jesus, but then I'm on the *Baywatch* beach with Pamela Anderson and the perpetual pattern continues. But there is a great positive to all the testosterone. I'm almost 16 and in a position to try out for the school's first water polo team – the main point of high school.

Its early August and yet another cold front is icing East London. We are sitting at the side of the water polo pool in our jerseys, jackets, jeans and flip flops. It's about 16 degrees, the water slightly colder. Our coach arrives, just back from a surf and says, "Alright boys, we are going to Joburg to win in two months and today we are going to choose the team that is going to do it. I'm fucking pissed off that some pansies haven't made it here today because it's a bit fresh. In my day we started training in July. At least we have already separated the men from the boys. There's no point in trying to warm up, so let's just start playing. Where is Andrew?"

"Coach, his parents said he can't play until it starts warming up because of what happened to his balls last year this time." We all laugh. Poor Andrew almost lost a testicle the previous year when one twisted and ascended on account of the cold. It highlights that what we are doing is not entirely prudent, but you won't be winning any water polo tournaments if you start training the week before it begins when it's warm, like the losers at the other co-ed school down the road from us.

We divide into two teams, white and blue caps, there are about twelve players either side, but only seven play at a time. This is normally no problem, but when its freezing there is nothing worse than getting out the water, warming up and then having to get in again.

"Luke, I heard you are a swimmer! Let's see if you can swim." The Grade 12's on my side tell me I will be racing for the ball at the start of the game. They are writing exams, some haven't shaved for a while, I'm in Grade 10 and I haven't started shaving. I obey the brawny



barbarians. Although they know I am a swimmer, they don't know that I have been training for the whole of winter, with a Russian coach who won a silver medal at the Olympics, in special preparation for this very moment.

Fitter and faster than the others I make the first water polo team, the most important thing in the world for me as a 15-year-old boy. We train solid for eight weeks, even adding in a couple of morning sessions before school until we make the *Groot Trek* north and arrive at the Ellis Park Swimming Pool Complex.

We dive into the heated water to warm up for our first game, the familiar smell of chlorine greets and then all of a sudden there is burning. Our lungs, unaccustomed to the high altitude are soon screaming. I think to myself, "If this what it feels like to warm up, what is it going to be like to play." And to make matters worse, we are not playing in a water polo pool, the playing area of the converted 50-meter pool is huge and will require lots of swimming. But, we are fit and progress through the group games on the first day with relative ease.

That night we arrive back at the hotel very excited. However, four of us are also filled with trepidation, we are juniors and still need to undergo our initiation. Our captain enters our room at the appointed time, "Alright boys, strip down to just your jocks, put a towel around your waist and put a swimming cap on your head. In five minutes meet outside my door."

Apocryphal stories of hospitalisations following previous initiations have conveniently made their way to us four juniors. The two Grade 11's in the group are attempting to form an alliance and say, "They can't force us to do anything we don't want to do. Did you hear what happened to Travis three years ago? He had to go to hospital because of the blood clots." The two Grade 11's stay behind. For the next few weeks, as perpetual juniors, they will have to carry our kit and I gleefully enjoy calling boys older than me "junior". They don't last long.

But my fellow Grade 10 and I make the odyssey to the room of the captain. Before we enter, we are instructed to pull our swimming caps over our eyes. I'm shaking like a jack hammer, but I gladly embrace the fear because there is nothing in the world that I want more than to play for the first water polo team.

It's the final day of the tournament and we have made the final. The main stand is swelling, and we are stretching in a circle. The seniors are buzzing, especially our captain, "I have been training my whole life for this moment! We are going to go out there and cream them. I don't care if you get tired. It only takes a second to puke and then you keep swimming. *Tentando Superabis!*"

Our opposing school is from Johannesburg. Ironically, everyone in the crowd, including the other schools, don't like them, so they all cheer for us. Our captain plays for South Africa, at centre back he is our main defender, throughout the tournament he often steals possession, swims the length of the pool and scores by himself. Our centre forward is an ox and is also a national representative. It's great having them in our team, but it's also disconcerting when they tell us how good some of the players in the other team are, also national representatives.

The hurly burly battle proceeds at a frantic pace. Eventually, the senior players tire and it's my turn to play. I eagerly mark one of the hulks very tightly. Before I know what has happened, he pulls my head towards him and head butts me, my nose begins to bleed, he laughs, "Watch out *laaitie*/junior! If you swim me, I will kill you!" "Swimming" him is the reason why I have been put in to play now. I sprint up and down the pool at each change of possession, tiring him out, making sure to not get too close to him when unnecessary. Eventually, my job is done, and I get out to watch the rest of the game from the side.

Our goalie is playing like a man possessed. In the commotion of one of his saves he manages to simultaneously gain possession of the ball and punch one of their players in the

ear. He passes the ball to a player up the pool and then looks back at us. “That wanker is going to have to answer that phone call, his ear is ringing like a switchboard, did you see what I did coach?”

“Ha, ha, Gary, just calm down or they will get suspicious!”

Our goalie can’t stop giggling. I’m naïve and have to be told by the other players on the bench that he is as high as a kite and has been getting *dagga*/cannabis for the team from a car guard outside the complex each morning. Suddenly, I realise that most of our senior players are high and that is how they keep going and going and going despite the altitude.

I look towards the stand and away from the crowd, our captain’s sister is basking in the sun. Shelly has blonde hair, blue eyes and the September sun is turning her skin to pure gold. I suddenly realise she is the most beautiful person I have ever seen. I have never spoken to her, even though we are in the same grade at school. Like Aphrodite she looks down from the stand as we continue our battle.

With time running out and with our scores equal, one of their players is temporarily excluded from the game for a minor infringement. It’s the moment we have been waiting for. In a well-rehearsed move, which involves our players switching positions, our captain scores. We win to the delight of the crowd. Our coach and some of our parents are pushed into the pool in celebration. Shelly descends to congratulate us, “You were awesome, Luke!” I didn’t even know she knew my name, now we are hugging. We return to school as heroes, displaying our medals. School is suddenly getting very exciting.

The remainder of 2000 is vivified by glorious greetings from Shelly in our school corridors as we change classes between periods. Her smile is alluring, and I’m completely mesmerised. Everything is going well. At the end of Grade 10 I do well academically, obtain an average of 86 percent and stand on stage with all the nerds when I come fifth in my grade. But academics aren’t my focus, I’m concocting a plan.

I'm aware that Shelly does swimming at school. So, I decide that at the beginning of Grade 11 I will forego club swimming and partake in the more social swimming at school. This will give us a chance to interact and for her to get to know me. The plan also involves lots of push ups over the course of the Christmas holidays. With the enticing telos in mind, it is quite easy to do a couple hundred a day, with the desire to look like a navy seal.

It is 2001 and the most exciting day of the school year arrives – the interhouse gala. Cheerleaders from opposing houses compete with each other for the most elaborate entrance, the red house dominate when they arrive at the municipal pool in a huge red fire engine. War cries ring out from the 1200 face painted, hyped up teenagers on the grandstand as the swimmers below jostle for points for their house.

The morning proceeds rapidly until the climax of the gala – the boys under-18 fifty metre freestyle race. I've already won some races and placed second in others. I know that if I win the final race, my house will win and perhaps more importantly, I will win the *Victor Ludorum* award for winning the most points.

Nine boys from the three houses step up to the starting blocks. I'm the only Grade 11 amongst the Grade 12's. The roar of the crowd is deafening and under my swimming cap I can't hear anything from the starter, so I purposely dive in and false start, everyone else follows and multiple gun shots ring out. I tell the starter we can't hear a thing and he will have to quieten down the crowd.

Eventually, there is perfect silence. I gaze out at the red line at the 35-meter mark and tell myself that if I want to win, I will only be able to breathe once and at that line. The gun goes off, the crowd thunders, we hit the water, eight butterfly kicks under the water, surfacing there is a switch to crawl kick, head still and slightly raised for sprinting, "strong strokes not fast strokes", the water wishes and echoes over the air pocket between my swimming cap and

ear hole, I breathe at the red line and then surge to the wall, we touch, lift our heads and the crashing wake announces it was a fast race in about 25 seconds.

It's exhilarating to hear my name over the loud speakers, followed by the roar of the crowd. I win the huge *Victor Ludorum* trophy and my house wins. It's amazing being a school hero, especially when Shelly has been watching.

Swimming at school is glorious, even if what we do is no more than an ordinary warm up for my rejected Russian coach. I even occasionally conjure up the courage to speak to Shelly until the next part of my plan is put into motion. Shelly walks home from swimming and on certain afternoons my swimming is followed by water polo at the municipal pool complex nearby. I tell my mother that I am now okay to walk the few kilometres and won't require a lift anymore from swimming to water polo.

I wait outside school for her after swimming. I'm more nervous than I have been for years, my hands are sweating, and I hope that when she arrives, I still remember how to speak.

"Hey, Shelly. I'm on my way to the Joan Harrison. Would you like me to walk you home?"

"Cool, that will be rad."

"It's so cold. Would you like to use my anorak?"

"Thanks, that's so sweet!"

At her home we have some tea and biscuits and I arrive at water polo late.

"Luke, why are you late? We have already stretched and warmed up!"

"Ha-ha coach, he's already warmed up!"

"Your mother has already warmed up! Coach, I was at swimming!"

Life can't get any better. No, actually it does.

It's the day of Saint Valentine and a committee raising funds for the matric dance is delivering pre-ordered cards, flowers and chocolates from admirers. I have sent a red rose to Shelly and addressed her as, "The most beautiful girl in the school". My gifts and cards arrive, and I quickly scramble through them for the only one that matters, "HVD, thanks for walking me home the other day, luv Shelly."

I ask my friend, "Steve, what does HVD mean?"

"Happy Valentine's Day, you nob!"

Spurred on by mutual friends, we meet at break time and arrange our first date, the movie, *What Women Want*. Soon I'm regularly walking her home and when I spend a Saturday with her and her family at their beach home, I think that I have really arrived – there is nothing better in the world than walking along the beach holding hands with the most beautiful girl in the world.

Summer becomes Autumn. Over the Easter holidays I go away on a hockey tour to George. I endure another initiation completely different from the previous year's water polo one. I'm disappointed to discover that certain senior's actually take deep delight in hurting the initiates.

I return to school and something is amiss with Shelly. She assures me that all is well. But, on the Friday I receive a letter from her at the beginning of second break. I go to the boy's bathrooms to read it. It reads: "Dear Luke, you are a stunning guy, but let's just be friends." I'm shocked! Inside I just feel empty. I don't cry like I had anticipated I would. I just float outside to my friends and numbly wait for the end of break.

In maths my best friend Steve enquires after me and it is only then that I burst out crying. There is nothing as raw as complete rejection. I'm sobbing now and sadness has engulfed me. That afternoon I tell my family what transpired, they all laugh and say that everything happens for a reason. I go and sleep.

I'm dazed for the rest of high school. I still do well at sport and at the end of Grade 11 receive swimming, water polo and hockey trophies, but my academic performance drops by about 25 %. I become a prefect in Grade 12 along with Shelly and I try my best to win back her attention, but to no avail. She has moved on.

I learn of her subsequent boyfriends at school dancers, from friends and at various sporting fixtures. The ghastly happenings induce physical feelings of extreme compression as if being in a vice grip or perhaps a black hole. Floating through school as a depressed boy doesn't draw much attention. Only a few teachers enquire, "Luke, what has happened? You should be getting an "A" for science. Why are you always sleeping in class?"

"Ma'am, I was watching soccer last night."

"He thinks he is cool now, ma'am!"

Most subjects become a complete bore. I only enjoy English. Our English teacher is passionate about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and I am intrigued by the character, Atticus Finch. Our teacher explains to us that Atticus is a man of integrity. We don't know what integrity means, so she explains that it is possessing the quality of always, without exception, doing what you believe in your heart is the right thing to do. Atticus also teaches us about courage, "It's when you know that you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do." I muse on what it means to be a person of courage with integrity. And then I hear another story that lingers in my heart.

A family member had been having a terrible time emotionally, she was severely depressed and would often battle to sleep. When this would happen, she would call the priest and Fr Seamus would rush out to her. I am struck by the realisation that when you are in difficulty a priest is the one that you can always rely on.

High school ends for me not with the end of exams, for which I didn't open a book, but at the end of our final provincial water polo tournament. The boys' and girls' teams are coming back from Durban on a bus. Shelly has played at the same tournament and is socialising very closely with some of the boys from a rival school in the team. She is sitting next to one of the biggest douche bags and I then realise she is making out with him. It feels like I am going to burst, all I feel is infinite pressure. The seat in front of me is broken and a piece of sharp plastic juts out. I calmly stare ahead. I sit quietly in my seat and I cut my knuckles on the sharp plastic until some of the pressure subsides. She goes off. And so do I. High school has finally relented.

A few weeks later I receive my report. I feel dead when I see two D's, one for maths and one for science. My dad says, "I wish I got such good marks, wow, a B average!" My mom adds, "you got a B for English without reading your set work books, ha-ha." I feel sick.



*Figure 4: My water polo team – my prime focus throughout high school. I am in the front row, third from the right (2002).*



**Grahamstown (2003)**

I'm at Rhodes University and begin the year with great hope. I look forward to playing university water polo. Aware that I enjoyed the abstract themes studied in English at school, I am drawn to the Humanities. Psychology is unfortunately a bit of a joke, we mostly do multiple choice tests to obtain marks and graduate students teach us. We do some assignments and our first one is on Freud's "Psychosexual Stages of Development". English is quite challenging. Our English essays are to be handed in on Friday mornings by 9 am. I therefore conclude that it would be quite okay to wake up early on a Friday morning, at about 6 am to start my essays, finish them at 8:45 am, and run down to the English department to hand them in. Unsurprisingly, I battle to pass English.

The realisation that there are approximately 6000 students at the university is also encouraging. I reason that because the population of South Africa is about 5 % Catholic, there will be about 150 young ladies at Mass on the first Sunday of the semester and there will be a bevy of Catholic beauties to choose from. But alas, on the first Sunday, I am confronted with the realisation that perhaps not all Catholics go to Mass every Sunday, there are only a handful of ladies, all of whom don't meet my fancy. I consider all the beautiful Catholic girls who are not going to Mass, them being in a state of mortal sin for missing Mass and their poor mothers and grandmothers at home praying for their immortal souls.

Initially, I enjoy going out with the other gents from my res. But, after a few months the monotony of those getting drunk around me bores and I'm disappointed by the sozzled girls I meet on nights out. I'm forced to consider that only a few months before coming to university I was having water balloon fights with filled condoms on sports tours and that now some of my friends are actually using condoms for their intended purpose. I begin to feel very lonely.

So, when I come across the Anglican Society advertising an Alpha Course, which covers the fundamentals of Christianity in a social group setting, I quickly sign up.

The Alpha course brings with it some welcome company. The young Christians are warm and friendly, and unlike at school, they don't even mind that I am Catholic. We discuss the basics of our faith and we grow in our love for Jesus. And then one evening something special happens.

Our leader announces that she has received a special "Word of Knowledge" from the Holy Spirit and that she has been told that someone in the group is carrying a deep hurt with them from a past relationship. She invites the person to come forward for prayer. I come forward and I share my story with the leader. She says, "I have the image of her being like a beautiful butterfly, moving from flower to flower." I cry torrents of tears. I'm relieved that someone is listening to me – giving me attention. And, I am amazed at how much God loves me.

It's the peace that you feel in your heart when you say "yes" to the call of God that confirms your vocation: this Catholic dictum is dancing in my mind on that day I decide to resolutely say "yes" to the call of God to become a priest.

It's the Spring of 2003 and I am on a mini-retreat with my Alpha group in Port Alfred, a picturesque little town on South Africa's Southern coast. The retreat's focus is the Holy Spirit and is the culmination of the Alpha course we are on.

There is a talk on the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit: speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues; miracles and healing; words of knowledge and wisdom; discernment of spirits and prophecy. All of us are "crazy for Jesus" and our discourses are imbued with holy talk. We break up into smaller groups to discuss the topics and to pray intensely for the Holy Spirit.

Most of the guys in my group are quite knowledgeable about the topics and share openly about being baptised in the Holy Spirit. Like most Catholics, I only have a vague idea about the subject matter, so I remain quiet. The group then begin to pray for each other and lay their hands on individuals as they are prayed for. Some of the gents begin to jabber and make sounds akin to Hebrew. Then it is my turn to be prayed for and the leader asks, “Luke, would you like to receive the Holy Spirit?”

“Yes”. A few of the group members lay their hands on me and pray over me.

I go outside and pray quietly by myself. It is then that I consider what it would mean to give myself completely to Jesus. Thoughts of the priesthood are foremost in my mind. And when I say “yes” to becoming a priest I am filled with great joy and peace, the confirmation I need. I gladly want to share the love of God with others, especially those in most need of love.

I decide that I want to immediately go to the seminary, to begin living the life God wants me to, the path he has especially chosen for me before I was even born. But I am advised by a priest to finish my undergraduate degree first. Extremely concerned about my spiritual life and missing home, I decide to leave the university town of Grahamstown, notorious for its debauchery, and move back home to finish my studies at Fort Hare University, East London. At 19 I’m on the path to becoming a holy priest.

### **5.3 Following a Vocation**

#### **East London (2004-2005)**

Moving back home all my focus is on my journey towards the priesthood and holiness – I really want to become a good instrument for God, to share his love. I start to attend Mass during the week and then ensure that I attend every day. I begin weekly spiritual direction with my parish priest and go to confession often. I focus on spiritual reading and consume copious amounts of information about my faith via books and electronic media. I help lead an

Alpha Course at my own church, set up a young adult's group and begin a youth group on a Friday evening at a neighbouring Catholic Church. I visit the sick and start reading the Scriptures at Mass. I come across the lives of the saints and I am completely captivated by several of them.

St Francis of Assisi had belonged to a wealthy family, but had left his wealth behind and embraced poverty in its extreme form. Via a crucifix, in an old dilapidated church, God had asked him to rebuild his Church which was crumbling. He prophetically opposed the pomp and wealth of the church of the time and helped reform it through his simplicity in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. I dream of following the example of St Francis.

St John Vianney had been a parish priest in France soon after the tumultuous French Revolution (1789-1799). He had inspired the conversion of a whole town through his example of holiness. He fasted, mortified his flesh and spent hours in the confessional listening to penitents who came from far and wide to confess to the holy priest. He too, along with other saints, such as Padre Pio and St Dominic, are true ideals for me.

In my studies of Catholicism, I am amazed when I come across Catholic Apologetics, the defence of the faith. I discover that every single Catholic doctrine can be defended logically and coherently with Scripture. Being backed up by the Bible is very important in South Africa, a Protestant country. I am therefore very willing to engage with Protestant friends in debates. I am convinced that if the poor Protestants were helped to see the light, which has been kept hidden from them, they would gladly and humbly convert to the Church that Jesus had formed. I therefore learn the Scripture passages and arguments in support of devotion to the saints, Catholic beliefs around the Mass, the rationale for the pope and bishops, veneration of Mary, the importance of confession, in other words, everything that Protestants oppose. These beliefs are important, but perhaps what is most important are the epistemological beliefs that are being entrenched.

I eagerly embrace the Catholic belief that “the fullness of the truth subsists in the Catholic Church”. Hence, I believe that everything we need to know about God and our path towards salvation is possessed perfectly by the Catholic Church. “The infallibility of the pope” is another doctrine I keenly embrace, the belief that under certain conditions, the pope cannot falter when he is teaching about the faith and about morality, because of a special grace given by the Holy Spirit. That the Church teaches the truth so perfectly is especially espoused during the papacy of John Paul II (1978-2005). And, this is especially the case with regards to matters concerning sexual ethics, human life issues and the place of women in the Church.

Those who advocate for the use of contraception in marriage and the ordination of women as priests are “othered” by conservative church members, in the literature that I read, and the milieu promoted by John Paul II and his devotees. I too am very keen to soldier on for truth against the errors and evils of liberals in the Church. And, I don’t stop to think that it is odd that the biggest battles in the Catholic Church revolve around married couples wanting to tango without the telos of a troop of toddlers and that a few hippie nuns in America want to be priests. Or, why I as a young man think it is of such importance.

It’s the middle of the night, restless agitation has led to tossing and turning. Sexual fantasies have penetrated the vacillation between sleep and wake. At 19 I’m still a teenager and the battle to remain chaste is intense. I fight off the impure thoughts, but they don’t relent. And, then the unthinkable happens, I wank. The surge of blood and testosterone subsides, and I am then left with my sin, my mortal sin.

In performing such an act, I have chosen evil over Jesus. The sin is mortal because it is of grave matter, involving the temple of the Holy Spirit, and I knew exactly what I was doing – I have separated myself from Jesus, I have broken our relationship and I have rejected the grace of God. And worst of all I am hoping to become a priest. What kind of

priest would do such a thing? A priest would be of absolutely no use if he is separated from Jesus and devoid of grace.

I sit down on my bedroom floor and contemplate my despicability in the darkness. I imagine the disappointment of Jesus, perhaps he now has to look away. I'm rock bottom. I'm not really sure if I can speak to Jesus right now, so I just sit for a while. I then think of the mercy of Jesus and that he would even forgive the dislikes of me. I then pray.

“Lord Jesus, I am nothing and you are everything. Please forgive me for wanking yet again. Please shower me with grace so that I am able to remain chaste, because it is too difficult for me to do it by myself. Lord Jesus, you love me so much, please help me to not sin again.”

I begin to feel light, it feels like I am floating, and I start to feel a pleasant dizziness. I begin to feel at peace, Jesus is truly showering down his grace upon me. I am finally having a mystical experience. I just sit there for a while with my head buzzing. It's amazing. I go to sleep knowing that everything depends on Jesus and that I am just a wanker in remission. But I also firmly believe that Jesus has given me a special grace to resist the evil temptation.

I join a soccer club and start training seriously with them. I then start playing first league hockey too. And I start to run a great deal. I start to get fitter and faster. But then I notice a slight pain below my knee caps. I don't pay attention to pain – I just keep training. It starts to become difficult to run, but I keep wrestling against my body. Until eventually I'm battling to walk, and I have to give up my running sports completely. A doctor tells me I have very bad patellar tendonitis and that I should only swim. It's very disappointing. I rest for a few weeks and when I try to run again, I realise that my knees are completely smashed. They never recover fully.

I carry on going to Mass every day. I have a vague awareness that my life is being sucked from me as I sit and pray with all the decaying old people, but I soldier on for Jesus.

The sacrifice of celibacy is constantly in my mind, but I imagine becoming a Good Shepherd like Jesus, “A Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (John 10:11). So, I avoid the temptation of girls. I begin to pray the rosary every day and I feel very guilty if I miss it – there is a spiritual war going on and there is no time for idleness. I read more spiritual books and I also make sure that I read and pray from the Bible everyday too.

Finally, towards the end of 2005, the time arrives for me to apply to study to become a priest. I fill out the forms and send them to my bishop. I endure a psychological assessment which takes several hours. I am ready to begin my life as a seminarian. But, first I need to receive the results of my assessments.

I make my way from East London to Port Elizabeth and then through the maze of the university. With help from students, I finally reach the psychology department. I am 20 minutes early, so I wait outside and survey the gigantic, grey, fort-like buildings. “Will I have been found out?” I think to myself. I eventually carry my limp body to the agreed upon venue.

She rushes in with my file, with my soul, she is obviously fitting me into her busy schedule. She only has a few minutes to spare, so she does not waste any time, “Luke, after my meeting with your Bishop we agreed that it would be best if you wait another year before you go to the seminary. This will allow you to work on a few things, for you to focus on some human development.”

“Okay.”

“I can see you are disappointed. What are you thinking? Is there someone you can now go speak to, like friends? What will you go tell them?”

“I’ll tell them I was not accepted because I am crazy.”

“No, you are not crazy. We saw in the tests that you were indeed very honest. But, we would like you to work on a few things – like learning to express your feelings so that you

don't bottle up problems. You also need to learn to be more assertive. I am sure after a year you will be much better prepared."

"Okay, thank you very much."

I make my way back through the grey university. I get into my car. I feel nothing. I drive back home to East London and tell my family. They laugh and say everything happens for a reason. I smile. I go to my room and sleep.

It's the beginning of 2006 and I have no idea what to do. I have been dreaming of becoming a priest for two and a half years and now I have to wait another year to begin my journey. I'm accepted to study towards my honour's degree in psychology, but I am so depressed I can't even manage the minor assignments given during the first couple of weeks. I drop out.

I then enquire about volunteering at an orphanage run by the church in Cape Town. When I phone, I am convinced that to maintain my integrity I need to tell them that I failed a psychological assessment. But my bishop organises for me to move to Port Elizabeth, for the third time, and for me to stay with a group of priests while I attend my counselling.

### **Port Elizabeth (2006)**

I arrive in Port Elizabeth, passionate about pious and hallowed matters. I pray intensely and read even more about the "perfect society", the Catholic Church. I plan my days carefully making sure I fit in my prayer and studies. I also make sure I fit in an hour of Latin and Xhosa each day. I go to my counselling so I can be fixed. On one occasion I write the following in my prayer journal:

*Feels weird coming to a psychiatric hospital for counselling. I feel crazy when I go for counselling and see other people, for example the students coming out before me. Is this a big thing about feeling crazy? One jokes about it, but it is still embarrassing!*  
(9 May 2006)



Although I experience the beginning of my sanctifying journey as a struggle, I am one hundred percent certain that God is calling me to be a priest, to be a good shepherd like Jesus who laid down his life for his sheep. My eyes are fixed on the goal God has gifted me with – so much so that I resolutely embrace the pain that it comes with. I’m not entirely aware of how much conflict is playing out within in me, even though my heart and soul are screaming out to me. I’m 21 and write the following:

*Last night I dreamed about Amy. Woke up with such a desire for her, such a crush. What a wonderful couple we would make. Something extremely human runs through my veins, my body feels weak and limp from the energies of humanity. I feel a more sincere attraction for her. I see something beautiful in her. The feelings themselves are not wrong. The reason I feel them has got nothing to do with anything sinister, I am human, I am alive. However, I need to be careful and discern where such a sudden influx of extreme feelings come from. They may be generated by the devil, or the devil may just use them. Saying no to indulging in thoughts of her stops the bodily energies running through my veins in such a way that I feel completely limp and tired and ‘pap’. If I give into them, I think it would have the opposite effect and make me feel completely energised. But I say no, I shall carry my cross of celibacy in imitation of Christ to the best of my ability. I will not give in, I will give 100% even if it means suffering and impossible (for humans) things. I therefore feel pap, but deep down in my soul I feel completely at peace, I see the beauty of God, his creation, how a completely chaste relationship with Amy can be something more beautiful, more valuable, something infinite for all of humanity, peace, hope, charity, faith – one with God. Lord I surrender to you. I feel the wound of celibacy – it is painful, but beautiful. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. (14 May 2006)*

Eventually, I realise that I'm not entirely happy just studying, reading, praying and going to counselling, it's not the holy adventure I had envisaged. I speak to my bishop about my concerns and my desire to do more service. He shares with me the story of a home started by Anglican sisters for orphaned children and those desperately sick with Aids. The home is called "House of Resurrection". It is exactly what I was imagining, something akin to the work of Mother Teresa, in the spirit of St Francis of Assisi, serving the poorest of the poor.

When I arrive, I see that the home is on a large property and has several buildings. There is accommodation for people who volunteer for an extended period of time, there is a section similar to a hospital wing, there is a chapel, an admin section and the children's section with their play school.

It feels just like what I feel called to do. I chat to some of the very sick patients, I play with the children who are desperate for attention. I work hard packing nappies, helping to buy groceries, I help prepare the food and sneak in some biltong for a couple of the male patients. It feels like I am really on the path towards holiness. But an experience makes me doubt this and alerts me to the special vocation of the saints.

I'm outside with the children in their playground, giving them as much attention as I can muster. They are mostly between the ages of two and six. It's wonderful being able to help so much. Then it's George's turn for attention. He is disabled and in a wheel chair, he is much older than the others, about ten. He smiles majestically at the adults who interact with him. As I move closer to him, I realise that he has shat himself in his wheelchair. The thought crosses my mind that perhaps I should clean it up. But there is also another permanent worker working with them. I'm repulsed by the stench and quickly move to another section of the playground. A few minutes later the poor lady who works everyday with the children discovers the dreadful surprise. She quickly takes him, without hesitation, to be cleaned inside. I witness an ordinary person, without airs and graces, doing what I can't do. Perhaps it

will be a bit more difficult than I had imagined to be a saint. I somewhat express the difficulty:

*This is a gift my Lord. But it is difficult my Lord, almost as though one is continually climbing without a rest. If I take a rest, I fall and fall into sin. I am continually fighting, working, it is so tiring. But You Lord are actually what keeps me going. Your grace is what sustains me. You are the One who does it all. It is all You. Come Holy Spirit, fill me, so that I will be able to function out of the world. Lord, being withdrawn from the world is so much better, so much more peaceful and purposeful, thank you. (21 May 2006)*

During the course of the year I hear stories about the misdeeds of certain priests and sometimes I witness them first hand. But I comfort myself with the thought that even Jesus chose a Judas as one of his twelve apostles and that it would make sense for about one out of every twelve priests to be bad apples. As long as the other eleven twelfths are good! They surely must be? With God in control I zealously finish the year and look forward to my seminary studies the following year.

### **Cape Town (2007-2008)**

I decide to leave my car at home so that I can live in solidarity with the poorer seminarians. My parents therefore drive me the 1000km from East London to Cape Town and make sure that I am settled in before they leave the seminary. The seminary had been established several years previously by the Archbishop of Cape Town because he had not been happy with the national seminary in Pretoria. My bishop, along with a few others, had decided to send his seminarians to the new factory too.

