

The Canticle of Spiritual Direction:
A Transformative Approach to the Song of Songs

by

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I dedicate this research project to
the ministry of Christian spiritual direction
in Hong Kong and South Africa

in honour of my beloved parents,
Eric Coskey (1925-2007)
and Susan Coskey (1924-2008),

whose faith exuded
the fullness of life,
the essence of love,
and the goodness of creation.

With special thanks to
my husband, Roderick
and two children, Mikaela and Joshua
for their sterling patience during these four years of research.
Our family dynamics and diverse ministries in Hong Kong
provide fecund ground for writing,
feeding the research with nurturing questions
and enriching it with the soil of ordinary human experience.

DECLARATION

I, Judy Elise Lam,
declare that

*The Canticle of Spiritual Direction:
A Transformative Approach to the Song of Songs*

is my own work
and that all the sources that I have used or quoted
have been indicated and acknowledged by means of the references.

SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Elise Lam', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

DATE:

12th September 2012

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This dissertation symbolises the gift of my love to the Beloved, the altogether lovely One of the Song of Songs whom I acknowledge as ‘friend’ and ‘lover’. It is a gift of shared experience, mainly with spiritual seekers in Hong Kong and South Africa with whom I have journeyed through spiritual direction and silent retreats. The intricate framework and cultural kaleidoscope of our conversations have contributed to the *raison-d’être* for this research. With our experiential work now transferred to the written word, it is my prayer that readers will be inspired by the Song of Songs to journey with the beloved in the Beloved.

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SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS

Summary

This dissertation suggests the Song of Songs as a biblical paradigm for Christian spiritual direction based on the poem's human dynamics, theological poetics and mystical aesthetic. The Song of Songs is paradigmatic as a journey from a state of self-neglect (depletion), through dynamic encounters of love (transformation), to living who I am in union with the divine *I AM* (deification). Identifying the human beloved as archetypal seeker and positing transformation in love as the *raison-d'être* for spiritual direction, the research delineates important implications for spiritual praxis, namely: the human subject (locus); human yearning (focus); the human search (journey); dynamics of human transformation and spiritual maturation (process); aspects of life-integration and union with God (purpose); and becoming a living sacrament in the world (epiphany). With its experiential-existential approach, *The Canticle of Spiritual Direction* serves as an interdisciplinary and intercultural resource on the Song of Songs, Christian spiritual direction, and Christian mysticism.

Key Terms

Song of Songs; spiritual direction; Christian mysticism; transformation in love; vineyard metaphor; biblical paradigm; human transformation and spiritual maturation; sexuality and spirituality; union and communion; contemplation and incarnation.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Formulating the research problem

1.1.1 *The rationale for the present research*

The Song of Songs' fascinating journey through history, as evidenced in the voluminous commentary over the centuries, offers the researcher a panoramic view of the movements and momentum of divine love as well as the tides and turns in the human response to that love. The first biblical commentary ever written was *On the Song of Songs* by the third-century Christian, Origen (Davis 2001:66), whose allegorical approach lies at the root of all later Christian interpretation of the Song (Norris 2003:xix). Origen's commentary is also 'the first great work of Christian mysticism' (Johnston 1995:17, citing Lawson 1957:265). For ancient interpreters the Song of Songs, along with Genesis 1 and Ezekiel 1, was reckoned among the deepest and most difficult texts in the Bible' (Norris 2003:xvii). Except for Genesis and the Psalms, the short eight chapters of the Song of Songs have generated more commentary than almost any other book of the Bible (Davis 2000:231). Is this not a cause for intrigue? Preliminary research and years of sustained interest in the 'most excellent' Song evoke a critical first question for this dissertation: *What is the Canticle's poetic vocation¹ and enduring enigma?*

The Song of Songs, an ancient poem, is often referred to as 'the Holy of Holies'² or the text of all texts that speaks of divine-human love. Spiritual direction, an ancient practice, has been described as 'the science of all sciences and the art of all arts',³ 'the greatest of all sciences',⁴ and the 'greatest of the arts'.⁵ Yet, within the plethora of classical and contemporary works on the ancient poem and the ancient practice, very little research, if any, has been done on the Song of Songs in spiritual direction. The lacuna in the literature is

¹ The Song of Songs, a poetic text in its entirety, is also referred to as the Canticle of Canticles. *The Song* and the *Canticle* will be used interchangeably throughout the dissertation. The term *poetic vocation* is adapted from Burrow's reference to the 'poet's vocation' in 'Raiding the Inarticulate' (2005a:341), the poet's vocation being a raid on the inarticulate' which Burrows takes from T S Eliot's 'East Coker' in *Four Quartets*.

² The term is attributed to Rabbi Akiba, second century A.D., whose allegorical interpretation of God's love for Israel was quickly taken up by Christian exegetes (Norris 2000:xviii), notably Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-ca. 254) who was the first to set the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs into a new Christianized form (Matter 1990:10).

³ Waaijman (2002:888) quotes Hausherr with reference to the particular gift and practice of discernment of spirits and states that: 'It is not a simple thing to discern God's 'inworking' on the soul.'

⁴ See Leech (1980:41) quoting Gregory Naziansen (A.D. 330-387).

⁵ Yungblut makes the bold claim that 'spiritual guidance is not only the oldest but also the greatest of the arts' because of its facilitation process of 'becoming human' (1995:2). Spiritual guidance, he contends is not itself a science but an art that grows ever more subtle and complex as consciousness keeps rising (1995:2).

surprising given the Song's unique 'theological poetics and mystical aesthetic';⁶ however, it evokes a critical second question: *How can the Canticle be transposed for twenty-first century spiritual praxis?*

Given the revival of spiritual direction toward the end of the twentieth century (Tam 2007:1-2) and the subsequent proliferation of spiritual direction writings, another lacuna in the literature concerns biblical research in Christian spiritual direction. Founded on a monastic tradition dating back to the fourth century Egyptian desert father, Anthony the Great, the practice of spiritual direction is essentially prayerful, pastoral and experiential. Contemporary spiritual direction 'text books' therefore deal mainly with the 'use' of Scripture in the process of direction (2007:69). The topic of 'Scripture and spiritual direction' and the biblical rationale for the ministry, however, have scarcely been addressed (2007:69), giving rise to a critical third question: *How does the Canticle inform contemporary spiritual direction and the spiritual journey?*

In highlighting the lacunae in the literature, cognisance is also taken of significant movements across the disciplines in general⁷ and, in particular, the resurgence of interest in the Song of Songs,⁸ the allegorical method,⁹ and medieval spirituality.¹⁰ These contributing factors underscore the timeliness of the present research and suggest that the post-Enlightenment era may well be a crucial moment in the Song of Songs' historical journey. A case in point is Shanks' assertion, following Nietzsche, that where a religion is 'poetically impoverished' it is in the end 'not being religious enough' (2001:140), which provokes a critical fourth question: *On what basis is the Song of Songs 'religious enough' to serve as poetic enrichment and spiritual nourishment for contemporary Christian spirituality?*

⁶ This term is borrowed from Burrows who elaborates the literary appeal of 'theological poetics and a mystical aesthetic' in contemporary spirituality (2005a:341-361).

⁷ For example, writing on movements in postmodernism and multiculturalism, and from an integrated Jungian-Buddhist perspective, Young-Eisendrath highlights the 'return to the practical, through the recognition that practices shape theories and not the reverse' (1997:15). She also distinguishes between 'skeptical' and 'affirmative' types of postmodernism in the social sciences (1997:15). The skeptical, or the deconstructive type, she finds inconsistent with analytical psychology while the affirmative, which includes hermeneutics and constructivism, advance theories that include the idea of universals of human life (1997:16).

⁸ In Tracy's discussion on 'Postmodernity and the Strange Return of God' (1994:42-46), the Song of Songs is mentioned as one of the texts to be heard as contemporary theologians attempt to name God in the present (1994:44-45). Noteworthy too are his comments on the recovery of the great mystics, especially the apophatic tradition, and the need for them to speak once again (1994:16-18).

⁹ See Turner (1995a), Matter (1990), and Decock (2008) on the allegorical interpretation which was respected until well into the nineteenth century, but faded with the development of historical-critical scholarship (Decock 2008:3). However, in the last forty years, much work done on the subject of metaphors has effected more nuanced approaches to allegory; metaphors are now seen as 'poetic means which are more apt to express deeper insights than precise, technical language' (2008:3).

¹⁰ Frohlich, commenting on method in the discipline of spirituality (2005:65-78), makes the controversial claim that medieval insights be reclaimed in grounding spirituality as a discipline in its own right (2005:73).

1.1.2 *The use of the term spiritual direction*

The traditional term '*spiritual direction*' will be used in the dissertation for two reasons. Firstly, it has become the generally accepted term for the practice despite the fact that most contemporary authors acknowledge its inadequacy. The presupposition in the present dissertation is that *spiritual* refers to the divine-human relation as the locus of the practice, a relationship which impacts on the whole person within the totality of a lived spirituality; *direction* points to God as the 'principal agent' and guide, maintains the focus on attentiveness to the Spirit, and signifies a progressive movement that is commonly referred to as 'a spiritual journey'. Secondly, the traditional term is semantically flexible in describing the one who listens, accompanies, facilitates, discerns and guides as *spiritual director*, and the one being accompanied as *directee*. However, since the term 'director' is misleading because of authoritarian, hierarchical, confessional, managerial and prescriptive connotations, *cojourner* will be used instead. The preferred term represents more accurately the incarnational nature of spiritual accompaniment,¹¹ the human solidarity in co-discernment, and the fraternal relationship between persons on a similar journey in God.¹² Since the word 'directee' is often perceived as impersonal and passive, with close connotations to counselee or client, *seeker* is a proposed alternative as it clarifies the intentionality, responsibility, and response-ability of the person 'seeking' God and 'seeking' spiritual direction; furthermore, it is consonant with the motif of *search* in the Canticle. The *cojourner-seeker* relationship, an original and creative combination of terms which I am proposing for use in contemporary spiritual direction, will be used in chapters beyond the Literature Review.

Spiritual direction will refer specifically to the one-to-one relationship between cojourner and seeker, as explicated by May: 'When spiritual guidance occurs in a formal, one-to-one relationship with another individual, it can be called *spiritual direction*' ([1982]/1992:8). Spiritual direction is diverse in approach and limitless in scope. Though various descriptions will be offered in the Literature Review, no single definition would accurately convey the nature of this ministry; nor would any methodology be able to explore sufficiently the divine-human dynamics of the spiritual direction relationship. Each practitioner arrives at his or her own approach to this ministry; however, the common objective is 'to guide persons to a deeper union with God by helping them listen to the Spirit who is the Chief Director of us all' (Culligan 1983:9).

¹¹ Waaijman's chapter on 'The Structure of Spiritual Accompaniment' (2002:874-920) uses terms such as 'spiritual accompaniment', the 'accompanist' and 'the person being accompanied'. It offers a succinct elucidation of the spiritual direction relationship with an emphasis on the 'inworking' of God (2002:870-894).

¹² Guenther states that the director is 'a traveler, neither an authority nor a guru' (1992:35)

1.1.3 *Stating the research problem*

Given the above-mentioned rationale for the dissertation, the research question is encapsulated as follows: *What is the validity and feasibility of the Song of Songs as a biblical-poetic paradigm for spiritual direction and the spiritual journey?* The thesis is that the Song of Songs offers a poetics for human transformation and spiritual maturation that informs contemporary spiritual praxis. To test this hypothesis, the research will explore the phenomenon of ‘*transformation in love*’ as the principal motif in the Song of Songs and the *raison-d’être* for spiritual direction.¹³ Based on these theoretical findings, the research will construct a *Song of Songs Paradigm for Spiritual Direction*.

1.2 Aim of the Research

With reference to the observations in 1.1 above, the aim of the present research is to contribute to the contemporary practice of spiritual direction by means of the following:

1.2.1 *Biblical enrichment for contemporary spiritual direction*

Given the demand for spirituality that impacts on the totality of human life, biblical research is necessary in identifying the ministry’s particular contribution to human development. With increasing convergence between spiritual direction and the clinical disciplines, coupled with the growth of the practice among lay persons, it is imperative that Christian spiritual direction be founded on a biblical rationale, grounded in biblical theology,¹⁴ and given adequate attention in the discipline of spirituality.¹⁵ For Southeast Asian communities, particularly Protestant, evangelical communities which stress the role of Scripture in spiritual formation (Tam 2000:69), the dissertation would serve as a helpful resource in spiritual direction training as well as in an experiential appropriation of the Song of Songs.

1.2.2 *Clarification of the raison-d’être for Christian spiritual direction*

The clarification of the principal motif in the spiritual journey and the *raison-d’être* for Christian spiritual direction is a means of identifying core Scriptural values. An identification

¹³ Noteworthy is Tribble’s point: ‘The interpretive clue within the text is also the clue between the text and existence’ (1978:7).

¹⁴ Ball cites Schneider’s observation that a strong dependence is put on personal experience with little attempt to situate the current revival of interest in spiritual direction in the context either of history or of biblical or systematic theology (1998:124).

¹⁵ The discipline of spirituality and the practice of spiritual direction both emphasise the role of experience and praxis; yet, in an important work like *Minding the Spirit* (Dreyer & Burrows 2005), for example, no reference is made to the tradition and practice of spiritual direction. The integration of spiritual direction insights would surely enhance the discipline of spirituality and, in turn, underscore spiritual direction as a spiritual practice.

of core values serves several purposes, namely: first, it defines the principles, process and practice; second, it confirms and consolidates the ministry within the field of the helping professions; and third, it augments the scope of Christian spiritual direction to attend to people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds without losing its distinctiveness.¹⁶ Given the rich tradition of Christian spiritual direction,¹⁷ a specifically Christian focus would bring a coherent and specific voice to the vast discourse on spirituality that is swirling around us (Schneiders 2005:17).

1.2.3 *Experiential appropriation of the Song of Songs*

The Song of Songs is the bible's most unconventional book that 'raids the inarticulate' and follows the 'wisdom of a different genre' (Burrows 2005a:341; 2005:208). Through an integration of medieval insights on the Song of Songs and spiritual direction, the present research aims to transpose the Canticle for a twenty-first century context through a focus on the human subject, rather than on the text as object. The research will offer suggestions for an experiential appropriation of the Canticle in spiritual direction, toward a holistically embodied spirituality and an incarnational mysticism.

1.2.4 *Aesthetic appreciation of the Song of Songs*

Embedded with insights of critical scholars and practicing spiritual directors, the present research is underpinned by an aesthetic appreciation of the Song. The aesthetic dimension is essential for without it the spiritual life becomes 'a largely verbal technique', a 'prose-flattened world' (Burrows 2005a:342,341) emptied of emotion and imagination, and a disenchanted journey devoid of mystery. Giving credence to the Song of Songs as biblical literature *par excellence*, the present research will exemplify ways in which the Canticle's poetic genius brings firstly, poetic enrichment to the didactic, discursive, analytical language of theology and religion, and secondly, spiritual nourishment along the *via negativa* of contemporary spiritual life.¹⁸

¹⁶ Johnston advocates that 'a mystical theology based on the Bible will be specifically Christian. As such, it will be the basis for dialogue with the mysticism of non-Christian religions' ([1978]/1997:51).

¹⁷ The idea of a spiritual guide is not distinctively Christian since various forms of spiritual and moral guidance were practised in primitive cultures and ancient religions for the purpose of enlightenment, virtue, wisdom, meditation and healing; for example, in shamanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and the classical philosophical schools (Leech 1980: 39-41; Wall 1983:11).

¹⁸ With reference to the *via negativa* in theological work, Davis discusses 'the way of astonishment' and the OT as a perpetual source of astonishment. She cites as exemplar the thirteenth century Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux for his 'carefully crafted' eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs (2005:2), a literary monument of the medieval monastic era that never got beyond Song 3:1 (2001:66).

1.3 Demarcating the Area of Research

The dissertation will be demarcated by two principal foci: *poetics*, a biblical and theoretical exploration; and *praxis*, implications for contemporary spiritual direction. The primary purpose for the two-fold demarcation is to explore the biblical rationale and *raison-d'être* for Christian spiritual direction and to draw biblical implications for the practice. Though biblical and theoretical, the research is experiential-existential (see 1.4.3 below) because the focus is the human subject as locus of transformation. *Poetics* therefore does not refer to a literary approach to hermeneutics that concentrates on the text (Trible 1978:8).¹⁹ Neither is the study exegetical or theological *per se*, so it will not engage arguments concerning historical background, archaeological data, compositional history, authorial intention, sociological setting, or theological motivation and result (1978:8), which Ricoeur refers to as 'the arguments of the older quarrel' (1998:303).

Poetics is used in a generic way in the present research; it refers to a 'poetic orientation'²⁰ which is fundamental to exploring the 'theological poetics and mystical aesthetic' of the Song of Songs (see 1.4.3 below). A poetic orientation is a reaching for a fresh understanding of the Song of Songs through a raiding of love mysticism toward a biblical paradigm for contemporary spiritual direction.²¹ In sum, poetics is new contemplation of old facts²² and the central aim of poetics is breeding a new conviction rather than settling a controversy.²³ The topic of love mysticism²⁴ calls for more intensive biblical reflection in the fields of spiritual direction, Asian spirituality, and contemporary Christian spirituality. The topic of mysticism, according to Burrows, has been largely ignored in the republic of theology and the attentiveness to the inarticulate and absent seems to have been

¹⁹ Trible comments as follows: 'To study the Bible as literature is to recognize, not prove, that it is in fact literature' (1978:8). Suggesting an intrinsic reading of the text, she states that stress falls upon interpreting the literature in terms of itself rather than on extrinsic factors such as historical background, etc. She also emphasises the organic unity of the text, and asserts: 'How the text speaks and what it says belong together in the discovery of what it is' (1978:8-9).

²⁰ See Abel's study of Ricoeur's vital circle of hermeneutics that is divided into four orientations: critical, ontological, poetic, and ethical (2008:193).

²¹ The 'reaching' and 'raiding' at the heart of poetics is borrowed from Burrows (2005a:341-361).

²² On literature in general, Rodway states that minds are awakened as things dulled by habit are seen freshly, and new contemplation grows out of old facts (1982:7).

²³ Abel (2008:186) cites Ricoeur on the role of poetics. In *Reading Ricoeur* (Kaplan 2008), the following chapters are helpful: 'Philosophy and Kerygma' (Klemm 2008:47-69); 'Love Proceeds by Poetic Amplification' (LaCocque 2008:129-138); and 'Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: From Critique to Poetics' (Abel 2008:183-196).

²⁴ Kelsey states that 'Love mysticism is not unique to Christianity, but is probably more organically central to classic Christian theory and devotional practice than to any other religious tradition' (1983:21). Ruffing writes on love mysticism as a missing dimension in contemporary spiritual direction (2000). Williams' *The Wound of Knowledge* delineates ways in which a succession of Christian saints attempted to articulate their vision of the Christian calling; in its final chapter, John of the Cross sums up, in many respects, classical themes of Christian spirituality, of the *distinctively* Christian understanding of spiritual maturation [1979/1990:180].

largely banished with the artists from this discourse (2005a:346). Johnston raises a critical question: ‘Is it not possible to elaborate a theological method which would put greater emphasis on *reflection on mystical experience*?’ ([1978]/1997:58).²⁵ Though love mysticism and theological method would be pertinent for research in the Song of Songs, the arguments of this newer quarrel are beyond the scope of the present study.

1.3.1 *Poetics: the biblical investigation*

Schneider’s question with regard to the study of spirituality is helpful in demarcating the area of research: ‘*What is the object, both material and formal, of this study?*’ (2005a:50). The ‘material object’ is concerned with the spiritual life as ‘an existential project’ and specifies the terms of the phenomenon to be investigated, while the ‘formal object’ refers to the terms of the aspect or formality under which the phenomenon is to be investigated (2005a:50-51). Based on these specifications, the proposed ‘material object’ is ‘*the vineyard as existential project.*’ The ‘formal object’ under which it will be studied is ‘*transformation in love.*’

With regard to the vineyard as existential project, the principal concern is the spiritual life as: concrete and embodied experience (2005a:52); interiority, or the vital ongoing interaction between the human spirit and the Spirit of God, the ultimate locus of personal transformation (2005a:51,59);²⁶ and ‘conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives’ (2005:6). ‘Transformation in love’ will focus on the human subject as locus of transformation. The objective is to understand transformative experience as it ‘actually occurs’ in the respective biblical texts under consideration, as it ‘actually transforms its subject’ toward psychological wholeness and spiritual fruitfulness, and as it ‘concretely’ relates to lived practice.

1.3.2 *Praxis: implications for the practice of spiritual direction*

In each chapter, implications for spiritual praxis will be interwoven into the discussion. Incrementally, the biblical findings and practical implications will provide the necessary data for the creative construction of the Song of Songs paradigm. The paradigm will reflect an integration of East-West religious perspectives, with a Chinese-Asian worldview forming the primary backdrop and experiential frame of reference. Though illuminated by experiential

²⁵ Johnston, a Jesuit living in Japan, with prolific writings in East-West dialogue, has an overarching theme of a mysticism of love with repeated reference to Lonergan’s theological method of love ([1978]/1997:135; 2000:211-215). Johnston’s intercultural and mystical insights are particularly helpful in the East-West integration, though more from the perspective of spirituality and less from the practice of spiritual direction.