I arrive the day before the others and so have time to explore. It's not a very big seminary, there is only place for about 40 students. Its situated in Athlone which had been designated as a coloured area by the previous government and is gang territory now. Electric

fences, backed by an alarm system, ensure that the seminarians can't escape. There is a swimming pool, a gym, several classrooms and a chapel. It's great to be finally doing what I am passionate about. I can't wait to start my two years of philosophy in preparation for my theology studies. A few weeks later I write:

*Lord, thank you for your call, not my call to the priesthood, but my call to You, thank you for such an abundance of grace that has allowed me to choose You. Lord, I choose You, all of You, I accept anything You want of me, anything You want to give me. You love me so much my Lord, I give myself to You. I love You. (25 February 2007)*

Filled with zeal I gladly embrace the routine of seminary life and of course add more prayer and study time too. I wake up at 5:30 and make a morning offering, consecrating my day to God. I quickly shower, shave and get dressed into my black cassock so that I can be in the chapel by 6:00. At 6:00, I read Sacred Scripture for 30 minutes. At 6:30, the community prays "Morning Prayer" together, which includes several psalms, hymns, scripture passages and prayers. At 6:45 we have 30 minutes of meditation followed by Mass at 7:15. We have breakfast and then classes from 8:30 to 13:00. Just before lunch I fit in "Prayer During the Day" - more psalms. After lunch, I rest for an hour and then give myself two hours of study. One hour is normally Xhosa and the other hour Latin. At 17:15 I pray the Rosary, at 17:45 we pray Evening Prayer together, followed by 30 more minutes of meditation. At 18:30 we have supper and I break for an hour. I then fit in two more hours of study, normally class assignments and essays. At 21:30 I pray "Night Prayer" and then retire with some spiritual reading.

It's very romantic dressing up in black cassocks, studying philosophy, learning prayers in Latin and speaking to priests about their studies in Rome. But then one day, whilst the games of holiness are being played, I stumble upon a seemingly trivial revelation. I hear

that most of the seminarians enjoy watching one of two soap operas: either *Generations* or *Desperate Housewives*. I hadn't imagined that seminarians or priests would indulge in something as sordid as a soap opera. I'm reminded of my naiveté and I have no idea what I am in for.

I love the philosophy. The wisdom of the ancient Greek philosophers is boundless. I don't quite agree with Heraclitus's emphasis on change, but still find him interesting. He had taught that "you can't step into the same river twice", emphasising that both the river and person doing the stepping are always changing. Plato and Aristotle are obviously a prime focus. Plato emphasises ideals and deductive reasoning; Aristotle prefers a more inductive approach from the ground up. It's fascinating to learn how St Augustine, the great proponent of the doctrine of original sin, uses Plato, while St Thomas Aquinas Christianises Aristotle, thus ensuring a perpetual tension between the two modes of thought within Catholicism. I also then learn that Pope Benedict XVI espouses St Augustine and therefore Plato – I do the same.

It's a Sunday morning and we are all in our black cassocks getting ready for a Latin Mass when we are called to the dining room by our rector. He announces, "Last night, just after 10pm, when you all should have been in already, someone not only make a loud racquet when coming in, but they also vomited their evening's merry all over the front steps."

Some of us listen to the news attentively and others laugh because they know who it is. He continues, "The culprit better come forward or there will be an investigation". The culprit does not come forward, there's no investigation, we chant in Latin, there's puke at the entrance to the seminary and I feel nauseous.

Our philosophy courses are augmented by several others and I especially enjoy the introductory courses to Sacred Scripture. I learn how rigorous, critical and scientific current Scripture scholarship is. Its intriguing to learn how Hebrew thought advanced and how

Sacred Scripture developed. I especially enjoy learning how the religion of the Hebrews was influenced by other cultures east of them. And then in casual conversation our lecturer drops a bombshell we had not anticipated. He talks about “the Abrahamic myth”. As long as I could remember I had always read the creation stories figuratively, but that was where my metaphorical reading of Scripture had ended. Now I was being confronted with the possibility that more of the Bible was to be read allegorically, not literally. It’s quite scary when you don’t know what’s real and what’s not. I’m being introduced to a new way of thinking and it’s a bit confusing.

It’s another Sunday morning and there is again lots of commotion. One of my peers had been stabbed the night before and was now in hospital in a critical condition. The energy in the seminary is sombre and tense. We hear that the previous evening, the victim and a few others, had become hungry and had gone to a nearby “garage shop for a pie.” Upon their return they had been mugged by a gang and the one poor fellow had been stabbed. But, it’s a seminary, things are not always as they seem, that’s just the story the priests are told.

Via other seminarians I hear the true story: the one who had been stabbed had been in a shebeen the previous evening and had been stabbed when he had tried to get lucky with another man’s woman. I’m just beginning to learn that some seminarians have girlfriends, and some have boyfriends. I, therefore, pray with more intensity and finish my first year in the seminary still motivated, but a bit worried about a few things.

I begin 2008 resolute to try even harder and decide to opt for a new spiritual director whom I believe will be more supportive of greater austerity. My previous director had told me not to worry about sexual thoughts and fasting. But, to my surprise my new spiritual director fosters some changes in the opposite direction.

“Luke, I can see that you are very good at being good. And, you will be able to do that for a while. But, there will come a time when you will grow tired of being good. What then? Who will you be then?”

I’m not sure if I believe what he is saying. The saints didn’t tire. But, something deep down resonates, and I wonder if I will tire. I’m in deep thought, as introverts are prone to be, he gazes at me intently and I look at him.

“Luke, are you happy?” His words are stabbing, no one has ever asked me that before and I didn’t think it was important that I should be happy. I burst out crying and I sob for a while. He listens to me crying, he listens to my wrestling heart.

He then gives me some instructions, “Okay, no more of all that pious spiritual reading during mediation, I want you to do the following, take out your prayer journal and write it down: remain silent; don’t read anything; allow everything; do not judge yourself; everything is allowed. The thing is you can’t make a free decision to be a celibate priest if you don’t even know what is there!”

Part of me trusts my spiritual director and part of me is not sure if this is the best way to become holy. But, the next day I write the following:

*Am I happy here? Lord, where is life? Where are you? I am so uncomfortable, so lethargic, so in need of a place of rest (fun?) Lord, am I supposed to be here, is it an illusion? Why have I just realised I am not happy? I am no one. Who am I living for? Myself, perhaps that is the problem. Lord, what do you want of me? Is it right that I imagine getting good marks, speaking many languages, getting more degrees, being well looked up to? All for you Lord, not my will, but yours. (6 February 2008)*

And still wrestling the next day I write:

*When last was I happy? Grade 10, beginning of Grade 11. That’s sucks. Am I alive? Will power... let go. (7 February 2008)*

The precariousness of attempting to befriend the feeling fiend is unsettling and I quickly look for something safer:

*You, Lord are my home. Lord, I am following you. I am only happy to be where You are. You sustain me and give me life. I am never alone. All I need to do is practice the presence of God. You Lord are my companion, my family. You are all I have. I am dependent on You. My Lord and my all. (19 February 2008)*

I zealously endeavour and work harder. And, it's much safer being very holy and very conservative. Just a reminder, the number one evil within the church at this time is said to be contraception and the devious idea that females, invalid matter, can be priests. So, in an ethics assignment I attempt to defend the Church's position on contraception and find out more than I bargain for when I do my reading.

I already know that the Catholic Church has "always" opposed contraception, that there are several Bible passages that can be used to support the church's position and that in 1968 Pope Paul VI wrote a letter in which he upheld the church's position in opposition to the moral malaise of the time. I also know that all Christian communities had upheld the true teaching until 1930 when the Anglicans, founded by a divorcee anyway, were the first group to condone birth control, followed by all the Protestants. Only the "Pillar of Truth" stood firm and the previous Pope, John Paul II, had been especially passionate about this objective truth. But I also learn a few new things.

Prior to the Paul VI's landmark 1968 encyclical a "Pontifical Commission on Birth Control" had been set up to investigate the prudence of the church's position. The commission, made up of experts in various fields, voted unanimously in favour of changing the church's position. Paul VI apparently took the result very seriously and wrestled with what he ought to do. The story goes that he and those in his inner circle were afraid that changing the church's position on birth control would lead to the laity questioning



everything, a slippery slope. Hence, in the decade that saw the advent of the pill, the Catholic Church released a document which upheld its teaching against contraception.

I then read that well respected Catholic theologians opposed the 1968 letter and taught that one could dissent and still be a good Catholic. It's a very new idea to me. But their writings are lucid and logical, free of fear, fear that I see within the Vatican. I also learn that at times in the Church's history a heresy had dominated which had viewed the material, the body, the sexual as sinful. The evil of sex was only said to be justified if it led to more children for God. I read that the ancients believed that a female only supplied a fertile womb for the man's seed, which was seen to possess everything that the person would become, and spilling the seed was akin to an abortion. I then actually read the documents from the Church of England's conference leading up to them allowing contraception and I'm amazed to find out that they seemed to be earnestly seeking the truth as opposed to simply giving into "modernity". And I read more and more, and I realise things are quite complex:

*Contraception – if it's okay then the church is wrong – what would that do to my faith? (10 April 2008)*

I'm feeling a little less sure of everything.

It's a morning like no other. Finally, I am truly going to face the greatest evil in the world face-to-face and combat it like a soldier for Christ. A small group of us make our way from the seminary in Athlone to an antique stone church in central Cape Town. As soldiers for Christ we are of course wearing our black cassocks. We arrive at the church and celebrate Mass with the other ones God has especially chosen for this very special mission. And then we leave, marching like infantry, but instead of guns we are carrying our rosaries, the Mother of our God is praying with us. We make our way in prayer to a private clinic in Cape Town where abortions are performed in the hope that our prayers may save some babies.

We don't interfere with anyone, nor do we block the paths of the butchers. We simply pray and sing hymns in the belief that there is a celestial battle between Good and Evil being played out right in front of us, in which Good will eventually triumph over Evil. We pray harder and harder and some of us are filled with the hope that the clinic will soon close and then another will close, until eventually there are no clinics performing abortions in Cape Town or in South Africa.

Slowly but surely people come and go. I wonder what their roles are. Is that a nurse? Is that a mother? Is that a boyfriend forcing a poor girlfriend to have an abortion? And then I see her.

She is wearing a light summer dress, a brunette in her mid-twenties. She washed her hair earlier and it is still slightly damp against her face. And then, she looks at us. I see her face. She is a person, a person in a difficult situation, a person with a hurt and humbled heart. And, we are on the pavement fighting a spiritual war in a parallel universe. I stop praying. I just look at her as she walks off, her wounds salted by our presence, our self-righteous presence.

For the first time during the day I am filled with compassion. Jesus was not at the Mass. Jesus was not in our prayers. Jesus was not in our hymns. He was in her heart and He looked at me through the face of a wounded woman. I am even less certain about everything.

Seminary life continues. We visit and pray for the sick at a nearby hospital; we play soccer; we pray, and we pray, and we pray; we study. Weekly, new scandals come to light: Fr Peter has just fathered a child; Fr John stole R100 000 from his church; Francis was seen at the movies with a teenage boy. Every week there is more and more shit, and everything feels heavier and heavier. I just try harder.

One of our philosophy lecturers encourages us to make sure we are reading the original works of the thinkers we are studying and not secondary accounts in textbooks. So,

when I'm studying Modern Philosophy, I start reading some of Kant's work. I quickly discover however that it's hard going and I find it dry and boring. I then bravely start reading some of Nietzsche's writings, I say bravely because I already know that he had proclaimed that "God is dead", I therefore regard him with particular caution before I start reading. To my surprise I start enjoying his work, its stimulating, he is making me question my faith, I feel a naughty rebellious pleasure reading it, I feel a spark of life and then I feel afraid, I put it down, I leave him alone and switch off my reading light.

Seminary life goes on: we go on week long retreats; we discuss the endless amount of politics in the church; we learn how to preach sermons; we begin to take on the priesthood *persona* which some of us have already perfected. But I'm still thinking about the play that is put on:

*Lord, celibacy does not seem like it is for all. Lord, I am beginning to believe that it would be better for priests to be allowed to marry, primarily to have better priests, healthier, happier, mature natural leaders. Secondly, there may be more vocations. This is what I believe. From seeing things in reality – something does not seem right, perhaps celibacy should be for a much fewer number of priests (12 September 2008).*

The stewing realisation that celibacy, after the example of Christ, is not that grand in reality makes me feel uneasy. My spiritual director has got me thinking more and more about my own life and our philosophy lecturers are fostering actual critical thinking. Closely connected to the realisation that mandatory celibacy will always be accompanied by incongruence, is the beginnings of my realisation that the church's teaching that gays should not enter the seminary or the priesthood, is even more absurd.

In 2005, under the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI, the Platonic thinker, the church had released a document that forbade men with "homosexual tendencies" from entering the seminary or the priesthood. But, as I looked around and added up what I heard, I was

reluctantly realising that Catholic seminaries and indeed the priesthood, are full of gays. In opposition to reality, I reason that the priesthood ought to be about sacrifice and that gays don't have anything good to sacrifice, hence they can't be priests after the example of Christ who died on the cross. And my mind can't fathom how an army of soldiers for Jesus could include large amounts of gays. I get frustrated with the imperfect situation right in front of me and I gossip about certain effeminate seminarians and priests. I write:

*Lord Jesus, I am feeling angry, frustrated, stressed. Feel like beating up every gay I see. Why is the priesthood full of queers? (23 October 2008).*

For a while one of my best friends joins in with the jokes until he asks me one day if he can have a chat.

We enter the small spiritual direction room adjacent to the chapel. A copy of Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* gazes down upon us. I can see that what he is about to tell me is significant, he is preoccupied and agitated and looks as if he is approaching the gallows.

"Luke, I really need to tell you something. I have been thinking about it for quite some time and believe that if I do not tell you now, I will be presenting a false image of myself. We have been joking about other people, but I myself am gay."

I'm stunned silent. How could this be? My mind races without a resolution, no coherent thoughts synthesise. I look at my friend, my good, generous friend of integrity and all I see is pain and fear. His soul bleeds tears in its window, but he does not give himself permission to cry. My heart too is now pierced.

"I'm not really sure what to say. It may take me a while to process what you have just said. But, I do feel the presence of God right now."

"That's okay, I understand that it has come as quite a shock."

"How long have you known for?"

“I have kind of known ever since I was a child. But I am only being honest with myself now and slowly coming out to my closest friends. Sorry that there are so many gays in the seminary and the priesthood, I never knew at the beginning myself.”

“That’s okay.”

We leave behind Rembrandt’s room. My friend’s revelation makes me aware of a great conflict within myself. My head can’t get around the news I have received, and it has always been the leader. But for my heart it is quite simple – show compassion. I become quiet. Less sure. I listen more. My heart wrestles until I realise that I am best friends with a homosexual person and it’s okay. The world does not crumble. Then another priest friend tells me he is gay, “It’s easier to tell your parents that you want to become a priest than that you are gay.”

Friends more *au fait* with such matters point out to me how many of the priests that teach us are gay. It’s a lot to take in a short time. But in a seminary there is always a lot to take in and I feel even more unsure about my vocation:

*Lord, I feel as though I am at a crossroads. Time out has an appeal of liberation. Amy is lovely. Seminary has the potential for more – mixed feelings (11 November 2008).*

And then one day fate intervenes.

I’m called to the rector’s office for the news I have been waiting for. A couple weeks previously a priest, acting as a representative of my bishop in Port Elizabeth had visited us. He had mentioned the possibility of some of us moving. He had asked where I had desired to move to, and I had told him that I would love to go to Rome. The representative said he would push for that for me. It’s a real possibility, the Bishop of Johannesburg sends all his graduate seminarians to Rome and if a bishop so wishes, it is quite simple to organise, overseas funding is always available. Because I have been doing so well academically, I along with many of my friends think it is a *fait accompli*.

Now I'm in the rector's office. "Luke, your Bishop has just called me and asked me to tell you that you are going to St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria for your theology studies."

"Father, are you serious?"

"Yes Luke, I'm really sorry, I actually don't know what to say."

"Do I receive counselling now or will a counsellor be provided for me?"

"Ha-ha, good luck."

I go and tell my friends and they are just as shocked as me. News has filtered through to us of some of the shenanigans at St John Vianney. A few months previously there had been an accusation of rape made by one seminarian against another. It's a notorious den of iniquity. A priest had assured us that it was not the kind of rape we were thinking about. "It's not like a stronger predator overpowers a victim. Normally what happens is there is lots of alcohol involved, there are agreements about money which don't materialise, one of them does not get what he wants and then there is the accusation of rape."

I continue the debriefing with my friends.

"Luke, you are going to have to get yourself a big stick, it's ridiculous."

"Or maybe better, I will have to tell them that my grandmother is witch and can make lightning strike whomever she wishes."

"That's wicked."

"Being sent to John Vianney is wicked!"

*I'm going to John Vianney. What now Lord? What do you want me to do? Lord Jesus, I feel dead. There is nothing inside me! (14 November 2008).*

I really do not want to go to St John Vianney. I consider taking time out and perhaps travelling. I also consider carrying on with my psychology studies. Both options are

appealing. But I am very scared. I believe that God has called me to be a priest and it would be wrong not to trust him. I wrestle with the many options and I don't know what to do:

*Lord Jesus, please let me know by Christmas! Please give me peace. (17 November 2008)*

God doesn't let me know anything. So, I pray harder and harder. And, everybody is proud that I am about to start my theology studies and soon there will be a brand-new young priest. Like a cow walking the same path from the meadows to the shed every evening, I journey towards Pretoria.



*Figure 5: St Francis Xavier Seminary, Cape Town. I am in the back row, first from the left (2008).*

### **Pretoria (2009-2010)**

I drive up to St John Vianney seminary, Pretoria, in early January 2009. Upon arriving I am escorted to my cell and it already has my name on the door. Soon I hear the unfamiliar languages of the other first year theology students echoing through our corridor.

Sotho and Tswana are completely foreign to me. At least Zulu is similar to Xhosa and I can make out some of it. I later discover that some from the other classes are speaking Venda and Tsonga too. It's completely foreign to me. There are about 100 students, three of us are white.

After evening prayer, we make our way to the dining hall and I am surprised to see how everyone rushes to get to the front of the queue for food. We wait for everyone to arrive, pray the angelus and then pray our grace. The queue moves slowly and when I get to the front, I realise why everyone was rushing, there is no meat or vegetables left for those at the back of the line. I then look for a table to sit at with my rice and I am finally invited by some of my classmates to sit with them.

“Ha-ha Tsepho, you have lost so much weight!”

“Hey *mona* (man), it's nice to be back to get good food.”

“And how is your *makoti* (woman/wife)?”

“No man. I went back to find out she has been doing it with another man, the priest from my own village. Mother Superior tried to lock her up in the convent, but you know, nuns also get hungry. I will have to wait my turn.”

I listen to life's lessons. Is it a shock? I don't know. The perpetual flow of such stories is life sapping and the easiest option is to become blasé about it:

*Lord, my heart is numb, I would love to marry, I'm anxious. Lord, where is the consolation? Lord, must there always be tension? What is wrong with the church?*

*Why so many weirdos? Lord, should priests be celibate? Celibacy. Another vocation Lord? (6 February 2009)*

So, I try harder. When we have manual work on a Friday afternoon in the gardens, I work like a slave, imagining that I am working for God like a holy monk. My peers watch me like I am from another planet, “Luke, we are becoming priests so that we don't have to work in gardens, relax *mfethu* (brother).” Stubbornly, I continue.



The seminary has over 100 residential students and about 40 students from religious communities who live off campus. We therefore have enough players in each class to form a soccer team and my class is one of the most competitive. Many are surprised when they discover that a “white” guy plays soccer well, “Luke, we just thought you were going to be a beacon, but you scored a brilliant goal”. On one occasion I am fouled badly, I end up being winded and I’m left gasping for air. Half my teammates come to assist me, they start pumping my legs and the other half attack the perpetrator. From the ground I look up and suddenly realise I am really part of my team and that I have been accepted, even if I am an *umlungu*/scum of the sea/white person.

Some of my classes are stimulating, others are boring, I work hard at my Greek. I teach some of my friends to swim in our huge swimming pool which had previously been a reservoir – a necessity when the Catholic seminary had to be built outside of the Protestant town. We visit the sick at hospitals, and we work with abandoned children. I slowly learn the prayers in the foreign South African languages from up north.

Even though my experience is crying out to me, I still try harder, I still want to be holy, I still want to share Jesus with others and let them know that they too are loved. I therefore choose a very ascetical spiritual director. On one occasion he comes to the seminary on a day of prayer and preaches on the following points which I resolutely write down to reflect upon:

*Don't stop talking about hell and purgatory. Fear of God is a gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*God does not change his mind – He's ineffable. The cross reveals the seriousness of sin. Only suffering shows true love – sacrifice. Assuming the cross of Christ gives life!*

*(3 April 2009).*

Inspired to soldier on I write that evening:

*My Lord and all, thank you for such a good retreat, thank you for such a good spiritual director. My Lord, thank you for revealing that my vocation is a gift from you. Although there are sacrifices it is primarily a gift. Thank you for showing me that I am self-centred and need to think more of others. Thank you, Lord, for giving me a new image of your priesthood. A priest is an alter Christus, a servant, thank you Lord that my vocation is still strong (3 April 2009).*

My Spanish spiritual director sits across from me in his long black cassock and thick white clerical collar. It's hot in Pretoria's furnace and I can smell his sweat and black polish from his shoes. His attire shouts out that he is serious. His greying hair is perfectly combed. I muse on the fact that for at least part of the day he wears a cilice, a sharp wire chain intended to inflict pain, on his thigh. He probably flagellates himself at a specific time each day. I wonder if he is currently wearing his cilice. I wonder if I should do the same. We begin with a prayer and our conversation begins.

"Lucas, are you free of sexual sins?"

"No Father, I still have sexual thoughts before I go to sleep at night."

"What you need to do is really offer this up to our Mother, the Perpetual Virgin.

When you think of such things, rather think of her. Tell her rather how much you love her.

She is the Immaculate Heart! She is the only woman you need."

"Yes, Father."

"Anything else that you battle with?"

"Father, I find that I am very judgmental of the other seminarians, especially with regards to them drinking and having girlfriends."

"*Mama mia*, I know this is a big problem here, it should not be so, I have spoken to the bishops about it, but nothing is done. But you are here. Why do you think God sent you

here? You must offer up yourself as a sacrifice, make mortification, fast and offer this up with your prayers as a supplication. You must pray for your brothers and do not lose heart.”

“Okay Father, I will try harder to do the work of God.”

“I will pray for you too, but to finish, it’s your turn to pray.”

I labour on like Sisyphus, I keep trying and the following month write:

*Lord Jesus, I am filled with Joy, your spirit is moving, here I am Lord, I come to do your will. I am a servant Lord, your friend, a servant, no greater than you my master.*

*Lord Jesus, purify me, cut me open for me to see the hidden bad motives. Lord Jesus, I want to be all yours, for your flock, to bring them to you. Come, Holy Spirit, fill me with your life, so that I may truly be Yours (16 May 2009).*

*Lord Jesus, I believe I have been called and sent by You, like an apostle. Interestingly, where I am, I have been sent. I have been sent to John Vianney. What for – not just for me! Divine providence invincibly used very carefully, but with You with me, who can be against me. My vocation tied up so much with who I am and will be. The ideals I have are not mine, they come from You. Therefore, they should not be overlooked, but embraced with confidence (27 May 2009).*

On Sunday mornings, we celebrate our main Mass of the week and the general public are welcome to attend. Beforehand we practice the songs in the various languages and our choir is brilliant. There is often accompanying movements and clapping – it looks grand. I don’t clap – the play doesn’t make sense to me. The person behind me just arrived back from his night out and had to climb over our two-meter-high fence in order to not get detected – I can smell the brandy. One of the altar servers was at a gay night club last night – he looks like he is about to get sick – the person next to me says it’s because he is on hard core drugs and didn’t get to sleep. Amongst the general public there are a few rich Pretoria ladies – sugar mummies – they supply some of the seminarians with the money they want and sometimes

even invite them out for a Sunday lunch. It's a win-win situation for some of the brothers who chat to the awe-inspired laity in their smart black cassocks after mass.

I begin to try and get away from the seminary as much as possible. Most weekdays between 2pm and 3pm we are allowed out and have some free time. I make my way to a local public pool and I swim and swim and swim. When we are allowed out on a Sunday, I visit a nearby church, enjoy the celebration with ordinary folk and I make some of my best lifelong friends away from the seminary. My first year in Pretoria draws to a close and I know a lot more than I did a year ago.



*Figure 6: St John Vianney Seminary, Pretoria (St John Vianney Seminary, 2013).*

A new year, 2010 begins and I am in my second year of theology. We are now introduced to Hebrew and its wonderful being able to rhythmically read the poetic creation stories. I make more friends and I grow accustomed to the absurd fact that many of them just view things differently. But, still there is depressing story after depressing story: two priests were drunk in the staff room and got into a fist fight; Fr James was seen in town with his girlfriend; Tebogo accused Thando of rape, he now has a STD and there is an investigation; Father Thomas arrived back early this morning, completely drunk and his job is to make sure that we are all on the straight on narrow. It's absurd.

Because we are all so holy, we go on two retreats every year, each about a week long and in supposed silence. A week before Easter I find myself making another one, only this time things are a bit different. My spiritual director is a Jesuit and he's very good at what he does – helping someone discern what God is saying as opposed to violently imposing a ready-made spiritual regime.

So, he says, "I get the feeling it's as if you are holding on very tight. You are working so hard, there is possibly no room for God. Perhaps what you need to do is chill a little. Let go and let God; let God be God." I try and listen more gently.

I'm drawn to a Scripture passage which has been tugging at me for some time. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children." I'm trying to figure out what it means to be childlike before God. Perhaps not trying to take on so much responsibility. Perhaps trusting and not worrying.

I read further, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." It doesn't feel like your burden is light, Jesus.

Suddenly, I realise I am a completely free, that Jesus died for me, and I don't need to do the dying. And I imagine leaving straight away, it's exciting, it's exhilarating. But just as quickly as I get excited, I start to get scared and I feel empty – it's like God takes everything from me:

*Terrible, terrible; no idea about vocation; doubt (27 March 2010).*

I don't know exactly what it is, but something changes on that retreat. Perhaps a new awareness of the dynamism of God. Perhaps my hearts desires were bubbling forth like a volcano. Perhaps I view God differently. But I carry on.

The 20 or so of us are sitting half-dazed in a lecture as the priest from a troubled region in Africa, now living in comfort in South Africa, dictates his lecture notes to us. I'm at the back of the class reading a book on Ignatian Spirituality, behind my notes. Every now and then I pay attention to what the imposter priest proclaims. Then out of the blue he starts reading a section which sounds very much like Calvinistic Theology. All of a sudden, I'm alert and listening more attentively. It's definitely Reformed, but he does not tell us that we are now learning about Protestant thought. He just keeps reading.

Following the ludicrous lesson a few of us discuss the shortcomings of the priest's notes. And when I google the odd sections I realise that all his notes are copied and pasted from a Protestant website. Thankfully we have an elected academic student representative who will surely take up the matter. So, we present our case to him.

But he is too scared to do anything. He is getting too close to the end to be sticking his neck out, it is much safer staying quiet. So, I, filled with anger, present our case and findings to our academic dean. Protestant Theology is not particularly problematic, it is however a problem that most of my class don't really know the difference between the finer points of Catholicism and Calvinism and our lecturer was mindlessly reading notes to us as though we were in a Presbyterian Seminary. I can't quite fathom my feelings: I don't expect much from

a priest; I'm concerned about my confused colleagues; it's a completely absurd; its laughable; I'm sad. I don't realise that in deciding to speak out, I have made myself a target.

Even though the last few drops of life are expiring from me, I'm still wrestling. I've offered to take a few sick seminarians to the doctor during our lunch break. We leave after our lectures, just before lunch and organise for someone to keep lunch for us. The afternoon hours tick away at a Pretoria East consulting room and we arrive back when the sun is setting. A friend promised to keep my lunch for me and now I can't find it in the dining room. I find him and ask about it.

"Ha-ha Luke, I couldn't leave it in the dining room, it would have been stolen, its locked away in my room for you."

I gratefully gaze upon a meal covered with congealed gravy, food I would have declined only a few years ago. It's cold so I decide that I would like to warm up my food. Problem: even though there are over 100 seminarians we don't have a microwave. So, I make my way to the priests' dining room. I'm 26 years old and have only gazed through the windows of the priests' dining room. I'm considering trespassing, sneaking into it and using their microwave. As I am weighing up the pros and cons of such a bold move a priest walks by, only a few years older than me. I think that my prayers have been answered – I will just ask him if I can use the priest's microwave, and I will be safe and secure with the granted permission.

"Good afternoon Father, I have just returned after taking some of the brothers to the doctor. May I please warm up my lunch with the priest's microwave?"

He looks at me and smiles. "No, it's just for priests." He walks off.

I'm deeply hurt. My soul is crushed. I realise that there is something I detest more than the celibacy façade – priestly power.

The worst of the Hadean odyssey is coming to an end, it's the end of 2010. My class mates have assembled in our lounge and there is a commotion.

"It's not right that Siphokazi brought his boyfriend here last night, brought 'her' boyfriend! We are going to report you!"

"Report me? I will report you for everything you have done!"

"Hey *Mona*, he was just a man off the street, a girl, it was actually not safe for all of us. And then the worst thing is that he joined us for Mass the next morning as though he was your visiting brother or sister or something!"

"Fuck off, if they try kick me out, I will say it is discrimination, that's how Zolile remained here, so *voetsek impimpi* (bugger off traitor)!"

It's the kind of conversation I have grown numb to. I just gaze at them and wonder what on earth I am doing here. My class mates are angry with the openly gay and actively so amongst us, and the conversation draws to a close.

"Voetsek yourself, *Mfazi* (woman), at least when we are all hungry, we have the decency to go to Sunnyside (suburb that prostitutes frequent) for sex."

I don't even know how I feel. Nothing. I go for a swim. I float. But something inside me still burns with the desire for God, with the desire for truth, something inside my heart still wants to wrestle.

My heart thumps speedily and uncontrollably against the confines of my chest, forcing me to breath quicker and quicker until I hear a resounding "duff...duff...duff" in my ears. Trembling below a colossal paining of St Augustine in the seminary's entrance hall I ask myself one more time if this is really what I desire. I ponder the meaning of integrity and personal responsibility. This is something I just have to do. I very consciously approach the door to his office which divides our two castes. I slowly and firmly knock thrice.

"duff...duff...duff".



“Si.”

I cross over the threshold, over the Rubicon and begin the five-minute conversation which will irrevocably alter the course of my faith journey.

“Good afternoon Father, may I speak to you about something?”

“*Va bene*/okay.”

“I have a perplexing predicament and I’m not sure how to approach it.”

“Alright, go on.”

I glance outside his office window – the jacarandas are blooming – Pretoria’s splendour. I inspire one more time, *yiza Moya oyiNgcwele*, come Holy Spirit.

“On several occasions I have noticed that you have discreetly entered the seminary with a lady, via the back entrance, and entertained her in your own room, sometimes overnight. Don’t you think it would be more prudent to entertain her in an open space like the lounge or the staff room?”

“No! I don’t think it is a problem! Everyone has access to my room! Why would it be a problem?”

“Well, in light of the way in which celibacy is viewed by many seminarians, ought we not to be particularly careful about such matters? Would you be willing to reconsider?”

“No, there is no problem with celibacy, bye-bye!”

“Thank you, Father.”

I walk outside, I’m shaking, my lower back aches. Inside - nothing. I amble down to the Stations of the Cross. “I adore You, O Christ and I praise You, because by Your holy Cross you have redeemed the world...” I finish praying the stations of the cross, pray the evening prayer psalms with the community and then pray for 30 minutes in silence – meditation. I then make my way to the dining hall for supper, but along the way I am ambushed.

“Come here, I want to have a word with you! Earlier when you spoke to me it felt like I was being interrogated. If you ever speak to me again, I will kick you out!”

He stares at me with diabolical disdain; his anger salivating and sticking to his porno seventies’ moustache.

“So, I must never speak to you again?”

“If you ever come into my office again with that attitude, I will kick you out!!!”

I make my way to the dining hall. We pray the angelus. “The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary....” And I force down a tasteless dinner, *amasi* and *umphokoqo*, sour milk and maize porridge. I go to bed just like many other nights in the seminary, hungry.

I finish the year and I’m completely relieved that mid-way through theology, the first six months of our third year, we complete a pastoral internship at a parish in our home diocese.



Figure 7: Theology students at St John Vianney Seminary. I am hidden in the back row, third from the right (2010).

### **Port Elizabeth (2011)**

In January, I arrive at my six-month pastoral placement and my priest supervisor is a pink faced Irishman who enjoys a party or two. My responsibilities include teaching catechism, leading the youth group, visiting the sick, preaching and tutoring maths at a nearby disadvantaged school. I also complete various assignments on my experiences.

At our first meeting I ask, “Father, what are the rules? What time should I come back in the evenings?”. He looks at me a bit bemused, “There are no rules, you can come back whenever you like, you are an adult.” And, he continues, “how will you discern if you just follow rules? You can only discover what’s there if you have freedom.”

It’s liberating to be trusted. He even allows for me to preach on a Sunday, to his full congregation, without having checked my sermon beforehand. In the seminary we were not even allowed to preach to our peers without getting the go ahead from a priest. So, with great zeal I get to work. But the freedom also allows me to do other things.

I swim at a nearby pool and because I’m allowed out in the evenings, I start playing club water polo. I socialise with friends and I get invited to visit a very charismatic church’s cell group. The small group of fired up Christians meet at exactly the same time we have meetings at the church I’m working at. So, I ponder what I should do. Should I even ask? Eventually I ask Fr Paddy and he replies, “Of course you can go.” I’m therefore socialising on an almost weekly basis with church persons the same age as me, from the same culture and with holy ladies. And, when I return to my parish, I keep on working hard.

Every Wednesday morning, I visit some of the sick and elderly in the parish. And, one morning I am visiting an old Polish lady whose husband had recently passed away.

“Hello, Saint Luke, it is so nice to see you again, you have really made my day!”

“Hello, Mrs Kowalski, it’s good to see you too. How are you doing?”

“I am doing better now that you have arrived. But, rather call me *Babcia*, it’s Polish for grandmother.”

Mrs Kowalski tells me all about her late husband, about the war, and all about her children and grandchildren. She gives me so much praise and adores me as a young priest-in-the-making. She makes me tea, and we eat the cake she has especially baked for my visit. It’s exactly what I had imagined doing, visiting the sick and needy, but there is a problem that is nagging at me. It doesn’t feel like I had imagined it would.

I don’t find visiting the sick at all fulfilling, even though it is what I believe I value very strongly. I find myself feeling dead inside. It’s not life giving. And then it dawns on me. I’m a 26-year-old male spending my twenties visiting the sick and elderly. What person in their right mind would imagine that it is developmentally appropriate for a young man to find having tea with elderly women vivifying? There are plenty of other elderly women quite capable of doing the visiting anyway.

I also begin to think that it’s odd that I am so deeply concerned about the salvation of others and that I believe the salvation of others could be so dependent on my actions. I realise that if I sat on my arse and did nothing God would simply find another way to reach his creatures – He is omnipotent. I also realise that I won’t be much use to others if I am depressed.

I start to get bored with the youth group too – I realise that I had previously thought it would be inspiring to lead young people to Jesus, but its life sapping putting on a show on Fridays. But I keep meeting with the people: teaching, preaching and caring. And I keep discerning. I’m able to juxtapose my real experience of pastoral work with my experience of socialising with my charismatic prayer group away from my church, particularly the socialising with one lady.

I feel like a rambunctious rebel meeting my favourite person in Port Elizabeth for coffee and discussing all sorts of Christian issues. My head tells me it's something I should not be doing, what would happen if we were seen together? But, deep down in my heart something is telling me, something I can't fathom, that it's right and healthy. I follow my heart. She is so beautiful, she teaches, plays tennis and is immersed in the Holy Spirit. For the first time in a decade I am falling in love. My discernment is intensified.

*Lord Jesus, you know everything about me. Is marriage to be the greatest sacrifice or maybe even the greatest gift: to receive a gift from you Lord in some way seems more correct than just giving. Lord, but the people? To show them how much you love them. So many people, quantifying is surely not right, to love a family is also of infinite value. But Lord, it is about what you want – You chose me for your work. As a priest – messiah complex? The feelings? Are the feelings important? What do they mean? The poor Lord? Do I give out of love anyway? The Lord is my shepherd! The feelings Lord! Battling on – not being alive! (14 May 2011)*

There are about a dozen occasions when I weigh up the pros and cons of priesthood and married life in my prayer journals. On one occasion, I write:

*Advantages of married life: friend, children, family, sex, fun, being myself, relaxed, career, love, life. Disadvantages: responsibility, money, less time for prayers.*

*Advantages of the priesthood: helping many people, eternal value – salvation of souls, represent Jesus and love, more priests in the diocese – more vocations.*

*Disadvantages: fatigue, depression, cynicism, loneliness, mental health (19 May 2011).*

After spending the evening socialising with my crush and her church group at her birthday party, the conflict within me is intensified and I'm left lying awake with countless

thoughts swirling around in my mind, spiritual discourses and life experiences jostle for attention. I sway one way and then the other – its tiring. I write:

*Lord you have imprisoned me. I want Teresa, but I can't have her. I am in prison, I can't have her because you will vex me. Lord Jesus, I feel like I have been knocked out and I am standing looking at the ref counting – should I get up? (14 June 2011)*

I linger in my thoughts until I simply juxtapose a married man's regular day with the ordinary day of priest. And it's all quite simple – I make my decision to change my journey and I believe God is quite happy with it. But, I'm not impulsive. I know that fleeting decisions can be mistaken, and I believe that I ought to linger with my decision for a while in order to test it out and to receive some sort of confirmation from God. And then one comes, from my bishop, he summons me.

I'm driving down Cape Road, Port Elizabeth, it's the same road I had driven down 21 years previously, the one with all the traffic lights, on my way to my new pre-school. And I'm praying, "God, I've always trusted you. I've always believed that if I followed you with integrity you would guide me. That if I was mistaken in believing that I was called to be a priest, you would intervene somehow. Lord, I really don't want to go back to the seminary next month. Please intervene."

I arrive at my Bishop's residence, close to the famous cricket ground named after St George, the slayer of a dragon. About a month before, my bishop had notified me that I had received a very bad report from the seminary, and he had allowed me to respond to it. The report even suggested that I was "a self-righteous Pharisee who should repent". My bishop now sat in front of me with the results of his discernment.

"Luke, I received a very bad report about you from the seminary. It was quite disturbing. But after listening to your side I raised the issues with the other bishops. We

discussed many of the issues at length. And it was decided that you should be removed from the seminary.”

I listen in dismay. It feels like a dream. Part of me is relieved. But part of me also feels the pain of rejection. Rejection from the church. It’s confusing.

“So, I am moving you to St Augustine College in Johannesburg and you will stay with a group of priests nearby. I have already registered you at the college and they are happy to have you.”

“Bishop, is there any chance that I could move to Rome? If I leave now, I could do a couple months of Italian before the semester starts in September.”

“No, I’ve already made my decision.”

My bishop gives me the details of the various persons I need to contact. I leave with papers. I’m moving to Johannesburg in a couple weeks. Floating.

### **Johannesburg (2011 – 2012)**

I arrive in Johannesburg in the middle of July and the white grass, hanging on to life somehow, alerts me to the fact that it’s going to be cold. The place I am staying at is basically an old-age home for priests. They are very hospitable and accepting of me, but they are old and decaying. The college I am studying at is within walking distance. In the evenings, my lectures finish late, I walk back in the dark and eat my supper by myself. Where before I had prayed in community, I now pray my morning and evening prayer alone – it’s a completely absurd situation. As a young man I don’t know how I feel about it – I’ve been both told to not feel, not to express emotions and to feel, to express emotions, at the same time. So, a revelation of how I feel will have to rely on the writings of a man seven years older than me:

***Broken, Regurgitated and Rejected***

*So, I gave my all,  
praying on my knees, day after day,  
praying for chastity night after night,  
giving it all to your mother.*

*I studied and studied, fasted and fasted.  
Amo, Amas, Amat, Amamus, Amatis, Amant<sup>1</sup>.  
And still it was not good enough for you.  
I cleaned and scrubbed disgusting bathrooms – Ora et Labora<sup>2</sup>.  
But you spat me out.*

*I tried and tried,  
worked on my Xhosa to build up trying friendships,  
Yesu, ndiyinika wena intliziyo yam<sup>3</sup>.  
But it was not good enough.*

*I played soccer and drove people around like a servant,  
I never gave up,  
I tried to follow your will.*

*Yet it was for truth that I was rejected,  
veritatis sine splendor<sup>4</sup>.*

*Cast out like rubbish and frowned upon.  
Who was I? Such a self-righteous person, just another white, not an umntu<sup>5</sup>, an  
umlungu – scum of the sea and hated, so fucking hated.*

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<sup>1</sup> I love, you love, he/she/it loves, we love, you love, they love.

<sup>2</sup> Pray and work.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus, I give you my heart.

<sup>4</sup> Truth without splendour, also a play on the title of one of John Paul II's encyclicals, *The Splendour of Truth*.

<sup>5</sup> Person.



*The stillness, the nothingness of been cast out,  
going to classes by myself.*

*Praying by myself like a criminal in quarantine.*

*And going back to fetch my stuff their eyes said,  
“We told you so. You cannot pray so much, you will not survive. Choose either  
drunkenness or sex, or better both, that will get you through, to your end goal of  
ordination.”*

*But ordination was not my goal, it was truth, truth without splendour.*

*“Bishop Impuku; Bishop Inja and Bishop Bubi say you should not come back.  
I will send you to St Augustines.”*

*Who was I?*

*Not a seminarian.*

*An impimpi?*

*A narcissistic prig?*

*Self-righteous?*

*I ate my supper alone in the retirement home for aged priests.*

*Late at night, after returning from my classes.*

*You hated me, you rejected me, you showed me*

*That the truth I had chosen was not splendid. I was rejected.*

*I gave everything, I gave myself.*

*Now nothing, just darkness, empty and cold.*

*Not a sound. Nothing.*

*Not even a person...just an umlungu. (17 April 2018)*

Despite the veiled feelings I find it a breath of fresh air to be studying with lay people, some of whom are studying for ministry in other churches, a few want to be religious education teachers. I get involved in the local parish and especially enjoy their young adults' group. I have lots of time on my hands and lots of freedom.

The freedom and time give me time to reflect. And I do so with the help of a Jesuit spiritual director, the same priest who had helped instigate a few moments of uncertainty on my 2010 Easter retreat. He is wise and intelligent. Over the course of several meetings, he encourages me to listen attentively to our dynamic God who speaks to us through our daily experiences, our own feelings and desires. The decision I had made in June blossoms in our meetings and I am finally able to write:

### ***Discernment of Vocation***

*For several years I had felt a strong sense of being called to be a priest. The idea that I could help people in difficulty and care for them after the example of Christ was very appealing. The idea that the "good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." (John 10:11) was a great motivation and helped make sense of celibacy. I believed that to love was to imitate Christ – the essence of the life of a Christian. And "a man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Therefore, aspiring to become a priest who laid down his life made sense. However, over the past year this has changed.*

*"Are you happy?" This was a question I was asked by my spiritual director while in my second year of philosophy and it stayed with me for a long time. Although at the time I tried to justify my unhappiness with some abstract idea that Christians are called to be full of joy, which may not be the same thing as happiness, it still made me feel uneasy. I began to ask myself if this was perhaps a sign that I was not called to be a priest. Looking back now I realise that I have not been happy since I entered the seminary. Discourses around sacrifice*

*and imitating Christ who suffered helped make sense of this, but these discourses no longer help.*

*“Let go and let God.” The idea that God is the one that leads, and I should follow also caused me to think more deeply about my vocation. The realisation that doing simply what I personally think will give glory to God, may not necessarily be the best way of praising God, also made me reconsider. I slowly came to see that it is more important to allow God to lead me even if this means doing what I may naturally consider less important. This is because it is God who works out how He is to save humanity and not me. It is therefore important for me to try and become the person that God wants me to be and not the kind of person I think will give the greatest glory to God. “If the Lord does not build the house in vain do its builders labour.” (Psalm 127) This passage from the psalms has a great deal to do with these thoughts.*

*I was once asked during philosophy why I want to be a priest and my response at that time was, “if I don’t become a priest who will?” At the time the person thought the response was quite heroic and so did I. It is very possible that my vocation was motivated by the shortage of priestly vocations. Previously I thought I could help solve the problem. I now believe that God is in control and that even with fewer priests He can work out how to show his love to people and save them. This thought gives me greater freedom in my discernment.*

*Scripture passages which speak of childlikeness (Matthew 18:3) have drawn my attention for a couple of years now. I could not reconcile the way I understood my vocation, with all the sacrifice, with the idea of being a child of God. I know that children do not usually take on great burdens. As I began to pray more and more about being a child of God, I thought that I may actually be called to marriage. This is also related to the need for rest. Although in the past I was led to pray with the passage “the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:58), I now feel more drawn to Jesus when he says, “Come to me all you*

*who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) The idea that we should be at rest as Christians is appealing.*

*I have also become more aware of my own feelings and my own inability to continue to ignore my heart in favour of reason. At the same time, I have come to believe that God speaks to us through our own desires and that what we want may very well be in conformity with God’s will. The idea that God wants me to be happy is also exciting.*

*Part of the change has been around the idea of how I relate to God. In the past my relationship with God has centred around me being a libation of some sort. I often reasoned that celibacy, the priesthood and the people I would serve would be great gifts. But I did not really appreciate these gifts in my heart. I now believe that it is important for me to be able to receive gifts from God that are meaningful – ones that I can appreciate. This I believe will lead to a better relationship with God, with God as Father and me as a child.*

*“I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) This was another passage that I felt drawn to in prayer. I realised that I was not experiencing life to the full and was happy to pray about the idea that God may therefore be calling me somewhere else. I could obviously only pray in this way after a few years of actually experiencing celibacy. I now believe that I can give greater glory to God as a happy person – “the glory of God is man fully alive.” (St Irenaeus of Lyon)*

*During my internship I had the opportunity to think and pray about many of these things. I also reflected on the fact that despite me being out of the seminary I was still not able to function as I would like to – experiencing a sort of minor depression. I realise that I need certain things to function as a person. The loneliness of celibacy contributes to me not being fully alive.*

*I think I finally made the decision one night when I was filled with great anxiety about my vocation. Unable to sleep I decided to pray “the agony in the garden”. My hope was that*

*I would be more willing to make the sacrifice that I felt I was being called to. But I still experienced great inner conflict – many thoughts seemed to point towards priesthood and many to marriage. I therefore decided to stop thinking about all these thoughts and countless scripture passages and hand them all over to God. I then simply meditated on an ordinary day in the life of a priest and juxtaposed it with an ordinary day in the life of a married person. I came to believe that I would be more myself as a married person and much happier and that this is where God is calling me. Although my plan at the beginning of my prayer time was to embrace more sacrifice, I think God led me elsewhere. (9 September 2011)*

My spiritual director affirms my decision. He tells me that my thinking makes perfect sense. I finally make the decision, after wrestling with it for several years, to discontinue my struggle towards the priesthood. I lay down my boulder-like burden. I am free.

I immediately tell my superiors in my diocese and they seem quite indifferent. I tell one of my lecturers, one of my favourite priests, another intelligent priest, that I am going to discontinue my theology studies. In our consultation he counsels me, “Luke, I get the feeling that you are coming towards the end of a particular stage of your life and that it could be wise to finish your theology studies for yourself. You only have one more year. It will help you to finish off this journey in the proper way.”

He makes sense. So, after some consideration I do just that: I decide to finish off my theology degree, I basically finish off my six years of priesthood studies, but privately. But my peers are buying houses and climbing corporate ladders. For some bizarre reason, I get it into my mind that I ought to not be wasting time – I should be more productive. I come across a full-time religious education coordinator post at a nearby Catholic school, I apply and get the job. I prepare myself to work full-time for the first time in my life, and at the same time to study full-time.

## 5.4 Following My Heart

### Johannesburg (2012)

Following the September break, I arrive back in Johannesburg. After descending through the thick brown smog, I wonder why anyone in their right mind would want to live in the place. I drive back to my flat in Parkwood, open the door and the emptiness of the flat hits me, I drop down to the floor in the door way and cry. I think how ironic it is that I left my studies towards the priesthood partly because I had feared the loneliness that celibacy would bring on, and now following that decision, I am living by myself for the first time in my life.

I have been teaching teenagers for nine months now, mostly a rambunctious group of Grade 8's and 9's, the noise they make has surely been outlawed by the Geneva Convention. I leave my flat at 6:00 to ensure that I arrive at school before 7:00. I tame the teenagers and then at 14:00 rush to my lectures which commence at 14:30. Six hours of lectures end at 20:30. I arrive home at about 21:00 to study and prepare lessons. Some days my lectures start a bit later, on these days I manage to fit in my extra murals. For some reason I espouse productivity and think that working and studying fulltime is virtuous. It's a routine that has been catching up to me and has now taken a huge bite at my ankles, while I'm extremely vulnerable.

On the evening of the first day of the holidays, following the arrival of all the grandchildren, my dear grandmother had passed away. The holiday had therefore revolved around her death and funeral. Coming back to Johannesburg involves me leaving my family behind and carrying on with my own battle.

The following day at school I can feel the adolescence "hertzling", pushing up my blood pressure and ringing in my ears. It feels like I'm floating. I've been discerning during the course of the year whether or not I'm called to teach – I still desperately want to do the

will of God – but my experience reveals otherwise. I enjoy counselling the learners, I despise discipling and taming the teenagers.

I realise though that I'm particularly enjoying my theology studies, perhaps I could become an academic, a full-time theologian. So, I immerse myself in my studies.

Sitting alone in a quiet library late at night I am completely captivated by the book I am reading. For the first time I am reading the original documents of the early church councils of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. I survey the parallel Greek and Latin texts crafted 16 centuries ago, I look for the Greek words I know and the Latin phrases I can decipher and then settle on the accompanying English translation.

I am busy with an assignment for what is often considered the most challenging subject in Systematic Theology, Trinity, hence I am drawn to the early deliberations around this central Christian doctrine. One of the Greek participants at one of the fourth century councils contests that it is because of the poverty of their language that the "Latins" refer to the Trinity as three persons, for the Greeks of the time preferred to refer to the Trinity as three *hypostases*/subsistences. I read on further as the participants at the councils debate the meanings of words and philosophical concepts, such as substance, being, and eventually reach a consensus on core Christian doctrines.

My reading highlights a few revelations for me. It took about four centuries for core Christian doctrines to be developed and ironed out, the faith of the early Christians developed markedly and the development of certain core doctrines, such as the Trinity, evolved quite precariously at times.

The text I'm reading also comments on the reluctance of the Greeks to refer to God as three persons. The best Greek translation of person is *prosopon*. However, *prosopon* would have also conjured up images of the masks, also *prosopon*, worn by actors in Greek theatre. Quite often Greek plays would revolve around a reoccurring theme of actors putting on

masks in an attempt to assert their individuality and a sense of agency in the play. However, their freedom was short lived and fate or the gods would eventually dictate the ending of the play. For the Greeks then, putting on a *prosopon* involved a futile attempt at an internal locus of control, one which fate victoriously fought against. I store the lessons in my memory bank.

Having experienced teaching for a year I decide it's not for me. I do however graduate with distinction. After six years of "priestly" studies I leave with a degree. I apply to study towards my honour's degree in psychology in Port Elizabeth and I am accepted. I especially choose Port Elizabeth because it is close to home and I reason that being in their honours class will give me a better chance of being accepted into their master's programme.

### **Port Elizabeth (2013)**

I arrive at the big grey university once more, at the same psychology department I had received my psychological assessment feedback in, nine years previously. The most challenging part of undergraduate psychology had been its tediousness, which had been fruitlessly fostered by the array of junior lecturers, some with only four years of study, who had been unleashed upon us. Now I look forward to stimulating lecture series from the professors the department advertises proudly on its website.

Our psychopathology prof is most intriguing, he has vast experience and is especially erudite and humorous at the same time. I vividly recall his first three lectures: a critique of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM); the etiology of depression, where I was introduced to the likes of Aaron Beck and Martin Seligman; psychosis, with a special emphasis on the prognostic factors in schizophrenia. And then all of a sudden, he stops.

"Alright, here is the schedule of the topics that need to be covered for the remainder of the semester. Divide yourselves into groups of about four or five and let me know who will be presenting on what."



Most of the students in the class were in third year psychology together. They have already formed their groups according to established friendships and implicit mutual agreements about competence. There is a highlighter brigade of girls who sit in front at lectures, they seem to even have different colour files for different modules. They quickly assemble an “A” team and are already writing their names down on the schedule. An Afrikaans group assembles on the one side of the class and are also rapid in their organisation. Other friendship groups quickly assemble. I’m just sitting there wondering what just happened. Eventually I find a few other shell-shocked students slowly finding their bearings and we write our names down on the schedule. Similar happenings occur in all the other classes, all the lecturers provide a schedule and we present. The junior lecturers at undergraduate level have now been replaced by 21-year olds at honours level.

The most interesting aspect of the honour’s year is the impending master’s selection week towards the end of the year, masters is after all our primary purpose for studying towards an honour’s degree. This heightens the competition within the class, because of the minimal places available in the masters’ class. Suddenly we are all checking and comparing our marks as they are advertised on the psychology notice board, there are marks for both tests and our group assignments.

Although, I am doing well in the tests my group presentations are substandard – on one occasion we even get called in by a lecturer to explain our mediocrity. I feel quite sick, my sole purpose for the honours year is to get into masters and now I am being “fucked” by a system seemingly beyond my control. I have to fight fate.

At the beginning of the second semester I form a new alliance, despite feeling guilty for leaving behind my special class side. I offer to edit everyone’s work before it is handed in. I no longer skim through notes just before a test, but diligently go over work at least the day before. Everything is geared towards the master’s selection.

The selection includes a written application, psychometric assessments, presentations and a rigorous interview with a panel of psychologists. The focus of my interview is on some of my personality traits, we therefore speak about my introversion and I don't even realise that I only have a nebulous grasp of what I'm talking about. One of the psychologists enquires about my priesthood studies and if I have integrated the experience. I reply confidently in the affirmative and proclaim that my decision to change had been made a whole two years before. There is friendly chatter and I am confident about my prospects. I wait nervously for my acceptance email. Eventually it comes.

“Dear Mr Wittstock, we regret to inform you that your application was not successful. We wish you everything of the best.”

It's a shock. It's an extreme disappointment. My whole year had been building up to this moment. Hard work, anticipation, angst, complete deflation. And I realise I am not good enough – they had detected a fundamental flaw which had forbade me from being accepted. I wonder if I will ever be good enough. Two other universities also reject me.

Back in our honours class we discover that only three persons of colour had been chosen from our class – all young ladies. The revelation fosters a flurry of feelings. I had known a quota system would be employed, but the way in which it seemed to be arbitrarily employed, influencing the course of my life, leaving me powerless, leaves me feeling despondent. But, only for a while. I soldier on for the remainder of the year.

I attempt to win the affection of the young lady who had caught my fancy two years previously while I had been discerning so intensely. Making my intentions explicit for the first time she informs me that she wouldn't date a Catholic. It's a stabbing revelation. I carry on. I'm involved at my own Catholic church. And a priest friend has got me involved with a youth group. I'm trying to work out what my faith means.

Having had my eyes fixed upon the master's course for so long I need to quickly reassess and make plans for the following year. It a tumultuous time. My esteem has taken a knock and I really don't want to do anything else. Friends alert me to another religious education post in Pretoria. I apply and I'm accepted – I shall be a productive member of society. I shall be something.

Following the completion of the exams I await nervously for my marks, after all I shall use them in the future to apply for masters once again. Eventually they arrive. I pass with distinction. And I come first in class! Only 2 out of about 50 pass with distinction. The other poor lady who received a distinction was also white – she was therefore also handicapped at the selection and didn't make it. They invite me to an awards ceremony so that I can receive the award for the “Most Outstanding Psychology Honours Student for 2013”. I write back, “Kiss my arse.” Well, actually I don't write that, but part of me wishes I had. I simply wrestle on with life, aware that I can't control everything, but that at the same time there is a mighty amount that I can master.

### **Pretoria (2014- 2017)**

I survey the large congregation for about a month before I reach a conclusion. I gain an understanding of the make-up of the families and then I speak to a couple of friends about the various prospects. I decide that I will speak to Kerry. She comes to Mass every Sunday with her family. They are involved at church and her sister helps run the soup kitchen. She is a primary school teacher, runs, and coaches swimming. She is gorgeous. After I make my decision, I think I am resolute. But, I chicken out on two Sundays in a row, I walk passed her, nothing comes out my mouth and I just keep walking. Finally, after two missed opportunities my courage outweighs my fear.

“Hello, I am Luke, would you like to join me for coffee in the hall.”

“Oh, I'm Kerry, I'm not sure, I will have to check with my family.”

Her younger sister enthusiastically forms an alliance with me and ensures that our post-Mass coffee occurs. Coffee leads to dates. Flowers and Sunday lunches with the family become routine. We are both about 30, we go to the same church, so I reach the conclusion that we shall probably get married.

At school I have a small group of girls for one of my extra-murals in a group akin to a Christian youth group. We have had a few sessions already where we have prayed together, discussed Scripture passages and sung songs. Our group size varies from week to week depending on female teenage whims which I never quite grasp.

Refilwe voices her concern, “Sir, so many are going to that Charismatic church, its huge, they have awesome lights, an amazing band and lots of cool things, like smoke machines. We should get a band here and then lots more girls will join.” It’s beautiful to see such enthusiasm. But I’m certainly not impressed by smoke machines, loud noise and most especially by big numbers. It’s a bit of a quandary. I don’t intend to dampen their enthusiasm. So, I try to mirror their enthusiasm.

“That would be awesome! To really feel the presence of God!” They all concur. Thsegofatso exclaims, “That would be so dope sir.” We all laugh because they have been teaching me adolescent jargon I previously knew not off: ‘dopeness’; “on fleck”; “oh snap” etc.

“So, you really want to feel Jesus?”

“Yes sir!” they shout in unison.

“And, you really want to talk to him?”

“Yes sir!”

“And, do you want Him to speak to you?”

“Yes sir!” and then they all giggle.

Together we make the arrangements to meet Jesus the following week. Our arrangements are gently, but resolutely steered by me in a direction they were not planning, but in the direction they agree too.

Our mini bus is filled with children's clothes, non-perishable food, milk formula for various ages and the requested children's paracetamol. We leave our school in the middle of Pretoria straight after school, at 14:00, and make our way North West until we are almost on the border of the neighbouring province. The homes get smaller as we drive on. The ground gets dryer. And the people look thinner. Eventually we arrive in Klipgat at a home the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa's Sisters, run for orphaned children.

Sisters Alphonsa, Rita and Annamarie come out to greet us in their famous white and blue sarees. They are absolutely delighted with all the gifts the girls have collected, "Jesus always provides!" The girls help unload the goods and joyfully follow Sister Rita's instructions about where each item should be placed.

I've loved Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity since I was a child. They make a special vow of wholehearted service to the poorest of the poor. For it is through the poor that they love and serve Jesus.

The sisters then take us to the two rooms which house the children. The first has about ten children between three months and two years. The girls hold the children and especially love feeding them. We then go into a second room. Older children are lying in cots. They all have various forms of disability. The girls then freely give them attention and care. They feel them, they touch them, and they love them. It's intense. So, I go wait outside, relieved that I'm no longer concerned about holiness. I'm very happy to just observe them loving like Jesus, loving Jesus. They spend an hour with Jesus and are reluctant when it is time to go.

We drive back in silence. We have just visited the heart of the Catholic Church. It's real. There's no time for *personas*. There's not even time for fuzzy feelings. The girls forget

about their band and we visit the sisters and the children several more times during the course of the year.

I'm standing in a corridor outside my office and children are streaming by. A few metres away Keegan, a Grade 3 girl, is approaching. Although, I only teach high school classes the junior primary children know me quite well because I often lead their devotions. I instinctively know what she is planning. I have seen the build up to hugs with female teachers many a time and she is approaching me, a male teacher for a hug. A thousand thoughts cross my mind – it's this age group of children that is most abused by priests. I drop my bag from my shoulder and use it as a shield. (I later remember that this is what my grandfather taught me to do in the event of a dog attack.) I don't think it's appropriate for male teachers to be hugging children, especially in a Catholic school. A perplexed look appears on her face upon seeing the raised drawbridge, she retreats.