²⁶ Frohlich refers to ‘interiority’ as the human spirit and the divine Spirit ‘fully in act’ (2005:71-76). Williams explores the topic ‘Interiority and Epiphany’ in relation to God’s *gracious* action (2000:239-264).

and cultural insights, the study will not engage the broader inter-religious and cross-cultural conversation. Instead, the poetics-praxis amalgam will demonstrate ways in which the Song of Songs radically confronts religious presuppositions, from which core principles for Christian spiritual direction within multi-cultural settings are derived.

1.4 Methodological Approach and Theoretical Framework

1.4.1 Literature research

The investigation of ways in which the Song of Songs informs the practice of spiritual direction will depend upon the multiplexity of the Song of Songs, the discipline of spirituality, and the practice of spiritual direction (SD). Within this ‘Song-Spirituality-SD’ triadic relationship, the dissertation will undertake a literature research. The literature on the Song of Songs will be limited to contemporary hermeneutical and literary approaches.²⁷ Works by the ancient writers in the Song of Songs tradition (such as Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyassa, Bernard of Clairvaux, and William-of-St-Thierry) will be precluded. The inter-disciplinarity of spirituality,²⁸ the integrative approaches to spiritual direction,²⁹ and practical input from Jungian psychology³⁰ will draw on contemporary scholarship. The term ‘transformation in love’ is attributed to John of the Cross;³¹ his works (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991) will therefore underpin the love mysticism of the Song of Songs. The present understanding of ‘*transformation*’ is informed largely by Carmelite spirituality because of its emphasis on contemplation as a path of individual and social transformation (Culligan and Gordis 2000:xvii).³² The Song of Songs paradigm will adapt insights from the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality, as elucidated by Fox (1991, 1995).

²⁷ Key sources include the literary and hermeneutical works of Tribble (1978), Ricoeur (1995, 1998), LaCocque (1998, 1998a), and Davis (2000, 2001, 2005, 2006).

²⁸ Key texts include *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Waaajman 2002); *Minding the Spirit* (Dreyer & Burrows 2005), *Exploring Christian Spirituality* (Lescher & Liebert 2006), and *Studying Christian Spirituality* (Perrin 2007).

²⁹ My knowledge of spiritual direction is based on the teachings of the three renowned Spanish medieval mystics John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola. Carmelites John and Teresa are considered ‘paradigms of humanity’ who teach of authentic human development (Welch 1996:99), and both write from their mystical experiences and practice of spiritual direction. Jesuit writings, based on Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, form a large corpus of contemporary spiritual direction literature.

³⁰ Johnson offers perspectives on the use of dreams, symbols, archetypes, and imagination (1983, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1991), while Young-Eisendrath’s works integrate Jungian, feminist and Buddhist perspectives (1997, 1999, and Young-Eisendrath & Miller 2000).

³¹ Waaajman (2002:427-482) provides a succinct explication of the phenomenon of transformation in love; *The Footprints of Love* (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaajman 2000) describe the main tenets of John of the Cross’ transformative journey in love.

³² *Carmel & Contemplation* (Culligan & Jordis 2000), *The Footprints of Love* (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaajman 2000), as well as Welch’s works (1982, 1990, 1996) serve as key texts on Carmelite teaching.

1.4.2 *Hermeneutical approach*

The hermeneutical task³³ of the present research is two-fold: to understand the transformative dynamics of love in the Song of Songs and, by projecting those dynamics into contemporary spiritual life, to construct a biblical paradigm for spiritual direction. Schneiders' approach to hermeneutics is conducive for several reasons: first, its primary aim is to '*understand* the phenomena of the Christian spiritual life as experience' (2005a:56); second, it is 'an articulated and explicit interpretational strategy' (2005a:56); third, it 'seeks to interpret the experience it studies in order to make it understandable and meaningful in the present without violating its historical reality' (2005:6); fourth, understanding involves not only the conceptual but 'appropriation that is transformative of the subject' (2005a:47); and fifth, it is 'inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural, and inter-religious' (2005a:59). Schneiders' three-fold interpretational strategy³⁴ will therefore be adapted to encompass a broader interpretive and appropriative framework, as follows: the existential-descriptive phase; the contextual-explorative phase; the contemplative-unitive phase; and the creative-constructive phase.

1.4.3 *Methodological Principles*

Four methodological principles will interface within the proposed hermeneutical approach: a poetic orientation; a contemplative-evocative disposition;³⁵ experiential-existential transformation;³⁶ and the journey motif as continuum. Since the Song of Songs is a love poem, not a rationalistic discourse, a *poetic orientation* is necessary to explore the *how*³⁷ of the Song in relation to human transformation and spiritual maturation. The task of translating the poetics of the Song into the prosaic language of spiritual praxis is not straightforward

³³ According to Ricoeur, the task of hermeneutics is two-fold: 'to reconstruct the internal dynamic of the text, and to restore to the work its ability to project itself outside itself in the representation of a world that I could inhabit' (1991:18).

³⁴ Schneiders' interpretational strategy involves three phases: (1) a description of the particular phenomenon to be studied; (2) a critical analysis using interdisciplinary tools; and (3) a constructive interpretation with contemporary appropriation (2005a:56-57).

³⁵ Sheldrake discusses the need for 'contemplative attention' and 'contemplative engagement' in critical methodology (2006:26-30). See Conroy on the contemplative-evocative approach in spiritual direction (1995:39-49); Edwards on a contemplative orientation (2001:4-5); and *Lectio Divina*, as a contemplative practice, elaborated by Hall (1988).

³⁶ See Edwards for a succinct explication of the nature of spiritual experience (2001:45-71); Barry for a theological discussion of the broader existential implications of the personal experiential (2004); and Guenther on a 'grounded' existential approach to spiritual direction (1992). Note Fischer's comment that the aim of spiritual direction is not adjustment, but rather 'transformation based on a vision of the reign of God' (1988:15).

³⁷ The emphasis on the *how* of literature is borrowed from Rodway's *The Craft of Criticism* (1982:7). His literary stance resonates with the approach in the present research: first, there is no one method or 'correct' approach to literature; second, 'pluralism' is the 'only indisputable principle of approach'; and third, 'there are more ways than one to the heart of works of creative literature' (1982:7). From a theological perspective, Wenzel comments that while exegetical knowledge of the Bible is valuable and informative, 'more important than exegetical knowledge is knowledge of method' (2008:247-251).

because the words of the poem ‘offer nothing that translates into simple prose’ (Davis 2006:185).³⁸ In applying flexibility with discretion, the self-implicating³⁹ nature of research will be assumed.

A *contemplative-evocative disposition* is required for the exploration of a ‘non-religious’ text for spiritual direction. Since human love is the obvious or plain sense of the Song text, the ‘religious dimension of human experience’ (Barry 2004:20-37) will be presupposed, as follows: firstly, any human experience can have a religious dimension and can be an encounter with God (2004:21); secondly, the religious dimension of human experience is supplied by the believing and seeking person *and* by the Mystery encountered (2004:25); and thirdly, any human experience, hence any medium, can disclose God (2004:28). The salient biblical presuppositions in exploring the religious dimension of experience include: Jesus Christ historically as the revelation of God *par excellence* and the core of Christian love mysticism; the role of Scripture as informative and transformative;⁴⁰ and the vital interaction of the divine Spirit and human spirit ‘fully in act’ through interiority-subjectivity.⁴¹

Experiential-existential transformation is grounded in ‘subjectivity’, that is, the experience of the human subject in shaping reality (Young-Eisendrath 1997:15). For tactical purposes, and where necessary, a distinction will be made between the ‘*experiential*’ and the ‘*existential*’. The reason is that the experiential (with the element of immediacy)⁴² is considered closer to poetry, while ‘existential meaning’ (or lived experience) in the broader

³⁸ With regard to interpreting the transformative dynamics of the Song of Songs, it is worth noting that poetics may be regarded ‘not only as a manner of *speaking* and *writing* but as a way of *seeing* and *knowing*’ (Burrows 2005b:496).

³⁹ In her critique of the Enlightenment ideal of scientific objectivity, Schneiders comments as follows: ‘All human enquiry is self-implicating and all knowledge is personal to some degree. The only truly critical approach to the knowing process is self-knowledge and honesty about our social location and presuppositions, and methodological control of their effects’ (2005:20). She adds that: ‘In a constructive postmodern context, spirituality as a self-implicating discipline will no longer be a stranger’ (2005:21).

⁴⁰ Mulholland’s *Shaped by the Word* ([1985]/2000) elucidates the role of Scripture in spiritual formation. Wenzel writes on existential communication, particularly the ‘experience of how the Bible functions and penetrates one’s ... spirituality, i.e. the Bible in the divine-human relationship’ (2008:246-251).

⁴¹ ‘Subjectivity’ was a subject which Jung reiterated in his early empirical work and later cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scholarly research (Young-Eisendrath 1978:15-16). As Christian mystic, poet and theologian, John of the Cross’ works are exemplary for an in-depth understanding of interiority-subjectivity (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991); contemporary works like Welch’s *Spiritual Pilgrims* (1982) and *When Gods Die* (1990) delineate the psychological processes and development of the mystic from a Jungian perspective. Other helpful works include: on interiority, from the field of spirituality (Frohlich 2005); on subjectivity, from the practice of Jungian analysis (Young-Eisendrath 1997:3-24); and on case studies from several psychological perspectives, the *Image of God Handbook* (2007).

⁴² The erotic-poetic experiences of the Song of Songs are immediate and primary, while narrative (which the Song lacks) is an interpretation, usually in the context of the greater narrative of Scripture, the Judeo-Christian tradition, Song of Songs commentary, and mystical theology. Tracy’s distinction between immediate and mediated experience and ‘first order’ and ‘second order’ experience is helpful in understanding the role of revelation in contemporary hermeneutical approaches to theology (1994:113-119).

sense is more akin to prose,⁴³ narrative⁴⁴ and commentary. Concerning love mysticism and the Song of Songs, experiential will refer to the experience as it ‘actually occurs’ in the text and, by implication, encounter with God. Existential will refer to interpretation as well as incarnational implications derived from the experiential; it also presupposes the notion of living the mystery, where God is ‘the deepest dimension of *all* experience’ (Fischer 1988:3).

Within the continuum of the biblical tradition, the spiritual life as existential project involves conscious involvement and long-range transformation. Following the paradigm of the Bible itself as ‘pilgrim’ on a journey, converging at various points to yield the integrity of its life (Trible 1978:7), the vineyard metaphor will be explored canonically and the motif of pilgrimage or *journey* incorporated. The journey of the vineyard metaphor over the course of the research will reinforce the biblical rationale for transformation in love and the *raison-d’être* for Christian spiritual direction.

1.5 Delineation of chapters

For the purpose of locating the dissertation within the contemporary context of spirituality and spiritual direction, the Literature Review, *Chapter 2*, will comprise two sections: first, an exploration of contemporary interpretations on the Song’s leitmotif of love; and, second, an exploration of contemporary methodologies in Christian spiritual direction, with particular attention to the praxis of love. The Literature Review will provide a foundational understanding of the Song’s poetic vocation and spiritual direction’s vocation of love, and suggest methodologies to be adopted in the course of the research.

Following the findings in the Literature Review, Chapter 3 – the *existential-descriptive phase* – remains within the poetic world of the Song of Songs and employs a metaphorical approach to ‘the vineyard’. The beloved’s self-referential metaphor of ‘my own vineyard’ serves as key referent and provides the hermeneutical cue to transformation in love. This chapter begins the enquiry into ways in which the Song of Songs informs the practice of spiritual direction by exploring the use of metaphor in relation to *eros*, that is, a focus on the vineyard as ‘locus of intimate loving’.

⁴³ A case in point is John of the Cross’ poems which encapsulate his mystical experiences; the commentaries are a reflection, a second step from experience. See Turner’s chapter on ‘John of the Cross and the Latin Tradition (1995a:175-199) in which he explicates the reasons why John’s poems and prose should be read in conjunction, while conceding that ‘in some ways the poems are the more fundamental and primary literary output within John’s *oeuvre*’ (1995a:196).

⁴⁴ See Kristeva for an illuminating discussion on song, poetry, and narrative, and the effects of the loss of poetry to narrative and the novel (1987:289-294), resulting in the emphasis on propositional acts, explanations, moralizing, communication and education.

In Chapter 4 – the *contextual-explorative phase* – the *mythos* of the vineyard is traced backward to the poetic-prophetic context of Isaiah 5:1-7 and Isaiah 27:2-6. Isaiah’s two songs of the vineyard provide an Old Testament lens for viewing the YHWH-Israel relation, which is fundamental to a mythological exploration of the vineyard in the Song of Songs and an understanding of the vineyard as mythological motif. The wider theological context elucidates the vineyard as ‘locus of divine-human intimacy’.

Chapter 5 – the *contemplative-unitive phase* – traces the beloved’s vineyard forward to John 15:1-17 for a mystico-symbolic understanding of the ‘True Vine’. The Vine as mystical symbol elucidates the *mustikos* of the vineyard which is poeticised in the Song of Songs and culminates historically in Jesus. Chapter 5 offers a succinct description of Christian mysticism and demonstrates the significance of the continuing-incarnation in communities of Christian love. Identified as the ‘locus of Christian community’, and in relation to Trinitarian relationality and spiritual friendship, biblical implications are delineated for the appropriation of the vineyard in spiritual praxis.

With an eye on the Asian context, Chapter 6 – the *creative-constructive phase* – formulates a spiritual direction approach to the vineyard based on the biblical findings in chapters 3, 4, and 5. The spiritual direction approach is essentially experiential-existential, which facilitates the construction of a *Song of Songs Paradigm for Spiritual Direction*. The paradigm cites four seasons as key reference points in the beloved’s transformative journey, elucidates implications for the vineyard as existential project, and offers biblical insights and experiential tools for the contemporary practice of spiritual direction.

Chapter 7, the Conclusion, summarises the major outcomes of the research, highlights the value of the research in relation to the Song of Songs, Christian spiritual direction and Christian mysticism, and delineates trajectories and considerations for further investigative studies on the present subject.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Classic and contemporary literature on the Song of Songs reflects some sort of ‘obsession’ with interpretation and paraphrase provoked by the Song that is ‘far out of proportion to the book’s modest scope of 117 verses’ (Scheper 1992:316).¹ Given the vast scope of ‘Song of Songs commentary’, the Literature Review will focus on one aspect of the Song, namely, its *leitmotif of love*; and, with respect to contemporary literature, will be limited to hermeneutical and literary approaches. The purpose is to obtain an understanding of the Song’s poetics of love and to correlate it with the praxis of love in Christian spiritual direction. With an eye on reaching a poetics-praxis amalgam in later chapters, it is important to note at this point an apparent distinction between the poetic and the prosaic in relation to the spiritual life:

People can imagine that religious faith represents a deep restlessness, dissatisfaction with the ordinary and the material; that it is poetry, not prose. They are not wrong about poetry – but poetry has to be made out of profoundly ordinary experiences, in the words that everyone uses. Practically all the great religious traditions insist at some point that holiness involves a new encounter with the prosaic along the way to transformation (Williams 2003:93).

From a spiritual direction perspective, the encounter with the prosaic is reiterated as follows: ‘There is poetry in the spiritual life but most of the time we are living in the prosaic mode’ (Jones in Guenther 1992:ix). Spiritual direction, according to Jones, can easily become ‘too spiritual’, and suggests that ‘the art of spiritual direction lies in our uncovering the obvious in our lives and in realizing that everyday events are the means by which God tries to reach us’ (in Guenther 1992:ix). The Song of Songs is made out of profoundly ordinary experiences, and with words and symbols we fail to use;² thus, an intrinsic relationship exists between the Song’s poetics and spiritual direction’s prosaic mode, which begs the question: *On the presupposition of the fundamental motif of divine love, how is love poeticised in the Song of Songs and practised in spiritual direction?* The Literature Review will be divided into two sections in exploring this question: first, an exploration of contemporary

¹ See Scheper’s chapter for a succinct summary of the enormously complex exegetical and literary history of the Song of Songs (1992:315-336.)

² See Williams’ comments on the importance of language and the need for communities to find ‘speech that can be playful and not just useful’ (2003:71).

interpretations of the Song's love motif; and, second, an exploration of the praxis of love in contemporary methodologies of Christian spiritual direction.

2.2 Review of Contemporary Literature on the Song of Songs

2.2.1 God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Trible 1978)

Two chapters entitled 'A Love Story Gone Awry' (1978:72-143) and 'Love Lyrics Redeemed' (1978:144-165) compare the primordial garden of Genesis and the redeemed garden of the Song of Songs. Using Genesis 2-3 as the hermeneutical key, Trible posits that the Song 'recovers the love that is bone of bone and flesh of flesh' (1978:144); this primordial oneness bears a striking parallel to the withdrawal of Yahweh in Genesis 2 and accounts for the absence of God in the Song because God 'withdraws when lovers discover themselves, speak the revelation, and become one flesh' (1978:145-146).

The woman in the Song is metaphorised as a garden (*gan*), to which the lover comes and claims as his own. The Song therefore represents a 'symphony of love' which echoes the original delight, not disaster, of the Genesis garden and reverberates with the joy that was originally intended for man and woman (1978:152). The sensuality of Eden expands and deepens in the Song to the extent that the senses become fully present and 'saturate the poetry to serve only love' (1978:153-154). In the redeemed garden of sexuality the lovers 'neither escape nor exploit sex; they embrace and enjoy it'. Here, there is 'no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex', which suggests that 'their love is truly bone of bone and flesh of flesh, and this image of God male and female is indeed very good' (1978:161). Trible's resounding statement on the Song's love motif is identified as follows: 'Testifying to the goodness of creation, then, eroticism becomes worship in the context of grace' (1978:161); the reason is that eroticism incites awe and wonder at God's intention for creatures, namely, of being wholly loved and to love fully in God.

Through rich intertextuality, Trible offers a succinct description of the garden motif and presents it as a redemptive feature on many levels, taking into account that the Song 'resonates and reverberates throughout Jewish and Christian culture as though it were understood to embody the central truth and mystery of the human condition' (Scheper 1992:315). The *garden* serves, on the one hand, as a significant metaphor – as a poetic setting for a primal language of love (Fisch [1999]/1988), a vehicle for erotic love, the meeting place of lovers, and female sexuality (LaCocque 1998; Walsh 2000; Carr 2003; among others). The garden also serves as an important *mythological motif*. Trible's literary approach to the garden provides a helpful model for an intertextual exploration of the vineyard as metaphor

and as mythological motif; it demonstrates that an intrabiblical reading is necessary for an understanding of the theological poetics, mystical aesthetic, and mythopoeic depths of the ‘non-religious’ Song of Songs.

Myth and mythological motifs are important because they extend deep into the biblical tradition; they provide a literary-historical context for the use of metaphor and elucidate more adequately than metaphor the depths of human existence (McFague 1982:36).³ Like other OT literature, the Song of Songs is ‘a developed literature’ and ‘a mixed genre’ which resists tidy classification. This is why, according to Schökel, the study of motifs which can transfer to different genres may be just as important as the study of literary genres (1988:19). Myths, like biblical ‘tales of origin’, desire to ‘explain radical cosmic and human situations by going back to the origins, which the OT places at the beginning of time, not outside or beyond time’ (1988:17).⁴ Though the Hebrews do not welcome myths as narratives, they ‘have no difficulty in incorporating mythical motifs into their lyric texts’. While in biblical narrative the mythical motif is ‘historicized’ or reduced to its primordial symbolic function (1988:17), it would be in order to assert that in the Song of Songs mythical motifs are poeticised to reinvest primordial symbolic function. Ricoeur’s assertion that ‘Poetry is mimetic because it is mythic’ (1995:58) elucidates the relationship between metaphor and myth, and poetry and actual practice; the value of poetry is that it mimics reality in ‘the hypothetical mode of fiction’ (1995:240). Tribble’s two chapters will be consulted in the exploration of the vineyard metaphor for she elucidates that revisiting the ‘myth of the Garden’ is crucial for a poetic reconstruction of the love story gone awry.

2.2.2 *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Alter 1985)

In a short essay of only nineteen pages, entitled ‘The Garden of Metaphor’ (1985:185-203), Alter highlights several unique features of the Song, the ‘only surviving instance of purely secular love poetry from ancient Israel’ (1985:185). To cite a few examples, the Song contains no exhortation or instruction, instead the voice of two lovers yearning for and

³ McFague states that metaphor is ‘one way – albeit a highly suggestive and fruitful way – by which to understand particular aspects of human being, especially those pertaining to expression and interpretation, creative and discovery, change and transformation’ (1982:36). It is ‘an adequate perspective from which to view our sensuous, affectional, and active lives at their base level.’ However, metaphor deals with ‘expression and interpretation not with the depths of human existence that lie even beyond words’ (1982:36).