Her confused countenance lingers in my mind. I decide to never repeat my heartless sterile deed, but rather to always accept the embraces of pre-adolescent children. Although, I try not to think about the child sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, it's always there, always at the back of my mind. I wrestle the truth with the rationalisation that studies point towards Catholic priests abusing about as much as the general population. The thought does not bring peace, but it allows me to not think about it too much.

The year carries on. I'm a bit worried about the inertia of the relationship I have with the gorgeous girl from Church – nothing seems to progress. I try my best to instigate something. But, it still feels like we are just friends. At least her family likes me. I carry on trying to be a good person. I obviously go to Mass on Sundays and I still go on Fridays. I help out at the church's soup kitchen.

During the course of the year I apply again for masters. One university rejects me outright. I'm invited to the selection week of three universities. The first week I make it to the

final ten, but they only choose seven and I'm not one of them. I attend the selection week at the University of South Africa and miraculously I am chosen as one of the ten. I don't even consider attending another interview in Port Elizabeth, I'm in love and gladly decide to stay in Pretoria.

It's 2015 and I make my way into one of our first classes. I survey the scene, like always, my thoughts are racing. Where should I sit? Not so close to that girl, she might think I'm after her. No, not far away by myself, they will think I am a weirdo. Not right next to the lecturer, that will be overwhelmingly intense. I find a safe seat. There are three black guys in my class jabbering away in Sotho languages and I only make out the odd word. I'm the only white male in our diverse class of ten. The ladies seem to be competing with each other to see who can utter the most words before our lecturer arrives – high-pitched words seem to score double points.

I look at the homework I have prepared. We have been given a similar assignment to my very first assignment in Psychology 1 – Freud's "Psychosexual Stages". Will we actually discuss the work? Theories that we are all so overly familiar with. I hope we move onto something else a bit more interesting.

Our lecturer enters. "And where do I find you?" she asks. We each get a chance to check in. Foremost in my mind is the fact that I have been given a "suspension" by my girlfriend because I dared to say that it would have been nice to have seen her over the weekend. So, I say, "I'm maybe a bit stressed about a relationship problem." Some of the others share a little bit about their own situations in life and most of us agree that we are all very anxious about embarking on our new master's course. The tension in the room is tangible. We then turn to our homework.

How will a masters class approach the discussion of our work? I'm already looking at the time. We spent a mighty long time just checking in. I'm hoping to be gone soon. Our

lecturer opens the discussion, it's as though the starter at an Olympic event has just fired the starter gun, and several eager hands shoot up instantaneously. I observe. We discuss one stage and then move on to the next. As we are invited to begin discussing the next stage, the same girl who dominated the first discussion already has her hand up, like a loaded machine gun. What the fuck? – we are discussing Freud's psychosexual stages. A few of the others also keep jostling to answer. This is going to be a very long two years! I mostly observe, and try to get at least one or two words in before the end of the very long lecture – which could have been efficiently completed in half the time if the lecturer had just presented the work.

We are then given topics for our first major assignment. I quickly survey the topics and start planning how I will quickly rush to the library to get the required reading material. Its masters, I really want to do well! I'm already planning the perfect essay in my mind when our lecturer drops the Nagasaki bombshell.

“Okay, I have already divided you into groups for your assignment, here is the list.”

I'm pulverised, completely deflated. It's masters, how can we still be working in groups? I feel completely powerless. White people aren't as keen on groupwork as black folk. And, males less so than females. Its fate fucking around again. Will I fight fate? I'm not sure if I still have the energy.

I soon discover that most of the lecturers are fond of groupwork. They are also fond of students presenting the classes. Some idiot concocted the idea a few decades ago that adults learn best by doing. We are, therefore, continuously afforded the opportunity to be taught by the uninformed. Classes linger on and time seems to stand still. Everyone is anxious; we take our nervous energy to our weekly group therapy sessions.

The twelve of us sit in a circle, ten students and two therapists. “Where do I find you?” I close my eyes to begin a short meditation, reflecting on how I come to the group therapy session. But, very quickly our silence is stolen. In a fraction of second, someone cries



out, “Okay, I will break the ice.” I open my eyes and wonder where the ice is. There’s now noise, no ice.

We each get a turn to check-in, some more enthusiastically than others. In such a tight circle, I can hear every breath of those sitting beside me and can quite easily smell what they had for breakfast. I’m alert and paying attention. I am interested in the lives of my peers and I am especially stimulated by the way in which the therapists lead the therapy sessions. With twelve people in a circle there is plenty to observe and think about. But, being in a circle presents one big problem – I am visible without protection and under perpetual scrutiny, it’s anxiety-provoking. Imbued with the angst of the others, our two-hour emotional contagion cauldron eventually finishes. I am exhausted.

Although, I have now begun training for a ‘secular career’, I still try and fathom a vocation, I still try and work out what God wants of me:

*Am I being God in the world? Am I being Jesus to myself? Am I treating myself with compassion? (22 February 2015)*

There seems to be a desire to not push so hard. To treat myself with compassion. But, it’s difficult to change.

After enduring infinite hours of peer-produced presentations, being slowly initiated into the department’s ecosystemic way of thinking, studying hard for tests and contributing mediocly in group presentations, I eventually make it to the Easter Weekend, midway through our first semester.

My Easter Weekend is largely spent on a group assignment – I’m slowly working through and preparing for a presentation on Watzlawick’s book, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, a seminal text for our department’s ecosystemic method of training. My partner’s agreed-upon task is to augment the presentation with information from journal articles. I labour away over the course of the Easter Weekend, deciphering the new concepts.

It's Easter Sunday morning and I am very happy to be sitting next to my girlfriend at Mass – it's like a dream come true. We don't hold hands, like I would like to, it's not what she wants. After Mass, I'm excited to make plans for our Easter Sunday together. I have especially decided to stay in Pretoria for the weekend rather than go home to East London - Kerry has so little time during the term for us to meet – it's however great that we have holiday time to catch up. I begin to enquire about plans,

“So, what are we doing today?”

“We? I've already spent time with you at Mass! I'm having friends over for lunch. It's already planned. You can't come.”

I'm shocked. I don't know what to say. We have been dating for about a year already, and I was so hoping things would be different by now. But, I don't want to rock the boat. So, I smile and say, “Okay”.

Inside I feel dead. I feel bad that I haven't made more friends in Pretoria, and that I have to bother Kerry every week. I'm such a weirdo. I go back to my empty flat. I try to work for a while, but I can't concentrate, my restless heart is wrestling. There is only one thing to do – go to gym for a swim. Numbed, I muse on the revelation that it's the first time ever I am spending Easter Sunday by myself, 1100km away from home. I train hard, and eat lunch at the gym. I'm just floating.

I arrive back to my empty flat, I have no desire to work, but I manage to muster just enough energy to complete my part of the presentation. I contact my partner so that I can collate the work. After several attempts, I eventually get a reply. “Sorry, I have not done anything, I went home for the weekend, we will just have to use your work. I hope you have enough time to put something together!” I feel sick. My last ounce of energy dissipates. Nothing. On nothing I put together a presentation.

It's the next week and I'm trying to listen to students in their twenties as they furnish us with their vast wisdom, they gleaned from the textbook we all have read. I can't sit still. My mind is elsewhere. I'm thinking about Kerry. The presentation bores on and, eventually relents. Just as our lecturer is about to leave, she turns to me and says,

“Luke, please come see me in my office quickly.”

My hearts drops. I'm in trouble.

“I see you are quite restless today, what is the matter?”

I've been found out. I know that if I tell her I will burst out crying. So, I just remain quiet.

“Is it a problem at university or outside?”

“Outside.”

“I see. If you ever want to chat. Just let me know.”

“Thank you”

I return to class and prepare myself for my own group presentation.

The semester roles on. I remain involved at church. On most Friday evenings, I help out at the parish's soup kitchen. I go to Mass twice a week and continue to discern what on earth God wants of me in this life. I buy flowers and jewellery attempting to ignite a barren relationship. I study hard and do well in tests. I endure group work. I progress through an oral exam at the end of the semester and then await the feedback.

I'm confident that my academic work has been sufficient. But, there is something I dread. I know that we will get very personal feedback on our own selves – a report on our personal development so to speak.

I'm instructed to meet at the office of one of the senior lecturers and I am told that I will receive my feedback from three of the psychologists. Eventually I'm instructed to enter.

I'm shaking. I enter and sit down on the open seat, the three clinicians are in front of me, ready to deliver the judgement I've been waiting for.

"Luke, you did well academically."

"Thank you."

"But, we are very concerned about a few things."

I listen in trepidation. It feels like my head is on the chopping block. I'm already tied down and I can't escape. The guillotine is released, and I can hear it coming.

"Why have you been so anxious. You must be upset about something."

I'm cornered. I have nowhere to go. I muster up the courage needed to speak. One slow step at a time so that I don't cry in front of three psychologists whose job it is to assess me.

"There is lots of stress in my relationship with my girlfriend."

"Oh, we see." They smile simultaneously.

"I know I need to make a change and I will when the time is right."

"But, we are also concerned about a few other things! You have previously said that you quite like Carl Rogers, but you are nothing like him. He was person-centred, and you are very judgemental with your classmates. You just sit there not participating."

"I'm sorry."

"Are you a snob?" The three clinicians stare into my soul.

My mind races towards the diagnostic criteria for "Narcissistic Personality Disorder". I wonder if that is what they are enquiring about.

"I don't know. Perhaps, I am. I will try to change." I think quickly about me wanting to be compassionate like Jesus, but obviously being an abysmal failure. I know I'm running on fumes. I'm not sure if I have the energy to make the changes, they are leading me towards.

"Do you still want to be here?"

Suddenly, I'm confronted with the reality that my position is precarious. I could be kicked out!

"Yes, most definitely," I plea.

"Okay, good luck with the changes."

I skate away on thin ice, and make my way to my peers who have also just received their feedback. After just a few months together, we have grown very close. One of the girls asks me how my feedback went. I slowly begin to cry. With my head on her shoulder I tell her what happened. We share our war stories and prepare for our second semester, all feeling a bit tender.

At the beginning of the second semester we are all paired with a psychologist in the department who takes on the role of "mentor". At the first meeting with my mentor he shares his concern for my well-being. My inner feelings of anxiety and depression are evident to others. And this realisation magnifies the urgency to make some changes in my life. My mentor and I discuss my history and current emotional state.

On one occasion he asks, "What are you passionate about?" The question shocks and lingers loudly. I used to be passionate about soccer and water polo. I used to be in love. I used to be passionate about Jesus and the Catholic Church. But now, I don't know if I am passionate about anything. I respond,

"I have a sensitivity towards the hurts of others."

"Sensitivity? Not passion?"

"No."

He puts me in contact with a very experienced psychology professor whom I eventually contact for psychotherapy. But, only once I am ready. I realise that the relationship I am in is bad for me, but I don't know if I am sure. What heightens my responsibility to

reflect upon it is the fact that others have been noting my bad state in life. The tumultuous turmoil leads me to weigh-up pros and cons.

*Benefits of staying: little bit of security, care for her – she does not benefit from me.*

*Do I benefit from her – NO. How do I break up with her? Does she care about me?*

*Trust yourself!!!! (16 August 2015)*

I know I need to make a change. But, I am not quite sure. What if I try just a little bit harder? Perhaps, she will change. Perhaps, I can love her as she is. Perhaps, she will eventually relax with me. Perhaps.

It's four o'clock, and I have just finished a day at university capped off with a destressing gym session less than a kilometre away from my old seminary. I am going to my girlfriend's family for supper – her mother has advertised on the family WhatsApp group that the oxtail has been cooking away the whole day.

But, Kerry has not let me know when I should arrive, so I plan to go to my flat first and wait for permission to visit at the appropriate time. Yet, when I leave the gym, I realise there is no electricity in my part of the city, the traffic lights are out, and it will take me an hour to get home and another hour to get to Kerry's family's place. So, I message her and tell her I am coming straight to her even though I haven't been given the suitable time.

Deep down I think my move could rock the boat. But, I also think that if a young couple have been dating for over a year it should be okay to arrive unannounced. Part of me is scared to perturb, but part of me is also very interested to see what will happen if I don't obey the rules.

It takes me an hour to drive through the traffic to the East of Pretoria and arrive just as Kerry is arriving. Upon seeing me on the pavement, she gets out of her car and storms towards me at the closed gate.

“Why are you so early? I haven’t even seen my parents yet! I have just got back from school!”

I’m hurt that my presence is so despised. Perhaps, I should have waited at the nearby shopping mall for a while. So, I just say, “You don’t have to entertain me. I will make myself coffee or something.”

The evening’s oxtail is nourishing and tasty, and the company of her family is a welcome relief from the silence of my flat. Like every night she goes to bed at 8pm and I go home. That night my heart decides to stop wrestling. But my mind has not quite caught on.

At the end of August, I return back to Pretoria after a short break at home. After not seeing my girlfriend for ten days part of me is still keen to see her. But the Sunday I arrive back does not suit her. I finally realise that it’s completely odd to not want to see a boyfriend after an absence of ten days.

So, on Friday the 4th of September, I drive to her home for the last time. Waiting at a traffic light, still closer to my home than hers, I begin to cry. It’s terrible to break up with someone you love. It’s awful to end a relationship that you have been working on, wrestling with, for 18 months. I then think of how excited I was when she arrived at the East London airport to visit me and my family only a few months before. How carefully I had painted the room she was to stay in in preparation for her visit. And, that one time she prepared a lunch box for me for university with a muffin she had baked, a yogurt, a boiled egg and a ham sandwich.

I’m too upset to say anything to her, so she stoically lets me know that she knows what I want to say. We say our goodbyes. I’m not sure if she is relieved or upset. I cry as I drive the familiar road back home for the last time. I arrive back home to my empty flat.

My psychotherapist has vast experience. He is intelligent and exudes confidence and competence. I share my life situation. In his presence, I feel completely normal. I begin to

become aware that he radiates life. I find it attractive. He is free. I'm not sure if he is holy or good –these two values slowly begin to fade. In therapy, he encourages me to start taking greater risks. Well, he encourages me to do lots of things. But, risks resound. He even gets up and demonstrates the difference between small steps and big steps. He wants me to take big steps. Therapy vivifies. I've been thinking about taking running seriously. Entries for Cape Town's iconic Two Oceans 56km Ultra Marathon have just opened. I enter and something inside of me begins to come alive.

But, I'm still battling at university. The psychologists in our department periodically have meetings to discuss our progress. It's one thing being fully aware that people are judging you. It's another thing knowing that about ten psychologists are observing - all the time. And, having studied psychopathology more intensely for several months now, I more aware of my entrenched personality flaws that they are observing, my obsessive-compulsive personality traits score quite high, and my schizoid and avoidant scores are also significant. I view myself through the lens of pathology.

Anxiety is amplified. Restless nights become even a greater wrestle. And, when I sleep, I have recurring dreams: I only have a few months left of high school. I haven't opened a book for months, and I don't know what is going on in Maths. But, I really want to get an A. If I start studying now, I can surely catch up. If I wrestle really hard, I can do well. Time is ticking. There are only a few months until my final exams, and I know nothing. Or, I dream that's it's the beginning of water polo season, "Coach, there's only a few weeks until the tournament, and we aren't fit enough!"

In my lucid life there is something bothering me. It's nearly the end of my first year of masters and I don't even have research proposal. I've thought about doing something on male depression, perhaps on adolescent male depression. But, I can't even start to write anything. So, I think about doing something on religion and psychology. But, I just stare at my



computer when I attempt to construct the beginning of a dissertation. Lecturers in my department are interrogating, “Where is your proposal, Luke?” The psychology department becomes a petrifying place – a place I’m in almost every day.

Eventually, the year draws to a close. My exams go better, and I finally get some positive feedback – I’m not doing that badly. I’m thinking of involving Ignatian Spirituality in my dissertation somehow and I am trying to work out how a career as a clinical psychologist fits into a nebulous vocation from God. So, I go on a weeklong Ignatian retreat at the end of 2015.

It’s five years since my last retreat – something that previously seemed so familiar seems a bit foreign all of a sudden. It’s a week of silence filled with prayer. Silence is very welcome after a very noisy year at university. The prayer feels very different. I, suddenly, realise I don’t commune with God in the same way. I’m not even sure He is there anymore:

*During prayer time, I felt at peace and loved, but battled with faith in God’s existence – not as something serious, but as something constant to be questioned. Decisions – how to be made if one cannot be sure? (10 December)*

The retreat, however, carries on with lots of the same familiar discourses, and I so dearly want to have a sense that what I am doing has a greater meaning, that I am on the right track, that God is in control. I write down a few lines akin to a mission:

*To live, experience life to the full. To become my best self. To love with intensity  
To be loved dearly. To offer the world my humanity. (15 December 2015)*

But, I know that I have a tendency to spew pious waffle. I try to go deeper. What is really there? Am I really being real with God? Congruent with Truth? I go deeper, for Truth has said, *Duc in Altum*/Caste into the deep:

*You called me to misery, you made me feel pain and loneliness, realise that your love is only an illusion, that you do not care.... I do not feel like coming closer to you because that sucks, I have tried it already – it is death. (17 December 2015)*

I finish the retreat and I realise that my relationship with God is not as neat and tidy as I had hoped it would be. Surely, that's part of a retreat! To feel close to God and happy that one's faith is secure. I'm not sure what I leave with.

Christmas holidays come and go, and I'm back in my flat in Pretoria. I'm in my second year of masters training and I really want to do well this year. I have my first marathon in a few weeks – a qualifier for Two Oceans. And, I am hoping that I can finally begin my research properly. But, I can't. I can't sit still and focus.

In previous years, I had sensed that my procrastination was directly linked to loneliness. I'm again trying to work out why I can't work, and again I realise that its loneliness that I feel when I'm at my desk staring at my computer. Even if I muster all my might and manage to begin something, after only a few words it feels as if I am tugged away by a mysterious force. Sometimes, I try harder. But, it is so tiring.

I then consider what my primary need is – it's for a loving relationship. I know that I ought to be concentrating on my studies. But, I know that if I am to flourish as a person, that's where my energy needs to be invested, that's where the energy wants to go, that's where it's going, that is where I want to go. So, four months after I broke up with my girlfriend I start dating again.

Initially, my eye is just on Catholic ladies. That's still my dream. I imagine arriving at church one day and seeing the most beautiful person kneeling and praying the rosary calmly and gracefully before Mass and then falling madly in love with her. But, that doesn't happen. Dating as an anxious person is hard work. Will she respond to my messages? Should I message again? I meet a beautiful Catholic lady. I'm captivated. We go on a date. We

message and then nothing happens. I'm seriously disappointed. I then broaden my horizons. I even download a dating app. I go on more dates with non-Catholics. I meet friends of friends. But, nothing is right.

And, all the time my peers at university are closely following the antics of a previous seminarian attempting to date. Some of the girls in my class quickly do Instagram and LinkedIn searches to ensure that possible matches will suffice. On the surface level, it's fun. But, deep down its tiring and draining, and I joke with a peer about embracing that resounding label – insecure anxious. All the while there is something else that looms large.

I'm a 31-year-old Catholic man, deep down in the depths of my very being I have the image of the ideal woman – the Virgin Mary. Part of me still believes that a decent unmarried woman will obviously still be a virgin. And, if she is a Christian that will be a given. But, on another level, I also know that my hope is unrealistic. I dread the possibility of falling in love, and then finding out that the girl of my dreams is already “one with someone else”, or even several others. My head and heart jostle. I try and imagine what I would do. It's a wrestle with no resolution.

I, therefore, run my first marathon. It's tough. After 25kms I hit the proverbial wall and have to pull myself to the 42<sup>nd</sup> km, but I manage to qualify for Two Oceans. I run the 56kms at Two Oceans and get the fright of my life when I see how high Chapmans Peak is, but I am proud when I finish, knowing that at least I can run. But, I still can't sit down and type a dissertation.

I'm sitting in a circle again. This time it's quiet. It's silent because I'm in the circle of my prayer group from church and not with my overwhelming university peers. I'm worried about my studies and my training. I'm most especially worried about not having begun my dissertation. In the silence of my heart, it feels as if God is saying that it will be okay; there is no need to rush. For a short while I am at peace.

I'm sitting in the dark behind a one-way mirror in an observation room. Three colleagues are in the room with me. Two of our trainers are also in the dark room with us, looking and judging that what we do is correct. One of my peers is being observed by us as they conduct a therapy session. We are whispering amongst ourselves about the ins and outs of the therapy in front of us. A couple of times during the session one of our trainers picks up a phone in our dark room and rings the developing psychologist on the other side with a few pointers. It's intriguing to watch a session of therapy unfold, that's if you are there, but, I'm elsewhere.

My family for therapy is about to arrive and I shall be judged next, or rather, I shall next conduct therapy. I'm glancing down at my notes from previous sessions. My therapy files are not quite up to date and I'm dreadfully scared that one of my trainers may ask to view my files and be shocked by my incompetence. I've been thinking about the family coming in next the whole week, I even prayed about this case at Mass on Sunday. I've been lying awake at night formulating and imagining a positive outcome displayed to my trainers and peers. The appointed time is nearing, my pulse rate is rising, a stress headache is tightening, I go to the bathroom one last time before my session.

Finally, I am in the therapy room with the family. It's highly stimulating to focus on several individuals at the same time, to have the theory that one is using to make sense of the family foremost in mind, to dynamically attempt to understand their current interaction and at the same time to be reflecting on my role as the therapist in the current system. The motive and goal of each word I say is carefully scrutinised. This is where part of my energy is spent.

A great deal more energy is being spent on the ever-present reality that I am being observed by two psychologists and four of my peers. What are my trainers thinking? What are my peers thinking? Do they think I am a smart arse when I try something novel in the

session? Do they think I am too fearful when I try nothing? Do they think I am completely incompetent? Finally, the session ends. I'm exhausted.

One of my peers comments, "It's amazing how you just forget that there are people behind the glass watching." I think to myself – I wasn't thinking of *people* behind the glass. I was thinking of individuals. And, I was thinking about what each individual was thinking. Thinking and thinking and thinking, fatigue.

I'm having my reoccurring dreams – if I open my maths books now, I can learn the grade 11 and 12 syllabi in three months, and I can still get an A. And, I can do the same for my other subjects. Or, it's a few weeks before a big school water polo tournament and I don't think I have enough time to get fit.

At university my research professor wants to know where my proposal is. "Prof, it's almost done. It's on its way. I have a new idea." I haven't started. The year gallops on. I float into my final oral exam and pass with a mediocre mark. I'm tired. My marks are disappointing, but at least I wasn't kicked out. I made it.



*Figure 8: My master's class at Unisa (2016).*

I'm now in my internship at Weskoppies Psychiatric Hospital and begin the year working in the adolescent ward. The children's problems are complex – that's why they are in hospital. Some are psychotic and many have been abused. Their experiences involve a lot of sexual abuse. During a therapy session, I can feel my body release adrenaline – it tightens my shoulders and flows up my neck like a river. It grips. I listen with all the energy I am able to muster, trying to ignore my stress headache. It's tiring. But, I try my best.

I formulate the case and hand in my notes to my supervisor. I wait for the verdict. In the midst of trying to make sense of the vast array of feelings conjured by my personal interaction with sick and vulnerable children I receive my notes back from my supervisor –

the red corrections have obliterated my work. I wonder if I have the ability to make it. Or, will I be rejected and kicked out from my internship. I have weekly meetings with my supervisor and hardly sleep the night before these ordeals. But, I'm still running.

I arrive at OR Tambo International airport (Johannesburg) with great excitement. I am leaving behind work for a week and tomorrow morning at 5:30 am, I will run a marathon with my dad and brothers. It's Friday and the airport is busy. A family contact at South African Airways (SAA) has organised me a very cheap "stand-by ticket". They are great if there is place, but you only fly if the plane is not fully booked or if booked passengers do not arrive on time. I, thus, arrive extra early to ensure that I am first in queue for an extra spot on the second last flight to East London. If I am not successful with the first flight, I am sure I will get on the second.

Just before everyone boards on the first flight the assistant prints out a ticket for me. Relief, I am going home. I run through security. I run to the gate... and, then I am stopped.

"Sorry, Mr Wittstock, please wait, we just want to check that the last passenger does not get on before you take his seat." I wait anxiously. Eventually someone comes along running and take's the last seat. "*Doos/Idiot*".

"Sorry Mr Wittstock, we will make sure you get on the 18:30 flight. In fact, we can print out your ticket. Here it is."

I make my way to another gate for the final flight to East London that evening. Its torture. I speak to my contact at South African Airways. She says she will make sure I get on, even if I have to sit with the cabin crew. I wait and wait. I try to board because I have a seat number already. But, they tell me to wait. I'm at the mercy of the SAA staff.

Eventually, I realise the SAA staff are allowing their buddies with stand-by tickets to jump the queue ahead of me until I am the only one left, and once again there is no place left on the plane. And, no other airlines are flying to East London that evening.

I'm dreadfully disappointed and deflated. The adrenaline rush and anxious waiting at the airport has been taxing. I've been looking forward to the marathon for months and I can't do anything stranded at Joburg airport eleven hours before the race starts in East London 1000km away. But, then I realise something. I can do something! I'm a person. I'm a person with agency.

I quickly do the maths. Its 1000km to East London. Problem. I caught the train to Joburg, and my car is in Pretoria. That's almost 1100 km from East London and that journey normally takes me eleven hours. If I leave right now, I can leave Pretoria by 19:30. I will have to shave an hour off the time it normally takes me to make the journey.

I'm now running back through security and running to the opposite side of the airport to the train station. If I just miss the train I may have to wait as much as 30 minutes for another one. So, I hustle. Fate furnishes me with a train about to leave from the airport. I jump on and it lifts off. I phone a friend who leaves a social engagement to lift me from the Hatfield station to my flat a couple kilometres away so that I can jump into my car to start the 1100km journey.

Everything is going according to plan. And, it's exhilarating to take note of how I am influencing my destiny. Soon after 19:30 I leave Pretoria. I fly passed Joburg and once again wonder why anyone would want to live there. I make up the hour I need to on the long straight and flat roads through the Free State – hitting some impressive speeds for someone with antisocial scores three standard deviations below the mean! It's tiring, but quick coffee stops in Kroonstad, Bloemfontein, Aliwal North, and Queenstown keep me going. I arrive at the start before my dad and brothers, quickly change and then act cool and casual when they arrive.

The 42.2 km run is a bit more difficult without sleep. But, something in my soul feels more alive by doing something seemingly impulsive, taking a risk and being a master of my



destiny. I finish the run with my dad and brothers, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul”.



*Figure 9: Finishing a marathon with my dad and brothers in East London. I drove through the night from Pretoria to make it to the start on time (2017).*

Eventually, after four months I make it through my first rotation with a satisfactory performance record, and I move on to my next rotation – the Forensic Firm. Most of the patients in this section have either raped or murdered and many have a psychotic disorder. It’s intriguing and I begin with great zeal. I read up a great deal on my cases and the kind of therapy most effective with the various illnesses – I have the hope that they will get well.

But, my initial enthusiasm is soon curbed. Most of the patients have had severe psychiatric diagnoses for many years, some for decades. I conduct comprehensive assessments on some of the patients, which involves spending several hours with them, hearing all about the ins and outs of their psychiatric histories and their disastrous deeds. It begins to take a toll.

My mind is full of real-life murder stories, and I have shaken the hands that have killed. Patients with such severe illness have a peculiar energy – it drains. It's as if you sit before a black hole and your insides are being vacuumed towards an abyss. I begin to miss deadlines again and my new supervisor is not impressed. Tension begins to build. I begin to float. And, then it is time for Comrades.

Comrades is a 90km ultra-marathon run between Durban and Pietermaritzburg in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province. The direction of the run alternates from year to year meaning that on one year runners run up from Durban, at the coast, to the inland Pietermaritzburg. On alternate years they run "down".

On the Friday before the race I arrive in Durban from Pretoria to run my first comrades – my family have made their way from East London and both my brothers are also running their first Comrades. Months of training have built up to this day. I have envisaged the route many a time. I am well aware that it is going to be tough. And there is an added curve ball.

Training hard for several months, working in a stressful environment and the beginnings of winter has led to me catching a cold exactly a week before the run. I weigh up the pros and cons of running, and decide that I will "fuck with fate" and take a powerful concoction of vitamins and minerals to fight off my virus. So, when I stand at the start line in Durban at 5:30 on the Sunday, I'm not in the best shape to run 90km. But, the national anthem plays and then the soundtrack to "Chariots of Fire", my very being stirs and I'm off to Pietermaritzburg.

Immediately, I realise that not doing any exercise for a week has left my legs very stiff. Right from the beginning it's tough climbing out of Durban. I wonder how I will make it to Pietermaritzburg, but I keep going, climbing uphill for about 30km. And, then I am tired. I have 60km to go. I keep going. At about half way my calves start cramping. I carry on further

and everything starts to become blurry. And, when I am completely finished, I look up at a sign displaying the distance to go – 42 km – a marathon. I labour on hour after hour. As I get closer to Pietermaritzburg, I run passed several other runners lying next to the road, only a few kilometres from their destination and I reflect on the fact that my body could also simply just shut down, but it hasn't yet. I go on. The sun sets. And, I finish my first comrades in 11 hours 54 minutes. And, I still haven't even started my dissertation. But, I'm giving my all for my patients, trying to be compassionate.

I'm back at the hospital and working with a patient by the name of Mangaliso. He is intelligent, but unfortunately not as intelligent as he believes he is. He believes he is a famous judge and has served at the Constitutional Court. Unfortunately, in reality he didn't pass his first-year law courses. He also believes that when he was at The Hague, he learnt several European languages including French, German, and Dutch. Regrettably, he has never left South Africa. Afraid of his own insignificance he has unknowingly concocted a *persona* that meets his need for admiration and security.

The murky mirror in front of me illumines the perilous nature of our psyches. Ten years ago, I was dreaming of studying at the most prestigious University in Rome, speaking many languages and being well respected, content with the reward of knowing that I am great. One of the books I read on delusions highlights that they are closely connected to the belief that one can be successful without doing any hard work to get there – conscientiousness is absent. And, I can't sit down and write a dissertation. Mangaliso and I are so different, but, we are the same. The dividing line between us is so thin, and life's lottery seems to play a huge role in deciding which side we shall fall.

Our frailty as psychologists in training becomes more and more evident as we work with vulnerable people. Our stress levels rise. Some of us get sick. One of my colleagues is hospitalised. Our motivation to become psychologists is inexplicably tied up with who we are

– “it’s all about the human stuff”. And, my desire to care, to be compassionate, to care for the poorest of the poor, those in need of love, no longer seems as noble as it once did.

In July, the three registrars in my firm suddenly decide they want to work like Trojans. The other intern psychologist in my firm therefore decides to take special leave. All of a sudden, I realise that in two weeks I need to interview and assess twelve patients and present their cases to a multi-disciplinary team. I then need to complete their reports, which according to my supervisor need to be about 25 pages long, in no more than one week.

Problem – twelve reports equates to about 300 pages. It takes about three hours to interview and assess a patient. It takes about another hour to prepare to present on them. We take about one hour to discuss each patient. It then takes me about five hours to write a final report. And, that’s just part of my work. I have about eight patients for psychotherapy each week, two groups for group therapy, and there are other meetings and training sessions.

I set out trying to do the impossible, but it can’t be done. I miss my deadlines. I’m floating. I don’t look at emails, lest my supervisor has sent me another email. Slowly, but surely, amidst all my other work, I hand in one or two reports a week. My supervisor is not impressed. I receive the lowest possible mark when my performance appraisal is done. I feel terrible. I don’t stop to consider that I complete more reports in one rotation than any of the other 13 interns. I just survive.

In the midst of working in an environment with so many different forms of stimulation, I become more and more aware how sensitive I am to the vast array of invasions my sensory system constantly battles against. I consider the work being done in the children’s ward – how the psychologists there are taught to be highly cognisant of the fact that some children need lots of stimulation and others require very little. I’m suddenly aware that I’m a highly sensitive person and that I have very particular needs that can’t simply be fixed by making myself endure vast amounts of stimulation. And, some of my flaws may even be

connected to unique strengths that may be useful for a psychologist. I begin to think more about “Positive Psychology”.

My internship, finally, begins to come to an end. Thankfully my final supervisor is more relaxed, and I am able to find my breath, to settle in, just as we are preparing to say our goodbyes. I begin to conclude the therapeutic processes with my various patients.

Tracy, is a lady in her mid-forties. I have been seeing her without fail for three months now. When I first met her, she was in an open ward with relative freedom. She had dressed up for our weekly sessions and had come well presented. She had spoken coherently about her illustrious modelling career, a story I initially believed. She had experienced innumerable traumas throughout her life which filled me with compassion, and I delusionally believed that if I listened with enough empathy she would get well. But, she didn't. In fact, she even got worse.

It's our final session, and, she is sitting more than a couple arm lengths away, that's how I have arranged the chairs. During our initial sessions it did not seem important to me who sat where, but now things have changed. She is actively psychotic, and I have positioned my chair right next to the door. The room is right next to the nurses' station. And, we are in a prison-like closed ward with bars on the windows. A robust gate guards the entrance to the ward, or perhaps rather, the exit.

Her hair is now short, having been hacked at by the closed ward nurses because of the poor state it had been in. Her pink gown is dirty. Her grooming has declined so much that she exudes rancidity. I'm trying to listen as carefully as possible to the incoherent words she is sharing. Perhaps, her subconscious will share a hidden message that I can empathically acknowledge. But I decipher nothing. She sits in front of me, the “poorest of the poor.” I am helpless. And, then the most lasting memory of all our sessions is formed.

She begins to cry. She gets up. She begins to move towards me in her dirty hospital clothes. Her eyes look wild. She is moving in for an embrace. Sister Rita would embrace her. Mother Teresa would kiss her. Jesus would wash her feet. I run away.

In a split second I have stood up, opened the door, fled and I am at the nurses' station saying my goodbyes. From the safety of the nurses' station, I say goodbye to her as she stands in front of me like an orphan.

“Luke, I just wanted to whisper something in your ear and say goodbye.”

“Thank you, Tracey, goodbye.”

There's no healing.

It's a great relief when I am awarded with a certificate for completing my internship, I was not kicked out. Another tiring year has finished, and I can, finally, go home.

## **5.5 Writing My Autoethnography**

### **East London (2018)**

Having been away from home for twelve years, and having lived by myself for six, it's a relief to finally be home, to breath in the fresh unpolluted coastal air. I always knew that if things ever got really bad, I could always just go home.

I can only start my community service once I have finished my research and its hanging over me like a dark storm cloud. So, I try to get to work.

I try desperately to put together a coherent proposal, but it is slow going. My plan is to show how I have integrated my Catholic faith with my chosen career as a clinical psychologist, hence the title of my research at this stage is “Towards the Congruence of Psychology and Catholicism.” I read slowly. I type slowly.

I come across an autoethnography by Dawn Johnston (2007) in which she shares her journey towards finding her own spirituality outside the Catholic Church. I'm irritated by her research and feel sorry for her. For I believe that it is a sign of maturity to be able to live with

ambiguity – to be able to live with the good and bad. But, she left. I’m wrestling with ambiguity in my religion and I believe that when I mature, I will be at peace. But, I’m not there yet.

At the end of January 2018, I take part in my first triathlon. It’s a half Ironman and involves swimming 1.9 km, cycling 90km and running 21 km. I find the cycling tough, having borrowed a cousin’s bicycle for the day, but it’s lots of fun. The decision to take part had much in common with my first decision to enter an ultra-marathon – to embrace life. In February, I run another marathon and then set my eyes on Two Oceans and Comrades. But, that’s still some time off.

Its 08:00 on a Sunday morning, I am at Mass in my home parish. I feel out. I’m not sure why I am here. Perhaps, I am hoping for a maturity that can live with ambiguity and complexity, aware of all the problems in the church, but also inspired by all the good.

The priest starts to preach. A priest I’m already not fond of – I have heard that he has taken it upon himself to single out individuals and demand that they go to confession. For me a person’s conscience is a sacred place, where only they and God dwell. The priest who leads my home parish invades the sanctuaries of people’s souls. And, he is about to share some more bad news when he continues to obsess about sin.

“Your sins make Jesus sad!”

I laugh. I look around. No one else is laughing. All the grannies are listening attentively. People brought up fearing sin and death are having a person from the higher caste dump his shit on them. They sit there lifeless, decaying and soul-sapping. I think how problematic the priest’s statement is. Anthropomorphising God is accepted to a certain degree in Christian Theology, largely on account of God’s incarnation in Jesus. However, God lacks nothing, He created humans out of his Goodness, not because He needed us or was lonely prior to creation. To say that we can make our Omnipotent God “sad” because we forgot to

say our prayers is laughable. But, there he is. I call him Adolf. There Adolf is, telling us what to do, and he takes 21 minutes and 39 seconds to do it. (That's double the average length of a sermon in a Catholic church). After Mass, Adolf calls me to his office.

“Luke, why didn't you come and introduce yourself to me properly, that is what you are supposed to do. You used to be a seminarian, and there is lots you can do!”

“Father, I did introduce myself to you.”

“But, you didn't tell me exactly who you are! Okay. I need someone to train the altar servers for me, the lady who is doing it does not really know what she is doing. So, on Friday you will come here at 16:00 to train them. It's very important for the Easter Triduum! And, I also need you to represent the parish youth at a meeting in Port Elizabeth.”

I just look at Adolf and try and work out what is going on in his mind. He goes on.

“Luke, God is calling you to do this thing for me!”

“No, I won't do it, I don't think that is for me at this moment in time, I'm quite busy with my dissertation”. Adolf goes on and on like a broken record, spewing religious discourses. And, I explain my position several times. Eventually I have had enough.

“Thank you, Father, I won't be held captive any longer, you are not listening to me, bye-bye!” He looks at me completely perplexed. We say goodbye. I don't return to my home parish. But, I keep on trying, I keep wrestling.

The next Sunday, I am at a neighbouring church. Perhaps, I will find a place of rest. Perhaps, something will nourish my soul. The priest isn't judgemental. But, he hasn't prepared a sermon. I feel trapped again listening to someone repeat readily available religious discourses. I leave empty. The next Sunday, I am at another Catholic church and a similar thing happens. I leave feeling emptier than when I arrived. I leave feeling depressed.

In my own small prayer group, I voice my quandary, “I am trying to live a life attentive to daily experiences, attentive to moments of consolation and moments of



desolation. But, for several Sundays I have just felt depressed at Mass.” My group listens attentively to the thoughts that have been circling in my mind. It feels different to voice them. And, even though part of me is not sure, I know what I need to do. I stop going to Mass.

I’m aware that I am in some sort of process I have not quite fathomed. So, I start to read a great deal for the first time since I was a zealous seminarian. I enjoy Jordan Peterson, who focuses a great deal on chaos, order, and meaning. Perhaps, my existential vacuum will be filled. And, then I read John Cromwell’s *Seminary Boy*, on his time as seminarian. I also acquaint myself with Karen Armstrong who lived as a young nun in a very strict convent before leaving her order. And, I can feel something inside me is stirring. But, it’s mysterious.

Restlessly wrestling, I try again to edit and complete my proposal. At home I can’t concentrate – I just stare out the window. I work for a few minutes and then I get agitated and find myself doing something else. I claw myself back and grind out another paragraph. I go to a coffee shop to work. I just stare at my computer and then leave. I still feel like Sisyphus. I hate it. I’ve been trying hard for so long and I am tired. I can’t go on like this forever, my dissertation will never get done. Is it time to do what I have often previously considered? To take some form of psychiatric medication.

I stare at the box of methylphenidate in front of me, it belongs to a family member, perhaps I should try it. Perhaps medication is a panacea. M-e-th-y-l-ph-e-n-i-d-a-t-e. I know exactly what it is. It’s powerful shit. And, millions of boys around the world are prescribed it because they don’t behave like good girls. Should I fast track my writing process? But, I know my inability to concentrate has got nothing to do with dopamine. Should I rather seek a prescription of SSRI’s? Perhaps, that would be the responsible thing to do? To admit that I need help. I can’t do it all by myself. That’s what many would say I ought to do! But, I also know serotonin is not the problem, even though it may appear so to some.

It's a problem deep within my soul. I don't want to linger around any longer. I have to go deep. *Duc in Altum*. The words of my spiritual director in 2008 resound – “allow everything.” I have to see what is there. I have to write freely without judgment. And I just have to let it flow out. So, I turn to my prayer journal and write quickly:

***Jesus is Sodomising a Child***

*6% of 1000 = 60*

*6% of 400 000 = 24 000<sup>6</sup>*

*You march in black, a soldier for Jesus*

*Speaking words of intelligence & grace*

*Speaking words of holiness and healing*

*You forgive sins, like God*

*You pray and Jesus is on the altar*

*You preach and it is Jesus who preaches*

*You are an alter Christus acting in Persona Christi*

*You are Jesus.*

*Jesus, God is with us.*

*Jesus, all that is good.*

*Jesus, who gave his life for all*

*Yet, it is you Jesus*

*Who raped so many children*

*Who tore at their souls and slaughtered their bodies*

*Who abused and abused.*

*It was the one's you “chose”*

*Who let this happen again and again, it was them.*

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<sup>6</sup> A rough estimate of the amount of “abuser” priests worldwide.

*Peter, James & John with all the power*

*Scarlet running down the battered bodies of boys.*

*We hate you Jesus*

*We hate your Church*

*We hate your Bishops*

*And we hate your priests.*

*You abandoned our children*

*And you let the pack of priests prey perpetually*

*No God; no good God*

*Unless, what was perceived to be good was evil incarnate and our eyes were deceived.*

*What is Good? God alone is good – there is no God – can you not see stupid.*

*God sodomised the children*

*Now I cry (11 April 2018)*

“Jesus is Sodomising a Child” takes me about a minute to write. And, when I am finished writing it, I do cry. And, I am shocked about what is on the paper in front of me. Previously, I had only allowed thoughts of the abuse of children by Catholic priests to trickle into my consciousness and I had ensured that my awareness had remained cerebral, a place where rationalisations keep things neat and tidy. But, my heart bursts forth and awareness challenges.

What now? I don’t feel comfortable with ambiguity. I am not carefully balancing the good and bad within the church as I had previously imagined a mature adult would be able to do. There is just repulsion. It’s not integrated. But, it does represent movement. I need to keep writing. But, not straight away. I need to rest for the rest of the day. It’s taxing. But, the following day I keep writing.

***Father Barabbas***

*You were overweight, for the food you ate day after day was your God,*

*The stench from the Northern market, festered in the pots you did not clean, you disgusting man.*

*Your room smelt, repugnant as I walked by. Half shebeen, half home for the infirm, the evil spirits, stained your musty stagnant den, your hovel.*

*You put on a coy smile when you spoke to those who mattered*

*Your demeanour was puppy like when you preached to those who had money, to those who would pay for your holiday, which I recall you asking them explicitly to do.*

*Yet, when you preached in the shack, you became the wolf and shouted at their frugality.*

*Many had surely left for there was only a few, the wise had gone elsewhere, yet you prayed on the ignorant, after demanding that more collection be given.*

*And going home that day*

*You revealed the inner sanctuary of a child of God, you broke the seal of confession*

*You betrayed the whole world*

*And told me she was HIV +*

*And as time went by Father Barabbas, I heard more about you:*

*The day a fellow priest had to pay pimps at the door of the church, to get them away, your puke from the brothel you frequented spilled over, and over in to the sanctuary.*

*And then when my heart was dead, I heard more.*

*You had paid the young men in your care for sex*

*Men who wanted to be priests because of their poverty, you chowed in their vulnerability, you disgusting repugnant dog.*

*I do not mourn your death, yet I had known you, had even driven you to a church in a squatter camp when I was dreaming of a holy mission.*

*In your early death you met the emptiness, the great nothingness you insidiously sought.*

*It was them you crushed, the people of God, the young seminarians*

*It was the last drop from my heart that you lapped up and spat out.*

*You disgusting Barabbas (12 April 2018)*

I also write Father Barabbas in about a minute. It's inspired by a priest I once knew.

Like my previous day's writing I am surprised to see what I have written – especially, how strong so much of the wording is.

Next, I write, “Broken, Regurgitated and Rejected”, which I inserted into the second main section of this narrative. And, when I finish writing it, I write a few more lines,

*I am thinking of the divorce – no one brought me flowers – no one mourned with me. I was just left empty with broken dreams and a broken heart – transparent tears.*

*(17 April 2018)*

Two days later I write further, reflecting on the person primarily responsible for “kicking me out” of the seminary.

***Father Pretence***

*Your musty body reveals the out of sync nature of you spirit and soul —*

*You never hit the road for a run, score a goal on the field or do some cardio in the gym.*

*Repugnant you pretend to be an academic & drop the few Italian words you know to pretend you are of importance, Vabene, Balissimo, we all know them your plonker, we're Catholic.*

*And with great pride you show of your studies & the pieces of paper*

*Not that impressive for people who actually know anything about academia, so what, a PHD?*

*We can all pretend, so who cares about the German, it's basically Afrikaans, shiessen, ich komme aus Ost London, aber iche spreche Deutch*

*Doos, not impressed, if that's all you have to show.*

*So, from the pulpit you pretended, but there was not an ounce of inspiration*

*Just some ballyhoo from the Bible you knew not of.*

*So, you dressed up in the black and white, your great opportunity in life and had your family see it. But you stank, like the sewage which you were.*

*So, it is not surprising that when I confronted you, you did not listen, why would the father of lies listen?*

*So defensive, so angry, so fearful, so you said*

*"I will make sure you are kicked out" and made sure you did.*

*But you will never be a bishop, for that you studied, for that you worked.*

*So, you played with your dream, your dream of becoming a bishop.*

*Mrs Pretence slept over for all to see. What was this? Were you so naïve, arrogant, or ignorant that you thought you could have your koek and eat it?*

*Nein, you could not naai night after night & expect to be a successor of the apostles*

*Just sommer because*

*So now you sit. No mitre. Just a bitter barred bastard*

*So, truth revealed itself to me*

*So painful at the time, perhaps I cared then, you little man.*

*It was for truth that I stood up to you, my heart raced, it was not what I wanted to do*

*I would have preferred to not rock the boat, it would have been easier, but that was not why I chose that path*

*It was for truth. (19 April 2018)*

Should I delete what I have written? It's not coherent and integrated. It reveals so much, maybe I should change those few words. It seems very immature. But, it is what's there. It's the truth. And I feel a little bit more alive having written it. There is a change. There is some movement.

It's another Sunday morning. I'm not going to Mass. This elicits an unspoken, but tangible tension in my family. A tension which my mother seems to feel most acutely.

"Are you not going to Mass again?"

"No."

"Why don't you go to Mass anymore?" I can hear she is hurt.

My mind considers how carefully I have considered my decision; how I knew this moment would come; and that I had hoped I would answer eruditely and coherently. So, I reply to my mother.

"Because I don't feel like spending my Sunday mornings listening to an asshole."

"Oh, are they all assholes?"

"Yes."

My dad is close by, biting his fingernails. It's an aching kairos moment. Part of me wishes I could just go to Mass for my parents. They never miss Mass and they take communion to the sick, but I know I can't go for them. I don't feel at peace. But, there is a spark. And, I feel more alive.

Having run Two Oceans over the Easter weekend, it is now six weeks to go until my second Comrades and I want to have one last big week of training. I have been running faster and faster and further and further as I get fitter and fitter. There's only one problem – getting fit is a complex process – it doesn't happen in a linear manner. The muscles and

cardiovascular system quite often soar ahead of the weaker tendons which strengthen when they are ready, if they are ready, in their own time.

On the first day of my big week I run 35 km on a Sunday, and I'm amazed how fit and fast I am. On my next run, I run fast again and realise my hip is really tight. So, I stretch it lots, thinking it is just a spasm caused by fatigue – I'll cut back after this big week. I then attempt one last very quick run and when I cool down, I realise I have made a big mistake. My hip is extremely painful and inflamed. A tendon connecting a strong muscle to my hip has been slowly tearing over the course of my months of training and my final big exertion has led to it giving up.

But, it's six weeks until Comrades! I rest for a few days and when I try to run slowly on a soft field, I realise that I can't. I have to walk. My hip is stuffed. For a couple of weeks I only swim.

Like a character in a Greek play I've been showing off my agency. But, fate has intruded; the laws of nature have erupted. Like Jacob, I have been wrestling with God. And like Jacob I'm limping away because my hip has been struck. And, I realise the name of my dissertation – "Wrestling Heart".





Figure 10: *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (Leloir, 1865).

It's comrades 2018, and this time we are running down to Durban. My goal is to finish an hour quicker than I did last year, under 11 hours. We again start at 5:30 in the dark, except this time it's really cold in the inland town of Pietermaritzburg. We run and drink, we eat and run, we go to the toilet and run, we get cramp, and we run.

After 60km my stomach starts to rumble, and I feel nauseous. I start slowing down and I start to worry that I might not make it under 11 hours. I plod along and just stick to water. I stumble further and I end up in the bushes alongside the road for a catharsis. I walk back to the road, look ahead and realise that the sub 11 bus, a large group of runners with a common goal, has just passed. I stumble along and I feel weak. The sub 11's disappear over the horizon. I feel cold and I begin to shiver. But, I wrestle on.

I start to run downhill. The jarring tears at my legs and my hip screams out. I carry on, all the while working out how I am going to finish in under 11 hours. I know that when I am really tired, I can push myself to run at seven minutes per kilometre. 25 km to go. 25 at 7

minutes is 2 hours 55 minutes. There's 3 hours and 5 minutes left to make it in 11 hours. I can still do it. But that's 3 hours of pain! I keep going. I have a 10-minute buffer, which become nine minutes and then eight. I keep going. With 15km to go it feels like my ITB's are about to snap. I keep going. And, then there is no buffer. I have 49 minutes to run 7km. I look up and see a long uphill. Where did that come from? I'm not sure if I can do it. I'm not sure if I want to do it. There are people lying next to the road again. But, there are also crowds next to the road cheering. I know that if I don't go hard now, I won't make it under 11.

In a sacramental ritual, I take off my running cap and give it to children next to the road. Because of my nausea I haven't eaten anything for 4 hours – I also give the children my many remaining energy gels, and I smile when I realise that they are chocolate flavoured.

I'm now a little bit lighter and I'm empowered by my resolute ritual. I start charging. I'm running on water and determination. I start to float. I know my tendons are tearing and my heart rate is probably at about 210, but I keep running. I'm amazed how much power I have. My 86<sup>th</sup> km is my fastest km of the day! I keep going. And, then on the horizon I see the sub 11-hour bus. With my eyes fixed firmly I charge for them and eventually catch up. I see one of my club members in the bus and join him.

“Howzit!”

“Jeepers, Bru, where did you come from?”

“Martizburg”

“Ha-ha”

I finish in 10 hours and 57 minutes. I can barely walk.

I'm on a high and amazed how I freely chose to finish in under 11 hours even though my body was revolting. It's amazing how free we are. But, I also consider the looming large fact that in 1986, 1987, and 1988 my father ran three Comrades all under 11 hours. And, that

he finishing, in 1988, was one of the earliest vivid memories I formed as a three-year-old. I wonder about all this freedom I am thinking about.

I'm back in East London and I've just begun writing my narrative. A friend has kindly offered me the use of her seaside flat overlooking the beach, so that I can concentrate more fully on my writing. I survey the flat. It has a beautiful view. One problem though – the desk faces a window. I quickly turn the desk around and laugh when I consider that some people are not only able to read facing a window, but are even able to read outside. Have you seen people reading on the beach? Masochists. With my back to the torturous glare I start writing.

I start thinking. Well, I always think, I just think differently. I'm thinking about the existence of God, the obligation to go to Mass, vocations, how we ought to live, responsibility for others and death – that ever-present telos. I'm through a third of my life already, if I am lucky. We will all soon be dead. Yes, fractions won't matter in heaven, but there might not be a heaven? I only have 50 or 60 years left of life. I better make the most of it. Nay, I have the responsibility to make the most of it. To live life to the full – it's my responsibility. I can do whatever I want. I can't blame anyone else, but myself, for not embracing life, not even God.

And, if I do meet God one day, I can imagine Her saying, "So Luke, what did you do with your life? I hope you didn't spend beautiful Sunday mornings sitting in Church as though you were already dead, already in heaven, just because you believed you ought to."

My image of God is fading, part of me wants to wrestle my childhood God back, and to hold on tight. But, my God is mysterious. I can't hold on to Him. I'm not even sure if She is there. But, my heart resounds, and for a reason that I can't explain I feel closer to God than I ever have. It's as though the Creator is primarily calling me to life, my Saviour is screaming out that I am free.

It's a beautiful, warm, summer's day at the beach. The water feels just right. The waves are perfect and at about six feet are tremendously tempting. A surfer is dazzling in the deep, and I'm drawn to do the same – but, I've never surfed before.

I borrow a friend's board and paddle out. It takes a while to get passed the breakers. For a while, I bob up and down, sitting on the board, discerning what I am going to do. I'm going to try to catch a wave.

I eye out an approaching swell. I start paddling my heart out. I start rising, it feels like I am in an elevator. I look down and realise I am six feet above the water in front of me – it's exciting, my heart is racing, I'm alive.

All of a sudden, I start dropping with the board. The sea is in control. I drop further. And, then I'm under the water being tossed and turned by the wondrous wave. I hold my breath, knowing that eventually I will surface. Finally, the wave is finished with me, and I surface through the white foam.

### **5.6 Epilogue: It's Always About the Human Stuff**

When Jacob wrestled with the Mysterious, he did so alone in the dark. When the sun rose, the wrestling ended, and he limped away. He limped away having gazed upon the Truth – having been struck by the Truth. He limped away weak and vulnerable – a changed person.

My desire to become a priest was, indeed, all about the human stuff. And, now as a developing psychologist I can say the same about this journey – it's all about the human stuff. It's about my heart that has wrestled – it's about my rising heart.



*Figure 11: Running along the Wild Coast of South Africa (2018).*

## Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of Chapter 5. The previous chapter included four main sections which correspond to the four main sections of this chapter. For the sake of efficiency, the presentation of each theme is immediately followed by a discussion of that theme, rather than postponing the discussion to an additional chapter. Therefore, there is a presentation of each theme, supported by a quote from the narrative, an examination of each theme in light of Rogerian thought and, finally, when it is beneficial, a discussion of each theme in conversation with the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2. Each section begins with a tabular representation of the themes and sub-themes to be discussed.

It is beneficial at the outset of this chapter to remind the reader that key in phenomenological thinking is the idea that individuals are able to make sense of their own experiences, to structure them, and to communicate their understanding (Spinelli, 2005). The analysis of my narrative here thus forms part of such an enterprise. The tone is, therefore, highly personal and may appear at odds with other genres of academic writing. However, it is in line with the highly personal and therapeutic nature of an autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011) wherein personal experiences are precisely structured.

It is also good at this stage to remember that the research question under investigation is, “What are the lived experiences of a person who has left a journey towards the Catholic priesthood in favour of embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist?” In Chapter 3, it was highlighted that from a phenomenological point of view there is an inextricable link between experience and experiencer, between *noema* and *noesis* (Spinelli, 2005). Including an analysis of my childhood at the beginning of the attempt to answer the research question, which primarily concerns experiences which come later in my life, has as its rationale a

thorough depiction of the person who experienced the phenomena under investigation – for person and experience are inseparable.

**Table 1: Themes and Subthemes Arising from “Childhood”**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>
6.2.1 Not good enough	<i>Fundamentally flawed</i>
	<i>My sin is always before me</i>
6.2.2 Boyish virtue – goodness	<i>A very good boy</i>
	<i>As holy as an angel</i>
6.2.3 The terrifying terra	<i>Petrified</i>
	<i>Captured</i>
6.2.4 <i>Tendando Superabis/By endeavour we will succeed</i>	<i>Fortified courage</i>
	<i>Diligence and progress</i>
6.2.5 Malevolent moves	<i>Forever in flux</i>
	<i>The lonely outsider</i>
6.2.6 I am lovable if...	<i>Success – affirming my existence</i>
	<i>Prestige is delightful</i>
6.2.7 The darkness	<i>Raw rejection</i>
	<i>Transparent tears</i>
6.2.8 The great escape	<i>Divide and dissociate</i>
	<i>Everything happens for a reason</i>
6.2.9 A faithful idealism	<i>Life can be perfect</i>
	<i>Inspired by heroes</i>
	<i>Firm faith</i>

### 6.2.1 Not good enough.

*Fundamentally flawed.* “I attend speech therapy...having something wrong with me is embarrassing.”

Seeing myself as being faulty in some way was repeated several times throughout the narrative. As a child these thoughts were closely connected to feelings of incompetence with regards to speech and the necessity to attend remediation for phonics in Grade 1. Later on, in the narrative this theme was repeated with me feeling inept in social interactions and me believing that I was psychologically defective in some way.

Rogerian theory places great emphasis on the “self-concept” and its development. Seeing myself as “fundamentally flawed” contributed significantly to my “self-worth” and its partial negative development. Rogers highlights that our “self-worth” impacts how we face our lives challenges and how we relate with people (Rogers, 1959). Later in the narrative it is shown how during times of stress, even as an adult, feeling fundamentally flawed resurfaces.

*My sin is always before me.* “Bless me Father, for I have sinned, this is my first confession, and these are my sins...”

Not feeling good enough, because of personal sin, reoccurs in my story. It was greatly fostered by belonging to a church with many rules. And, it was perpetuated by the necessity to go to confession to confess sins meticulously discovered through many examinations of conscience. The narrative highlights this especially with regards to sexual sin – it was shown how low I could feel on account of such an acute awareness of my own failings – rendering me not quite good enough.

Such a constant awareness of sin is a prime example of “conditions of worth” – the Rogerian concept that an individual may begin to believe that in certain situations they are valued and in others not, depending on their own course of action. Awareness of my sin also influenced my sense of “self-worth’ (Rogers, 1959).



The literature reviewed did, indeed, mention the association between religion and guilt (Behere et al., 2013; Peterman et al., 2014; Sheldon, 2006). And, McCourt's (1996) presentation of Catholic discourses around sexuality also highlighted that my experience was not unique, but rather a challenge that many a Catholic teenager faces.

### **6.2.2 Boyish virtue – goodness.**

*A very good boy.* “The primary goal at Mass, if accomplished, is to remain quiet and still for a very long time. If the task is achieved, I will be deemed good.”

Being obedient and not breaking rules was a theme that ran through the whole narrative. It is, thus, considered a core theme – for it was the same good boy who decided to become a good seminarian in the hope of becoming a good priest. And then when my path in life changed towards psychology, I still hoped to be good by caring for others.

The desire to be good relates to a condition of worth – I will be accepted if I am good. With this condition of worth being so operative my own façade of goodness became second nature and I perhaps lived the antithesis of Kierkegaard's dictum so often repeated by Rogers, “To be that self which one truly is” (Rogers, 1961, p.166). Rogers' prime concept of authenticity was foreign to me. It is, therefore, unsurprising that changing from something so entrenched was difficult.

*As holy as an angel.* “We kneel for five minutes and then ten and I can imagine how holy I am becoming.”

Being good in relation to God meant for me as a child, teenager and then even as a young man that I was holy. I truly believed that if I spent enough time praying and in church, I could become holy – I would be showered with grace, I would be in a good relationship with God and my very being would change.

Once again, the desire to be holy was inextricably linked to a condition of worth – I am acceptable if I am holy. It is interesting to note that this “introjected value” involved

seeking out what I in fact did not naturally find desirable, such as spending long hours in church. It did however allow me to feel better about myself – to give me a better sense of “self-worth” (Rogers, 1959). Such a focus on being holy was also indicative of living a life completely opposed to the Rogers’ emphasis on “existential living”, or living fully in each moment (Rogers, 1961).

### **6.2.3 The terrifying *terra*.**

*Petrified.* “Fear sets in. I have absolutely no idea where I am, and I have no idea where my mother is going – I am all alone. I start to cry.”

Discovering “fear” as a reoccurring theme throughout the narrative, beginning with prominence in the first section, was a surprise that was only gleaned during the analysis of the data. I wrote “fear” 12 times in the margins of the first section. Fear, thus, abounded in new situations, in the unknown, and in the concerns about what people would think of me.

Rogers notes that a fully functioning person trusts themselves and human nature (1961). My fear, so operative as a child, relates directly to not trusting myself, not believing that I possessed the agency to negotiate the fears that threatened. And, they were also related to not trusting others, I did not have a sense that those whom I encountered, especially those in authority, were intrinsically good.