⁴ As Schökel notes: ‘if we take as models the undoubtedly mythological texts of the ancient Near-East – Egyptian Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian – it is clear that the OT has not admitted myths. Neither the religious background, nor the intention, nor the development permit us to identify the biblical stories as myths’ (1988:17); instead of mythological, and to avoid confusion, Schökel suggests the term ‘tales of origin’ (for example, with reference to the first chapter of Genesis).

praising each other. Second, the poem lacks historicity and a ‘life setting’; even if it had one, he questions whether such a ‘misplaced concreteness’ would unlock the so-called intended or original meaning of the poem (1985:186).⁵ Third, the Song is ‘splendidly accessible to the folk’ in spite of its ‘artistic sophistication’ (1985:186). Fourth, it has formal differences with other biblical poetry, like the ‘free gliding in and out of parallelism’ which distinguishes the poem as ‘the very antithesis of the neat boxing together of matched terms in Proverbs’ (1985:186). Alter’s essay remains largely within the framework of the poem and offers a nuanced approach to the distinctive beauty of the Song, elucidating the suppleness and liveliness of the lovers’ dramatic speech (1985:186), the poetics of flaunted figuration and the flamboyant elaboration of metaphors (1985:196-197), the enchanting interfusions and fluctuating movements between the literal and metaphorical realms, the transformations of the landscape into body parts, and of the body into spices, fruit, and wine, and *double entente*, ‘witty ingenuity’ and ‘idea of play’ (1985:201-203). These transformative insights form the basis for an incarnational approach to the vineyard and will be elaborated in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. Alter describes how the exuberant metaphors carry the action forward through rather fluid boundaries between figure and referent, human body and natural setting, inside and outside (1985:198-199), demonstrating ways in which poetic language is ‘manipulated as pleasurable substance’, yet with the ‘elegant aesthetic form of a refined poetic art’ (1985:203). Probably the sentence which sums up Alter’s contribution to an understanding of the Song’s leitmotif of love is the following: ‘Only in the Song of Songs ... is the writer’s art directed to the imaginative realization of a world of uninhibited self-delighting play, without moral conflict, without the urgent context of history and nationhood and destiny, without the looming perspectives of a theological world-view’ (1985:203). In this imaginative, uninhibited and playful world of the Song, the love enacted by the two lovers produces a harmonious correspondence between poem and the world. Taking the playful use of metaphor to the experiential level, the present research seeks a correspondence between the poetic world of the Song and contemporary spirituality. The intention is not to impose a looming perspective of a theological world-view, but rather to draw on the poem’s

⁵ Original hearers of the Song would have been familiar with biblical idiom and would have understood the religious allusions. Allusion, as Alter states is pervasive in the Bible; the reason being that on the evidence of the text themselves this was ‘a traditional culture that encouraged a high degree of verbatim retention of its classic texts’ (Alter & Kermode 1987:113). He comments further that ‘the matrix for allusion is often a sense of absolute historical continuity and recurrence, or an assumption that earlier events and figures are timeless ideological models by which all that follows can be measured’ (1987:117). This principle would apply to many metaphors in the Song like the garden and the vineyard. Of particular interest for the present research is his explication of the dynamic intensification of horizontal and vertical movements in biblical poetry which is concerned above all with a ‘dynamic process moving toward some culmination’ (1987:186).

correspondence with its extralinguistic reality, namely, lived experience. The potential for such transference is that the poem is ‘potently suffused’ with ‘gratifying associations of the erotic’, which engenders a yearning for the Song’s unique quality of love. Alter’s sheer aesthetic appreciation of the Song exemplifies a taste of the pleasurable substance of a flamboyant, yet elegant, garden of metaphor.

2.2.3 *Poetry with a Purpose* (Fisch [1988]/1990)

Fisch contends in his twenty-four page essay on ‘Song of Solomon: The Allegorical Imperative’ ([1988]/1990:80-103), that the purpose of the allegorical method was necessary ‘to explain the extraordinary hold that it exercised on the imagination of its readers’ ([1988]/1990:97). He adds that constructing allegorical schemes of greater or lesser validity cannot be avoided since the text is ‘so obviously symbolical, so rich in imaginative suggestions and reference, also so mysterious; hence ‘the allegorical imperative’ ([1988]/1990:96). The ‘allegorical imperative’ is impressed on the reader by the pressure of the text itself and ‘the vibrations that it sets up in the minds of readers’ ([1988]/1990:97, 98). From the perspective of the Song’s love motif, Fisch cites ‘I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine’ (Sg 6:3) as encapsulating ‘the meaning of the whole song as a witness to a transforming encounter between two persons who know one another’ ([1988]/1990:83). He delineates several important movements toward wholeness, simplicity, and perfection which underscore the mystery which the poem ultimately mediates, namely, toward ‘a love that has nothing left in it of things that can be perceived, counted, or measured’ ([1988]/1990:83-84). This mediation is applied through a persistent feature which distinguishes the poem from other models of love poetry, namely, ‘its dramatic tension’ ([1988]/1990:85). Fisch elaborates that the tension of an unremitting *search*, an agonizing yearning, and a lovesick bride touches heights and depths that are unknown in love poetry, ‘indeed in love poetry of any time’. The Song is unique because it is ‘a long poem of sustained lyric force, unified and powered by this very quality of yearning’ ([1988]/1990:86), a dynamic movement which becomes ‘a structural principle in the poem as it moves forward incrementally from one stage of yearning to the next’, a longing which is not only attributed to the absence of the lover, but a longing of ‘the poem itself seeking its final meaning, its epiphany’ ([1988]/1990:86). Through ‘an ever-moving horizon of deferred gratification’ in the Song, this seeking and finding (or not finding) reflects one of the major themes in the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, the search for God ([1988]/1990:87). The longing is intensified by the shifting kaleidoscope of dreams, a riot of images, and an abundance and confusion of similes and metaphors ([1988]/1990:87-

90). Dreams in the Song work paradoxically as ‘anti-dream’ because the moments of seeming gratification are ‘overlaid by the struggle and the search’ ([1988]/1990:99). As effective as the poem might be, Fisch highlights the ‘limits of art, the impotence of poetry’, that poetic language reaches a point where it fails to express or apprehend the mystery at the centre of the Bible’s meaning, namely, the mystery of the divine-human relation ([1988]/1990:101). The one image that has a ‘better chance than others’ in capturing this relationship of love, he suggests, is the image of ‘bride and bridegroom, man and wife’ – a relation which has the possibility of true dialogue and a genuine quality between covenanting partners, as well as the potential for dramatic change in ‘a relationship that is never static, a balance that is always shifting’ ([1988]/1990:102).

The transforming encounters of love, the metaphor of search, the dramatic tensions, and the dynamic incremental movements all contribute to the poem itself longing for epiphany – pertinent insights which provide a textual composite for the human search for love, God and self, as well as an intriguing enquiry into the poetic vocation of the Song of Songs.

2.2.4 *The Voice of My Beloved* (Matter 1990)

Rabbi Akiba, second century A.D., is often quoted and critiqued for conferring on the Song a sacred value, which is encapsulated in his magisterial statement: ‘All the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies’ (Davis 2000:238-241). Since Akiba’s treatment of the Canticle as sacred text, early Judaic and Christian interpretations were dominated by the allegorical approach. Matter states that ‘very few Christian exegetes of the Song of Songs before the modern age seem to have questioned the premise of allegorical interpretation of the text’ (1990:4).⁶ She highlights several salient points with regard to the medieval tradition of the Song: first, the function of Song of Songs commentaries can only be perceived within the broad context of medieval Christian literary expression (1990:11); second, torn out of this broad context, ‘the form has now lost the richness of its original function’ (1990:11); third, the form and the function were well recognized and considered quite viable because of the assumptions and strategies of the allegorical interpretation inherited from Akiba and adapted by Origen (1990:10-11); fourth, the Song of Songs became ‘the most frequently interpreted book of medieval Christianity’ (1990:6), with exegetical commentaries that developed ‘in a

⁶ Regarding the ‘sacred/secular nomenclature’, Scheper states that it creates a false dichotomy (1992:318). Such polarized controversy, he elaborates, represents in itself an ensnarement in a dualistic mentality; there is no evidence that such an anachronistic distinction would have been meaningful in ancient Israel (1992:318). See Schneiders’ introduction (1999) for an explication of pre-modern readings of both the literal and spiritual meaning of Scripture.

coherent tradition of its own with continual, and very sophisticated, reference to itself' (1990:8); fifth, one of the reasons for the flourishing of the Song of Songs within the medieval Latin context is that 'it provided an extraordinarily rich ground for the elaboration of allegory', and thus an unparalleled opportunity for finding the truth hidden beneath the figures of the text, that is, 'meanings placed in the text by the Holy Spirit' (1990:10).

Concerning genre, Matter argues that 'Song of Songs commentaries make up a special category, constituting a sub-genre of their own' (1990:7). The significance of this point is the 'internal transformation'⁷ of one genre into another where the second participates and shares with the first but eventually develops characteristics of its own (1990:8). Given the Song's erotic imagery and rhetorical immediacy, it provided many compelling texts which were used in other theological tasks (1990:10). The flourishing of the Song is partly attributed then to its intrinsic potential based on the phenomenon of 'internal transformation. This is evident in the fact that 'the medieval Song of Songs genre' expanded to the role of a 'metacritical genre,' one that provides an important key to other literary forms (1990:11).⁸ As an assumed and important part of medieval poetics, the 'Song of Songs commentary genre' thus became a 'horizon of expectation' and 'a model of writing' (1990:11).⁹ Taking into consideration the process of 'internal transformation' in influencing not only exegetical works but other medieval literature, Matter suggests that the allegorical tradition is especially rich as a model of how the genre 'evolves' through the Middle Ages, becoming increasingly more moral, and therefore more personal, in its approach (1990:14).

What is the relationship between the medieval tradition and the present research? Teresa of Avila's vernacular commentary (*Meditations on the Song of Songs*), among others, takes interpretive stances developed by the Latin exegetical tradition (allegorical, tropological, or mariological); yet, is written in 'a devotional mood which was one part, but not the whole, of the Latin Song of Songs commentary genre' (1990:181). In the case of John of the Cross' poetic adaptation of the Song (*The Spiritual Canticle*), it is the 'code of Song of Songs tropological exegesis, in fact, that supplies the meaning for the verses on which the elaborations are based' (1990:186). The Song was used in the monastic tradition as a form of

⁷ With regard to 'internal transformation', Matter cites Corti (1976) in her footnotes (1990:18).

⁸ Metacriticism is 'a mode of criticism that carefully explicates the ideological and institutional aspects of various reading practices; criticism about criticism' (Taylor & Winquist 2001:241). 'Meta' provides 'a larger/wider perspective of a particular subject'. By extension, 'metacriticism' encompasses a wider purview of critical and interpretative strategies by investigating the predominant assumptions that inform various modes of reading. In short, metacriticism 'focuses explicitly upon the interpretive lens through which a text is mediated and read' (2001:241).

⁹ Matter quotes Todorov's *Introduction to Poetics* (1981) with reference to certain 'literary types' that become a 'horizon of expectation' and 'a model of writing' (1990:11).

lectio divina,¹⁰ or sacred reading,¹¹ which facilitated a mystical encounter in which the soul became united with the heavenly bridegroom.¹² A work which captures the devotional, tropological, and allegorical interpretations of the mystical tradition is *The Cantata of Love* (Arminjon 1983) which will not be reviewed here as it is a verse by verse commentary on the Song; however, it will be consulted in the course of the research.

The phenomenon of ‘internal transformation’ is essential to the present research’s transformative approach to the Song, the presupposition being that the Song has an intrinsic aptitude to generate continual commentary and to evoke new uses and a reuse of the Song. While the phenomenon of ‘inner transformation’ generates sub-genres and new meaning potential, the Song of Songs is its own critic. Its metacritical function subverts the ‘limit expression’ of every interpretation, particularly the ‘limit-expression of religious discourse’ (LaCocque 1998a:31, citing Ricoeur); by implication, no one interpretation of the Song’s love motif is conclusive. The effect of this metacritical technique is not to be underestimated in interpreting the Song’s poetic vocation and in suggesting new interpretations of its poetic vision.

2.2.5 *The Song of Songs* (Brenner 1989); and *My Song of Songs* (2000)

The Song of Songs has played a significant socio-religious function within the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹³ For Jewish communities, the Song serves as a redemptive analogy for the Israelitic exodus from Egypt and symbolised the Shekinah, the giving of the law at Sinai. The Song was thus read at the Jewish Passover, and the tradition continues in certain communities (Brenner 1989:95-96). It was also sung in Israel as folk songs in celebration of

¹⁰ See *Too Deep for Words* (Hall:1988) for an explication of this ancient form of ‘sacred reading’, a disposition and desire to ‘see’ God and to be one with God in love (1988:14-15). *Lectio Divina* is also explicated in practical terms for prayer, corresponding to the four basic psychological functions in *Prayer and Temperament* (Michael & Norrissey 1991:31-45).

¹¹ Sheldrake (2006:27) and Welzen (2006:125-144) elucidate the role of *lectio divina* in theological method, a four-fold reading of Scripture that is associated with the Benedictine tradition: *lectio*, or listening; *meditation*, or reflection; *oratio*, a prayerful turning to God; and *contemplation*, the tasting of the sweetness of the Word and delighting in God.

¹² Davis cites Bernard of Clairvaux as ‘the most breathtaking biblical preachers of all time’ because he was ‘one of the most astonished readers of all time’, and elucidates that the great twelfth century Cistercian mystic was ‘completely intoxicated by what he read, ‘a fully alert reader’ who wrote eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs (2005:5). Bernard insisted that the Song be read with the heart, in his constant reference to the ‘book of experience’ (Evans 1987:47).

¹³ For a clarification of the literal and liturgical aspects of the music of the Song in Jewish contexts, see Brenner (1989:99-100). The Song of Songs played a central role in the Puritan celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which Hessel-Robinson depicts as ‘an erotically charged encounter between Christ and the worshipper’ and ‘a celebration of the union between Christ and the beloved’ (2009:105-106); he therefore suggests a more sensory rich and joyous approach to the Eucharist that could lead to a wider renewal of affective and experiential spiritual practice and a contemporary appropriation of the passionate piety of the Reformed tradition’s Puritan forebears (2009:112).

human love. Having heard the Song of Songs initially in its secular usage, Brenner considers any allegorical or hidden meaning implausible and asserts categorically that the content of the Song text is ‘songs of love and love-making between heterosexual humans’ (2000:162).¹⁴ She asserts that ‘[e]ver since antiquity, a minority of Jewish and Christian exegetes have admitted the secular nature of the love lyrics preserved in the SoS’ (1989:75-76). Since the eighteenth century the Song’s literal meaning has gained more and more ground, subverting notions of a ‘higher’ or ‘transformed meaning’ (1989:76); Brenner therefore contends as follows: ‘[s]ecularity, a-historical character, lack of national bias, and the theme of love are characteristic of the SoS. The accumulative weight of these four features makes the book unique within the literature of the Hebrew Bible’ (1989:80). She suggests a return to a simple verbal or literary interpretation, that is, to view the SoS as an anthology of profane love lyrics loosely – if often meaningfully – strung together. The rest, the attribution of intention or design to the original composition and its components, is ‘a matter of reader’s perception rather than of verifiable theories’ (1989:75). In a later essay entitled: ‘My’ Song of Songs (2000:154-168), Brenner reflects ‘a new, more nuanced, [relative] permissiveness concerning the pertinence of readerly difference for critical work’ (2000:156). Here she presents interesting autobiographical material, describing her personal and academic relationship with the Song. Writing from a Jewish perspective, she highlights the formative influence of the Song on her childhood and now on her daily existence and professional life, which demonstrates the impact of context on reader reception and on biblical interpretation.¹⁵ In fact, she comments that the Bible – including the Song of Songs – belong to her life experience, ‘the emotive baggage that goes everywhere’ with her (2000:157). She insists on its ‘singability’, that is, they ‘are songs, poems set to music’ (2000:161). Given her long acquaintance with its Hebrew sounds, texture, images, etc., converting verbalization into visualization requires little effort (2000:159-160). Brenner views the Song as songs about *love* – erotic, physical, and emotional; and the two aspects of love as ‘material and non-material’ which are inseparable and captured by images (2000:161-162). She remains unconvinced of any hidden meaning in the text which infers divine love or religious passion (2000:162). The value of Brenner’s work is that it provides a lively and living autobiographical perspective on a journey of a woman, Jewish, native Israeli, a mother, divorced, middle-aged, Bible scholar for whom this ancient love song has become ‘My’ Song

¹⁴ Kearney offers a helpful discussion on pre-modern Jewish interpretations, particularly with regard to marriage, and highlights that not all allegorical interpretations denied the sexual (2006:310-317).

¹⁵ On the transformative effect of the praxis of spiritual reading, Waaijman’s elucidation of the role of reading and listening in the early Judaic-Christian tradition is helpful (2002:691-728).

of Songs (2000:154). In acknowledging that ‘the pretense to critical objectivity is fast losing ground’, which makes way for a wider category of ‘personal/autobiographical’ perspectives (2000:156), Brenner’s work serves as a stimulus for a contextualisation of the Song of Songs and for new contemporary uses. For example, a chapter in the same volume entitled ‘You are Beautiful my Love’ by Hausl & Silber (2000:186-195) demonstrates ways in which the Song may be used on retreats, ‘bible days’, or ‘awareness days’ for women. Through the interactive modes of reflection, art, and dance, the purpose is to initiate a discussion with one’s own self and stimulate self-awareness.

2.2.6 *Thinking Biblically* (LaCocque & Ricoeur 1998)

Ricoeur will feature prominently in the present research because of his literary insights, hermeneutical emphases, and fresh approach to a transformative use of language.¹⁶ In his short but dense essay on the Song of Songs, entitled ‘The Nuptial Metaphor’ (1998:265-303), Ricoeur questions the one-sided sexual interpretation as well as the overemphasis of sexuality in contemporary interpretations on the Song, to the demise of its spiritual dimension.¹⁷ Critiquing the ‘naturalistic’ or erotic interpretation as ‘a unilinear conception of the trajectory of explication of the Song of Songs’ (1998:265), he proposes ‘a plurality of interpretations, among which allegorical readings, which are themselves multiple and even contrary to one another, would find a place’ (1998:267). Given this suggestion, the Song’s leitmotif of love has access to a plurality of readings compatible with the obvious sense of the text as an erotic poem; at the same time, it is freed for ‘new reinvestment in other variations of the amorous relation’ (1998:268). Ricoeur suggests ‘a multiple, flowering history of reading, set within the framework of a theory of reception of the text’ (1998:265), readings that produce new ‘uses’ or the ‘reuse’ of texts which do not make claims to an original meaning or authorial intention of the Song – which is precisely the approach in the present dissertation.

Ricoeur cites the Lutheran Reformation as one significant influence in the paradigm shift from the spiritual/allegorical to the sexual/literal interpretation of the Song, with the

¹⁶ Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach to theology is ‘not to create completed, doctrinal systems but to interpret the multivalent, rich, ambiguous metaphors arising from the symbolic base of a tradition so that those symbols will once again speak to our existential situation’ with ‘fresh possibilities for it becoming a transforming reality in our lives’ (McFague 1982:120). Ricoeur’s insights are especially helpful in interpreting an ‘imagistic tradition’ in order to ‘renew its religious potential’, the ‘overall goal of interpretation’ being ‘*to return to the experience* the primary language expresses’ (1982:120-121).

¹⁷ Toward the end of the twentieth century a few authors joined the chorus rejecting the past opposition of sexuality and spirituality in interpreting the Song; and a ‘cross over’ of the sexual-spiritual divide is now ‘in the air’ (Carr 2003:145). Authors cited by Carr include Murphy, Lyke, Ostriker, Keel and Walsh. Sources from the present bibliography which fall within this category include Ricoeur, Davis, Scheper and Kearney.

historical-critical method divesting the Song of its ancient credibility (1998:265), paving the way for exegetical and anti-authoritarian arguments, and discrediting the allegorical interpretation which henceforth is ‘understood to be contingent and arbitrary’. After the Reformation, the evaluation of sexuality as an expression of meaningful human relations became a ‘major cultural factor’, with the Reformation calling people to live out their faith within the setting of a worldly vocation – work and marriage – which took away from the Song its monastic paradigmatic character and its privileged setting for a correct reading of the Song of Songs (1998:293-294).¹⁸

Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach remains on the textual plane or ‘obvious sense’ of the text; he cites the ‘nuptial metaphor’ as the Song’s principal metaphor which serves as ‘the virtual or real point of intersection’ where all forms of love cross, the ‘hidden root, the forgotten root of the great metaphorical interplay that makes all the figures of love refer to one another’ (1998:303). While the carnal-spiritual interfacing is an inseparable love, Ricoeur suggests that the nuptial metaphor be disentangled from the sexual, but not abolished; in this way, the nuptial serves other configurations of love than that of erotic love (1998: 274). Metaphor, according to Ricoeur, may be defined ‘in terms of movement’ rather than a mere classification of nouns – a ‘transpositional movement as such, in processes more than classes’ (1978:17). Thus, following Origen,¹⁹ he gives attention to the Song’s dynamic movements of love rather than being fixated on the identities of the lovers; these dynamic movements, or the inner dynamism and inner transformation of the Song, are the basis for a transformative approach to the Song of Songs.

Within Ricoeur’s ‘world of the text,’ the Song becomes a literary embodiment of love and a poetic articulation of love; however, for an exploration of its human-transformative potential as it impacts on the practice of spiritual direction, the dynamic movements of love need to be read as a mimesis of human experience. In this way, depersonalising the lovers, ‘spiritualising’ or deifying love, and ‘objectifying’ the text are avoided. The profound irony of the Song as metaphorical text lies in its incarnational implications for human embodiment,

¹⁸ With reference to the Western monastic tradition, the ‘extraordinary literary self-awareness of this tradition is evident in the nearly one hundred extant commentaries and homilies on the Song of Songs written between the sixth and the fifteenth centuries, texts which show great complexity and virtuosity of allegorical interpretation’ (Matter 1990:3). Matter contrasts the flourishing of the allegorical method within ‘the cloister tradition’ and the insistence of Reformation scholars that ‘the Bible speaks plainly, on the literal level’ and ‘should speak in the vernacular’ (1990:4-5). She elaborates that the sixteenth century boom in biblical studies ‘brought with it disdain for what was increasingly seen as the artifice of medieval allegory’ (1990:5). Later in the modern period, the growth of form-criticism ‘shifted the emphasis even farther away from medieval exegetical norms’ (1990:5).