*Captured.* “The teacher walks around the classroom looking for a victim...I’m in serious trouble. So serious that my teacher arranges a meeting with my mother and my mother finds out what I did.”

Closely connected to fear was the concern that I could be caught out – safety was precarious. I was, thus, concerned that I could be captured for doing something wrong – for not being good. Being caught out also related to the fear that my “fundamental flaws” could be discovered, thereby leading to harsh judgment.

We can thus see that my poor sense of self-worth was coupled with the conditions of worth I had grown accustomed to, contributing greatly to my fear of others. This further made it increasingly more difficult to portray any resemblance of authenticity, as I lost myself in the facades I believed would win me praise.

#### **6.2.4 *Tentando superabis/By endeavour we will succeed.***

***Fortified courage.*** “I try my best at Franky Frog and eventually I’m swimming with my brother again. I swim harder and harder with the bigger kinds. And, I’m eventually chosen for the provincial team.”

“Fortified courage” relates here to the constant encounter of difficulties that were overcome with hard work and determination – with resilience. I learnt at an early age that problems can be overcome if you just work hard enough.

Core in Roger’s thought is the drive to self-actualisation (1961). Perhaps in my striving to become more, to become a good swimmer, we see how intense this drive to activate my potentialities was. And, it is this drive that resounds throughout my childhood into adulthood, a drive which would cause my wrestling to be intense.

***Diligence and progress.*** “I am amazed. I learn the answers to hundreds of questions from the Catechism.”

Closely connected to “fortified courage” was an inherent conscientiousness – a conscientiousness that came easily as a child. Despite attending remediation and not achieving well in Grade 1, I still obtained a certificate for “diligence and progress” – at a time before everyone achieved an award. This trait may be overlooked. But, it will be important to note that it was a conscientious person who decided to embark on a journey towards the priesthood, a conscientious person who felt a need to rebel and protest, and a conscientious person who would later find it difficult to be studious.

Perhaps, what is of interest is how my drive to self-actualise was intrinsically connected to the conditions of worth I aspired to before me. I really wanted to work hard to achieve well academically, but perhaps only so that I could be accepted (Rogers, 1961).

### **6.2.5 Malevolent moves.**

*Forever in flux.* “Although I am back at the same school I started at, everything seems new and scary.”

Constantly moving is another overarching theme. As a child, my father’s promotions at work necessitated transfers and as an adult the same pattern would be repeated as I moved for studies, vocation, and work. Such moves required readjustments which eventually took their toll and meant that for a large portion of my life I was settling in – I was unsettled.

Moving hampered my ability to learn to trust others, to trust human nature – so important for Rogers. It also made it more difficult to experience the acceptance and empathy which Rogers noted as preconditions for growth. Incongruence was perpetuated as I learned to mask the hidden tears with a stoic countenance (Rogers, 1961).

*The lonely outsider.* “When rugby season begins, I realise I am the only English boy in the team – English boys play soccer and Afrikaans boys play rugby...it doesn’t bother me too much that I’m an outsider in the team.”

The narrative highlighted in the first section how constantly moving led to me being constantly in flux, often the outsider or the new person. Courage, noted above, allowed me to function in such situations – but it was not with a vast array of friendships – it was through other means, such as through hard work. This can be juxtaposed with the constant of church, family and sport. Like the reminder that it was a conscientious person who decided to become a priest it is also good to remember that it was someone who did not quite fit in who decided to follow a religious vocation.

Yalom (1980) notes isolation as one of the givens of existence, he also notes that anxiety occurs when one becomes aware of such a given. From an existential point of view, my response to isolation is key in understanding the genesis of my perceived priestly vocation. In becoming a person, Buber (1937) noted the great importance of togetherness, with his emphasis on the “I-Thou” relationship. The absence of “I-Thou” relationships necessitated the development of an alternate mode of existence.

#### **6.2.6 I am lovable if... .**

*Success – affirming my existence.* “I am the captain of the under-eleven A soccer team and the top goal scorer...I’m a provincial swimmer. I’m the best at maths in my class.”

A constant theme is achievement. I achieved academically and sportingly. It is important to note that this was not just incidental. The narrative highlighted that success was important – it was through success that I valued myself – it was simply who I was and how I viewed myself. Achieving can thus be said to have been a prime motivation and a defence against vulnerability and feelings of inferiority.

Being successful was thus, from an early age, a definite condition of worth (Rogers, 1959) – “I am worthy of existence if I am successful” would have characterised my thought. Even today it’s difficult to imagine life divorced from a striving to be successful. And, it is quite easy to imagine that a drive to success is in some way a form of compensation, especially considering that “being fundamentally flawed” initiated the thematic analysis of this chapter. This drive towards wholeness, in the form of compensation, is indeed acknowledged by Rogers (1980) as part of the process of self-actualisation.

*Prestige is delightful.* “It’s exhilarating to hear my name over the loud speakers, followed by the roar of the crowd. I win the huge *Victor Ludorum* trophy and my house wins. It’s amazing being a school hero.”

Achievement brought prestige and esteem from others, perhaps even status. Just like my discovery during the analysis of the data that “fear” was a constant theme, so was the discovery how important being esteemed was for me. Why is this important? It’s important because on the very first page of my narrative, in the prologue, I highlight that many choose a vocation to the priesthood because of the status that it affords. Realising that status was so important for me as a child helped me to see the role that this motivation played in my desire to become a priest.

Striving so intensely to be esteemed is in direct opposition to the “I-Thou” way of relating postulated by Buber (1937), and esteemed by Rogers (1961). This is because others are recognised as a means towards an end – only as a means to affirmation. It is good to remember how Buber (1937) emphasised the necessity of “I-Thou” relationships for our very being, we depend on them in order to become people, to fully actualise. As long as I primarily sought out success, status, and esteem, something in my very being was lacking.

### **6.2.7 The darkness.**

*Raw rejection.* “There is nothing as raw as complete rejection. I’m sobbing now and sadness has engulfed me.”

Although not a common theme, “raw rejection” was chosen as it was described with vivid intensity in the course of the narrative. The prime rejection in the narrative is the rejection of me by the girl I idealised. It sets the scene for my faith journey. However, although it is core, the illumination of other idiosyncratic motivations has shown how the path towards the seminary was not simply as a result of a teenage rejection.

From a Rogerian point of view, rejection can be understood in a number of ways: as a result of a teenage rejection my self-worth diminished (Rogers, 1959). But, teenage rejection also initiated an existential confusion: in the relationship I was very “good”. In fact, I did everything I believed a good boyfriend would do... and I was still rejected. This left me

perplexed, and it would only be later that I would realise that I can't convince/force people to love me by being good.

***Transparent tears.*** “Floating through school as a depressed boy doesn't draw much attention.”

The narrative highlights several losses which I was not acutely aware of as a child. For example, I only thought of the various moves as involving a loss, as an adult. Unaware of loss, I was also not aware of my feelings until I became depressed as a teenage boy in Grade 11. I was aware of my sadness – I'm not sure if anyone else was. This theme flows into the rest of the narrative.

Rogers (1961) highlights empathy as a precondition for growth and this was not forthcoming during times of difficulty as a child. Above it was suggested that I primarily sought out success and esteem, thus the initiative to relate to others in a way which would have fostered the empathy I needed, was not forthcoming from me. Here I think of the existential theme of freedom espoused by Sartre (1943) or the characteristic of a fully functioning person to move towards an internal locus of control (Rogers, 1961). As a child, I did not take the initiative to seek out what I needed.

### **6.2.8 The great escape.**

***Divide and dissociate.*** “Everything happens in slow motion and it feels as if I am floating. I feel thankful that I feel nothing and don't need to fight back tears like I had to when I was young. I'm eleven and quite easily feel nothing. I eat my tasteless sandwiches. The chocolate makes me feel nauseous.”

Upon embarking on the writing of my narrative I was aware that one or two scenes would involve emotional dissociation. I was unaware how dominant this theme would be throughout the whole narrative. For it is the same boy that was able to “quite easily feel nothing” who endured several years in the seminary, even though he was unhappy. This

childhood theme is, therefore, also important to consider in the attempt to make sense of my faith journey.

Rogers (1959) would refer to the dissociation noted above as a form of incongruence, as psychological maladjustment, where an experience is not appropriated to awareness. This is because for Rogers, an awareness and openness to experience is key in functioning fully.

*Everything happens for a reason.* “That afternoon I tell my family what transpired, they all laugh and say that everything happens for a reason. I go and sleep.”

A great deal of the narrative has to do with feelings – with my heart. However, as the above theme suggests, in my family of origin, intense feelings were not acknowledged. Rather, there was always a change to a positive in an attempt to quickly make sense of, or do away with heartache.

Yalom (1980) would note this as an anxious attempt to deny one particular given of existence – meaninglessness. And, Camus (1942) would highlight the absurdity of life which an assertion such as “everything happens for a reason”, attempts to mask, thereby leading to the foregoing of a full immersion into the reality and vicissitudes of life. In other words, not living life fully.

### **6.2.9 The ideal romantic.**

*Life can be perfect.* “There is nothing better in the world than walking along the beach holding hands with the most beautiful girl in the world.”

The most prominent theme in the first chapter was a constant reference to ideals. Quite often the ideals are akin to dreams inviting inspiration towards them. What is important to note though, is how pervasive my idealist worldview was – at times hopeful, but at other times divorced from reality. Once again, in highlighting my earlier years, and my proclivity towards idealism, I am contextualising the experience which is the subject of this research – the change from a religious vocation towards a career as a clinical psychologist.



The idealism characteristic of this theme is in direct contrast to the phenomenological/existential philosophy underpinnings of this dissertation. Idealism, epitomised by the philosophy of Hegel, was derided by the likes of Kierkegaard precisely because it postulated that all absolute answers could be ascertained by using reason (Stumpf, 1993). This is pertinent here because such a view would see experience as superfluous, the experience that Rogers (1961) postulated was so important to be open to, in order for one to mature.

*Inspired by heroes.* Fr Gummersbach teaches those who are preparing for the most august sacrament himself. His office is like a mystery on earth, filled with books and perhaps most importantly, there is a picture on his desk of him and his seminary soccer team. He is a German missionary priest. He serves the white, coloured and black churches in Knysna, he even built one of the churches in the location himself.

I'm certain that when he dies, he will go straight to heaven.

My idealism, and desire for saintliness, was related to the inspiring example of others. As a child I was most inspired by sport stars, I especially wanted to be like them. And poignantly, I was especially captivated by the example of several priests whom I looked up to. These aspirations encouraged me to be more and to strive for ideals personified.

Rogers (1959) paid great attention to the way in which an individual strives to become their ideal self. My ideal self was formed in close collaboration with the ideal persons I admired. But, just like the above theme, such a striving can blind an individual from the messy reality which is offered through experience.

*Firm faith.* "God is the eternal, infinite, living Being."

Throughout the first section explicit belief in the existence of God is portrayed. And, pertaining to this research in particular, a firm faith in the precepts of the Catholic Church.

Faith in God and His Church permeate the scenes that set the context for the following of a vocation.

Faith is difficult to elaborate upon. It almost seems that possessing faith was the primary condition of worth (Rogers, 1959), the absence of which being too awful to even contemplate. But, it's more than that – it stands in direct opposition to the death and meaninglessness proposed as givens by the existentialists (Yalom, 1980).

As a child it was developmentally appropriate to possess such a faith – a “mythic-literal faith”, spoken of by Fowler (1981), which simply accepts the faith of the parents and understands the religious stories shared mostly literally. It is more in the next section that my faith led to so much inappropriate and unnecessary angst. This is the section that is next discussed.

**Table 2: Themes and Subthemes Arising from “Following a Vocation”**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>
6.3.1 Perfect peace	<i>Finding meaning – to love like Jesus</i>
	<i>I can be esteemed – I can be loved</i>
6.3.2 Ignited idealism	<i>Zeal for Your house devours me</i>
	<i>Perfect conservatism</i>
6.3.3 Crusading against conflict	<i>Personal angst</i>
	<i>A fierce opponent</i>
6.3.4 Spiritual strivings	<i>Aspiring ascetic</i>
	<i>Ascending to heaven</i>
6.3.5 Devastating disillusionment	<i>Continuous disappointment</i>
	<i>Absurd duplicity</i>
6.3.6 Waking up to experience	<i>Personal desolation</i>
	<i>Personal perturbations</i>
6.3.7 Opening the door	<i>Uncertainty</i>
	<i>Critical thought and questioning</i>
	<i>Gradual transformation</i>
6.3.8 Liberating change	<i>Freedom and trust</i>
	<i>A renewed faith</i>

**6.3.1 Perfect peace.**

*Finding meaning – to love like Jesus.* “I gladly want to share the love of God with others, especially those in most need of love.”

Throughout the second section there are often references to particular thoughts, dictums, and biblical passages which are drawn on in order to make sense of a particular

experience – to give it meaning. At times the seeking out of meaning occurred during times of turmoil – and when a sense of meaning was found, or perhaps even conjured, peace ensued.

In deciding to “love like Jesus” there was a great confluence of factors at play. There was the desire to be good, to adhere to a condition of worth. There was also the aspiration towards an ideal self (Rogers, 1959). But, there was also the great drive away from confusion, away from meaninglessness, towards meaning which gave structure and security. The drive towards meaning forms the basis of this section. It is therefore primary, just as Frankl (1946/1988) suggests.

In Chapter 2 it was indeed highlighted that religion fosters a life of meaning and purpose and that this contributes to positive mental health (Galek et al., 2015). However, it was also noted by Oladipo and Onuoha (2014) that seminarians quite often lack a sense of purpose and, therefore, seek it out in the seminary. My narrative shows how I lacked a sense of meaning and sought it out in the church, this brought initial relief.

*I can be esteemed – I can be loved.* “And, everybody is proud that I am about to start my theology studies and soon there will be a brand-new young priest.”

Unlike the vast majority of themes gleaned from the narrative, the formulation of this one required a certain amount of reading into the text rather than just extracting explicit material. This did not occur as a result of the application of particular theory, but rather following the analysis of the first section wherein it was discovered that a prime theme was indeed the need to be esteemed. The theme, “I can be esteemed – I can be loved” therefore represents an unconscious motivation that was discovered during the course of this research, rather than being an explicit motivation foremost in my mind at the time of making the decision to follow a religious vocation, a decision which brought “perfect peace” at the time.

The desire to be esteemed may be viewed as a search to fulfil a fundamental need – a need foundational for self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968). It, therefore, highlights what was lacking in my life – the prerequisites of acceptance and empathy (Rogers, 1961). In the show of following a “great” path there was an incongruent masking of vulnerability.

Belonging and social support were noted as positives of religious involvement (Behere et al., 2013; Mievsky, 2017; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Krause & Wulff, 2005). It was also noted that a priest is especially appreciated in Catholicism (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1563). Seeking belonging and social support as a future priest, rather than confronting “isolation” (Yalom, 1980), was an attractive option.

### **6.3.2 Ignited idealism.**

*Zeal for Your house devours me.* “Moving back home all my focus is on my journey towards the priesthood and holiness – I really want to become a good instrument for God, to share his love. I start to attend Mass during the week and then ensure that I attend every day.”

When I share a few thoughts on my faith journey I often begin with, “I was very idealistic at the beginning.” An analysis of the first section showed that this idealism was already there and that it merely blossomed when I set my sights on the priesthood. However, many people are said to be idealistic and it is often noted that most young people are in a certain sense idealistic. The narrative highlighted how intense this idealism was – I was filled with zeal beyond what would be considered ordinary idealism.

At this stage of the narrative there is an intense move towards my ideal self, but it is an ideal self that is so entrenched with a self formed from an amalgamation of conditions of worth – note how I begin to attend Mass every day. I did not consider whether or not I found such activities fulfilling, if they were vivifying, I simply did them. And, unknowingly, embraced an inauthentic life, far from “To be that self which one truly is” (Rogers, 1961, p.166).

Fowler (1981) characterised the faith of adolescents as being “synthetic-conventional”. It would seem that my young adult faith was still adolescent. This is because Fowler (1981) characterises the faith of adolescents as involving the adoption of a very definite system of belief in opposition to the complexities of life and, then, embracing the belief system with great enthusiasm.

***Perfect conservatism.*** “I eagerly embrace the Catholic belief that ‘the fullness of the truth subsists in the Catholic Church’. Hence, I believe that everything we need to know about God and our path towards salvation is possessed perfectly by the Catholic Church.”

My ignited idealism was spurred on by Catholic discourses on how perfect the Catholic Church is – for it is said to have been the church founded by Jesus. Having something perfect directly contrasts with the imperfect. And, if you are an idealist you most certainly want to protect the perfect – you want to conserve it against the imperfect. I therefore aligned closely with conservative thinking patterns which set me up for difficulty when the challenge of reality announced itself.

Conservatism postulates that the world is ordered – that there most definitely is meaning. Holding on tight to conservatism, with a readymade meaning-making structure, may be viewed from an existential point of view as a great struggle to avoid the possibility of absurdity and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). This is characteristic of the “synthetic-conventional” faith (Fowler, 1981) mentioned above.

### **6.3.3 Crusading against conflict**

***Personal angst.*** “*This is a gift my Lord. But it is difficult my Lord, almost as though one is continually climbing without rest*” (21 May 2006).

During the course of writing this autoethnography, I read through my old prayer journals. I was surprised to see how much personal conflict was present in my writings – conflict I was vaguely aware of at the time, but which I spiritualised and normalised. The

experience of embarking on the journey towards the priesthood was, therefore, filled with conflict.

For Rogers (1951), inner tension results when the concept of self is incongruent with the experiences of the person. This is akin to not being integrated and occurs when experiences are not “symbolised and organised into a system which is internally consistent with the structure of the self” (Rogers, 1951, pp. 513-514). The journey towards the priesthood was therefore filled with tension and incongruence – to prolong the journey, awareness of certain experiences needed to be avoided.

Festinger (1957) developed the term “cognitive dissonance” to explain the tension that results when a person attempts to hold opposing view simultaneously, or when their views are contradicted by experience, but they remain impervious to change. Bae (2016) highlighted that religious belief is often accompanied by cognitive dissonance. And, Juma et al. (2017) illuminate the cognitive dissonance that is at play in the lives of seminarians. My experience agrees with these writers.

*A fierce opponent.* In my studies of Catholicism, I am amazed when I come across Catholic Apologetics, the defence of the faith. I discover that every single Catholic doctrine can be defended logically and coherently with Scripture. Being backed up by the Bible is very important in South Africa, a Protestant country. I am, therefore, very willing to engage with Protestant friends in debates.

In the prologue of the narrative there is the alluding to the fact that although South Africa is a predominantly Christian country, with about 80 percent of the population identifying as Christian, Catholics comprise only about seven percent of the population (Juma et al., 2017). This is again touched on in the first main section and then again in the second. This fact may seem insignificant to some, but it is of core significance in my experience. Being loathed as a group brings upon defensiveness. Defensiveness often takes on the form

of offense. And, I was very willing to attack, to strive, to fight for my side in the hope that my faith would be vindicated, that I would be vindicated.

From a Rogerian (1959) point of view, the rigidity and absoluteness which characterised this theme was a form of incongruence and maladjustment referred to as “intensionality”. This form of functioning is in direct contrast to the “fully functioning person”. This is because there almost is no openness to experience, so little room for change and the constriction of life.

McCourt (1996), in *Angela's Ashes* showed how there was a great divide between the Protestants and Catholics in his home country of Ireland. He even demonstrated how he was convinced as a child that Protestants were all doomed to hell. Something of these beliefs was also demonstrated in my narrative.

#### **6.3.4 Spiritual strivings.**

*Aspiring ascetic.* “Filled with zeal, I gladly embrace the routine of seminary life and of course add more prayer and study time too. I wake up at 5:30 and make a morning offering, consecrating my day to God.”

As a conscientious person I was accustomed to meeting difficulties with courage and fortitude. For example, as a child I had gladly embraced the routine of early morning swimming. Thus, the embracing of a strict spiritual regime came somewhat easily. I was, thus, able to deem myself as being on the path towards holiness, because of the will power that I employed. The attainment of a neatly and carefully structured routine allowed me to believe that everything was under control. It was, thus, easy to obey seminary rules – rules which pave the way to the priesthood.

My attempt to self-actualise was directed towards an ideal self closely tied up with the conditions of worth I inauthentically attempted to placate. And in so doing, I embraced a life



in opposition to the “rich full life” championed by Rogers (1961) – asceticism is precisely about extinguishing the passions, foregoing desires and the killing of life.

In her memoir, Armstrong (1981) demonstrated very well how she construed her vocation as the suppression of desire. And, that this view was encouraged by her superiors. This theme, an ascetical suppression of desire, is therefore quite common in Catholicism.

*Ascending to heaven.* The precariousness of attempting to befriend the feeling fiend is unsettling and I quickly look for something safer:

*You Lord are my home. Lord, I am following you. I am only happy to be where You are. You sustain me and give me life. I am never alone. All I need to do is practice the presence of God. You Lord are my companion, my family. You are all I have. I am dependent on You. My Lord and my all.* (19 February 2008)

The spiritual strivings which were ascetically embraced enabled me to escape the troubling reality I was beginning to encounter – both externally and internally. It was only by rereading my prayer journals, during this research process, that I was able to vividly grasp the reoccurring pattern of using pious prayers to escape from my vexing concerns – a pattern which began in childhood and was merely transformed into pious prayers.

A fully-functioning person lives existentially, in the moment, aware of all that the moment offers (Rogers, 1961). By trying to transcend experiences through prayer, I was living a life in opposition to the existential life valued by Rogers.

### **6.3.5 Devastating disillusionment.**

*Continuous disappointment.* “Weekly, new scandals come to light: Fr Peter has just fathered a child; Fr John stole R100 000 from his church; Francis was seen at the movies with a teenage boy. Every week there is more and more shit, and everything feels heavier and heavier. I just try harder.”

Above it was noted that as a child, and, especially, as young seminarian I was particularly idealistic – I simply expected to find those ideals in the church, but I did not. Disappointments added up, one after the other and slowly eroded away my idealism. In the prologue I stated that “it’s all about the human stuff”, perhaps the refrain encapsulating new thoughts following disappointments as an idealist would be, “priests and seminarians are just like everyone else.” But, the journey towards such a realisation is not instant, it is arduous. Such disappointments are key in the story of my narrative.

The ideal self I had been striving towards, the ideal self of my self-concept, was intimately connected to the ideal I believed was offered by the Catholic Church, especially through the fine example of her priests. It was noted in the Chapter 3 that incongruence was used by Rogers in a variety of ways, one of those ways was to describe there being a vast difference between the ideal self and reality (Rogers, 1959). And, this was precisely what was at play during times of acute disillusionment, my self-concept was under threat, my self-concept so intensely tied up with my Church. And, for Rogers (1959) this is precisely what produces tension and anxiety, it is precisely what is so difficult.

The literature reviewed emphasised the harmful effects of negative religious coping, where there is a sense of abandonment by God or a generalised disappointment in religion (Warren, et al., 2015). Lun and Bond (2013) also emphasised that psychological well-being is negatively affected when the religious lose faith in their religious leaders.

My negative religious coping fostered a life in opposition to Rogers’ (1961) fully-functioning person. In Cromwell’s (2006) memoir he explains how disillusioned he was with the clericalism he encountered in his seminary. Disappointment is therefore a theme shared by others when they set out on a journey towards the priesthood.

***Absurd duplicity.*** “*Voetsek yourself mfazi (woman), at least when we are all hungry, we have the decency to go to Sunnyside (a suburb frequented by prostitutes) for sex.*”

The disillusionment mentioned above could be characterised as the encountering of reality – people are frail and make mistakes. However, it was not only normal human mistakes that I encountered on my faith journey, but an absurd duplicity. People were quite willing to not only make mistakes, but to actively embrace lives in contradiction to that which they professed. And, this absurd duplicity was not the result of a few bad apples – it was pervasive, it was systemic.

The disillusionment experienced was connected to the challenging of my belief that life has intrinsic meaning. I still battle to make sense of my past experiences – there seems to be no way to coherently structure them. I, therefore, agree with the existentialist Camus (1942/2013) that much in life is completely absurd and will escape any attempt to be made sense of.

One of the main goals of an autoethnography is to give a glimpse into hidden cultural experiences (Jones et al., 2013) in order to foster critical thinking. My portrayal of the absurd duplicity within Catholicism attempts to contribute towards this enterprise.

#### **6.3.6 Waking up to experience.**

*Personal desolation.* “I don’t find visiting the sick at all fulfilling, even though it is what I believe I value very strongly. I find myself feeling dead inside. It’s not life giving.”

The constant construction, destruction, and restructuring of meaning enabled me to make sense of my experiences from a spiritual point of view, or perhaps intellectually, but there was something I could not avoid – my own feelings. Near the beginning of my seminary journey I became aware of my unhappiness. And then, when I worked at a church away from the seminary, I realised that I was unhappy too. A change towards being attentive to feelings was fundamental in me waking up to experience. And, the feeling that demanded attention was personal desolation.

A movement towards the focus on feelings and personal experience was a move towards a phenomenological way of viewing my life and the world (Spinelli, 2005). No longer did I rely primarily on rationalistic deduction glistened from an ideal world in the sky, I was willing to begin living an existential life with a greater openness to experience (Rogers, 1962).

In Pietkiewicz's (2016) research on various precursors that led to men leaving the Catholic priesthood, he noted that the priests he examined experienced higher levels of psychological distress, depression, and burn-out than the general population. As a nun, Armstrong (1981) noted that she was very unhappy in the convent. Personal desolation may be viewed as a common theme leading to a change in vocation.

***Personal perturbations.*** Two years previously he had enquired whether I was happy. His question had brought on tears – I had not really considered happiness a priority. His words had been germinating and having experienced seminary life for four years now, I have phenomena to reflect upon as opposed to the simple lure of ideals.

Beginning to listen to my own feelings and carefully reflecting upon experiences was also accompanied by sage advice from several mature priests. Although, some spiritual directors simply advised that I try harder, the interventions of others perturbed and assisted greatly in change. It was partly by listening to the wisdom offered by others that I was able to make a change. I was, therefore, presented with an array of advice, a variety of discourses to choose from within a particular religious tradition, and I was able to choose my own way.

Empathy was offered to me and was instrumental in the fostering of change (Rogers, 1961). I was, therefore, aided in the journey towards freedom, I was not battling alone. Like Stein suggested, it was through “intersubjective experiences” (Stein, 1916/1989, p. 63) that I was able to come into contact with the reality of my life. It was through a friendship with a homosexual seminarian that I was able to begin to think congruently about homosexuality

within the church. And, it was through an encounter with a person that I could begin to accept the complexities of the decision to opt for an abortion. It was, therefore, through personal encounters that I was perturbed.

### **6.3.7 Opening the door.**

*Uncertainty.* “Contraception – if it’s okay then the church is wrong – what would that do to my faith? (10 April 2008)

Prior to entering the seminary, I concluded that I was 100% sure that I had a vocation to the priesthood. I was also certain that the Catholic Church taught the truth perfectly. This certainty was slowly corroded until I could admit that I was uncertain. With uncertainty came the freedom to reflect more critically; with uncertainty came the freedom to change. The uncertainty was fostered by me being confronted by sound opposing arguments and the stark reality of a world which operated differently from how the church proclaimed it did.

Rogers (1959) referred to intensionality as rigidity, a severe form of incongruence. In beginning to question I was moving towards an openness to my experiences, I was becoming more and more aware of my own incongruence.

Perhaps it took so long to instigate change precisely because an awareness of incongruence does not necessarily immediately foster the other aspects of being a “fully functioning person” – I was not able to trust myself yet (Rogers. 1961). Further change was still necessary.

Rank, who inspired Rogers so much, emphasised that mental health is intimately connected to creativity (Kramer, 1995). Rigidity stifles creativity. But, it was through my uncertainty that I could begin to think with greater freedom, with greater creativity.

*Critical thought and questioning.* Lord, celibacy does not seem like it is for all. Lord, I am beginning to believe that it would be better for priests to be allowed to marry,

*primarily to have better priests - healthier, happier, mature natural leaders. Secondly, there may be more vocations. This is what I believe. From seeing things in reality – something does not seem right, perhaps celibacy should be for a much fewer number of priests.* (12 September 2008)

The movement towards a change was also fostered by the development of greater critical thought and questioning. New ways of thinking allowed me to question much of which occurred in the church, my view of God, the motivations of others, and then even my own motivations. One cannot underscore enough the impact of realising that the church is wrong about some things – it most certainly altered the trajectory of my faith journey. Questioning brought about the ability to compare and contrast, the ability to choose between alternatives – it brought about freedom.

Perhaps the movement towards critical thinking is akin to a movement towards living authentically as proposed by Heidegger, not just adhering to the thoughts of the majority, or the most readily available discourses – not being lost in the “they” even when the “they” is the religious group one belongs to (Heidegger, 1927/1996).

The questioning mentioned here was also highlighted as being core in the religious journey of Armstrong (1981). And, it also represents a movement towards another goal of autoethnography – that of permeating culture with critical thinking (Ellis et al., 2011). It is also representative of a move towards the individuated-reflective faith spoken of by Fowler (1981), where young adults begin to critically evaluate their faith.

***Gradual transformation.*** “I know that fleeing decisions can be mistaken, and I believe that I ought to linger with my decision for a while in order to test it out and to receive some sort of confirmation from God.”

A crucial ingredient in the process of change was time: it took time to appropriate lessons learnt, it took time to integrate them, and it took time to change. Some important

insights were gleaned on retreats and when working away from the seminary – away from great intensity – during “times out”.

This element of time is related to what Rogers calls “the move toward becoming a process” (Rogers, 1961). Process involves changing over time. And, before a change is possible, a great deal needs to be learnt. Growing awareness is a product of gradually becoming open to experiences (Rogers, 1962). Gradually becoming aware is in line with the phenomenological project espoused by Husserl (Stump, 1993). Although the idealist would assert that knowledge may be deduced rationally and quickly, for the phenomenologist this is not so. Truth is gleaned through the careful and continuous reflection upon experience as it slowly reveals itself (Stumpf, 1993). Intrinsic to the theme of “gradual transformation” is the time that it takes to grow in awareness.

### **6.3.8 Liberating change.**

*Freedom and trust.* “There are no rules, you can come back whenever you like, you are an adult... how will you discern if you just follow rules? You can only discover what’s there if you have freedom.”