¹⁹ Kearney emphasises human embodiment and points out that, in the service of a higher truth and wisdom, far removed from the embodied love of flesh and blood, an anti-carnal reading of desire was one of the main motivations behind Origen’s insistence on an allegorical interpretation of the Song (2006:317).

which is understated in Ricoeur's textual and literary emphasis, but is fundamental in the interpretation of the beloved's transformative journey in the Song.

2.2.7 *Romance She Wrote* (LaCocque 1998a)

LaCocque highlights that Midrash²⁰ views the sacred text 'as having several complementing levels of understanding', while 'exegetical allegory claims only one possible reading' (1998a:10). With reference to the mystical interpretation, he notes that 'there is indeed a bridge between the naturalist reading of the Canticle and its mystical reading: both readings are dealing with different levels of understanding' (1998a:11); however, 'no bridge' exists between the naturalist approach and allegorical exegesis because 'they compete for the same bank of the river' (1998a:11). LaCocque accentuates Eros and maintains that the Song 'magnifies' the erotic love between a man and woman, as opposed to an agape-like vertical relationship. He states that a mystical reading of the Song is not precluded; however, what is prohibited is 'a dualistic opposition between Eros and Agape'²¹ which has been the tradition of Christian church's reading of the Song of Songs (1998a:209-210). Lamenting the 'violence' done to the Song through 'interpretation gone awry' (1998a:210), he posits an erotic hermeneutic of the Song.

In both of LaCocque's works cited in this review, his hermeneutical approach is intertextual, the context for explicating how the Song reverses the traditional metaphoric pattern in order to jolt and subvert religious presuppositions (1998a:26), cause readers to be disconcerted (1998a:27), and even disoriented (1998a:29). He suggests that the author 'went as far as possible in the direction of transcending the syntagmatic sequence into a paradigmatic order, meant to supersede the existing order' (1988a:31).²² In parodying traditional conceptions, religious conventions, and prophetic literature, its subversive function produces in the reader a sense of disorientation and displacement; the purpose is a search for the unnamed Source of love in the Song of Songs, whether textually or experientially. For

²⁰ Norris comments that 'there is little evidence how interpreters understood the Song prior to A.D. 70'; the seventh century Targum was 'the earliest full blown exposition' of the Song following Rabbi Akiba's interpretation (2003:xvii). He elucidates that exegesis 'was not about novelty but about finding the triune God in new and unexpected places within the Scriptures' (2003:xv); furthermore, allegory, the classical interpretation, was a method in which Scripture touched most deeply on both mystical and erotic levels (2003: xvii-xx).

²¹ The sexuality-spirituality divide is addressed in works such as *Romance She Wrote* (LaCocque 1998a); *Exquisite Desire* (Walsh: 2000); *The Erotic Word* (Carr: 2003); *Toward a Theology of Eros* (Burrus & Keller 2006); and *Holy Eros* (Whitehead 2009), among others; each one offers helpful critique of Nygren's longstanding *Agape and Eros* dichotomy (1953).

²² Brenner comments as follows on metaphor: 'The language of the text actually achieves the impossible: it is conventional but, at the same time, original' (1989:14-15). LaCocque argues: 'However original its metaphors, the Song of Songs is from start to finish literarily allusive' (1998a:27).

example, LaCocque arrives at the following conclusion: '[I]f God's name is not found, it is because God is to be tasted, heard, seen, and touched in the Song' (1998a:31).²³ The paradox of religious parody in the Song then is that 'the theological fullness of a limit-experience' (1998a:31) is concentrated in a canticle of love – a significant factor of 'pure poetry' which will become evident over the course of the research.

LaCocque's hermeneutical approach is not only erotic, but iconoclastic; and is succinctly captured in his chapter on 'The Shulamite' (1998:235-263). Though subversive and rebellious – to the point of 'derision and provocation' (Ricoeur 1998:301) – he provides helpful insights on ways in which the Song parodies religious presuppositions and presumptuous language. Furthermore, he provides a succinct explication of Ricoeur's use of metaphor and intertextual approach (1988a:31-33). Regarding the Song of Songs as the exegetical challenge *par excellence*, LaCocque locates the Song at the heart of the Scriptures and at the core of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as follows:

To consider the Song of Songs as the Holy of Holies within the sanctuary of biblical literature means that, with Canticle, the reader has reached the omega-point of textual itinerary. Love is the core of revelation; all the rest is commentary (1998a:38).

2.2.8 *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Davis 2000); *Getting Involved with God* (2001); and *Reading the Song Iconographically* (2006)

Davis is a lone voice among contemporary scholars 'in her conviction that the Song was correctly understood by the rabbis and church fathers who set the book within Israel's Scriptures' and who, on this basis, asserts that the Song is in large part about 'the love that obtains between God and Israel – or, more broadly, between God and humanity' (Hawkins & Stahlberg 2006:xix). What is Davis' premise? She claims that by the first century of the Common Era, after the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the physical focal point for prayer and pilgrimage was gone leaving the Song of Songs, according to a rabbinic story, as 'worthy to replace the Temple as a means of access to God' (2000:240). Thus, as a literary sanctuary, the Song of Songs has served as the 'Holy of Holies of Scripture' leading Davis to assert that 'the Song is one way of entering that holy place – even, the only way' (2000:241). Though there is no reference to God, prayer, or any aspect of Israel's religious practice or tradition in the poem, she argues that the Song of Songs is the 'most biblical' of books because 'the poet is throughout in conversation with other biblical writers'

²³ Davis comments that LaCocque transposes what belongs to God onto the human lover, the 'vertical axis' onto the 'horizontal axis' (2006:173)

(2000:231).²⁴ It is a poem, that cannot be explained, resolved or decoded; instead it invites the reader to ponder, puzzle, draw connections, and push beyond what we thought before, and vigorously exercises the religious imagination that has been trained in biblical tradition (2000:237-238). On this basis, she treats the Song as an ‘iconographic text’ – a window opening between two worlds – mediating ‘between the historical, sensible existence and transcendent experience’; moreover, the iconographic text ‘is an imaginative expression shaped by prayer and the theological traditions of the Bible; it witnesses to our fragmentations and yet offers glimpses of a higher unity’ (2006:176-177).

As with other commentators like Tribble, Ricoeur, and LaCocque, Davis states that the poem represents the ‘reversal of that primordial exile from Eden’ (2000:232), the reversal of ‘the Fall’, and the reversal of desire, with the new word *t’shuqah* for ‘desire’ marking ‘a new beginning to sexual history, a place of healing for women and men together’ (2001:72-73). The Song ‘digs down to roots’ (Latin *radices*), to the very base of history; it works for repair and renewal and ‘represents a rereading of the tradition’ (2001:72-73). Davis digs deep down to roots with her ecological sensitivity and love for the land, particularly Israel – epitomized by another work: *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (2009), and advocates as follows: ‘Perhaps the greatest religious value of the Song of Songs for our generation is to make the perspective from the Garden real and compelling’ (2000:237).²⁵

Davis concurs with LaCocque that the Song of Songs presents ‘the greatest hermeneutical challenge in the Bible’ and suggests that their works be read together (2006:173). With similar hermeneutical approaches though, these two authors arrive at different conclusions. According to Davis, her iconographic view is toward healing and adoration, while LaCocque’s iconoclastic view is ‘laden with subversive and rebellious overtones’ (2006:173). Her commentary on the Song demonstrates a mutually informative rather than a mutually exclusive approach between the sexual and the religious, toward a holistic understanding of our humanity in which ‘we can come to recognize sexual love as an arena for the formation of the soul’ (2000:233). Davis’ multiple approaches, treatment of the Song of Songs as sacred text, appreciation of creation, and references to renowned mystics are primary reasons for incorporating her works in the present dissertation.

²⁴ Davis suggests that as modern readers we are far from the sensibilities of an oral culture such as ancient Israel where literature and religious texts were circulated orally, read aloud and repeated and became engrained in the public memory (2000:245).

²⁵ Cognisant of the fragmentation of the postmodern world, the dislocation caused by globalization, and the disorientating effect of pluralism (Foley & Schreier 2004:xiii), Frohlich takes up the subject in her chapter entitled: The ‘Myth of the Garden’ and Spiritual Ministry in Postmodern America (2004:92-106).

2.3 Review of Contemporary Spiritual Direction Methodologies

The purpose of the present section is to explore briefly several contemporary methodologies in Christian spiritual direction with particular reference to the praxis of love. For tactical purposes, the exploration will be demarcated by three areas: the formal one-to-one spiritual direction relationship;²⁶ pertinent themes for spiritual direction in Asia;²⁷ and, references to the Song of Songs in spiritual direction writings, though these are sparse.

Since the spiritual direction legacy of the three most influential Spanish mystics Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), and John of the Cross (1542-1591) will undergird the present research, it is helpful to encapsulate at this point their primary contribution to the love motif. Johnston states that though Ignatius never fell under the spell of the Song of Songs, he was ‘an incorrigible romantic’ who taught that ‘love should manifest itself in deeds’ (1995:251). As for Teresa’s great contribution to mystical theology, it is found in ‘her teaching on the Incarnation’ which focuses on love for Jesus, the Word Incarnate, with a ‘practical-down-to-earth stress on love for one’s neighbor’ (1995:68). John of the Cross’ mystical theology is ‘a theology of love’ or, specifically, ‘the secret wisdom that comes from love’ (1995:95); John is not only doctor and poet of divine love, but the wounded and passionate ‘bride of The Canticle’ (1995:94). For Teresa and John, the Song of Songs was the most important book of the Bible (Davis 2000:257).

2.3.1 *Spiritual Direction According to St John of the Cross* (Florent 1980)

Spiritual direction is ‘a difficult art, it is nevertheless very necessary’; therefore, practitioners ‘are obliged to be careful and understand what they are doing’ (Florent 1980:7).²⁸ Moreover, they need to have knowledge of what God is doing. The sanjuanist model places the accent clearly on ‘the unconditioned primacy of the divine action’ for, according to John of the Cross, the ‘chief agent, guide, and mover of souls’ is the Holy Spirit (1980:9). His practice of spiritual direction was informed by the relationship between the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the Incarnation, with Christ as the foundation of faith; on this basis then, ‘what defines the relationship of the directee to the director is faith’ (1980:12). Embarking on spiritual direction is an intimate ‘act of faith’ involving the innermost life of the soul, a faith

²⁶ Chan comments that ‘direction in its specialized sense is a one-to-one relationship’ and observes that ‘Asian people are generally less open in group situations. They are more inclined to ask the most important questions in a one-to-one relationship’ (1998:226). Dougherty has researched ‘group spiritual direction’ in a variety of groups and in a variety of settings in *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction* (2003).

²⁷ For further foundational and practical cross-cultural perspectives in spiritual direction, see *Common Journey: Different Paths* (Rakoczy 1992).

²⁸ With reference to John of the Cross’ *The Living Flame of Love* (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:698).

which is the essential nourishment of the spiritual direction relationship and the means by which a person will be led to the divine union, a journey which is characterised ‘more by believing than by understanding’ (1980:15). This faith is not opposed to love, but is a concrete and lived faith that is enriched with all the love possible, a faith ‘through which we love God without understanding God’ (1980:16).

Love is at the heart of John of the Cross’ spiritual direction, a love that is founded on pure faith and which traverses the way of negation toward divine union. Overlooking love as the heart of John’s teaching is to misinterpret his themes of negation and to ‘distort the beauty, depth, and humanness of his person and doctrine’ (Chowning 1992:31). The mystical doctor is ‘thoroughly Christian and incarnational’ and ‘the starting point for approaching John’s negation spirituality is the experience of being loved by God’ (1992:34). The negation aspect is central to the apophatic tradition²⁹ and serves as a meeting point in East-West interreligious dialogue;³⁰ sanjuanist spirituality, as this particular research will demonstrate, has particular relevance for the contextualisation of spiritual direction in Asia. Furthermore, John of the Cross’ model exemplifies the traditional term ‘spiritual direction’ through its accent on the divine action through the work of the Spirit, the deepening journey in faith, hope and love, and a transformative process which brings human enrichment and spiritual nourishment. Maintaining the emphasis on the ‘spiritual’ and giving the ministry a ‘direction’, John of the Cross’ insights enhance the integration of faith and love, psyche and spirit, as well as *kataphasis* and *apophasis*. With this kind of integration, his contemplative model is invaluable at the mid-life stage and beyond, and will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

2.3.2 *Care of Mind Care of Spirit* (May [1982]/1992)

May describes a spiritual director as ‘an informed human being who represents a channel of grace’, one who points directions rather than gives orders ([1982]/1992:8-9). This particular work is subtitled ‘A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction’ in which he describes psychology as ‘the efficiency of one’s functioning’ and human spirituality as ‘the dynamic

²⁹ The value of the apophatic and Asian traditions in areas such as intuitive insights, practical wisdom, and bodily disciplines, for example yoga and tai chi, counterbalances the one-sided rationalistic and analytical approaches of the West (Edwards 1980:164-172; Chan 1998:230-231). For example, on breathing practices and *tai chi* exercises, Liu elucidates ways in which interior peace and quiet assists the flow of vital energy through the psychic channels while remaining externally at rest (1986:7). His explication on the concepts of ‘nonaction’ and ‘nonbeing’ (1986:17), and maintaining the balance between ‘strength and motion’ through tai chi exercise and ‘weakness and gentleness’ through meditation (1986:9), is particularly helpful for an integration of the theory and practice of developing interior stillness.

³⁰ Note the article on ‘Buddhism and the Nada’ of St John of the Cross (Sullivan 1980:183-203) as an example of the Western and Eastern comparisons of union.

process of love in one's life' ([1982]/1999:xvi). His definition of 'efficiency is the how of life; love is the why' underscores the praxis of love in Christian spiritual direction, particularly in a contemporary culture which characteristically 'sacrifices love by idolizing efficiency' and is more intent on the solving of problems rather than considering 'what love is really inviting' ([1982]/1999:xvi). May observes that people are 'more desirous of seeking love than understanding', therefore what is mostly required in spiritual direction is 'a simple, loving availability [...] with God's graceful Spirit blowing where She will' ([1982]/1992:200). He concurs with the disposition of 'a prayerful heart within a contemplative atmosphere' stating that what the health care profession lacks is 'prayerfulness or real spiritual attention' ([1982]/1999:200). On spiritual direction's distinctive role, he states that it 'should deal primarily with those qualities that seem most clearly and specifically spiritual, those that reveal the presence or leadings of God, or evidence of grace, working most directly in a person's life' since spiritual direction in its purest human form is 'a journey towards more freely and deeply choosing to surrender to God' ([1982]/1992:202, 16, 63). While the psycho-spiritual emphases converge in practice (Tam 2007:11-36), May cautions against 'a patchwork of physical-psychological-spiritual activities' that is called 'holistic'; rather, psychological and spiritual integration takes place in the practitioner's heart, not in any theoretical understanding or models of care; he suggests that when the heart is kept as prayerfully open to the Source of Love as possible, no artificial integration will be needed because there will be no artificial separations in the first place ([1982]/1992:xvii).

Spiritual direction calls for prayerful vigilance on the part of the director for, as May cautions, human loving in the spiritual direction relationship must not 'eclipse the divine love that may in part be expressed through our caring' ([1982]/1992:177). The tendency toward ego inflation, the issues of transference, a preoccupation with content, or even personal interest in the directee, can easily distract from the larger openness towards God.³¹ May stresses the importance of discerning between personal ego and the divine will in any helping profession as the 'potential for distortion' is the 'most fierce and treacherous confrontation faced by modern spiritual guides and leaders' ([1982]/1992:20). His psycho-spiritual insights underscore that spiritual direction is effective in the measure to which director and directee relinquish personal mastery and surrender to the divine mystery. Furthermore, his cautions with regard to ego inflation underscore my suggestion of the use of the 'cojourner-seeker'

³¹ On the interpersonal dynamics of the spiritual direction relationship, transference and countertransference, and boundaries in the relationship, see May [1982]/1992:113-148; Ruffing 2000:155-180; and Edwards 2001:124-132.

combination. While a practitioner may speak of ‘my client’ or ‘my directee’, the possessive inference of ‘my seeker’ would be counterproductive to the co-discernment of the Spirit’s direction; furthermore, it has the potential to produce an unhealthy co-dependency.

2.3.3 *The Contemporary Ministry of Spiritual Direction* (Schneiders 1983)

Spiritual direction is ‘a process carried out in the context of a one-to-one relationship in which a competent guide helps a fellow Christian grow in the spiritual life by means of personal encounters that have the directee’s spiritual growth as their explicit object’ (1983:46). Schneiders distinguishes three types of spiritual direction: educative spiritual direction; spiritual paternity and maternity; and fraternal friendship. The *educative spiritual direction* type is characteristic of initial spiritual formation situations for the purposes of ‘imparting theological, moral, and spiritual information’ which tends toward a certain ‘authority pattern simply because of its educative pattern and the clear disparity between guide and directee’ (1983:49). Spiritual direction fulfilled an institutional and educative function, bearing in mind that in the Christian tradition it developed ‘chiefly because of its utility in the formation of monks’ (Wall 1983:11); it is basically ‘a monastic concept’ (Merton 1975:13) which dates back to the Desert Fathers in Egypt, Syria and Palestine in the fourth and fifth centuries’ (Leech 1980:41).

The second type to which Schneiders refers is that of *spiritual paternity or maternity* which is an ‘extraordinarily close, usually life-long relationship’ which like true spiritual friendship is ‘an extraordinary gift of God and not the product of human initiative’; however, this relationship which was often implicitly or explicitly presented as the ideal, Schneiders asserts is ‘quite simply an error’ and that it would be ‘futile and dangerous’ to adapt to ordinary situations in spiritual direction (1983:49-50). This type is not synonymous with the contemporary term ‘mentor’ because, as Leech explicates, the ancient role of spiritual father³² or of the *abba* of the wilderness was grounded in ascetic disciplines and silent practices, and spiritual guidance was based on particular gifts of ‘discretion and diakrisis’, or the discernment of spirits (1980:41).³³ He adds that by the fourth century the term *pneumatikos pater* was well established in patristic writing (1980:41).³⁴

³² In a detailed study which focuses on asceticism in the early Church Fathers, Demacopoulos (2007) points to the love of the spiritual father/son relationship in direction, an important insight not to be overlooked in the institutionalisation of the practice.

³³ See Leech’s elucidation on the psycho-spiritual in prayer, discernment of spirits and the demonic (1980:104-136) and the central role of the spiritual director as healer. On discernment, as a charism or acquired skill, see Chan’s chapter on ‘The Discernment of Spirits’ (1998:199-224) in which he insists that spiritual direction ‘include the charismatic model of direction as exemplified in the desert tradition’ (1998:230). The charism is

The third type of spiritual direction is *fraternal spiritual direction* which involves ‘an adult relationship between two mature Christians’, the real basis of the relationship being ‘the fraternal friendship between two adult children of the same Father’ (1983:50).³⁵ Schneiders elaborates that no abandonment of critical judgment or alienation of personal responsibility is expected on the part of the directee, and ‘a *fortiori* it must involve no infantilism or psychological regression’. The guide is ‘simply a friend and companion who possesses a certain competence in an area important to the directee’, but is ‘not a parent or superior surrogate’ (1983:50). The ‘children of the same Father’ is a motif derived from Jesus’ paradigm and praxis of love in Jn 15:15 in which he refers to his followers, men and women, as ‘friends’ (Jn 15:15), and, by implication, brothers and sisters of the same Father. Since the relationship between director and directee in the East is ‘almost always hierarchically ordered’ based on the concept of ‘master-disciple’ in Chinese culture, and ‘guru-follower’ in Indian culture (Chan 1998:231), Schneiders’ third model is preferable in contemporary Asian contexts because a fraternal friendship model emphasises three particular aspects: both seeker and cojourner are pilgrims on a journey; the Spirit is the principal agent and chief guide; and personal responsibility and personal growth are assumed in spiritual friendships.

2.3.4 *Holy Listening* (Guenther 1992); and *Toward Holy Ground* (1995)

Guenther regards the practice of spiritual direction, in some ways, as ‘a protracted discussion of the two Great Commandments’ (1992:26) – of loving God and loving neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:37-40). The focus of the ‘protracted discussion’, however, is not a theological articulation of love *per se*; instead spiritual direction helps people to ‘strip away the layers and articulate what they really want: God’ (1992:26). The spiritual direction session then is viewed as ‘a time of prayer’ (1992:17),³⁶ a prayerful ambience for sharing personal narrative or one’s unique story. Guenther encapsulates the spiritual director’s task as follows: ‘to help connect the individual’s story to *the* story and thereby help the directee to recognize and claim identity in Christ, discern the action of the Holy Spirit’ (1992:32). Embodying ‘the feminine’ of God, Guenther describes the role of spiritual director as ‘midwife’, one who is

presupposed in all approaches to spiritual direction, a ministry which facilitates discerning the Spirit’s movement in the whole of life; hence the prolific ancient and contemporary writings on *diakrisis*.

³⁴ On the basis of these early origins, Leech delineates the ‘marks of a spiritual director’ as a man possessed by the Spirit; with experience, learning, and discernment, and one who gives way to the Holy Spirit (1980:88-89).

³⁵ May cautions that the informal terminology of ‘spiritual conversation’ and ‘spiritual friend’ in the practice of spiritual direction could work against the accountability, direct confrontation and precision in discernment required in the practice ([1982]/1992:10).

³⁶ Leech offers two dense chapters on ‘Prayer in the Christian Tradition’ and ‘The Practice of the Life of Prayer’ (1980:137-186).

present to another in the process of birth giving and involved in vulnerable, deep and intimate accompaniment (1992:87). The image of ‘midwife’ is not exclusive to women;³⁷ in fact, the image is based on Meister Eckhart’s concept of the womb, or of God ‘coming to birth in the soul’ (which will be elaborated in Chapter 5 of the present dissertation). In her second work *Toward Holy Ground*, Guenther uses the image of the *amma*, ‘the *old* mother’ (1995:12) for a more advanced stage of the spiritual director’s life. Citing the gifts that women bring to spiritual direction, her praxis of love includes maternal conversation, nurturing, the role of ‘mothering’, and feminine models of spiritual direction.³⁸ She asserts that ‘the greatest gift the director can bring is a loving presence’ (1992:135) because love is not limited to the verbal, nor to the visual but extends to the gift of self. In ‘*Holy Listening*’, Guenther embodies the gift of hospitality, as evident in the bringing of her whole self in loving attention to the other, a presence which she describes as ‘the gift of myself, which may not be much, but it is all that I have’ (1992:21). The spiritual director is therefore one who welcomes the stranger, is the ‘bestower of guest-friendship’, and reflects ‘the abundant hospitality shown by the host at the heavenly banquet’ (1992:10). The spiritual director, as ‘a host in the truest and deepest sense’ finds ways of relinquishing the role to ‘the true Host’ in order that the space she has prepared becomes gracious and holy (1992:10, 39). Guenther’s model of spiritual direction optimises prosaic and homely elements in her holy practice. In this sense, Jones is correct in commending Guenther’s *Holy Listening* for her ‘demystification’ of spiritual direction (in Guenther 1992:ix). Hay’s work (2006) follows in Guenther’s footsteps by elaborating the Latin word *hospes* as the etymological root of hospitality and by offering a ‘new paradigm for hospitality’ based on the sixth century Rule of St Benedict.

2.3.5 *The Gentle Art of Spiritual Guidance* (Yungblut 1995)

The model par excellence for Christian spiritual direction is summed up in Yungblut’s categorical statement, that the ‘first and foremost Christian spiritual guide is Jesus’ (1995:131). Jesus’ gentling art of spiritual guidance transformed John from a ‘son of thunder’ to ‘the beloved disciple’; John, in turn, exemplifies for Yungblut a ‘spiritual guide par excellence’ (1995:131). On the basis of personal transformation, Yungblut insists that ‘the first and foremost qualification for an aspiring spiritual guide is that she or he should have

³⁷ Guenther states that feminine images ‘do not imply exclusivity’ as ‘both men and women can be sensitive midwives of the soul’ (1992:86).

³⁸ See *Women’s Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* (Conn [1986]/1996); also an elucidation of the *Via Feminina* which is ‘a linguistic expression that affirms the revelatory and prophetic in women’s experience’ (Lanzetta 2005:13).

had one or more mystical experiences (however undramatic) of being loved by a mysterious presence, God' (1995:135). His rationale is that those who have come to this vocation have been 'nurtured through spiritual guidance from others and initiated through the experience of being loved, singled out and commissioned to love others with the selfsame love with which they have been loved' (1995:11). Yungblut designates spiritual guidance as 'a gentle art, a gentling art' that can be administered only by one who has been profoundly gentled (1995:140); he suggests that the only sound, sustained milieu for spiritual direction is 'one of gentleness because what is involved is a 'tendering' process' (1995:4). His interpretation of 'mystical experience' is with reference to Jesus' earthly experience, that is, a 'present reality: the immediate, here-and-now experience of the Kingdom of God on earth', an experience that 'involved a sustained awareness of the Presence, a capacity for relatedness to others, and a perception of beauty, truth, and goodness heretofore unknown and therefore unrealized' (1995:11). From this interpretation of Jesus' paradigm, it is deduced that the effectiveness of the spiritual direction relationship is mystically linked to the depth to which the spiritual director has experienced life, love, and the Other as a present Kingdom reality.

Within this divine milieu, Yungblut draws on Jung's depth psychology and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin's 'myth of cosmogenesis', and proposes 'a new mythology'³⁹ in sexuality (1995:5, 49, 56-79). The touchstone for spiritual guidance in this critical area, he asserts, is 'the direction in which Spirit is moving in the sexual expression of an individual – that is, whether it is moving retrogressively toward more primitive animality or toward more sublimated hominization' (1995:69). Where sex is not 'increasingly reflecting the marks [or fruit] of the Spirit [it] must be seen as in some sense an arrested development' (1995:73-74). His central thesis is that an integration of Jungian psychotherapy and Teilhard's mythology offers potential for human growth in the area of sexual expression through the process of individuation, which he states succinctly as follows: 'It is an interior marriage of the masculine and feminine principles that alone makes possible profound psychic as well as physical marriage in the human dyad' (1995:72). Yungblut's conviction is that when this 'unlimited potential for union is explored within the framework demanded by Spirit what is experienced is holy marriage within each individual and with each other' (1995:73). What Yungblut is suggesting is that sexuality be treated within the realm of the Spirit, which is a recovery of the 'essential goodness of matter as Spirit-laden' (1995:65, 67). Encapsulating Teilhard's new mythology as 'God at the heart of matter' (pan-entheism) –

³⁹ Yungblut challenges traditional views of the Genesis Fall, biblical authority for sexual morality and vocational celibacy, and the idea of marriage for the sole purpose of procreation (1995:56-79)

‘not God as matter’ (pantheism) – Yungblut engenders a respect and reverence for present life, and envisions the potentiality and transformation of the human person in a present involvement with God, and in the service of God (1995:2, 4, 65). It would have been interesting had Yungblut brought the Song of Songs into his discussion since the Song is conducive to a new mythology of sexuality based on original blessing, primordial condition, and a reversal of the ruptures of the Fall in Genesis. Without engaging Yungblut and Teilhard, but drawing on contemporary Jungian insights, the present research will address the topics of sexuality, psychic marriage and spiritual marriage.

2.3.6 *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* (O’Donohue 1997)

In the Celtic tradition, ‘soul love’ or soul friendship is captured in the old Gaelic term, *anam cara*, meaning ‘soul friend’ (O’Donohue 1997:35). It was not a mere metaphor or ideal, but ‘a soul bond which existed as a recognized and admired social construct’ (1997:38).⁴⁰ The soul bond was an ‘art of belonging’ that awakened and fostered a deep and special companionship (1997:35). The *anam cara* was considered God’s gift, one who practiced the ‘art of love’ since, as O’Donohue poetically elaborates, ‘Love is the only light that can truly read the secret signature of the other person’s individuality and soul’ (1997:36). The *anam cara* was a person graced with several attributes, namely: love which is the most real and creative form of human presence; consciousness, depth of awareness, and a reverence for presence; and affection which awakened ‘a new art of feeling’ (1997:37-38). The sacred friendship brought integration and healing, gradually refining one’s sensibilities and transforming one’s way of being in the world (1997:38). The Celtic tradition did not view *anam-cara* friendships as cerebral or abstract (1997:38); thus, its sublime perspective permits us to enter into ‘a unity of ancient belonging’ (1998:39). Describing the Trinity as ‘the most sublime articulation of Otherness and intimacy, an eternal interflow of friendship’, O’Donohue considers friendship to be ‘the nature of God’ (1997:36). On the basis of Jesus’ words ‘I call you friends’, he describes Jesus as the ‘first Other in the universe’ and ‘the secret *anam cara* of every individual’ (1997:36-37). This brief sketch of an ancient tradition attributes the sacramentality of human presence to the extraordinary gift of divine friendship, an important principle which will be taken up in Chapter 5 with regard to Jesus as archetypal lover and friend.

⁴⁰ See Leech’s *Soul Friend* on the Celtic church, where he states that the office of soul friend was not seen in ‘specifically sacramental terms’ (1980:49-51); also his section on spiritual friendship and spiritual fatherhood in Aelred of Rievaulx (1980:53-54).

2.3.7 *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Chan 1998)

Chan describes spiritual direction as ‘an *oral* traditioning process that engages the individual in a one-to-one personal encounter’ and affirms spiritual direction’s contribution to the church, as follows: ‘There is something in oral exchange that other forms of communication cannot replace’ (1998:236), the ‘other forms’ referring to preaching and teaching. He also suggests that the role of women spiritual directors be more fully explored and incorporated into the work of direction of the whole church because ‘women are often able to bring a distinct perspective to the cure of souls’ (1998:229).⁴¹ He views the work of a spiritual director as going beyond merely providing a professional service; he states that ‘in fact, it goes beyond what we are accustomed to calling work. It is sharing a way of life with another’ (1998:228).⁴² Chan’s emphasis on ‘a way of life’ rather than ‘work’ is particularly important in the Asian context so that the imbalance of work and doing be restored in favour of *being* – an aspect that will be elaborated in the vineyard as existential project (Chapter 6). For the Asian readership, Tam’s spiritual direction insights are to be read alongside Chan’s work as they highlight the negative impact on the person when ‘working for God’ takes precedence over ‘relating to God’ (2007:164). Tam’s systemic approach – illustrated in three case studies of a social worker, an accountant, and a pastor – enables the spiritual director to identify factors that shape a directee’s ministry and spirituality, namely, religious/family/social/work systems (2007:165).

The sharing of a way of life includes the disclosure of painful experiences; yet, spiritual direction has a wide lens which is to connect individual story with Christian story. Through spiritual direction an individual learns to live in congruence with the Christian story, which Chan aptly describes as follows: ‘Every Christian has a unique story, but each person’s story forms part of the larger Christian story. And it is the larger story that authenticates each person’s individual stories. This larger story is not just a model for individual growth; it is also a single tapestry to which each individual contributes his or her unique strand’ (1998:232). Chan’s comment sounds like poetry because, in the prosaic of ordinary life, people gravitate to spiritual direction because they feel depleted and disconnected and do not find in the institutional church nourishment for their soul and congruence with *the Story* – particularly at critical stage of mid-life. Through a spiritual direction treatment of the human

⁴¹ See Benner’s *Care of Souls* for an explication of the term ‘soul cure’ and ‘soul care’ (1998:31-34).

⁴² The ‘willingness toward self-disclosure is one of the primary distinctions between spiritual direction and psychotherapy, where the mutuality of the former is an essential characteristic of the relationship’ (Guenther 1992:35).

beloved and the vineyard as existential project, the present research will demonstrate the significance of the individual search within an intricate Christian, yet deeply human, story.

2.3.8 *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* (Ruffing 2000)

Spiritual direction, according to Ruffing, bears a resemblance to spiritual friendship but ‘by its very nature is usually not an entirely mutual or equal relationship’ (2000:163). It is a pastoral relationship in which the spiritual director has a professional and ethical responsibility toward a directee. Ruffing elaborates two critical areas in the early stages of a spiritual director’s practice that could harm directees, namely, ‘the power differential in the relationship’ and ‘skills required to recognize and manage transference and countertransference’ (2000:155-180).

Writing specifically on ‘spiritual direction beyond the beginnings’, Ruffing comments that ‘the role of desire and the relationship of human love to mystical love has become a major theme in theology and spirituality in the contemporary period, especially in the English-speaking world’ (2000:105). In an assimilation of an Ignatian approach to desire and the erotic experience of God in love-mysticism, she draws on the Western mystical tradition and explores desire in relation to the mystical process, a process which is transformative (2000:97). She strongly asserts that ‘without the experience of these mysteries in our own spiritual lives or a vicarious openness to them through knowledge of the tradition, we really cannot be of much help to others on a passionately quickening spiritual journey’ (2000:100). Spiritual directors need, in addition to competent supervision, ‘some knowledge of the Western Christian tradition of love mysticism, and an adequate phenomenology of desire, which relates all forms of human love to their fundamental goal of union with God’ (2000:100). This tradition, according to Ruffing, ‘draws on a personal relationship with Jesus, the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, and the Song of Songs’ (2000:100-101). Elsewhere, in an essay ‘Flesh is More than Flesh’, she views human beings as ‘personal, embodied spirits’ and highlights a neglected theme in theological anthropology, namely, ‘the ecstatic characteristic of human persons’ (2000a:174). Ruffing laments the fact that we have clearer teaching about sexual morality and sexual sinfulness than we do about ‘sexual holiness, sexuality in the service of love, and sexuality as a privileged locus of ecstatic mystical experience’ (2000a:178). She therefore asserts that the task of spiritual directors is to become comfortable with the sexual and the spiritual, that is, through our ‘embodied and sensitive responses we can slowly help our directees integrate their sexuality and spirituality, both in human relationships and in prayer, when prayer takes the form of complex erotic imagery related to

God's intimacy with them' (2000a:178). Ruffing's work on spiritual direction 'beyond the beginnings' is a helpful resource, particularly for mid-life and beyond. It is an informative experiential, theological and mystical resource for understanding traditional love mysticism in relation to contemporary concerns of desire, gender, and sexuality, which highlights the rich complexity and sacred depths of the practice of spiritual direction. In her overview of classic mystical writings and contemporary perspectives on love mysticism in spiritual direction, Ruffing cites the Song of Songs as the biblical tradition for love mysticism without any elaboration. The present dissertation fills the lacuna by bringing the Song of Songs into this discussion and elucidating ways in which it serves as an apt biblical source for exploring love mysticism, the search for the Beloved, the interfacing of spirituality and sexuality, and transformation in love.

2.3.9 *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God: A Theological Inquiry* (Barry 2004).

Barry's theological reflection affirms several principles of an experiential approach to spiritual direction, namely: spiritual direction 'focuses on experience and expects that people will be able to encounter God there' (2004:3),⁴³ directors are to be 'deeply interested in God' in order to facilitate conversation about God in human experience (2004:36); and the major role of the spiritual director is 'to help directees pay attention to their experience as the locus of their encounter with God' (2004:35). As an amplification of *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (Barry & Connolly 1983), a popular work on spiritual direction, Barry extends the discussion of personal encounter to God's action within the community through a focus on the Trinity as the theological and relational basis for community. In doing so, he addresses misconceptions concerning the individual, prayerful, and experiential aspects of the practice of spiritual direction and demonstrates that the personal encounter with God is a fuller experience of God in the world. He does this by expanding the 'Ignatian idea of finding God in all things, of being a contemplative in action' (2004:37) with MacMurray's concept of 'meaningful knowledge [...] for the sake of action' and 'meaningful action [...] for the sake of friendship' (2004:4). In the emphasis on action and friendship, he places love at the centre, insisting that love is 'demonstrated' by 'works' but is essentially a reflection of a direct relationship with the Lord (2004:53). He elaborates that works do not constitute community;

⁴³ For a discussion on the nature and centrality of religious experience, see Barry & Connolly (1983:13-27, 101-107) and Edwards (2001:45-71). Also note Barry's preference for the term 'the religious dimension of experience' as an alternative to 'religious experience' (2004:20-39). Turner discusses the deformations of 'experientialism' which abhors the experiential vacuum of the apophatic and resists the deconstructions of the negative way (1995:259-260).

rather the primary motivation for our togetherness is mutual friendship in the Lord and a desire to celebrate that friendship (2004:52-53). On the basis of the Trinitarian emphasis, Barry arrives at the conclusion that 'Friendship is love' (2004:90) and 'at the heart of the universe is the creative desire of God to draw us into the universal community whose motive is love and whose intention is community' (2004:106). His theological enquiry presents Christian spiritual direction with an integrated model of personal encounter within the Trinity, the immediate community, and the universal community. As Chan correctly states: 'The spiritual life of an individual will always remain in flux if there are no stable structures of church, family, friendship and work through which one expresses one's covenantal relationships' (1998:233). Barry's theological enquiry, however, moves beyond the 'I' consciousness of immediate relationships to the depth and breadth of divine love which gives birth to community. The implication for Christian spiritual direction then is that personal encounter is the enfolding of a unique individual in the unitive, communicative, and fruitive love of the Trinity⁴⁴ and it is this relational integration which is the existential basis for being a friend in the Lord and a loving presence in the community. Chapter 5 of the present dissertation will develop the integration of the Trinity into contemporary spiritual direction in an exploration of Jesus' paradigm of spiritual friendship.

2.3.10 *Seeking God in All Things: Theology and Spiritual Direction* (Reiser 2004)

Reiser's dense theological resource points to the centrality of divine-human encounter in spiritual direction, as follows: 'If there is one place where the unfolding nature of revelation is confirmed, surely that place is spiritual direction. The spiritual director watches as it happens' (2004:29). The key to authentic Christian religious experience he asserts is 'that God is love and that the cross brings this love to the fullest expression' (2004:100). At the core then of Reiser's practice is the following conviction: 'that the encounter with Jesus risen includes first and foremost the realization that we have been loved, personally, individually, and inexplicably. Divine love is inexplicable because sinfulness, inadequacy, and incompleteness have been all too familiar a part of our lives' (2004:101). The mystery of divine love, however, comes to us by way of invitation, not through coercion. Reiser is therefore correct in his assertion that 'the Great Commandment might more accurately be called the Great Invitation' (2004:24). He elaborates that the biblical injunction to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength is at its core an invitation to 'taste and see' (Ps

⁴⁴ For an elucidation of 'fruitive love' as the model of divine affection and the work of active love in the Trinity, see 'The Trinitarian Mysticism of Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381)' (Kourie 2008).

34:8) or to ‘come and see’ (Jn 1:39). Thus, in the practice of spiritual direction, when one believer accompanies another in responding to and working out the implications of the Great Invitation, ‘both are led to a fuller awareness of the divine mystery’ (2004:23,24). Suggesting the Incarnation as a starting point for spiritual direction, which is foundational to the Paschal Mystery as the primary symbol for the death-resurrection motif, he identifies compassion as the virtue which best describes the mystery of God. On this basis, an incarnational direction for the practice is derived, as follows: ‘A person fully ensouled is a person who has become thoroughly compassionate’ (2004:117).

In Christian spiritual direction, the Bible serves as an interpretive framework for the divine-human encounter because ‘Scripture gives us both a lens through which to contemplate our lives and a vocabulary by which we can verbalize what we have noticed’ (2004:142).⁴⁵ Spiritual direction furnishes people the opportunity to see ‘the pattern of grace that has been unfolding over many years’ and in the process of direction to ‘write’ their unique story with ‘nuance and distinctiveness’ since each narrative ‘recapitulates the history of salvation’ (2004:141). The unfolding of grace and seeking God in prayer are fundamental aspects of the practice, encapsulated as follows: ‘Seeking God has to do with daily prayer; looking for answers has to do with theology’ (2004:67). Grace unfolds within the context of seeking and finding God within the providential setting of personal circumstances. Reiser underscores the Ignatian principle that ‘for those who seek God, God will be found “in” every situation as the empowering ground of love’ (2004:67). Where God is sought in love, with a pure and single-hearted intention, the person will come to possess the ‘interior knowledge’ and be seized by the ‘profound gratitude’ of which Ignatius speaks (2004:67). Moreover, it is this disposition of being profoundly moved with gratitude to God which ‘prepares the way for how we greet everything that might happen to us’ (2004:67).

Finally, in relation to the broader theological discussion of contemporary spiritual direction, he explicates that *kataphatic* mysticism ‘emphasizes what can be positively said about God on the basis of Scripture and salvation history’ (2004:12). The ‘mysticism in question’ in the contemporary orientation of inter-religious dialogue, he suggests, is the *apophatic* tradition, ‘with its stress upon the experience of unknowing’, an experience which ‘belongs to the tradition of the human race’ (2004:12). For Christian spiritual direction at the ecumenical edge, its contemporary theology has to be done ‘comparatively’, that is, ‘with one

⁴⁵ Johnston emphasises ‘the return to the Scriptures’ in ‘the updating and modernizing of mystical theology’ citing great mystics as being nourished by the Scriptures, dominated by the power of the resurrection, and transformed into Christ ([1978]/1997:51).

eye on what others have to share with us about their experience of God'. However, he asserts that 'we shall be in a position to draw fruit from other religious traditions in proportion to how much we have appropriated our own Christian faith' (2004:10-11). As the present research in the Song of Songs and spiritual direction will demonstrate, a biblical or theological foundation to spiritual direction is enhanced by an interdisciplinary approach, an eye on interreligious issues, as well as an appropriation of the Song of Songs in Christian spiritual praxis.

2.3.11 *The Given and the Gift: Sexuality and God's Eros in Spiritual Direction and Supervision* (Hamilton-Poore 2005)

Viewing sexuality as 'a given' and 'a gift', Hamilton-Poore draws on two theological presuppositions: with reference to the OT, 'the clearest and strongest affirmation of sexuality, desire, and the erotic is found in the Song of Songs' (2005:88); and, the second great biblical affirmation of sexuality and eros is the Incarnation, with Jesus of Nazareth as 'the humanly embodied expression of God's own erotic desire' (2005:90).⁴⁶ On the basis of God 'becoming flesh' in Jesus, human sexuality is affirmed and redeemed; thus we are able to become one with Christ and one with God not in spite of our sexuality, 'but precisely because we are sexual beings with a capacity, as Jesus both demonstrates and enables, to give an embodied, passionate response to the God who desires us' (2005:91). On the theological implications of the incarnation for human sexuality, Hamilton-Poore views Christian spiritual direction as 'a participation in the mystery of the Incarnation' for, in the meeting of two or three persons in contemplative listening, God has 'a way of showing up' (2005:91). Furthermore, 'sexuality, desire, and the erotic makes an appearance every time we meet for spiritual direction' (2005:92).⁴⁷ He suggests ways of affirming human eros and God's eros in the spiritual direction relationship, as well as in supervision, while cautioning directors to pay attention to the directee's stages of spiritual development and heed the Song of Songs' warning not to rouse love before it is time (2005:10). Divine and human eros will be integral to the present research; however, contemporary gender issues will not feature prominently in the discussion. In the context then of gender and the sexuality-spirituality-Song discussion, it is helpful to note Edward's comments on gender differentiation (2001:133-148). He points to

⁴⁶ Rolheiser states that 'The central mystery within all of Christianity, undergirding everything else, is the mystery of the incarnation' (1999:75), the hermeneutical key being 'Giving Skin to God' (1999:76). God is *incarnus*, literally 'in physical flesh' from the Latin word *carneus* (1999:78) is especially important for a lived spirituality, that is, 'in the way we are asked to live out our faith lives' (1999:81).