A final decision to make a change was aided by relationships which valued freedom. It was also fostered personally as I imaged viable alternatives: teaching and psychology. I felt trusted by others and I began to trust myself more. The trust brought on the freedom to experiment and, ultimately, the freedom to make a change.

The *sine qua non* for growth, according to Rogers, is acceptance in the form of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961). The wrestling in my own head and heart swirled and circled and only began to abate in relationship with those who did not judge me – in relationship with those who simply accepted me as a person in process – even before I began to accept myself. These were relationships with “fully functioning” persons who

trusted others – who trusted me. I particularly think of my pastoral supervisor and spiritual director in 2011.

*A transformed faith. At the same time, I have come to believe that God speaks to us though our own desires and that what we want may very well be in conformity with God's will. The idea that God wants me to be happy is also exciting. (12 September 2010)*

Personal change and viewing the church differently was accompanied by a fundamental change in the way that I viewed God and what He expected of me – my image of God had fundamentally changed. This is important to note – that my change from a religious vocation occurred in the context of intense prayer – I believed at the time that a change was in conformity with God's will. Only when I was sure that God was happy with my change was I happy to make the change.

My image of God therefore changed: my view of God was initially intrinsically connected to my many conditions of worth; I then changed to viewing God as one who is accepting and who truly loves unconditionally (Rogers, 1961). The move was towards a God who trusts human nature and who wants people to live a rich full life (Rogers, 1961).

There was, therefore, a movement towards “positive religious coping”, which is characterised by a collaborative and real relationship and sense of connection with God, as well trust in God as a benevolent force in one's life (Warren et al., 2015; Behere, et al., 2013; Krause et al., 2017; Koenig, 2009) This allowed me to make the changes which instigated the events of the next section.



**Table 3: Themes and Subthemes Arising from “Following my Heart”**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
6.4.1 Adjusting to the world	<i>Loneliness and other practical problems</i>
	<i>Starting again and lagging behind</i>
	<i>Changing identity</i>
6.4.2 Returning fear	<i>I could be kicked out!</i>
	<i>An insecure romantic</i>
6.4.3 Holding on	<i>A fragile faith?</i>
	<i>Psychologists also care!</i>
6.4.4 Burnt up	<i>Carrying cynicism</i>
	<i>Carrying hurt and loss</i>
	<i>Striving on nothing</i>
6.4.5 Awareness of fragility	<i>Sense in sensitivity</i>
	<i>We are all broken</i>
	<i>Discovering dissociation</i>
	<i>Is goodness noble?</i>
	<i>There is no healing</i>
6.4.6 Finding control and life	<i>Initiating control</i>
	<i>My soul is not dead</i>

**6.4.1 Adjusting to the world.**

*Loneliness and other practical problems.* I think how ironic it is that I left my studies towards the priesthood partly because I had feared the loneliness that celibacy would bring on. And now following that decision, I am living by myself for the first time in my life.

A movement away from the security of the church was a drastic change that some may underestimate: I lived by myself, worked a full day for the first time, did grocery shopping for the first time, cooked, started internet banking to pay for bills, went onto my own medical aid and did tax returns for the first time – things that were all taken care of by others as a seminarian. There are always huge emotional changes that need to be negotiated with such a huge change – but it is also the new practical tasks of adulthood that accompany living in the “world” which can be stressful.

Yalom (1980) highlights that living an existential life will bring with it the need to confront isolation, a given of existence. And, this is precisely what happened upon leaving the security of the church, I was literally alone for the first time in my life.

Speed and Fowler (2017) were shown in Chapter 2 to have demonstrated the dependency that religion may foster. Crawford et al. (1998) also spoke of the former religious feeling anxious about taking up life in the “world”. And Pietkiewicz (2016), in his research on priests who left the priesthood, noted their lack of confidence in functioning as lay people, with the usual or common tasks of adulthood, outside the church. I had most certainly been dependant on the church and functioning outside the church was a great challenge.

***Starting again and lagging behind.*** “But, my peers are buying houses and climbing corporate ladders. For some bizarre reason I get it into my mind that I ought to not be wasting time – I should be more productive.”

One of the great difficulties that needs to be negotiated when moving away from a religious vocation is what to make of the lost time. Part of me is resentful that I prayed away my twenties, perhaps a large part. And, I’m not sure what to make of those feelings. It was a huge adjustment to be only a few months away from the priesthood, a few months away from a prestigious position in society and then to leave it in favour of starting right at the bottom in another field.

Here we are speaking quite directly about my self-concept and the way in which I valued myself – closely connected to conditions of worth linked to success (Rogers, 1959). And, what to make of lost time? Ambivalent feelings swirl. Nietzsche (1882/2001) speaks of *amor fati*, the ability to love the complexities of our past precisely because they are instrumental in whom we become. I feel like I am heading there, but more shall be said of this in the analysis of the fourth section of the narrative

***Changing identity.***

Although, I have now begun a ‘secular career’ I still try and fathom a vocation, I still try and work out what God wants of me:

*Am I being God in the world? Am I being Jesus to myself? Am I treating myself with compassion? (22 February 2015)*

One of the great struggles involved in discontinuing a journey towards the Catholic priesthood is the sudden identity change that such a decision brings on – I moved away from being secure in the belief that I will soon imitate Jesus in a unique way, towards a great deal of uncertainty, which in the very writing of the dissertation is still being worked out as more changes occur.

Rogers (1959) emphasises again and again that a change in one’s self concept is very difficult. This is precisely why it is so much easier to deny new experiences to awareness. But, this leads to anxiety and tension, and if it persists, pathology.

In Chapter 2, Hankle’s (2010) various stages of discernment on the way to becoming a priest were introduced: the acquisition of the idea of sense of self as a priest, testing alternative senses of self, transitioning into a sense of self as priest, affirmation of sense of self as priest, and persistent disposition of discernment. One may, therefore, infer that a change away from the journey towards the priesthood is not an instantaneous metamorphosis – it too involves a patient process.

### 6.4.2 Returning Fear.

*I could be kicked out!* “Suddenly, I’m confronted with the reality that my position is precarious. I could be kicked out!”

A main theme in the first section was my own fear. In the second section that fear receded as I “ascended” from it. However, in changing from the secure path towards the priesthood in the third section, fear again dominates. Moving away from a religious vocation, therefore also brings one into contact with what was escaped from – in my case a great deal of fear, especially the fear that I could be rejected.

This theme revolves around lack of acceptance or unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961). It demonstrates that when acceptance is lacking, growth is hampered. But, it also demonstrates something very pertinent to the underlying philosophy of this dissertation – it demonstrates that the phenomena I experienced were markedly permeated by previous experiences. Any experience is perceived by a person, a whole person with a past, present and a future – a person in process. *Noema and noesis* (Spinelli, 2005) are always present together. By simply investigating a phenomenon, much is lacking, for it is always a person who experiences.

*An insecure romantic.* Dating as an anxious person is hard work. Will she respond to my messages? Should I message again? I meet a beautiful Catholic lady. I’m captivated. We go on a date. We message and then nothing happens. I’m seriously disappointed!

Although, I experienced the celibate life as a great sacrifice, it absolved me from the tumultuous vicissitudes of dating. Moving away from a celibate vocation has been exciting, but it has also been very tiring. Something escaped from so severely, is not suddenly embraced in a care-free manner – it has involved me carefully allowing myself to be

vulnerable and has forced me to face my deepest fears – rejection, hurt, loss, the possibility that I could be unlovable, and erotic desire which is not easy to manage.

There is, thus, a paradox at play in this theme. Rogers (1961) highlights empathy and acceptance as prerequisites for personal growth – Maslow (1968) would speak of them as needs. Seeking a relationship, therefore, involves the search for these needs. But, when empathy and acceptance lack considerably, the seeking out of them is hindered. For insecurity makes seeking out a relationship so much more difficult. It is a wrestle.

#### **6.4.3 Holding on.**

*A fragile faith?* “I finish the retreat and I realise that my relationship with God is not as neat and tidy as I had hoped it would be. Surely, that’s part of a retreat! To feel close to God and happy that one’s faith is secure. I’m not sure what I leave with.”

Although discontinuing priesthood studies was a drastic change, there was still the attempt to hold on to what was familiar, what was safe. I, therefore, held on to my Catholic faith and convictions, hoping to make sense of them in a new way, I did not want to let go completely. In a precarious world I still had the desire to have an overarching meaning making system. But, as I interrogated my faith more deeply, I became more and more aware of how unsteady it was – this left me feeling insecure during this time of transition.

The analysis of the first section spoke of faith as perhaps the most important condition of worth (Rogers, 1959). The willingness to begin to take note of experiences which challenged this, which even challenged my self-concept, continued to allow for the fostering of change. The realisation of the fragility of faith involves encountering the meaninglessness Yalom (1980) speaks of as a given of existence. Openness to meaninglessness allows one to begin to entertain the idea of nothingness (Sartre, 1943/2003) – all our ideals which bind us are straw. And, when we realise this, we are free with great potential.

*Psychologists also care!* “To live, to experience life to the full. To become my best self. To love with intensity. To be loved dearly. To offer the world my humanity.” (15 December 2015)

Trying to hold on to the ideals and values which I had lived for many years, I still had the desire to care and to do that which I deemed good – to love. Although I had given up dreams of the priesthood, I embraced psychology in the belief that a parallel career would be just as meaningful and beneficial to humanity. In deciding to embrace such a career, much had changed, but much had stayed the same.

My self-concept allowed me to embrace a career similar to the priesthood (Rogers, 1959). And, it was a career motivated by care and love, a supreme good, that is what I still felt called to do, that is what I believed was good, that is what I believed made me good – a supreme condition of worth (Rogers, 1959) still so operative after several years in search of reality.

Crawford et al. (1998) also note how the former religious they investigated moved towards caring professions precisely because there seemed to be a congruence between their former religious lives and the caring professions. They too were able to embrace careers in line with their deep values.

#### **6.4.4 Burnt up.**

*Carrying cynicism.* “What the fuck – we are discussing Freud’s psychosexual stages. A few of the others also keep jostling to answer. This is going to be a very long two years!”

In reading the narrative one can easily detect a change in tone that enters the story post my seminary studies – it is a pervasive cynicism that influences my day-to-day interactions and occurrences. In writing the narrative I was aware of the tone, I did not find it appealing, but I ascertained that it was faithful to my post seminary situation in life. I believe that this cynicism was closely related to the loss of ideals – I did not expect much from the

world anymore. My experience of training as a clinical psychologist was, therefore, heavily influenced by the way in which I entered the process, and this made it a much more difficult journey.

There is, thus, the repetition of the intrinsic link between Husserl's *noema* and *noesis* (Spinelli, 2005). There is also the possibility that the trust in human nature, espoused by Rogers (1961) as a characteristic of a fully-functioning person, was still lacking. The lack of this trust infused my view of the world, others and my experiences. It is also likely that this way of viewing the world was imbued with the tension which resulted from me being unable to reconcile my ideal world with my experiences – my personified incongruence.

*Carrying hurt and loss. You called me to misery, you made me feel pain and loneliness, realise that Your love is only an illusion, that you do not care...I do not feel like coming closer to you because that sucks, I have tried it already – it is death*  
(17 December 2015).

As one engaging with the world in a cynical way, I was also carrying fresh wounds – I had been hurt deeply and lost much on a journey where I had given everything. In attempting to carry on with life I was not always aware of how acutely I had been wounded by the church – and it is also possible that those who interacted with me just assumed that that is how I was – not a person in process.

The intensity of the hurt and loss portrayed above shows that something intrinsic to my self-concept (Rogers, 1959) was challenged and then eventually lost. The dream of becoming a holy priest, after the example of a loving Jesus had captivated me – had encapsulated my self-concept. And, now it was gone. Moreover, the empathy necessary to grow (Rogers, 1961) through such an experience was lacking, and the awareness of the hurt and loss was not admitted fully to awareness (Rogers, 1959) resulting in continued incongruence – resulting in continued tension.

Crawford et al. (1998) compare leaving a religious vocation to grieving and unemployment. Armstrong (1981), too, compares her experience of leaving the convent with a bad divorce or a major bereavement, resulting in about six year of depression for her. These writings resonate with my experience.

*Striving on nothing.* “I used to be passionate about soccer and water polo. I used to be in love. I used to be passionate about Jesus and the Catholic Church. But now, I don’t know if I am passionate about anything.”

It’s difficult to engage with the world fully and to function well when life has lost meaning and wrestling for coherence intellectually bears no fruit – the mind does not motivate. Perhaps, the passions of the soul are deeper than the mind. But, when the soul is sapped, then what? Then there is nothing. If you leave everything, there is nothing!

The ideal self one strives towards during the process of self-actualisation is an intrinsic part of the self-concept (Rogers, 1959). However, it has just been shown that during the process of leaving the seminary much of my self-concept was lost. What does one then strive towards? Nothing? Can there be a striving out? Perhaps, only a journey to the inside of one’s being is possible, a journey akin to this autoethnography.

Although it was noted in Chapter 2 that religion often fosters greater mental health, it has also been discovered that highly religious people, who believe their lives lack purpose and meaning, are prone to ill-health (Galek, et al., 2015). My experience was most certainly of one who was highly religious. And, when my religion began to fail in giving my life meaning, incongruent tension revealed itself.

#### **6.4.5 Awareness of fragility.**

*Sense in sensitivity.* “In the midst of working in an environment with so many different forms of stimulation, I become more and more aware how sensitive I am to the vast array of invasions my sensory system constantly battles against.”



As a seminarian and even as a child I had constantly been striving for holiness, battling against sin, ever aware of my faults. Then as a psychology student, I became more and more aware of my personality traits and linked them closely with pathology. However, during my internship much of my own idiosyncrasies began to make more sense viewed through the lens of sensitivity. A sensitivity that just was, something that was not in need of alteration. Such a realisation led me to look at myself rather than strive for lofty ideals divorced from the reality of me, from the reality of my own sensory system.

So many ideas are contained in this theme: there is the importance of Rogerian acceptance; there is the relinquishing of certain conditions of worth; there is understanding and empathy for myself (Rogers, 1961). But, what seems most core is the cessation of striving for an ideal-self separated from the reality of who I am – which only brings incongruence and tension (Rogers, 1959). It involves a more careful appreciation for my own unique needs (Maslow, 1968), gleaned most especially from paying greater attention to my own experience (Rogers, 1962).

***We are all broken.*** Our frailty as psychologists in training becomes more and more evident as we work with vulnerable people. Our stress levels rise. Some of us get sick. One of my colleagues is hospitalised. Our motivation to become psychologists is inexplicably tied up with who we are.

My earlier realisation that the motivation of men to become priests was intimately connected to their very human motivations was then followed by the realisation that psychologists too all have very personal, unconscious and conscious, reasons for wanting to be psychologists. Often these motivations are connected to a vulnerability. However, this fundamental truth is not always explicitly acknowledged – the profound vulnerability of psychologists. Rather, what was paradoxically encountered during training, and even when

working, was the expectation that psychologists would have everything under control, a mythical control which would have extinguished any motivation to embark on such a career.

For Rogers (1961), genuineness or authenticity is key in becoming a fully-functioning person, it is also crucial in the establishment of the therapeutic relationship and forms the basis for effective therapy. This genuineness is also vital in the establishment of an “I-Thou” relationship which is ontologically generative (Buber, 1937/2000).

It is interesting to recall that Buber had contested with Rogers whether or not a psychotherapeutic relationship could be characterised as an “I-Thou” relationship precisely because of the powerful position of the therapist (Ross, 2009). However, it is surely possible that a movement towards genuineness, wherein there is the deep awareness of one’s own frailties, is a movement towards the fostering of an “I-Thou” psychotherapeutic relationship.

*Discovering dissociation.* I set out trying to do the impossible, but it can’t be done. I miss my deadlines. I’m floating. I don’t look at emails, lest my supervisor has sent me another email. Slowly but surely, amidst all my other work, I hand in one or two reports a week.

At the beginning of writing my narrative I imagined that one or two scenes would involve a certain amount of emotional dissociation: I did not realise that this would become a reoccurring main theme. During my internship, I slowly began to become aware of this pattern which had accompanied me since childhood, a pattern which allowed me to survive, but also one that divorced me from reality and hampered better functioning. Along with the realisation that I previously employed such an extreme method of survival was also the realisation that it was because I was so desperately attempting to escape another extreme – fear and pain.

Emotional dissociation is an extreme form of incongruence, whereby, an experience is not symbolised or appropriated into awareness (Rogers, 1959). There was, thus, a pattern on

my part of not being fully open to experiences. This blindness had previously allowed me to pursue a path foreign to what would lead to a rich full life. An awareness of this pattern allowed great freedom.

*Is goodness noble?* “And my desire to care, to be compassionate, to care for the poorest of the poor, those in need of love, no longer seems as noble as it once did.”

An interrogation of implicit motivations has led me over the past few years to question whether or not my desire to be “good” is of any value. Thus, following the dissolution of much of my faith, I have also been confronted with the precariousness of many of my values. This is important because it highlights me being aware of my own finiteness – I no longer consider myself virtuous just because I am able to be good. The virtues which I am beginning to espouse I seem to lack miserably – I am fragile.

It was the existentialist Nietzsche (Stumpf, 1993) who first led me to think more deeply about my own intrinsic motivations. And, towards the end of my journey it was him again who caused me to interrogate my resolutely held onto value of goodness: for goodness was so valued because of entrenched conditions of worth (Rogers, 1959). Sartre (1943/2003) speaks of “bad faith” as not only the following of prescribed actions, but the actual inauthentic adoption of values simply because they are espoused by society. An interrogation of taken for granted values is, therefore, a movement towards authenticity.

*There is no healing.* In a split second I have stood up, opened the door, fled and I am at the nurses’ station saying my goodbyes. From the safety of the nurse’s station I say goodbye to her as she stands in front of me like an orphan...there is no healing.

Awareness of my own fragility has been highlighted for me in the therapeutic relationships I worked on as a trainee and intern psychologist. Before I had dreamed of how profoundly patients would change on account of my intervention – be it a skill or simply empathic presence. This had been a large part of the rationale for embracing the career of a

psychologist. But, powerless before pain, I who once wished to save souls, have realised my own fragility, a fragility which has forced me to face my own need for healing, desired for my patients.

Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" (1968) postulates that a genuine self-actualisation can only occur when one's psychological needs are met, such as the need for intimacy. My great desire to actualise, as one caring for others, was therefore built on a precarious foundation, for the story of my narrative is also the story of me wrestling with unmet needs, especially my own need for empathy (Rogers, 1961).

With a self-concept limited by so many conditions of worth, such as the imperative to be strong, vulnerability being anathema, there was little room to fully appropriate my own need for healing. The inauthentic need to use others as a means, in stark contrast to an "I-thou" relationship (Buber, 1937/2000), served only to maintain a self-concept, whereby, I could continue to view myself as a healer – a healer esteemed.

In writing my narrative, I primarily envisaged that phenomenological philosophy would shine forth, but issues pertaining directly to depth psychology emerged vividly. In a similar way, I have attempted to analyse the data from a Rogerian point of view, but other ideas have sprung forth, such as those of Carl Jung (1875-1961). In the spirit of openness, I therefore allow a diversion because of its utility.

Jung emphasised the danger of an analyst identifying with the healer archetype. This is because they may project their own need for healing onto a patient and not be conscious of the projection. This would have a vast array of implications for countertransference and transference. However, this situation can be remedied if the analyst becomes aware of their own need for healing and identifies instead with the wounded healer archetype (Jung, 1951/1966)

The phrase “there is no healing” therefore represents my own frustration resulting from an overidentification with the healer archetype – eventually, I came to a dead end and change was necessary. A movement towards the wounded healer archetype is akin to a movement towards authenticity – so imperative for an “I-Thou” relationship.

Crawford et al. (1998) discovered that those who had left religious life were often very much aware of their own need for healing – this awareness helped foster empathy for others in their caring professions. A growing awareness of my own need for healing is very much part of the process of this autoethnography.

#### **6.4.6 Finding control and life.**

*Initiating control.* I’ve been looking forward to the marathon for months and I can’t do anything, stranded at OR Tambo (Johannesburg) airport eleven hours before the race starts in East London 1000km away. But, then I realise something. I can do something. I’m a person. I’m a person with agency.

A core theme throughout the narrative was control – whether it was being out of control, being controlled, or slowly initiating greater control. A key theme in the third section of the narrative is therefore a move towards greater control. At times, this involved taking a risk.

This movement towards becoming a better functioning person relates directly to Rogers’ idea that a more mature person will have “an increasing trust in his organism” and precisely operate more and more often from an internal locus of control – taking the initiative to influence the course of their lives (Rogers, 1961). It also relates very closely to the existential theme of embracing the freedom that one possesses (Sartre, 1943/2003).

*My soul is not dead.* “The national anthem plays and then the soundtrack to ‘Chariots of Fire’, my very being stirs and I’m off to Pietermaritzburg.”

Some writers distinguish quite carefully between the spirit and the soul. I was very good at the spiritual – praying and transcending reality. But for a long time, I was not very good at being soulful – being vivaciously passionate. Awareness of my own fragility and moving away from such a prime focus on the spiritual allowed me to begin to embrace a more soulful life (Moore, 1992).

There is, therefore, a move towards a “greater richness in life” (Rogers, 1961). And, the quote above is indicative of a peak experience, described by Maslow (1959) as being more abundant in the lives of those who are moving towards self-actualisation, a movement which continues in the final section of my narrative.

**Table 4: Themes and Subthemes Arising from “Writing my Autoethnography”**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
6.5.1 A powerful past	<i>Powerless struggle</i>
	<i>Fate fighting</i>
6.5.2 <i>Duc in altum/Caste into the deep</i>	<i>Writing freely to free</i>
	<i>Anger</i>
	<i>Repulsion</i>
	<i>Cheated</i>
	<i>Hurt</i>
	<i>Conflict</i>
	<i>Disintegrated</i>
6.5.3 Delayed differentiation	<i>From the church</i>
	<i>From my family</i>
6.5.4 A developing psychologist reoriented	<i>Embracing life</i>
	<i>Freedom</i>
	<i>A new faith</i>

**6.5.1 A powerful past.**

*Powerless struggle.* Restlessly wrestling, I try again to edit and complete my proposal. At home I can't concentrate – I just stare out the window. I work for a few minutes, I get agitated and find myself doing something else. I claw myself back and grind out another paragraph.

A large part of the narrative involved moments of depression and anxiety which for me greatly influenced my level of functioning. Several times, I alluded to feeling that the

simplest tasks were colossal – akin to carrying a great boulder up a mountain like Sisyphus. Such feelings of inertia are especially disheartening for a highly conscientious person.

It was noted in Chapter 3 that Rogers proposes that anxiety is a state in which the incongruence between the concept of self and one's experience is slowly approaching awareness (Rogers, 1959). It would seem that the incongruence experienced and demonstrated above is indicative of the tension spoken of by Rogers and elaborated upon as paradoxical by May (1983), because the anxiety involved me accepting a greater degree of non-being in order to preserve some degree of being – some part of my self-concept (Rogers, 1959).

***Fate fighting.*** “All of a sudden I start dropping with the board. The sea is in control. I drop further. And, then I'm under the water being tossed and turned by the wondrous wave.”

A main theme in the narrative and, indeed, the whole autoethnography is the embracing of greater freedom, however there is a very definite caution about this freedom – it is not absolute. My repeated attempts to conjure up a previously strong willpower, without facing what delved in the depths of my soul, was futile. For although we are persons with agency, the world operates according to rules and limits which need to be adhered to. And, these rules and limits will constantly summon and demand attention if they are not placated.

My great desire to actualise with freedom therefore depends on many prerequisites according to the humanistic view – actualisation cannot occur without empathy, acceptance, and genuineness (Rogers, 1961). Moreover, there is the imperative that experiences which challenge the self-concept are appropriated prior to self-actualisation (Rogers, 1959). If these prerequisites do not occur, one will flounder with little flourishing.

### **6.5.2 *Duc in altum/Caste into the deep***

***Writing freely to free.*** It's a problem deep within my soul. I don't want to linger around any longer. I have to go deep – *duc in Altum*. The words of my spiritual



director in 2008 resound – ‘allow everything.’ I have to see what is there. I have to write freely without judgment. And, I just have to let it flow out. So, I turn to my prayer journal and write quickly.

This autoethnography involves several levels of writing: there are extracts from my journals, there is the writing of the narrative, and there has been the more formal process of fleshing out the chapters of this project whereby actual data analysis has taken place. These differing kinds of writing have all added to me integrating my faith experience. Writing freely allowed me to illuminate for myself much of which was not readily available to my awareness.

Such a process most certainly requires an awareness that life is about process, it also requires a greater trust in human nature, my own organism (Rogers, 1961). Trust brings about acceptance – the acceptance that what will be revealed will be what is – and will not necessarily be bad (Rogers, 1980). These ideas are closely connected to an autoethnography being therapeutic for the writer (Ellis et al., 2011).

**Anger.** “We hate you Jesus. We hate your church. We hate your bishops. And we hate your priests.”

Perhaps the most dominant feeling expressed in my journal writings and conveyed via my narrative was anger – I wrote down anger 17 times in the margins of the fourth section of my narrative. This is significant largely because its explicit portrayal was almost absent during the initial three sections – anger was always kept in check – “for surely a ‘good’ person does not get angry – it is a deadly sin after all. An expression of anger surely involves a lack of control and I have always been in control.” But, anger is expressed significantly, perhaps because control subsides, and its significance surely lies not in its sudden conjuring and expression, but in it having always been there.

The expression of anger entails a movement away from a condition of worth which proposed that anger ought not to be expressed. It is, therefore, also a movement towards genuineness and authenticity, away from facades of what is deemed good (Rogers, 1961).

**Repulsion.** *“Your room smelt, repugnant as I walked by. Half shebeen, half home for the infirm, the evil spirits, stained your musty stagnant den, your hovel.”*

Along with anger came great feelings of repulsion. Once again, these feelings were present for a long time, but were never fully comprehended. Feelings of repulsion were particularly directed towards the great amount of duplicity that I encountered, but also towards that which stifled freedom and life. For example, in the third section of my narrative I juxtaposed the absurd situation in the seminary, where men who had promised to live a celibate life were unashamedly doing the opposite, with the example of a particularly austere priest who fought against the flesh with a cilice. Previously, I had found him heroic, but upon writing the narrative I realised that I was equally repulsed by him who so carefully constricted life. Perhaps what is so significant about repulsion is how it represents such a change, a splitting, from extreme idealistic attraction to utter repulsion.

Being prepared to share this repulsion has a great deal to do with the attempt to be genuine (Rogers, 1961). But, it also has a great deal to do with the sharing of vulnerability – one of the key components of an autoethnography (Jones et al., 2013). This is because it is in my writings where I express repulsion that I feel most vulnerable – writings which could be characterised by readers as portraying a whole host of defence mechanisms, such as splitting and projection. Being aware of this fact, and still begin willing to share it, precisely because it is more real, is a conscious attempt to embrace vulnerability.

**Cheated.** *“Praying by myself like a criminal in quarantine.” (17 April 2018)*

Although, when initially analysing the above quote I wrote “wronged – not just” in the margins of my narrative, I did not originally include the theme of being cheated in my initial

list of themes. This is because I had not ascertained that it was primary. But a serendipitous occurrence, or perhaps even a Jungian synchronic occurrence, illuminated this theme as being very core while I was busy writing this chapter.

I came across a “Ted Talk” by Jeff Kluger (2011), wherein the close connection between feelings of disgust and believing that one has been treated unfairly was explained – both correspond with increased activity in the anterior insular cortex of the brain (Tabibnia & Lieberman, 2007). It had puzzled me as to why my journal writings were so imbued with disgust and repulsion, and it now seemed that I possibly found an answer which resonated – deep down I believe that I was cheated and betrayed, and my disgust was alerting me to this fact.

In Chapter 3, it was noted that autoethnographies also entail the striving for social justice (Ellis et al., 2011), they involve “breaking silence/reclaiming voice and writing to right” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 32). Discovering that I feel as though I was cheated, is an invitation to embrace a key component of the methodology of autoethnography – a call to positive change.

*Hurt. “I am thinking of the divorce – no one brought me flowers no one mourned with me. I was just left empty with broken dreams and a broken heart – transparent tears” (17 April 2018).*

Hurt is a major part of my leaving behind a religious vocation. And, the hurt that is felt is often not acknowledged or understood by outsiders. One feels hurt because dreams have been dashed, ideals have dissipated, and an unexplainable loss pervades. By simply saying to others, “I realised it was not for me”, so much hurt is not shared. How can one in polite conversation say something akin to, “I lost everything, I lost my worldview, I lost God, I lost my dreams and I lost my passion.”

The idea of losing a key component of my self-concept (Rogers, 1959) is, therefore, repeated. But, perhaps, the most striking point of this theme is the lack of empathy that this veiled cultural experience elicits.

**Conflict.** *“What is Good? God alone is good – there is not God – can you not see stupid.”*

Conflict pervades throughout the narrative. Previously, I mentioned that I was surprised to see how much conflict permeated my prayer journals whilst I was in the seminary. But, conflict is particularly evident at times of change, at times of transition, as different paths jostle for attention. Perhaps, conflict is so prevalent at these times precisely because new paths necessitate that the old is left behind, that the old is lost – the old which was once prized and cherished, and which offered security and predictability.

Previously, it was noted that the relinquishing of the dream of the priesthood involved a drastic change to my self-concept (Rogers, 1959). The above quote demonstrates the continuation of this process – almost as though even the little that was left was taken. The theme is also an example of the very “processing” that occurs when experiences are symbolised into awareness. It also demonstrates very practically the questioning, doubt, and reconfiguration (Fisher, 2017) which may occur during a possible move towards irreligion.

**Disintegrated.** What now? I don’t feel comfortable with ambiguity. I am not carefully balancing the good and bad within the church as I had previously imagined a mature adult would be able to do. There is just repulsion. It’s not integrated.

It is paradoxical that one of the main goals of this autoethnography was to move towards integrating my faith and I found that the opposite resulted. However, I believe that living with such uncertainty is far more honest than holding on tightly to something misconstrued as order. Wrestling meaningful coherence together is tiring. Accepting disintegration is a relief.