⁴⁷ May addresses gender issues, erotic attractions, and dealing with sexuality in spiritual direction ([1982]/1992: 135-148), and includes insights on the limitations of marital partners offering each other spiritual direction.

the downside of traditional or classical bridal mysticism, where the human soul is regarded as feminine and God is imaged as masculine. Edwards' observation is that inadequate attention is being given to 'the masculine attraction to the feminine' and the understanding of the divine as 'an alluring feminine presence' (2001:137). The 'intimate male/female metaphor' of Hosea and the Song of Songs, or of the 'maternally feminine' in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37), he suggests do not positively connect with or inform the powerful encounters of male directees. Welch also takes up the masculine issue, with particular attention to the adverse effects of patriarchy, in his chapter on 'Men, Women, and Contemplation' (1996:102-121). Based on a Jungian approach, Welch suggests that the contemporary emphasis on the feminine engenders a search for a deeper understanding of masculinity (1996:103), particularly a masculinity which is 'reoriented around a center which is experienced as Otherness' (1996:112). Acknowledging that institutionalisation has 'domesticated' men and women to live the tradition and kept them 'from being in touch with the life-giving forces at the core of their identity', he concludes that 'If contemplation means the openness to God's transforming love, no matter how it is approaching us, then it makes some sense that the new life within us will have gender related characteristics' (1996:121).

2.3.12 *A Psycho-spiritual Approach to Christian Spiritual Direction* (Tam 2007)

Tam points out that spiritual direction is not a biblical term nor can the contemporary form be found explicitly in Scripture (2007:69). Advocating a sound theological understanding of the practice, he locates a biblical rationale for Christian spiritual direction in Luke 24:13-35. Here, the colloquium between Jesus and the disciples in the Emmaus journey 'reflects the very nature of spiritual direction' for Jesus is not only present as companion but is the subject and topic of conversation (2007:80). On this biblical basis, the spiritual direction conversation is a 'trilogue' of God, director, and directee (2007:80), with the essential elements of the practice identified as pastoral care, conversation between friends, the faith journey, discovering and responding to the presence and invitation of God, and living with 'a heightened awareness of God and a deeper commitment to God Who is Love' (2007:89).

Writing within the Chinese Christian context of Hong Kong, where nuclear and extended family structures form an inextricable part of the spiritual direction conversation, Tam highlights the value of spiritual parenting or 're-parenting' in spiritual direction, particularly where the family of origin and local churches lack models of nurture. Spiritual parenting, he suggests, is a biblical metaphor, a loving relationship which counter-balances

the trend toward professionalism in spiritual direction.⁴⁸ Taking his cue from St Anthony's model as 'father to the monks', Tam describes the spiritual father as one who is a learner on the way, not a spiritual giant or a guru (2007:59).⁴⁹ He considers St Anthony an 'archetypal figure' in spiritual direction for his 'way of dispossession' (2007:54), humble disposition of 'dying daily' (2007:109), and 'fatherly attitude' in journeying with others (2007:61). Spiritual parenting is to be viewed within Tam's overall psycho-spiritual model which uses a systemic approach to assess a directee's spiritual formation, especially the impact of parental and family influences. At young adulthood and mid-life, it becomes apparent that unresolved family issues result in a stunting of spiritual growth, with directees often fixated at the 'childhood stage' of Fowler's Faith Development theory (2007:161). It is the task of the spiritual director to assess these causes of 'fixation'; for example, abuse, trauma, neglect, and childhood hurts. The directee needs help in perceiving hurtful experiences in a new light, and discovering how pain might serve as a potential for growth and a new way forward (2007:116). Tam includes a discussion of Fowler's structural stages of faith as a way of exploring synergy/or the lack of synergy in human and spiritual development. The discrepancy between biological age and spiritual maturity is often a source of deep inner conflict, and is assessed by an 'awareness of where we presently are and our openness to transformation' (2007:113), basic structural readiness in psychological, social, and relational growth for real growth in faith (2007:103), and a balance or imbalance between self-care and self-giving (2007:103). It is the task of the spiritual director to attend to both spiritual maturity and human maturation in the directee's growth toward wholeness and full personhood (2007:113). Tam also gives attention to the spiritual director's own maturity, which he evaluates through the grid of St. Anthony, the archetypal spiritual director, and Fowler's faith development theory (2007:107-111).

Adopting Satir's Model of Therapy, Tam comments that Satir's approach has proved immensely helpful in his practice because a spiritual director is more concerned with facilitating the directee's potential for growth in God than in making psychological assessments (2007:114). He identifies the spirituality of the Satir Model as encountering and connecting with people, 'not the formulation of theories' (2007:132); consequently, Satir's

⁴⁸ In Paul's reference to 'ten thousand guardians in Christ' and 'not [...] many fathers' (1 Cor 4:15), 'guardian' was translated as 師傅 in older versions of the Chinese Bible, meaning teacher, expert, trainer or master and connotes hierarchy, authority and disparity. A more recent translation is 啟蒙教師 refers to a teacher who introduces one to a certain field of study.

⁴⁹ Tam states clearly that spiritual fatherhood is not a 'resuscitation of sexism or patriarchy', but an elaboration of 'an ancient, and perhaps the original, metaphor in the history of spiritual direction within the Christian tradition' (2007:49).

‘use of self’ and her spirit-to-spirit ‘contact’ serve as essential experiential components because the therapist’s ‘self’ is as ‘an organic and life-giving channel of transformation’ (2007:165-168). The ‘use of self’ refers, in spiritual direction terms, to ‘embodying the presence of God (2007:173). In making contact with the core or spirit of the person, Tam explicates the Iceberg Metaphor of the Self – a seven-layered diagram of a person’s inner world – as a means of exploring from the obvious level of behaviour (the tip of the iceberg) through various intra-psychoic levels to the deeper universal-spiritual levels identified as the yearnings of the Self, the ‘I am’ (2007:174-175). The Iceberg Metaphor enables spiritual directors to discern congruence and incongruence between religious behaviour/beliefs and a person’s deepest yearnings/desires; moreover, it gives important clues as to how and why religious behavioural patterns are constructed or deconstructed (2007:175).

Integrating the cure and care of soul (2007:11-36), Tam addresses modernity’s ‘loss of soul’ and ‘fundamental yearning’ from an Asian perspective. He concurs with Satir that the yearning for love is the ‘song of the soul’, a yearning which is intensified in Asian people ‘by the deprivation of love in the family of origin’ (2007:186). Aware of the existential factors that ‘shroud the light’ in Asian people, Tam brings to his practice Satir’s ‘utmost value and respect for the uniqueness and miracle of the individual’ (2007:197). He posits a Satir based spiritual direction model which ‘maintains the focus on deepening an individual’s spirituality while, at the same time, fosters the restoration of a wholesome selfhood that grounds a healthy spiritual life’ (2007:197). Through illuminating case studies and emotive verbatim, Tam’s work elucidates the complex socio-cultural-familial-religious issues which impact on a person’s self-worth, survival strategies, and coping stances – and draws the conclusion that ‘[t]he most basic and primary human yearning is Love’ (2007:184). With pastoral experience in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, and other Asian countries, Tam observes that vast numbers of Asian people are suffering a very deep woundedness of soul, which convinces him that ‘[u]nfulfilled yearnings, particularly the lack of love in childhood, must be addressed if a person’s spirituality is to flourish’ (2007:198).

2.4 Conclusion

It is evident from the foregoing exploration of contemporary literature on the Song of Songs that the Song’s love motif is unlike any other biblical text. It is decidedly not a Sinaitic law (Deut 6:5), a Christian mandate of love (Mt 22:34-40), the greatest theological virtue (1 Cor 13), or a treatise on love (John’s epistles). Rather, the biblical love song is regarded as the Holy of Holies of all the Scriptures, the core and compendium of the Judeo-Christian

tradition, the most unbiblical book of the Bible, the most biblical of all books, and the embodiment of the mystery of the human condition. The Literature Review has elucidated these diverse opinions and demonstrated that the Song of Songs is no ordinary love song or love poem. The love it proclaims is extraordinary because it is loaded with a theological poetics and mystical aesthetic of divine love, as expressed in the experience of human love. In view of this complexity, the poetic vocation of the Canticle may be stated as two-fold: first, the Song of Songs is a poetic prism of love from which multivalent meanings are refracted so as to provide endless evocation, optimal conversation, maximal appreciation,⁵⁰ and continual transformation; and, second, it is a poetic phenomenon of love in search of epiphany in human lives and in the prosaic of lived reality.

It is evident on the basis of the Canticle's poetic vocation that the Song's leitmotif of love is best explored through an interdisciplinary integrative approach. Hermeneutical and literary works cited in the Literature Review demonstrate that the contemporary milieu of Song of Songs commentary consists mainly of multiple-integrative approaches, reader-oriented interpretations, and personal-autobiographical reflections. A multidimensional approach to the Song of Songs will therefore be adopted in the present research, namely, the metaphorical, the mythological, and the mystical. These three approaches are not rigid categories, but the purpose is to extrapolate salient dimensions of the love motif and to explore the existential potential and incarnational implications of the vineyard. The approaches are summarised below:

The *metaphorical* approach focuses on several aspects: the interfusion of the literal and figurative aspects of metaphor which suggests an interfacing of the sexual and spiritual interpretation; the dynamic tensions and dynamic movements in the text which bring about an incremental development in the lover-beloved relationship; a parody of religious conventions which subverts presuppositions in order to augment the Song's meaning potential; and the imaginative and delightful play of love on the level of the material and non-material.

The *mythological* approach highlights that the Song embodies the central truths of the biblical tradition and the mystery of the human condition. In conversation with other biblical writers, the poem digs deep, finds its intertextual roots in the original garden of Creation, and reinvests the poetic setting of the Song with primordial symbolism. In this sense, the Song represents a radical rereading of the tradition by restoring and repairing the love that obtained

⁵⁰ Note Schneiders' point on the 'genuine interdisciplinary character of Christian spirituality' which is a 'study of Christian religious experience understood as maximally inclusive' (2005a:21). Notice too her footnote that, in non-religious spirituality, this is an 'embodied task' that seeks to apprehend the 'optimal relationship' between the self and cosmic totality.

between man and woman, between creatures and the Creator, and between humans and nature.

The *mystical* approach, associated with early Jewish interpretations (Rabbi Akiba) and Christian adaptations (Origen), treats the Song of Songs as the Holy of Holies of Scripture, a literary sanctuary which engenders allegorical, tropological, and devotional readings of the Song as well as a mystico-erotic love between the human beloved and the divine lover. The Song of Songs flourished particularly in the medieval Latin context, affording it a sub-genre of its own known as ‘Song of Songs commentary’, and later expanded to a metacritical genre which influenced other medieval literature. Given the unparalleled flourishing of Song of Songs writings in the medieval context (mostly allegorical interpretations), love mysticism has subsequently and inextricably been linked to the Song of Songs.

Two important presuppositions for a transformative approach to the Song of Songs arising from the Literature Review have been identified and will be adopted: first, the phenomenon of inner transformation which evokes multiple interpretations of the Song’s love motif; and, second, the aptitude of the metacritical genre to generate new uses and reuses for the Song without any loss to its originality. These intrinsic factors provide the rationale for the correlation between the poetics of the Song and the praxis of spiritual direction.

Since contemporary scholarship focuses more on the text as object than on the human beloved as subject, the Literature Review evokes several experiential questions which will be addressed in the course of the research: What is the spiritual itinerary of a text that begins in the middle of nowhere and ends nowhere? With the dramatic tensions and dynamic movement toward some culmination, what is the significance of the poem itself in search of epiphany? Given that love is the core of biblical revelation, what is the key to the poem’s *raison-d’être*? Furthermore, contemporary scholars highlight the significance of the *garden* which, on the basis of Gen. 2-3, assigns to the poem a theological poetics of sexuality; however, scant attention is given to the *vineyard*. With the beloved’s vineyard as hermeneutical key, the present research will show that the poem is suffused with allusions to sexuality *and* spirituality; moreover, the vineyard metaphor is potent as a transformative feature as well as an existential project for contemporary spirituality. The insights and enquiries that have emerged from the Literature Review will undergird the multidimensional exploration of the vineyard and also inform the vineyard as existential project.

With reference to the foregoing exploration of contemporary methodologies in Christian spiritual direction, it is evident that the divine-human relationship is the primary

focus of the practice and, though not explicitly stated, the starting point of the practice is the mystery of divine love. The various methodologies form a rich composite of the praxis of love; each one illuminates a particular aspect of the mystery of divine love, aspects which are succinctly collated and delineated as follows: God as principal agent in human transformation and the Source of faith, hope and love (traditionally the theological virtues of spiritual maturation); the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery form the bases for Jesus' paradigm of soul friendship and spiritual direction; the Great Commandment serves as the Great Invitation to be loved by God in an inexplicable and unconditional way so that God might come to birth in the human soul; a present-Kingdom reality envisions the potentiality of human transformation and the harmonisation of all aspects of the self in a loving relationship with God; Trinitarian relationality is the basis for Otherness, community, friendship, compassion and good deeds; the gift of sexuality which is expressed in loving human relationships is also a conduit for deepening intimacy with God; the Bible is an interpretive lens for contemplating our lives, framing our story, and recapitulating the acts of divine love in human history; and the human yearning for love often emerges from deprivation and a deep woundedness of soul, yet ultimately seeks God.

As the Literature Review elucidated, no one methodology would capture the essence and dynamics of divine love or of divine-human encounter; however, each spiritual director/cojourner seeks to embody and image the divine in particular ways; namely: as a person of faith, hope and love in the path of not understanding God, yet believing (John of the Cross); as an informed human being and a channel of grace who points directions (May); as a friend and companion who is competent in adult relationships and facilitates fraternal friendships among children of the same Father (Schneiders); as midwife to the soul and a bestower of guest-friendship who attends to the homely and holy needs of seekers (Guenther); a profoundly gentled and loved person who is involved in a tendering process of human transformation (Yungblut); an *anam cara* or soul friend who practices the art of love and the art of friendship, a sacramental presence which effects healing and integration, refinement and transformation (O'Donohue); one who shares a way of life with another, in ways that help individuals to articulate and embrace their unique story and live in congruence with the Christian story (Chan); one who is pastoral and professional, who embodies the erotic and the mystical, because human love is related to the desire for union with God (Ruffing); one who is deeply interested in God and who facilitates conversation about encountering God in human experience and in community (Barry); one who has encountered the risen Jesus, is fully ensouled and thoroughly compassionate, drawing fruit from

conversation at the ecumenical edge (Reiser); one who participates in the mystery of the Incarnation, as a sexual being with a capacity to give an embodied, passionate response to the God who desires us (Hamilton-Poore); and a spiritual parent/friend who is a learner on the way, journeying with others, attending to their loss of soul and fundamental yearning in order that they discover their true personhood and recover their worth in the God of Love (Tam).

Having explored a broad range of contemporary methodologies, several lacunae in the literature have emerged which the present research intends to address through a conversation between the Song of Songs (poetics) and spiritual direction (praxis). First, while emphasis is placed on human experience and human encounter, an archetypal seeker for the human search for love, self, and God is yet to be identified. Second, transformation is cited as integral to the process of discovery and recovery, and of healing and integration; however, the transformative journey in love, from a biblical perspective, has yet to be addressed. Third, if personal story is to connect with the biblical or Christian story, a biblical exemplar is needed that would offer as broad a scope as possible as well as an experiential framework which would evoke the complex reality of a contemporary lived spirituality. Fourth, the Song of Songs is cited in relation to eros, desire, sexuality, love mysticism, and intimacy with God; yet, contemporary works cited have not explored the biblical love song for its integration and appropriation in spiritual direction. Fifth, if the human yearning for love is the song of the soul, contemporary spiritual direction would be enhanced by a biblical voice who sings in superlative key of that ageless yearning. Sixth, no manual or handbook exists for the diverse practice of spiritual direction – and rightly so. The present research hopes to enrich contemporary literature with a *canticle* of spiritual direction based on the Song of Songs; *canticle* referring to contemplation of the mystery of divine love and a celebration of human transformation in love.

Chapter 3

A METAPHORICAL APPROACH TO THE VINEYARD:

The Existential-Descriptive Phase

3.1 Introduction

The Song of Songs' poetic vocation is two-fold: first, it serves as a poetic prism of love which refracts multivalent meanings of love and therefore calls for multiple readings of the love motif; and, second, it is in search of epiphany in every generation, with a concomitant transformation across time. The present chapter begins the exploration of the poetic prism with a metaphorical approach to the vineyard and remains largely within the framework of the Song of Songs. The purpose is to understand the transformative experiences of the human subject, *the beloved*,¹ and to interpret her transformation for spiritual praxis. Centred on the vineyard metaphor, the existential-description investigates the poetics of the Song by listening to the beloved's experience 'as it occurs' in the text and by following the dynamic movements across the eight chapters of the Song. The findings in the present chapter will determine the validity of transformation in love as the principal motif in the Song of Songs and the feasibility of the vineyard as existential project.

Since the research is intended for the *use* of the Song in Songs in spiritual direction, the metaphorical approach will adopt Ricoeur's hermeneutic which is centred on *reading* rather than on the writing of a text.² In addition, an intertextual and intersecting reading will be adopted because intertextuality, as 'an effect of reading', generates theological readings of the Song and creates sparks of new meaning, points of intersection among the biblical texts (Ricoeur 1998:295). Theological is not synonymous with religious since the Song is 'profoundly theological' (LaCocque 1998:253-254), yet 'devoid of any religious jargon' (1998a:15). Ricoeur's suggestion of 'an intersecting metaphor' will also be employed because it invites the reader 'to consider the different and original regions of love, each with its symbolic play' – on the one side, the primordial garden of Genesis and on the other the poetic garden of the Song of Songs; on the one hand, divine love as invested in the Covenant

¹ In relation to God the divine lover, the human beloved is treated as a generic term for women and men on a transformative journey in love. Welch (1996), Ruffing (2000), and Fischer (1988, 1999) take up the issues of gender and spirituality in a general way, not directly related to the Song of Songs. LaCocque presents a strong case for female authorship of the Song and challenges the patriarchal/prophetic tradition which often portrays women in a negative light (1998a).

² Ricoeur critiques the allegorical approach which claims that meaning is allegedly immanent within Scripture (1998:295) as well as contemporary erotic interpretations like LaCocque's (1998; 1998a) which also make claims of 'original meaning' or 'authorial intention'. He cites LaCocque's 'detheologization' of the erotic metaphor as a subversive view which arises from a particular epoch of reading in which the topic of sexuality enjoys considerable freedom (1998:274-276).

with Israel and later in the Christic bond and, on the other, human love as invested in the erotic bond (1998:301). The intersecting metaphor gives birth to a double *seeing as*, where the prophets *see* the divine-human relationship of love *as* conjugal love and, in the love of the Song, the erotic bond is *seen as like* the love of God for the creature/creation. The *seeing as* is ‘the organon of every metaphorical process, whether it works in one direction or the other’ (1998:301); it is fundamental to the intersignification of human and divine love in the present approach to the vineyard.³ On the relationship between metaphor and the love motif, Ricoeur’s comment is especially pertinent: ‘It is the power of love to be able to move in both senses along the ascending and descending spiral of metaphor, allowing in this way for every level of the emotional investment of love to signify, to intersignify every other level’ (1998:302).⁴

The beloved’s *search* and transformation are central to the metaphorical approach, and is briefly summarised at this point because it evokes several productive questions for the existential-description. Framed within the two poles of Sg 1:6 (my own vineyard I have neglected) and Sg 8:12 (my own vineyard is mine to give), the beloved’s search might be aptly described as ‘a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God’ (Benedictus 2005:1:6).⁵ This quote is extracted from the papal encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (Benedictus 2005) where the theme ‘On Christian Love’ affirms the unity of body and soul and advocates the healing and restoration of *eros* to its true grandeur. In citing the Song of Songs, the encyclical highlights two different Hebrew words used in the Song for love, namely, *dodim* which is a plural form suggesting a love that is initially ‘insecure, indeterminate and searching’, and *ahabà*, which the Septuagint translates with the similar-sounding *agape*, ‘the typical expression for the biblical notion of love’. Furthermore, the self-seeking of *dodim* is contrasted with the self-giving of *ahabà* (Sg 8:6)

³ On metaphor in contemporary poetics, Nirenberg asserts that ‘the old and manifold polarities, in particular the opposition between literal and metaphoric, are being neutralized, or at least softened’ (2007:171); and adds that ‘whether any given term in a poem is to be taken literally or metaphorically, must become thoroughly undecidable’ (2007:172) for the colors of thought, of being and of truth cannot be poetically distinguished (2007:153-154).

⁴ Metaphor is not mere decoration and delectation; images do not serve as a simple ‘dressing up of ideas’ (Schökel 1988:100). The ‘stylistic function’ of metaphor is now superseded by a more content-oriented approach and a conceptual function (van Hecke 2005:3) because ‘metaphor is indigenous to all human learning from the simplest to the most complex’ (McFague 1982:32).

⁵ Landy traces the beloved’s path from the ‘absence of self’ to the ‘fullness of self’. His enquiry is: ‘how does [the Song] speak to us, what is its viseé on the world; as one of the great human affirmations, how does it speak for us’ (1983:272). Another approach would be to consider the woman’s psychological process from ‘desire to individuation’ which addresses issues of gender, contrasexuality and self from a Jungian perspective (Young-Eisendrath 1997:25-58).

which suggests that through the experience of a real discovery of the other, love's progression is a moving beyond the earlier selfish character of self-seeking toward concern and care for the other which seeks the good of the beloved. The ongoing exodus, or the movement beyond ourselves towards the Divine, purifies and transforms *eros* without negating or destroying the God-given gift. As the present approach will demonstrate, the Song of Songs maximises *eros*' potential in the journey from self-seeking to self-giving. Taking the discussion further to the experiential level, the present chapter will trace the beloved's transformation in love through a focus on the vineyard metaphor, and draw biblical implications for the vineyard as existential project.

From the perspective of spiritual direction praxis, the starting point or entry level is invariably the 'closed inward-looking self'. The cojourner's task is to guide the seeker toward greater freedom and authentic self-discovery in God who is infinite love and intimate Mystery. Several productive questions will therefore undergird the existential-descriptive overview: (1) What intratextual evidence accounts for the transformation of a depleted, neglected self to a creative, generative self, through the search for a self-transcending love? (2) What intrinsic factors evoke an experiential-existential engagement with the Song that would contribute to a biblical rationale for transformation in love? (3) How does the beloved's search inform 'the spiritual life as existential project', a project that concerns conscious involvement in life-integration through self-transcendence?

3.2 The existential enquiry

The hermeneutical cue for the existential enquiry is the beloved's self-referential *vineyard* which is commonly interpreted as *herself* (Murphy 1990:78), her *body* (LaCocque 1998a:185), or *female sexuality* (Falk 1990:155).⁶ According to Murphy, the connection between *herself* and the imagery of vines and vineyards is implicit in her description of the lover as 'a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi', his 'going down to see if the vines had budded', her invitation for them to 'go early to the vineyards', and 'their vineyards that are in bloom' but threatened by foxes (1990:78). Falk suggests that the vineyard is more than a literal place; it also refers to 'an appealing site for the lovers' (1990:154). She also highlights the distinction between *kerem*, translated as 'vineyard', and *gefen*, meaning 'vine', and suggests that *kerem* is used in several different ways in the Song

⁶ In the possessive form, it is a symbol for *female sexuality*, that is, when the woman speaks of her own vineyard, she refers to *herself*, and when the man speaks of his own vineyard, he refers to his *beloved* (Falk 1990:155).

which enhance the resonance of each occurrence of the vineyard motif and bring textural richness (1990:155-156). *Gefen* refers to the grapevine in the stages of budding or early fruit, a reference to spring, and is associated with erotic experience in the Song. It also refers to ‘mature fruit’ or ‘clusters of the vine’, and is a metaphor for the beloved’s breasts in Sg 7:8.

Concerning the vineyard in Sg 8:11-12, Murphy’s view is preferable⁷ that the woman is contrasting ‘her own self (*šelli*)’ with Solomon’s vineyard (1990:79) for it creates ‘a framing structure for the Song as a whole’ (Davis 2000:299). Elliott adds that the ‘formal structure is indeed an organic one’ with the prologue (1:2-7) and epilogue (8:5-14) forming an *inclusio* to the entire poem (1989:236). LaCocque advances the idea of the Canticle as ‘a ritornello’, or of the whole poem as ‘an inclusio’, suggesting that it is ‘indeed a *round*’ or ‘an endless song’ without a plot (1998a:181, 190-191).⁸

The inner coherence or literary unity⁹ of the Canticle is fundamental to the present thematic and transformative approach to the vineyard. At the same time, Ricoeur’s point is noted that the Song is ‘from one end to another a song and not in any way narration’ (1998:270-271). Since the lover-beloved dialogues are recounted through the woman’s (dominant) voice, Arbel’s observation that the entire Song is ‘a woman’s inner and personal discourse’ is also taken into consideration (2000:90-101). The poetic features of inner discourse, dreams, and imagination are effective experiential tools used in spiritual direction, and will therefore be incorporated. According to Davis, dreams are an important poetic feature of the Song for its dream images are deeply contextualized in ancient Near Eastern religion, art, literature, history, the physical geography of Israel, and in Old Testament themes (2000:238). In fact, she refers to the Song as ‘a dream transcribed’ and ‘a poem that imitates the movement of a dream’, yet it is not a dream for it deals with real relationships (2000:238). Whether sections of the Song text are viewed as dream states, waking dreams, active imagination, or inner recollection is unclear. The metaphorical interplay and inner dynamism of the Song, however, provide engaging poetics for an existential description of the human search for love, God, and self.

For a thematic approach to the Song, Tribble’s ‘cyclic structure’ is conducive. She elaborates a framework of ‘five major movements’ of varying lengths, separated and joined by the refrain or adjuration where the beginnings and endings of each canticle interweave the

⁷ Falk refers to this pericope as belonging to the man’s speech, which suggests that his beloved is not to be shared with anyone else (1990:155).

⁸ For example, 8:1-2 recalls ‘the kiss of his mouth’ in 1:2; the word *ahabà* in 8:6 recalls 1:3-4; and 8:12 refers to the beloved’s vineyard in 1:2 (LaCocque 1998a:190-191).

⁹ On the Song of Songs, Bekkenkamp makes a helpful distinction between the unity of the *text* and an original unity or unity of authorship (2000:64).

cyclical patterns in the overall structure (1978:146, 152). The eight short chapters of the Song of Songs text (only 117 verses) are therefore divided into five canticles, punctuated by the beloved's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem, as follows:

- Canticle of Neglected Desire (1:1-2:7);
- Canticle of Interior Searching (2:8-3:5);
- Canticle of Paradoxical Awakening (3:6-5:8);
- Canticle of Primal Ecstasy (5:9-8:4);
- Canticle of Generative Love (8:5-14).

The progression of love across the entire poem may be gauged from the canticles' names in the above schema. It reflects an ever-deepening relationship of love which is foregrounded in the Song of Songs as erotic human love and is analogous to the development of divine-human intimacy. Since each canticle forms a single unit, each will be briefly explored on the basis of three experiential questions: (1) *What is evoked?* (2) *What is released?* and (3) *What is celebrated?* The scope of the questions will be limited to three aspects in each canticle, namely, the beloved's self-referential *I am* (Sg 1:5-6; 2:16; 5:8; 6:3; and 8:10b); the vineyard imagery which includes vines and wine; and dynamic movements which highlight the transformative effects of love.

3.3 An existential-description of the vineyard

3.3.1 *Canticle of Neglected Desire* (Sg 1:1-2:7)

In the first canticle, *desire* is evoked, *awareness* released, and *receptivity* celebrated.

The poem begins with a sense of immediacy and without any history. It opens with the spoken, namely, the voice of the beloved whose initiative puts the heroine at center stage and makes it is 'a woman's song from beginning to end' (LaCocque 1998a:43).¹⁰ The beloved speaks of the lover in the first person and in the third person, shifting between her erotic desire and her elevated admiration of her lover. The lack of logical coherence in the prologue gives the poem a lively spontaneity, which enhances the poetic effect and echoes human sentiment. As Arminjon states, 'the grammar of passion does not mind such difficulties' (1983:52). On the flip side, the prologue's lack of logical progression is sympathetic to the difficulties of human articulation; for example, in the practice of spiritual direction, people often come 'in the disarray of their disordered loves not able to articulate what they really want: God' (Guenther 1992:26).

¹⁰ Citing Brenner, LaCocque states that 53 per cent of the Song is in female voice and 34 per cent in the male voice.

The immediacy and sensuality of the prologue evoke the four senses – of hearing the Song, of touch in ‘pull me’, smell in ‘oils’, and taste in ‘kisses’ – which leads Bekkenkamp to assert that the Song is not *about* eroticism and sensuality, it *is* erotic and sensual (2000:86). These references to touch, taste and smell are unusual, notes Davis, for everywhere else in the Bible hearing and sight predominate (2000:242). LaCocque comments that the poet does not *use* aesthetics to attain a historical and theological end; rather, ‘the aesthetic is cultivated for its own sake, without embarrassment and without excuse’ (1998:236). Given the erotic and sensual poetics, the first experiential component evoked by the Song is *desire*. The beloved’s specific desire is for the lover’s kisses and for a love that is more delightful than wine. In fact, the stress on ‘physicality’ is stronger in Hebrew as the word *dôdîm* connotes *lovemaking* rather than love (Davis 2000:242); thus, the beloved desires a physical touch. In this sense, the Song of Songs is conducive to spiritual direction for, as Guenther asserts, ‘we must let ourselves be touched’ (1992:31).

Within the ambit of desire is the role of Eros. LaCocque treats the Song as ‘a hymn to Eros’ (1998a:18)¹¹ and asserts that the purpose of its metaphorical language (with religious connotations) is to praise *eros* (1998:249). He rejects the intellectual assent of a ‘disembodied agape’ on the grounds that the erotic is not a mere rhetorical vehicle, with the tenor sanctified by an aloofness of spirituality (1998:252). The entrance to the magnitude of the Song’s love is through the erotic, which activates bodily response, arouses desire, and invites the reader to listen, feel, smell, taste and see so that reading becomes a personal encounter and a meaning event.¹² It is evident thus far that *humanness* is the nexus of the Song, which underscores the significance of the vineyard metaphor (the beloved *herself*) as its locus of transformation.

Presupposing *Eros* as the transformative agent in the Song (the underlying motif of divine love), human desire (*eros*) is pivotal in the existential search. Walsh contends that *desire* or ‘wanting the lover’ is the central theme of the Song, not love (2000:13). Davis views the poem as one of desire rather than satisfaction, which depicts only isolated moments in the presence of the other (2001:85, 83). What accounts for the particularity of the beloved’s desire? Her request to ‘draw me after you’ is no ordinary request for it is

¹¹ It is not necessary to explore in-depth *why* and *how* the poem celebrates Eros or to discuss the agape-eros dichotomy since LaCocque’s hermeneutical essay offers an excellent intertextual study on this topic (1998a).

¹² Schökel notes with reference to Hebrew poetics that OT scholars ‘generally have a habit of ‘seeing’ the biblical text, without listening to it’ (1998:20). Hearing suggests an ‘inner posture’ that opens the reader to the ‘formational dimension whereby the text becomes an experience of encounter with God’ which, in turn, enriches and enlivens the ‘informational dynamic’ of the text (Mulholland [1985]/2000: 61). In the particular case of the Song, all the senses are called forth for an encounter with the hidden or unnamed God of the text.

reminiscent of priestly and prophetic texts like Jeremiah 31:3, and echoes the same vocabulary of love and the same setting of exultation (LaCocque 1998a:69-70). The request is magnified by ‘we will exult and rejoice in you’, which is an allusion to public worship and corporate celebration. Davis asserts that this diction ‘is too elevated for ordinary love language’ and therefore points the reader beyond a literal interpretation, to God (2000:243).

What is released? The awakening of the beloved’s desire is cathartic for it releases an *awareness* of self that surpasses the self-knowledge generally obtained through interaction with life circumstances, natural surroundings, and the web of social relationships. The awareness of self depicted in the prologue is sparked by admiration, exultation and worship; in turn, it redirects the beloved’s gaze to her existential predicament and brings her vineyard into perspective, as follows:

My mother’s sons were angry with me
and made me take care of the vineyards;
my own vineyard I have neglected. (Sg 1:5-6, NIV)

Since Israelite women did not generally own land, Davis states that ‘my own vineyard’ is a figurative term not only for the beloved *herself* but also for desirability; thus, the neglect of her own vineyard means that she had not taken the time to make herself desirable for her lover (2000:244). More pertinent is Murphy’s reference to ‘an untended vineyard’ (1990:78), an admission which paraphrased would read as ‘I am an untended vineyard.’ The admission highlights the existential tension between the personal and the collective, the inner and outer, and between being and doing, a conflict which impacts on the beloved’s sense of *self*. She realises at this juncture that her vineyard has been consumed by hard labour; furthermore, it has been overshadowed by hostile relations, social obligations and worldly affairs. The tension is accentuated by her recognition of a ‘yet lovely self’ which is veiled by a dark exterior, a sun burnt appearance which she does not disparage. On the contrary, she compares it positively to the tents of the Kedarites – a nomadic Arabian tribe famed for their power and splendor – and to the glory of Solomon’s curtains, an allusion to the curtains of the Temple which hung before the Holy of Holies (Davis 2000:244).

The beloved’s self-awareness is further illustrated in the combination of two self-descriptions: ‘I am a neglected vineyard’ and ‘I am dark’. Though a dark, earthy, swarthy working woman, she exudes erotic effulgence and a rare transparency. Nameless, of no repute, and even considered promiscuous, she expresses publicly her personal adoration and erotic yearning for a kingly lover. Though an ‘outsider’ and rather unconventional, in contrast to the daughters of Jerusalem who are the urban, sophisticated, fair ‘insiders’ (Brenner

2000:166-167), the beloved dares to confront the status quo. The daughters of Jerusalem nevertheless play an important role as the audience within the poem. Throughout the Song they serve as a foil to bring the beloved's thoughts and feelings to articulation and thus provide a vantage point for viewing the actions of and relations among the main characters (Davis 2000:52). The beloved is truthful, naming the anger of her 'mother's sons' as the primary reason for her self-neglect as well as admitting her complicity in compounding the neglect. Her candour highlights an important point, that 'being true to oneself does not mean judging or blaming; rather, it means speaking one's own thoughts and feelings with respect for others, without trying to cover up the harsh bits or the rough edges' (Young-Eisendrath 1999:22). Ironically, harsh and hostile conditions highlight the beloved's extraordinary personality and holy audacity. She desires to be drawn or 'pulled' by the lover, a necessary disposition for transformation in love because, as Arminjon highlights, what matters is 'to let oneself be drawn' and 'to let oneself be grasped by God' (1983:72). As archetypal seeker, the beloved demonstrates that when the work in other vineyards becomes consuming, a deep longing for divine love is enkindled; moreover, she acts on the awakening of that desire and on the birth of self-awareness. Given this 'holy audacity', it stands to reason that Davis draws a comparison between the beloved and Teresa of Avila: 'For boldness in love, Teresa is a match for the woman in the Song. And maybe it was from the Song that 'the Madre' learned her boldness' (2000:257).¹³

The realisation that collusion with the collective militates against her own sense of *self*, or personhood, is a kairotic moment for it triggers the beloved's desire for love and uncovers her 'psychic wound'. Johnson, following Jung, notes that 'if we find the psychic wound in an individual or a people, there we will find their path to consciousness because it is in the healing of our psychic wounds that we come to know ourselves'. He suggests that 'we undertake the task of understanding romantic love for it too becomes a path to consciousness' (1983:xii). By surrounding the beloved's vineyard with existential and relational conflict and sparking her desire for romantic love, the Song reflects that the yearning for love is born of human need/lack and that the efficacy of pain and suffering is 'a birth of consciousness'. Self-neglect, as a real and common psychic wound, is thus a crucible for healing and transformation. Spiritual direction attends to these needs through fostering a relationship with God who is 'mystery, the wholly Other whom we cannot know or name in

¹³ Davis asserts that 'Teresa's *Meditations on the Song of Songs* remain to this day one of the most engaging interpretations ever written' (2000:257).

any adequate fashion' (Barry & Connolly 1983:31); and, citing Lonergan, this relationship develops toward the personal experience of 'being in love with God' (1983:21).

Another pivotal point occurs when the woman speaks directly *to* her lover whereas in the prologue she spoke *about* him (Trible 1978:146). This is not the case throughout the poem for, as Bekkenkamp has observed, the woman speaks more *about* her lover than *to* him; conversely the man generally speaks to the woman directly, though these direct forms of address take place in her memory or imagination (2000:66).¹⁴ Nevertheless, the fact remains that the beloved not only speaks her truth but is one who is personally addressed. The dialogues in the Song therefore incite questions regarding the identity of the lover whom she addresses as 'you whom I love' (Sg 1:7), 'you whom *my soul loves*' (Davis 2000:24), or 'you whom my *nephesh* loves' (Trible 1978:157). Ricoeur points to the 'phenomenon of indetermination' and suggests that the identity of the lovers is secondary to the dynamic movements in the text (1998:268-269), a phenomenon which allows the vineyard metaphor to intersect and intersignify along the horizontal and vertical planes of the love motif. Linafelt suggests that the Song is not about specific lovers or full-blooded characters, but about literary characters or 'fictive speakers' (2006:209-300);¹⁵ or, according to Exum, it is about 'archetypal lovers' and 'types of lovers' whose characters take on 'various guises or personalities and assume different roles (2005:83). Since the lover is not only unnamed but elusive, it is best to treat the varying images and different personas of the 'man' as belonging to the same character, an approach which depicts different dimensions of the beloved-lover relationship and of their transformations in love. Arbel suggests that the woman takes on different roles, both masculine and feminine, and in her imagination observes herself in possible encounters with him (2000:91), which leads to a possible reading of the Song as 'a female-oriented view of heterosexual love' (Bekkenkamp 2000:65). The important point is that the shifting images of the lover, as well as the dynamics of approach and withdrawal, pivot on the vineyard metaphor, that is, on the beloved herself.

From an existential perspective, the 'not naming' of the lover entertains the possibility that 'naming' is yet to be brought to consciousness, where naming is directly related to

¹⁴ On this basis, Bekkenkamp posits the daughters of Jerusalem as the overall implied audience in the poem, not the lover (2000:65).

¹⁵ Linafelt comments that in lyric poetry the accent is placed on passion, and in narrative discourse, on plot. In drama or narrative 'dialogue belongs to characters rather than speakers', while lyric poetry has the distinct advantage of evoking the reader who 'potentially becomes the speaker'. In this way, lyric poetry becomes part of a reader's 'well of experience' (2006:301-305), insights which underscore the Song's evocative potential in spiritual praxis.

intimate knowing (or intercourse);¹⁶ in other words, the beloved is still at the infatuation stage and has yet to discover ‘the other’ for who he is. Another apt interpretation is that here, as the woman is robbed of life in its intended fullness, the ‘not naming’ alludes to a yearning for the essence of love, the fullness of life, and the goodness of creation. This insight is adapted from Tribble’s explication of ‘naming’ in the Genesis account, that in asserting power over the woman the man reduces her to the status of an animal by calling her a name. Ironically, he names her *Eve* which is a Hebrew word that resembles in sound the word *life*, even as he robs her of life in its created fullness. Tribble highlights the incongruity of the man’s naming of the woman in the clause ‘because she was the mother of all living’ (1978:133). At the core of the psychic wound then lies the yearning for our original unity and primordial harmony which implies that the human *search* is oriented toward wholeness and harmony; and, in spiritual terms, toward union with God.

By retaining the poetic feature of an anonymous lover, attention is given to the *search*, that is, the seeking and finding (and not finding) which lies at the deep core of Israel’s story, its ‘phenomenological essence’ (Fisch [1988]/1990:85). Through the interplay of arousal and anonymity, and eroticism and audacity, the Song of Songs has a unique ability to facilitate the *search* for ‘the one my heart loves’ – a point which Fisch captures most poignantly:

The greatness of the Song ... is that it expresses this phenomenological essence in its intensest form, almost, one might say, as pure lyric, without a didactic spelling out of historical referents of contexts. It is pure signification, almost one might say, pure poetry. Perhaps that is why it is called the ‘song of songs’ ([1988]/1990:87).

The *search* in the first canticle is identified in the call of her own vineyard and the consequent movement away from the collective. Here the search is metaphorised by the beloved seeking and following the shepherd-lover, envisaging a new horizon, and longing for a pastoral setting where he grazes his flock and provides rest for his sheep. The search also involves the unveiling of her authentic self and the freedom to be her own person within the circle of her lover’s friends, not as a burnout worker under the sun but as a lover with her own vineyard. Her intentional search is captured in a question ‘Where do you rest your flocks at noon?’ – the first and, in fact, the only question the beloved asks of the lover in the entire Song (Arminjon 1983:100). Though many classic interpretations have been offered on this pivotal question, the significance from an existential perspective is her search for a self-

¹⁶ Poetic intercourse will be discussed in Chapter 6 as contemplation or unitive knowledge.

transcending love and a desire for a life-giving change; in sum, she is on the threshold of the inner journey.