Here, it is worth repeating a quote from Chapter 3, “If a significant new experience demonstrates the discrepancy so clearly that it must be consciously perceived, then the individual will be threatened, and his concept of self disorganised by this contradictory and unassimilable experience” (Rogers, 1959, p. 203). Awareness does not bring about instantaneous integration – it is, however, a step towards genuineness and congruence.

Kline et al. (2008) mentioned that in their study on responses to the Child Sexual Abuse Scandal, Catholics were hurt, their past pains were reawakened, some attempted to separate their relationship with God from the church and many felt concerned about family members. My response in writing this autoethnography most certainly involved hurt, but also a great deal of disintegration, which only followed when my many defence mechanisms (Devine, 2003) began to recede.

Me, with a Catholic worldview, feeling disintegrated as a result of the child sexual abuse scandal, makes sense. Guido (2008) emphasised in Chapter 2 the sacramental worldview of Catholicism, wherein priests are viewed as acting in the “person of Christ” (Catholic Church, 1994, para. 1548). The scandal calls into question this worldview because the very people who were believed to have represented Jesus are no longer seen to do that. And, in the spirit of autoethnography, with the task of illuminating hidden aspects of a particular culture, one more clarification relating to the Catholic worldview will be of benefit.

In Protestant theology there is generally a distinction between the Christian Church as a spiritual reality, and its earthly manifestations. For Protestants the spiritual church is primary and its earthly manifestations very secondary – this enables Protestant institutions to be quite fluid. This is not so in Catholicism.

In Catholicism, the spiritual and institutional are one – they cannot be separated. This is because it is believed within Catholicism that Jesus founded an earthly institution, with the apostles as the first bishops. Although it was noted above (Kline et al., 2008) that in response

to the scandal many Catholics separated their relationship with God from the institutional church – this is problematic from a Catholic worldview. So, when I have doubts about the institutional church, everything is doubted. And, once again, the meaninglessness spoken of by Yalom (1980) needs to be confronted and my self-concept needs to be altered as new information is appropriated (Rogers, 1959).

### **6.5.3 Delayed differentiation.**

*From the church.* ‘I am trying to live a life attentive to daily experiences, attentive to moments of consolation and moments of desolation. But, for several Sundays, I have just felt depressed at Mass.’ My group listens attentively to the thoughts that have been circling in my mind. It feels different to voice them. And, even though part of me is not sure, I know what I need to do – I stop going to Mass.

As an all-encompassing meaning making system, the Catholic Church provided me with security. As a child, in the midst of several uprootings, the church was always there. And, as an adult it even gave material security. To imagine a world apart from the church, or perhaps on the periphery, had previously been difficult. To step out away from the known was therefore a moment of great significance, scary at first, but vivifying and freeing eventually.

The further drastic change to my self-concept was, therefore, precipitated by a more careful attention to experience. What is important is not simply that experience was consulted in the decision, but that it was given a primary place of significance. Helping me to continue to move towards Rogers’ dictum adopted from Kierkegaard, “To be that self which one truly is” (Rogers, 1961, p.166).

In Chapter 2, it was highlighted that psychologists ought to develop competencies to deal with religious matters in a psychotherapeutic context (Aten & Hernandez, 2004; Begum, 2012; Vieten et al., 2016). It was also emphasised that psychologists should attempt to

integrate their own religions (Frame, 2001). Although, I cannot say that I have fully integrated my faith, the process of this autoethnography has fostered greater awareness and helped me move towards differentiation, a theme which was also highlighted as key in the autoethnography of Van der Merwe (2013) on her way to becoming a psychologist.

*From my family.* It's an aching kairos moment. Part of me wishes I could just go to Mass for my parents. They never miss Mass and they take communion to the sick, but I know I can't go for them. I don't feel at peace. But, there is a spark. And, I feel more alive.

The narrative began with the refrain, "It's all about the human stuff", now towards the end, a turn towards my own family offers a brief intimation of what perhaps all my musings about the Catholic Church and God are really all about – my family. Growing up in a devout Catholic family makes it difficult to even separate the two: family and church. It is, therefore, not surprising that a movement towards individuation entails differentiation from both, and in so doing there is a movement towards greater complexity (Rogers, 1961), a movement akin to the movement towards authenticity Wichman (2012) spoke about in his autoethnography.

#### **6.5.4 A developing psychologist reoriented.**

*Embracing life.* At the end of January 2018, I take part in my first triathlon. It's a half Ironman and involves swimming 1.9 km, cycling 90km and running 21 km. I find the cycling tough, having borrowed a cousin's bicycle for the day, but it's lots of fun. The decision to take part had much in common with my first decision to enter an ultra-marathon – to embrace life.

A movement towards appreciating life represents a change in the fundamental orientation of my life – perhaps even a 180-degree turn. As a child and seminarian, I valued love and goodness which was especially embraced through sacrifice – soul-sapping in the pursuit of a higher ideal. The change represents a movement towards passion and the soul.

A movement towards life, espoused by Rogers (1961), and the existentialists (Sartre, 1943/2003; Camus, 1942/2013), therefore, represents the appropriation of a value gleaned through experience, especially experience of life lacking. There is, however, the irony that although a movement towards life is in process and has begun, there is also the inescapable fact that I have now set it before myself as an ideal – like a Hegelian idea propelling me forward. There is thus the further appreciation of complexity – I have a new phenomenological way of viewing the world which I am attempting to synthesise with Idealism.

**Freedom.** “I can do whatever I want. I can’t blame anyone else, but myself, for not embracing life, not even God.’

The embracing of greater freedom, especially in relation to my faith, resounded towards the end of my narrative. This movement towards greater freedom in my faith was also accompanied by feeling freer in other aspects of my life, such as the ability to take risks. The realisation of freedom does not necessarily bring about an all-encompassing integration, but rather illuminates the endless potential that life offers.

Freedom was shown as one of Yalom’s (1980) givens of existence – for the existentialists, freedom is primary. This freedom allows trust of self to develop and leads to the embrace of greater creativity (Rogers, 1961). For Rank, freedom was foundational for mental health – he highlighted that the neurotic was someone who denied his own will (Kramer, 1995). An embrace of freedom is, therefore, a move towards positive mental health. “That for which we have angst is our potentiality-for-being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p.178). A movement towards freedom, living in the world, and the embrace of creativity is therefore also a movement away from “angst”.

**A new faith.** My image of God is fading, part of me wants to wrestle my childhood God back and to hold on tight. But, my God is mysterious. I can’t hold on to Him. I’m



not even sure if She is there. But, my heart resounds, and for a reason that I can't explain I feel closer to God than I ever have. It's as though the Creator is primarily calling me to life, my Saviour is screaming out that I am free.

It may sound paradoxical, but at no stage during the course of my intense faith journey did I believe that I was moving away from God, it was always towards, towards beckoning Truth. I most certainly needed to leave behind falsity, and this occurred with great difficulty. As a developing psychologist my new faith is much lighter, I no longer feel the desperate need to defend, I'm happy to listen, and I hope this will put me in a better position to be fully present to other persons in a therapeutic relationship.

I believe that the mysterious nature of my faith is connected to a fuller embrace of life as a process – my understanding is constantly changing, open to new experiences, and information. And, perhaps, most importantly, it is a faith that takes greater cognisance of my experiences – it may not be fully integrated, but it is certainly more congruent and genuine (Rogers, 1961).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In Chapter 5, the beginnings of an answer to the research question, “What are the lived experiences of a person who has left a journey towards the Catholic priesthood in favour of embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist?” was presented in the form of a narrative. In this chapter, a continued answer to the research question was presented in the form of a presentation of the themes and sub-themes that were produced following the analysis of the narrative. This analysis produced the following main themes:

Preceding the experiences that relate directly to the research question, was a childhood where I felt I was “Not good enough”, this was compensated for with “Boyish virtue – goodness”. The world was seen to be dangerous, it was “The terrifying *terra*”, but I strove on with fortitude believing “*Tendendo superabis*/By endeavour we will succeed”. My

childhood was marked by many “Malevolent moves” which played a role in me believing that “I am loveable” when I succeed, and I am esteemed. Stages of my childhood were influenced by “The darkness” which I was able to make “The great escape” from, especially through “A faithful idealism”.

In following a vocation, I initially found “Perfect peace” as my need for meaning was placated. I was spurred on with an “Ignited idealism”, and found that I was “Crusading against conflict”, both externally and internally. My great “Spiritual strivings” set me up for “Devastating disillusionment” when I encountered the reality of seminary and priestly life. Preparation for a change ensued when I found myself “Waking up to experience” and an actual change occurred when I was happy with “Opening the door” through critical thinking and questioning. I experienced leaving my journey towards the Catholic priesthood as a “Liberating change”.

Following the change, I found it challenging “Adjusting to the world” and my “Returning fear” highlighted that in seeking out the priesthood I had sought to escape from many fears. It was a great struggle “Holding on” to my faith especially when I set out training as a psychologist feeling as if I was “Burnt up” and still influenced so much by previous experiences. My training as a psychologist allowed an “Awareness of fragility”, especially my own, and this led to me “Finding control and life”.

Embarking on the process of writing an autoethnography allowed me to face “A powerful past”, especially when I was able to “*Duc in altum*/Cast into the deep” of my own soul. This helped foster a “Delayed differentiation” which has led to me being “A developing psychologist reoriented.”

The analysis of the narrative and the production of themes has helped me to continue to reflect on my own experience through a personal structuring of it – it has, thus, been a phenomenological endeavour (Spinelli, 2005). Moreover, this procedure has been therapeutic

and has therefore played a vital role in the process of this autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011), a process which is assessed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This final chapter comments on the process of writing this autoethnography, how it answered the research question, and how the goals of the study were achieved. The contributions of this research, its limitations, and the recommendations the research process has generated are also covered.

### **7.2 The Process of this Autoethnography**

The process of this autoethnography has been a journey. I began the process with the motivation to integrate my Catholic faith with my chosen career as a psychologist – a working title at the beginning of the process was “Towards the congruence of Catholicism and psychology”. At that stage, part of me still wanted to vindicate my faith – to maintain an important part of my self-concept (Rogers, 1959). But, the journey fostered change.

In the spirit of Rogerian thought, the process fostered an awareness of a great deal that was hidden – especially my feelings of anger, hurt, and repulsion that I feel towards Catholicism. This awareness was thoroughly unexpected.

The process of wrestling with my faith, wrestling with God, paralleled the process of me wrestling with myself (Scupoli, 2010). This autoethnography is therefore also very much about the process of embracing my vulnerability (Jones et al., 2013). The narrative highlighted that one who wrestles with God, walks away limping. A greater appreciation of my own fragility has also helped me to interrogate my previously taken for granted desire to be a psychologist.

The process has, therefore, been intense. Existentialists often speak about the process of becoming, but in his work, Luvaas (2017) cautions that the process of an autoethnography is also very much about “unbecoming.” This is because a thorough, critical interrogation invites one to not only embrace the new, but to leave behind the old – a drastic change to the

self-concept (Rogers, 1959). This autoethnography, has therefore, been efficacious. However, at the outset it sought to answer a particular research question and to address particular research goals. These are, therefore, now revisited in order to examine the success of this research.

### **7.3 Contributions of this Research**

**7.3.1 The research question.** The primary way in which the research question, “What are the lived experiences of a person who has left a journey towards the Catholic priesthood in favour of embarking on a career as a clinical psychologist?” was answered, was through the narrative presented in Chapter 5. This answer was augmented with the presentation of themes in Chapter 6 which further elucidated the experience in question.

#### **7.3.2 The goals of the research.**

***Religion and mental health.*** The aim here was to present an example of the interplay between religion and mental health through my own unique story. In seeking out this goal, there was an extensive presentation of my mood, functioning, and thinking patterns as I wrestled with my faith. The use of Rogerian theory, and the themes produced, showed how my faith changed as I began the process of moving slowly towards becoming a “fully functioning person” (Rogers, 1961).

***Religion in clinical practice.*** It was noted in Chapter 1 that the complex interplay between religion and mental health often plays out in a psychotherapeutic context. A further aim was therefore to elucidate a process of change in religious thinking, especially in relation to mental health, by offering my story as a resource for professionals. This was done in this research through the use of my narrative and its analysis. It was shown how difficult change is and how slow the process may be. It was also shown how deeply my religion permeated my life – which could be the case for many a client who enters into a psychotherapeutic process.

***Congruence of psychotherapists.*** A core goal of this research was also to work towards greater congruence as a developing psychologist. This was indeed fostered during the writing of this autoethnography. Not only did it allow me to structure my religious experiences, but the process also allowed me to become aware of certain aspects of my experiences that I had not fully appropriated. This process continues.

### **7.3.3 Paradigm, methodology and theory utilisation.**

***Phenomenology.*** This research utilised phenomenology in a way different from the norm. Most often the “phenomenological method” is employed in psychological research and that which is universal in an experience is sought, the *noema* (Spinelli, 2005). In contrast, this study emphasises uniqueness in experience, the *noesis*, and how experiences are permeated by unique ways of viewing the world and even past experiences. This was, especially, shown throughout the narrative as previous experiences flowed into subsequent ones. The inextricable link between Husserl’s *noema* and *noesis* was, therefore, clearly shown (Spinelli, 2005).

***Autoethnography.*** There is a vast array of particular methodologies employed when researchers utilise autoethnography – the thinking behind autoethnography allows for this freedom. The production of a substantial narrative and the analysis of it is rare (Ellis & Bochner, 2016). Thus, the particular method of producing an “evocative narrative” and analysing it serves as an example for others to use.

***Rogierian Theory.*** The use of Rogierian theory to analyse my narrative is also one example of how Rogierian theory may be employed. The utilisation of Rogers’ thoughts also demonstrated some often-overlooked aspects of his theory.

For example, it was not always clear if self-actualisation ought to be void of conditions of worth, or if the conditions of worth slowly fade away as one moves closer to becoming a “fully functioning person”. This quandary may be clearly grasped if one imagines

a situation where a particular family places great emphasis on self-development, a condition of worth so to speak. Hence, it is not always clear where conditions of worth end, and self-actualisation begins.

Rogers placed great emphasis on the necessity of empathy, acceptance, and genuineness for human growth (Rogers, 1961). However, he also placed a great deal of emphasis on freedom. It is not clear in his thinking whether or not a person deprived of the “necessities” will be able to independently strive towards self-actualisation and become a “fully-functioning person”. His emphasis on freedom would suggest that this is possible - for the existentialists we are always free! But, his utilisation of a humanistic way of viewing human development, with a strong emphasis on human needs as prerequisites for growth, would suggest that it is not. This dichotomy was not resolved in the analysis of my narrative.

#### **7.4 Limitations**

There are several possible weaknesses inherent in this research. Many of them relate directly to my decision to employ the methodology of autoethnography and some of the shortcomings relate to how the methodology was implemented. Other possible deficiencies relate to other characteristics of the research.

Roth (2009) mentions the possibility that an autoethnography may become a narcissistic autoerotic exercise. There is, however, also the idea that an autoethnographer ought to embrace vulnerability (Jones et al., 2013). Throughout the writing of this autoethnography I interpreted the embrace of vulnerability to entail a degree of self-disclosure that goes beyond the norm, a risky self-revelation with a definite purpose. It is possible that in attempting to embrace the rationale of autoethnography I erred on the side of narcissism.

Ellis et al. (2011) speak of autoethnographers adopting the style of autobiography by writing aesthetically. However, as a beginner writer, there is no guarantee that this

autoethnography is aesthetic. Moreover, it was decided at times during the writing of this autoethnography to forego a certain amount of “beauty” in favour of utility. Hence, certain extracts from my diaries may seem long and superfluous to certain readers, but they have purposely been included for the reader who may derive benefit from having direct access to very particular aspects of my thinking processes at the time of writing the diary entries. Furthermore, certain seemingly trivial scenes were given excessive focus, these would have been shortened if being aesthetic was the primary goal. They were focused on with the therapeutic nature of an autoethnography in mind – writing about them was therapeutic for me. A further limitation is therefore that this research may not be aesthetic to some readers.

It was noted in Chapter 4 that an autoethnography ought to seek generalisability, it ought to be relevant for readers. And, an autoethnography should seek verisimilitude, it should be believable (Ellis, et al., 2011). Various steps were taken in the attempt to seek out transferability and verisimilitude, but these two characteristics may still be lacking to a certain extent. It is possible that the thinking and experiences conveyed in this research do not resonate with a large number of possible readers. And, there is the possibility that some of the experiences may seem fantastical. The utility of this research is, therefore, not guaranteed, and in embracing autoethnography a gamble has knowingly been taken.

At times it seemed as if I was fumbling as I used Rogerian thought to analyse my narrative and I may have linked his thinking too closely with the thinking of the existentialist philosophers. It is very possible that this was precisely because of my own need for the freedom and life espoused by the existentialists. My own needs, therefore, played a huge role in seeking out the schools of thought to be employed in this research and in the very way in which they were implemented. Moreover, at times it seemed as though the analysis could have been better implemented with other theories.



For example, there are many times in the course of the narrative where psychodynamic ideas sprang forth. It may have, therefore, been better to give greater emphasis to a formulation of operative defence mechanisms. And, in deciding what I ought to write about I didn't always just choose to write about "epiphanies" – sometimes I wrote about something precisely because that was where the energy/dynamism was and the process was therapeutic. At other times, my thinking was imbued with the thoughts of Seligman (2018) and his ideas on learned helplessness and learned optimism. Several other ways of viewing the narrative may also have been better. But, because of the limited scope of this dissertation, simplicity was opted for and Rogers was retained.

In a certain sense, the narrative, the heart of this dissertation, is an attempt at a work of art – something which cannot be fully grasped. There is, therefore, much which may spring out for the reader which is not mentioned in the analysis, there are many loose ends which have not been brought together and resolved. But, part of the process of this autoethnography involves the acceptance of complexity - loose threads, messiness, unresolved aspects and chaos are, therefore, part of the product of this research.

## **7.5 Recommendations**

In attempting to interrogate the way in which my religion influences my mental health, I embarked on a critical examination of my religion – infusing culture with critical thinking is intrinsic to the methodology of autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). A major recommendation would be to challenge other professionals to embark on similar tasks – to be highly critical of the religions and cultural groups from which they hail. There is also much in modern forms of Protestantism and Islam, for example, which urgently require robust critical thought, this task primarily belongs to readers from these groups who are better placed as insiders.

Psychologists ought to be comfortable and knowledgeable when working with matters pertaining to religion in a psychotherapeutic context. Religious matters may be primary in the therapeutic process and it would be unjust to avoid them – especially when a critical challenge directed towards a client is necessary in order to foster change. Psychologists not confident in such situations should refer to other professionals in the same way that they would for other concerns they are uncomfortable with.

When working with Catholic clients, as Plante (2015) suggests, psychotherapists will do well to remember the great diversity within the Catholic Church – each person makes sense of their faith in a unique way. This diversity, and even variety, means that psychotherapy has great potential – a client may be helped to adopt healthier religious beliefs, during a process of psychotherapy, which are found inside the Catholic tradition. And, it will be good to remember that other religions too, often encompass great diversity.

I concur with Wichman (2012) that the use of autoethnography is very beneficial for clinical psychologists in training, and ought to be more readily encouraged. Autoethnography, as a therapeutic methodology, has a very practical utility for persons who will become the “primary instruments” in psychotherapy.

The vulnerability of psychologists, especially in training, needs to be more readily acknowledged and critically dealt with. This will help foster genuineness and the formation of congruent psychotherapists which will by implication impact what they can offer their clients.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how this study’s research question was answered and how the goals of the research were attained. Special emphasis was given to the contributions this research has made, its possible limitations, and the recommendations that have been generated by it.

As the researcher, I have found the process to be of immense value, especially the writing of my narrative, “Wrestling Heart.” The research process has therefore already been moderately successful.

The possible full success of this study will only be realised if readers find it of value too. In the same way that the study began by “Risking Revelation”, the conclusion and sharing of this work involves a risking of relevance, a risk I now take.

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### Appendix A: Beginnings of Data Analysis

Idealism  
4

forests and waterfalls are close by. I'm an altar boy, well more correctly, an apprentice of an altar boy - I simply follow my elder brother around on the sanctuary on a Sunday. Following the passing of my sister, I do not know how old she had been, we pray resolutely every day for another baby. I'm absolutely amazed when my little brother is born - God answers our prayers. Along with the coming of my baby brother comes the news that we will be moving again, to Port Elizabeth.

**Port Elizabeth (1990 - 1992)**

We drive through rushing traffic, through an infinite number of traffic lights, Stutterheim did not have a single traffic light, take turn after turn and arrive at my new school. There is a soccer field, a huge playground and a sandpit as big as the beach itself. I'm introduced to my new teacher - a young plump lady. There are four classes and thousands of children. My mother leaves. She walks off with my baby brother in a blue baby carry bag. She drives off. The sound of my dad's blue Volkswagen Beetle fades and then disappears.

Fear sets in. I have absolutely no idea where I am and I have no idea where my mother is going - I am all alone. I start to cry. My whole body cries. My teacher places me on her lap and I carry on crying. My new school is an abyss. The young teacher is at a loss and concocts a desperate plan, "Perhaps your mother has not left yet. Let's go and have a look."

A glimmer of hope arises. Upon inspecting the entrance to the school my hope dissipates and the darkness engulfs once more, her sinister ploy serves only to subside the torrent of tears which reappear unabated.

I'm challenged to stop crying at school and my big brother is encouraged to stop picking his nose. I make a few new friends. I learn how to play soccer. I go to swimming lessons so that I can learn how to swim strokes properly before I start big school. I wrestle the tears away.

Title -

*Contrast*  
*Reptm.*  
*Size*  
*Repetition*  
*Oppos.*  
*Repetition*  
*Emotional*  
*Intensity*  
*Emphasis*  
*Anti-bulk*  
*Emphasis*

*Following*  
*Fervent*  
*God's*  
*Providence*  
*Movement*  
*Repetition*  
*Transition*  
*Smallest*  
*Loss of hope*  
*Powerless*  
*Smaller*  
*Absence*  
*Fear*  
*Isolation*  
*Fear*  
*Emphasis*  
*Absurdity*  
*Deep*  
*Sorrow*  
*Relation to*  
*Brother*  
*Adherence*  
*Struggle*

## Appendix B: “Childhood” Theme Organisation

abandonment (2) rejection (2),

acceptance (3) achievement (9) esoterism, esteem (10), exception, affirmation, confirmation (3) acknowledgment, prestige (15), singularity (3), status, striving for acceptance, group belonging,

adventure (2) desire (2), excitement, extreme positive emotion, passion (3) stimulation, being led, following,

blame

boredom (2),

brother,

change (2) movement (2), outsider (3), interruption, isolation (9) loneliness (5) transition (3)

comparison (4) competition (2) opposition,

compassion, concern (2) care, empathy,

control (4) initiative (2),

courage (3) endurance (3), endeavour (4) fortitude (3), diligence, motivation, meaning making, striving (4), struggle,

death, disappointment (4) desolation (2), emptiness (2), depression (4), hurt (2), deep sorrow disconfirmation (3), loss (5) dissatisfied, low function, shock (3), sickness (2) sorrow (4) pain suffering (2), need for love,

dissociation (5), avoidance, negation of disappointment, suppression of fear, self-comfort, seriousness (2),

fear (12) failure, embarrassment (2), reprimand (2), Worry (2), trepidation, being caught out (2) catastrophising,

goodness (4), holiness is endurance, perfection, piety, Well behaved, sacrifice, sanctification,

ideal (17), hoping, dreams (3), awe (5), aspiration, reverence (4), naivete, faith, god's providence, unrealistic versus idealism, splitting,

incompetence (3), insignificance (6) low esteem, small (4) self-abasement, (2) bad esteem, powerless (5), out of control,

judgement, (7) guilt, sexual sin not good, sin makes you bad, emotional judgement

### Appendix C: “Childhood” Theme Clustering

**Not good enough: sub-theme 1- useless; sub-theme – bad and sinful,** incompetence (3), insignificance (6) low esteem, small (4) self-abasement, (2) Poor self-esteem, powerless (5), out of control, judgement,(7) guilt, sexual sin not good, sin makes you bad, emotional judgement, being led, following, blame, comparison (4)

**A rolling stone: sub-theme 1 flux; sub-theme – 2 – opposition; subtheme 3 – loneliness** change (2) movement (2), outsider (3), interruption, isolation (9) loneliness (5) transition (3) opposition,

**Terror:** fear (12) failure, embarrassment (2), reprimand (2), Worry (2), trepidation, being caught out (2) catastrophising,

**The darkness: sub-theme 1 – loss; sub-theme- rejection; sub-theme 3 - pain** death, disappointment (4) desolation (2), emptiness (2), depression (4), hurt (2), deep sorrow , disconfirmation (3), loss (5) dissatisfied, low function, shock (3), sickness (2) sorrow (4) pain, suffering (2), need for love, abandonment (2) rejection (2), boredom (2),

**The great escape: sub-theme 1 - dissociation (5), avoidance, sub-theme 2- everything happens for a reason -** negation of disappointment, suppression of fear, self-comfort, seriousness (2),

**Tendando Superabis:** courage (3) endurance (3), endeavour (4) fortitude (3), diligence, motivation, meaning-making, striving (4), struggle, comparison (4) competition (2) control (4) initiative (2),

**Boyish virtue – Goodness:** goodness (4), holiness is endurance, perfection, piety, Well-behaved, sacrifice, sanctification, learning

**Idealism:** ideal (17), hoping, dreams (3), awe (5), aspiration, reverence (4), naivete, faith, god’s providence, unrealistic versus idealism, splitting, brother,

**I am lovable:** acceptance (3) **achievement (9)** esoterism, **esteem (10)**, exception, affirmation, confirmation (3) acknowledgment, **prestige (15)**, singularity (3), status, striving for acceptance, group belonging,

**Soul:** adventure (2) desire (2), excitement, extreme positive emotion, passion (3) stimulation,

**Care:** compassion, concern (2) care, empathy,

### Appendix D: Copies of Six Diary Entries

~~Even~~ 5:30 → Morning offering.  
 Prayer 6:10: Scripture → Word of God speaking time with God.  
 6:30 Offer  
 6:45 Meditation → Scripture 5 min prep  
 3 med 1 reading 10 min  
 7:15 Mass <sup>with scripture</sup> Pray for Holy Mos 10 min 10 min  
 7:45 Breaks  
 10 Minutes  
 8:25  
 12:45 Pray in the Day ⊕ Halfway exam.  
 1:00 Lunch.  
 1:25 - 2:30 Rest  
 2:30 - 3:45 - Study.  
 3:45 - 4:00 Break  
 4: - 5:15 Study.  
 5:25 Rest Study.  
 5:45 Offer  
 6:00 Meditation → ~~Method of St Ignace~~ \*  
 \* Francis de Sales \*  
 6:30 Supper.  
 7:00 Study.  
 8:00 Break  
 8:30 - 9:45<sup>30</sup> Study, Night Prayer Extra<sup>20</sup>  
 10:00 Bed. time, Spiritual Reading.



Am I happy here? Lord, where  
 is life, where are you. I am so  
 uncomfortable so lethargic so in need of  
 a place of rest + (fun?) Lord, an I suppose  
 blue, is it an illusion. Why then  
 I just realised I can't be happy,  
 I am not. Who am I trying  
 for - myself, perhaps that is the  
 problem - Lord, what do you  
 want of me. Is it right that I  
 imagine getting good marks, speaking many  
 languages, getting a degree, being  
 well looked up to.  
 All for you Lord. Not my will but yours.

You Lord are my home. Lord, I am ~~✗~~  
following You. I am only happy to be  
where You are. You sustain me and give  
me life. I am never alone. All I need  
to do is "practice the presence of God"  
You Lord are my companion, my family,  
You are all I have. I am dependant  
on You. My Lord am my all.

Calibacy.

hard, calibacy does not seem like it is for all. hard I am beginning to believe that it would be better for priests to be able to marry, primarily to have better priests, healthier, happier, more natural leaders. 2ndly, there may be male vocations. This is what I believe. From seeing things in reality - a society does not seem right, perhaps calibacy should be for a much few number of priests. The question then is, am I still called to calibacy - or would I be called to marry, if able to do so.

14 May 2011

Lord Jesus, you know everything about me.  
 Is marriage to be the greatest sacrifice or maybe  
 even the greatest gift: to receive a gift from you  
 Lord in some way seems more correct than  
 just giving. Lord, but the people. To show them how  
 much you love them. So many people, quantifying  
 is surely not right, to love a family is also of  
 infinite value. But Lord it is about what you  
 want - You choose me for your work.

As a priest - messiah complex. The feelings? Are  
 they important? What do they mean? The poor Lord?  
 Do I give out of love anyway? The Lord is my stepdad!  
 The feeling Lord! Battling on - not being alike!

11 April

Jesus is sodomising a child

6% of 1000 = 60

6% of 400 000 = 24 000

You march in black a salute to Jesus  
 Speaks words of Inequality & go  
 Spelling words of hatred & lies  
 You confess lying sus like God  
 You pray & Jesus is on the floor  
 You preach & it is Jesus  
 who preaches  
 You are a Merchant acting in  
 person Christos  
 You are Jesus

Jesus, God is with us  
 Jesus, All that is God  
 Jesus, who give us life to all

Yet, it is you Jesus  
 who rape so many  
 children who tear at  
 their souls & slaughter  
 their bodies, who abuse  
 & Abused

It was the ones you "chose"  
 who got this happen again &  
 again, it was them

Peter, James & John with  
 all the other  
 apostles running down  
 the balcony stairs at you

we hate you Jesus  
 we hate your Church  
 we hate your Bishop  
 we hate you priests.

You abandoned our children  
 And you let the pack  
 of priests pray repeatedly

No God; No Good God  
 unless what was perceived  
 to be 'god' was evil  
 incarnate & our eyes were  
 deceived.

What is Good? Good alone  
 is Good - There is no  
 God - can you not see  
 stupid

God, sodomized the children  
 now I cry.

**Appendix E: Editor's Letter**

**Robert Orr Editing Services**  
"Orrsome Editing"

**Date: 28 April 2019**

**To whom it may concern:**

I confirm that I have edited the following dissertation:

**Author:** Luke Jonathan Wittstock

**Title:** Wrestling Heart: The Autoethnographic Faith Journey of a Developing Psychologist

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