What is celebrated? Transformation is a ‘celebratory phenomenon’ in each canticle, a phenomenon which evokes a fullness of vision rather than argument – an appropriate rigour in achieving aesthetic congruence in creative work like poetry (Williams 2000:xiv). In each canticle a key celebratory phenomenon is thus identified which exemplifies a particular aspect of the Song’s transforming power of love. In the first canticle, the movement from ‘I am a neglected vineyard’ to ‘I am faint with love’ is an indication of transformation, with the beloved’s *receptivity* as the dialogical key. Receptivity might seem ironic given that the beloved does much of the talking. Only six of the twenty three verses from 1:2-2:7 are attributed to the lover. Again the Song reflects ordinary reality for it is quite common that the early stage of love is characterised by an explosion of words, images, senses, emotions, and physicality. Though the beloved at this initial stage is portrayed as self-seeking and possessive, she is fully engaged and receptive, and opens herself to love. Thus, her neglected vineyard is replenished in the presence of her lover who is depicted as a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi. Replenishment is alluded to in ‘a fertile oasis of vines and palms on the desolate west shore of the Dead Sea’ – a footnote explicating ‘En-Gedi’ in the New Jerusalem Bible¹⁷ (1990:774). Instead of the heat of midday which she had envisaged, her encounter of love is that of delighting and feasting in refreshing shade, and resting in the arms of her lover.

What are the transformative effects on her self-image or self-perception? No allusion is made to her undesirability or dark skin; instead, the lover feeds her desire, affirms her beauty, and singles her out as a lily among thorns and a darling among the maidens – a stark contrast to her hostile social context. She addresses her lover by the term *dôdî*, which is rendered ‘my darling, my lover’ (Davis 2000:247). He, in turn, refers to her as ‘my darling’ and ‘my friend (*ra’yatî*)’, esteeming her with the highest regard for *ra’yatî* means ‘my friend, my companion’ (Davis 2001:71). In the Song, this Hebrew term is the man’s customary term of endearment for the woman and must have been carefully chosen because, as an Israelite man’s address to his beloved, is found nowhere else in scripture (2001:71).¹⁸ With reference to Gen. 1:27, *ra’yatî* implies covenantal relationship (2001:71) as well as a relationship of equality and erotic friendship (2000:247). Recalling the identity of the woman in the creation

¹⁷ Hereafter, the New Jerusalem Bible will be abbreviated as NJB.

¹⁸ Tribble translates *ra’yāh* as ‘love’ and avoids using the word ‘beloved’ altogether, especially for the woman, because it connotes a passivity that is incongruous with her portrayal throughout the Song (1978:163).

account, Tribble recommends the term *companion* rather than *helper* as a correct English translation of the Hebrew word *‘ezer* because helper connotes ‘an assistant, a subordinate, and indeed, an inferior’ which has no such connotation in Hebrew (1978:90). Davis, on the other hand, highlights that the term ‘helper’ is used in other biblical contexts of God and therefore does not imply lesser status (2000:294).¹⁹ As the existential description unfolds, it will become evident that the designation of ‘my friend’ or ‘my companion’ for the woman reinforces the Song’s poetic vision of mutuality and equality between lovers.

Finally, the metaphorical interplay of ‘I am a neglected vineyard’ to ‘I am faint with love’ is a clear indication of the transformation from impoverishment to replenishment. Thus, the charge or adjuration of ‘do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires’ may be paraphrased as ‘Do not disturb me, but let me rest in the quietude of love until I am awakened and aroused to a deeper love.’

3.3.2 *Canticle of Interior Searching* (Sg 2:8-3:5)

In the second canticle which refers to a dream, *discernment* is evoked, *otherness* released, and *response-ability* celebrated.

Previously, her brothers’ anger and injustice were cited as primary reasons for the beloved’s untended vineyard; however, the care for the vineyard in the second canticle becomes inviting and self-implicating. Awakened from her earlier repose, the woman utters three short exclamations: Listen! My lover! Look! Here, she is aroused in a dream by the lover’s leaping over the mountains and bounding over the hills, like a gazelle or a young stag, calling his beautiful one to arise, and go with him. Seasonal changes from winter to spring²⁰ are clear indications that the vineyard is no longer neglected; on the contrary, it is sensually depicted by flowers, fragrant blossoming vines, early fruit, cooing doves and singing (2:12-13). The dream evokes the experiential component of *discernment* because dreams, as an eruption from the unconscious, require inner work. In this particular case, the purpose of the arousal is for the beloved to perceive the new season, interpret the lover’s new initiatives, respond consciously to his invitations to arise, and deal with the destructive little foxes that ruin the vineyard. The text lacks explanation as to the identity of these little creatures; however, in the context of the dream, they play a significant role in the interplay of positive and negative forces within her.

¹⁹ Biblical references cited include Deut. 33:7; Ps 115:9, 10, 11.

²⁰ The structure of Arminjon’s commentary is based on the four seasons of love (1983), where ‘winter’ refers to exile.

From a psycho-spiritual perspective, wild animals are powerful dream images in the early stages of love for they bring to consciousness the inner parts of ourselves that are clothed in the images (Johnson 1986:25).²¹ Discernment through dreams is therefore integral to inner work²² because the divine often approaches at this unconscious level and surprises us with new invitations. Johnson states it succinctly, in psychological terms: ‘Our isolation from the unconscious is synonymous with our isolation from our souls, from the life of the spirit ... if we don’t go to the spirit, the spirit comes to us as neurosis’ (1986:10). He therefore defines inner work as ‘the effort by which we gain access of the deeper layers of consciousness within us and move toward integration of the total self’ (1986:13). The negative image of destructive foxes serves as a contrast to the lover’s positive initiatives as well as a caution to the beloved to safeguard their young love. According to Falk, *foxes* is a masculine noun in the Hebrew which means that *little foxes* refer to ‘young men’ (1990:155). Given the woman’s languid response to the new arousal, the caution of ‘little foxes’ is more likely concerned with inhibition for here she is depicted as a dove in the hiding places on the mountainside, reluctant to show her face and express herself – a stark contrast to her sense of urgency and intensity at the outset of the Song. Given that the condition of her vineyard is now replenished and blossoming, what is the significance of her withdrawal?

What is released? The lover’s approach in the dream represents an invitation to *otherness*, a calling forth of the hidden parts of self which remain inhibited and resistant to love. Given the lover’s unexpected arrival, coupled with her experience of the sheer goodness of love, would hiding in the clefts of the rock represent self-absorption with feelings of undesirability, or with unacknowledged shame imposed by the socio-cultural-religious scripts of the collective? According to Young-Eisendrath, shame is ‘an emotion that expresses the desire to hide, disappear or even die because we fear the self is empty, bad, or inferior’ (1999:23). Shame, she elaborates, is linked to ‘a sense of *being*, not doing; and hiding is a form of protection from being exposed’ (1999:23). The release of *otherness* is restorative for it assures *ra’yati* that winter is over, that their shared vineyard consists of blossoming vines. The lover longs for her to come out of hiding, to see her face and to hear her voice; moreover, the calling forth takes the form of wooing and cooing – as opposed to divine questioning in the Genesis account of ‘nakedness and hiding’. It is worth noting that no mention is made of

²¹ Landy clarifies that dreams depend on ambiguity for its richness; they are a ‘counterpoint of multiple meanings’ whose essence is multiplex and polysemantic (1983:139).

²² Johnson’s two works, namely, *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* (1986) and *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* (1991) offer creative psycho-spiritual insights for appropriating the Song in the practice of spiritual direction.

her 'own vineyard'. A pivotal point occurs about midway through the short second canticle (of only fifteen verses) where she becomes conscious of her lover's presence browsing among the lilies, the lilies being a reference to herself. Consequent to the release of otherness is her self-description of 'I am his' and the realisation that 'my lover is mine', a recognition of the *gift* of the other who approaches her in love and with true longing. An attitude of otherness, with a 'wonder and openness before the other', is an essential component in spiritual direction for self-preoccupation and self-absorption hinder contemplation (Barry & Connolly 1983:74, 78).²³ Since the spiritual direction relationship exists 'to allow the aspiring human spirit to act freely, to facilitate the person's contact and cooperation with the Holy Spirit' who is the 'source of spiritual formation' (Gratton 1980:95), resistances and blockages, fears and inhibitions are explored for the purpose of increased freedom in the Spirit. Here, through the quietude of a dream, yet with the energy of a gazelle or a young stag, the release of otherness draws the beloved from an unhealthy self-absorption and awakens her to a deeper 'I am' in love. Discernment, which includes the inner work of dreams, thus serves a healing and redemptive purpose. Tribble illustrates this point, that animals in the Song become 'synonyms for human joy' and that their names are 'metaphors for love' (1978:156). As to the little foxes that cause havoc in the vineyard, they can be captured by love. She elaborates that the Song banishes the ambivalence toward animals that Genesis 2 introduced, and the tension between animals and human creatures disappears because all animals serve Eros (1978:157).

What is celebrated? In order for receptivity to transform into a heightened sense of response-ability, a conscious movement of the self toward the other is required. In the 'rising up from her bed' and her ardent 'search in the night', the beloved's sense of *response-ability* is celebrated because these motions serve as a positive response to the invitation to arise. Response-ability also alludes to the difference between mere romance and real relationship, where romance refers to illusion, projections and inflated expectations, while relationship develops beyond passion and affection to commitment and loyalty (Johnson 1983:103, 110). Following the graced encounter of the lover's browsing in the lilies, she makes the conscious move from preoccupation with romanticism in rising up from her bed, toward a discovery of the other for who he is and the demands of real relationship. True to herself, she pursues her lover with passion and affection, commitment and loyalty, as evidenced in the phrases 'I looked', 'I will get up now' and 'I will search for the one my heart loves'. The call of love,

²³ Barry & Connolly discuss self-absorption in *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (1983:48-52).

however, intensifies and takes her deeper into the night; in spite of her courage against all odds to pursue the imperceptible movement of love, she is first ‘found’ by the watchmen (3:3).²⁴ In the ‘going out of herself’ into the night she is assisted and found and, in that liminal²⁵ space and unfamiliar place, the other appears as sheer gift – a double irony in her search. The existential implication is that the purification of eros in the first night effects disentanglement from romantic idealism and a freedom to receive the other as sheer gift.

With greater response-ability and consciousness, the beloved’s capacity for interiority is expanded. Interiority, according to Frohlich, is firstly, ‘presence to oneself’ and secondly, a ‘critical appropriation of one’s presence to oneself’ (2005:70). Through interiority, we grow in awareness of ourselves and of our presence in the world, a point which is evident in the beloved’s desire to bring her lover to her mother’s room. Interiority includes a revisit to the past, as far back as ‘the womb’, the innermost place of renewed birthing and tender nurturing, the preparation for new images, and the transformation into adult love. Ricoeur suggests that the return to the maternal home speaks of ‘a return to the beginning’, a ‘historical’ move which is foreign to the non-narrative character of the Song (1998:296-297). It is a necessary move nonetheless because Genesis provides a narrative of a sequence of ‘absolute births’, including the birth of mutual love and human discourse. The original context makes no separation between spiritual and sexual love. Ricoeur elaborates that Genesis and the Song of Songs speak without analogy of just ‘one love’, namely, the erotic love between a man and a woman. What the Song adds to the Genesis discourse is ‘the reciprocity of speech between two lovers who are equal in their admiration for each other’ (1998:297). The inference then of the maternal home is a recovery of primordial love and a redressing of love where mutuality and harmony reign. The mother’s house also draws attention to the role of *woman* in creation. Tribble describes the creation of woman as ‘the advent of sexuality’ and ‘the culmination of creation, fulfilling humanity in sexuality’ (1978:102). With Eros as its principal agent, the Song recovers the primordial unity of sexuality and spirituality, the original *eros* where union between man and woman was enjoyed in communion with God. Interiority in this particular context then refers to a *radical* appropriation of the presence of divine love in our relationships so that we know how to live, how to love, and how to harmonise – radical referring to ‘probing our roots’ (Davis 2000:294)

²⁴ See Kearney for an elaboration of her first ‘being found’ in relation to ‘being desired’ by the divine (2006).

²⁵ Turner describes ‘liminality’ as intervals or passages that may be ‘sacred’ and termed as ‘anti-structural’ and applies to the ‘stripping and leveling of men before the transcendent’ (in Whitehead, J & E [1979]/1992:62-63). Also see Winnicott on ‘transitional space’ as the zone of creativity and freedom in the mother-child relationship (Clément & Kristeva 2001:58).

From a psycho-spiritual perspective, the mention of mother may refer to the need to explore ‘psychological complexes’, the name Carl Jung gave to emotional tendencies to protect ourselves in the same ways we did in childhood (Young-Eisendrath 1999:26). Complexes are ‘the psychological karma that we bring with us from our families of origin’ and are unconscious or semi-conscious tendencies to act out our emotional childhood dramas and repeat the emotional themes from childhood, especially in our adult partnerships and parenting (1999:27). Why the absence of the paternal in the Song? LaCocque notes that the Song ‘stands out from the customary and institutional framework’ and brings into question the matter of a ‘conventional wedding’; hence the absence of the father and of descendants (1988:248-249). His central point, citing Ricoeur (1955), is that Eros is ‘not institutional’; Eros’ Law is based on ‘the reciprocity of the gift’ and it is thus ‘an offense to reduce it to a compact, or to conjugal duty’ (1998:249). Interiority, as a radical presence and appropriation of divine love in our lives, alerts us to the ‘psychological karma’ brought about by the institutionalism of marriage and brings into question conventions which insist on hierarchy and duty rather than on the reciprocity of love in marriages/relationships.

On another level, the return to ‘mother’ is synonymous with a return to ‘the womb’, a symbol which enhances the aesthetic congruence of the Song because ‘womb’ serves not only as the locus of birth but is one of the most profound symbols of human love (Trible 1978:51). As the nexus of life giving and generous envelopment, ‘the womb’ also symbolises the relationship between maternal love/wisdom and divine love/wisdom (LaCocque 1998a:162-164). The return to the womb correlates with the process of interior searching and prayerful reflection on one’s psychological complexes for the purpose of being reborn in love. The practice of spiritual direction facilitates this rebirth, where the ‘midwife to the soul’²⁶ is present to another in a time of vulnerability, attending to the pains of life, working in areas that are deep and intimate, and doing things *with*, not *to*, the person giving birth (Guenther 1992:87). In this particular context, Guenther’s image of midwife epitomises maternal love/wisdom and depicts the aspect of *accompaniment* in spiritual direction.

In the second canticle, the beloved’s charge to the daughters of Jerusalem may be regarded as an injunction to be discerning in the invitation to otherness for the shared vineyard involves confrontations with an intricate network of inner and outer foxes. The recognition that ‘My lover is mine and I am his’ invariably opens up deeper layers of the self in order that romance is transformed into real relationship. This transformative movement of

²⁶ The image is based on Meister Eckhart’s concept of tending to the birth within which, in the process, brings ‘pure being and blessing’ (Guenther 1992:81). The concept will be developed in Chapters 5 and 6.

the first dark night entails the ‘going out of oneself’ to receive the other who comes as gift and who is desirous of authentic response and real relationship.

3.3.3 *Canticle of Paradoxical Awakening* (Sg 3:6-5:8)

In the third canticle, *descent* is evoked, *reciprocity* celebrated, and *woundedness* released.

Descent is the golden thread that weaves the textural paradox of the third canticle and connects the lover’s heart with his beloved’s. It is evoked on several levels. First, a dream or waking vision where the lover is likened to ‘King Solomon’ confirms the beloved’s adoration of her kingly lover in Sg 1:2-4. She is enamoured by his grandeur and nobility while he is captivated by her beauty and body. His downward gaze from her eyes to her breasts, as well as the movement from her elevated images to his focus on human embodiment, suggests *descent*. Second, in the longest *wasf* of the lover so far in the Song text, an uninterrupted fifteen verses of lavish praise and graphic detail (4:1-15), *descent* is stated explicitly in the lover’s invitation: ‘come with me from Lebanon’ and ‘descend from the crest of Amana’.²⁷ Third, the disclosure of a kingly lover’s heart represents a descent for here her status in love is affirmed, as follows: ‘You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride, you have stolen my heart’. The endearing terms ‘my sister, my bride’ are significantly placed at the midpoint of the poem (4:8-15), a section which serves as ‘the center of gravity for the whole book’ (Davis 2000:266). Here, ‘Lebanon’ and ‘bride’ together refer on one level to God’s enduring passion for the bride Israel and, on another level, the profound recognition of kinship and the joy of full identification with another human being (2000:268-269).

Given the ‘phenomenon of indetermination’, the dramatic tensions in the text, as well as the kaleidoscopic shifts between wakefulness and dream, it is best to view the Song as a love song/s or as love lyrics²⁸ rather than a wedding song/s (Brenner 2000:162), and to presuppose that the references to ‘wedding’, an epithalamium for Solomon’s wedding, appear in the context of a dream (LaCocque 1998a:8). LaCocque asserts that while the Song celebrates conjugal love no mention of marriage between the lovers can be found in the poem (1998a:7). Ricoeur’s explication of ‘the nuptial’ is helpful that the bond between the lovers unfolds ‘apart from any reference to the matrimonial bond, without excluding it or requiring it’. The nuptial, in this sense, correctly refers to ‘free love’ (1998:294); moreover, as ‘root

²⁷ The places and landscape in the Song are biblically familiar, but are used flexibly for poetic effect, as connotative rather than denotative descriptions (LaCocque 1998a:28); hence the emphasis on poetics and praxis.

²⁸ Falk’s modern translation of the Song of Songs classifies the genre of the Song as ‘love lyrics’, commenting that if lyric means ‘songlike’ then the Song of Songs is ‘a quintessentially lyric collection’ (1990:114).

metaphor’ and ‘intersecting metaphor’, the nuptial signifies *more than* the sexual and the matrimonial which suggests that it be disentangled from ‘sexual realism’ and ‘matrimonial moralism’ (1998:274). On the issue of consummation, Ricoeur suggests that if the alleged moment of the lovers’ union is textually located, it is *sung* and *evoked*, rather than described, narrated, or recounted (1998:270). In contrast, Davidson’s ‘linear progression of the book’ based on the symmetrical structure surrounding the central wedding sections (3:6-5:1) presents a ‘quasi-story’ and a case for married love (2007). Similarly, Hwang and Goh’s ‘chiastic structure’ posits the same pericope as the poem’s pivot or ‘consummation’ and suggests that ‘the wedding night’ is the climax of the poem (2002:36-38). Their thesis is that the Song portrays a serious, committed and mature love where the lovers exercise self-restraint and high morals before and after Sg 5:1, which implies that the lovers’ exclusive sexual union is reserved for that climactic moment (2002:126).

What is celebrated? It is precisely at this juncture that the celebratory phenomenon is most apt for it evokes the element of reciprocity in the beloved’s deepening transformation in love rather than argument about the rite or institution of marriage. *Reciprocity* is celebrated because the ‘peak experience’ of the garden encounter (which several commentators cite as the ‘consummation’) is an indication that the beloved’s sense of *response-ability* has matured to *reciprocity*. Her ‘locked garden’ is opened to the lover; he delightfully enters to taste its choice fruits and she names her garden *his*. Davis writes that here, in the heart of the Song, however briefly, every desire is fully satisfied, though the dominant tone of the Song remains one of longing or happy anticipation. She adds that the satisfaction may be sexual but should also be heard as expressing ‘a moment’ in the spiritual life – ‘one moment, not a settled disposition’ (2000:274). The garden section evokes a return to Genesis 2-3, the hermeneutical key used to unlock the garden in the Song of Songs. In the poetics of a ‘paradise lost, paradise regained’, Tribble recalls ‘the garden of creation’ and comments that the lyrics of eroticism in Genesis 2 become a symphony of love in the Song (1978:144,146). According to Ricoeur, the Song reopens ‘the enclave of innocence and gives it the space that allows for the autonomy of the poem a whole’. A theological way of reading the Song, he suggests, is to place ‘a poem of innocent love’ alongside the ‘myth of a good creation’, which would lead to a proclamation and celebration of ‘the indestructibility at the base of the innocence of the creature, an innocence that was not abolished by the Fall, but underlies even the history of evil, which love cannot avoid’ (1998:298). He elaborates that the joyous innocence is ‘not only eschatological, but can be sung today’ – a celebratory phenomenon which underscores profoundly the title ‘Song of Songs’ or ‘Canticle of Canticles’.

The peak experience of the garden is both nourishing (milk) and intoxicating (wine). Arminjon states that ‘if the Song were an ordinary love poem it should end at this summit’ (1983:241);²⁹ however, it is extraordinary as an ongoing exodus in love. With the emphasis on transformation of the vineyard, the garden encounter is therefore treated as a ‘poetic pause’³⁰ in the overall structure of the poem, albeit a glorious pause. The garden and the dream form a paradoxical sequence where a nourishing and intoxicating peak experience is followed by vulnerability and lovesickness, or ‘the sinking of the heart’ (Sg 5:8). It is significant that *wine* is the only vineyard imagery used in the third canticle. Here the lover echoes the woman’s initial desire for ‘a love that is more delightful than wine’ with his delight in her love which is ‘far more pleasing than wine’. In the garden encounter, where the lovers eat and drink to their hearts’ content, the convergence between his ‘stolen’ heart and her ‘awakened’ heart is poignant because their reciprocity conveys the ideal that love is repaid with love, and that love alone satisfies love.

What is released? The spiraling movement of descent connects the beloved’s ‘heart’ (*libbî*, in Hebrew)³¹ with her self-description ‘I am faint with love’. The efficacy of the disclosure of the lover’s ‘heart’ is carried for seventeen verses from 4:9, via the peak experience of the garden (4:12-5:1), to the most excruciating moment in the Song of Songs, a moment which is captured in a dream:

I opened for my lover,
 But my lover had left; he was gone.
 My heart sank at his departure.
 I looked for him but did not find him.
 I called him but he did not answer.
 O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you –
 If you find my lover,
 What will you tell him?
 Tell him I am faint with love (5:8)

The deep *woundedness* released in this dream encounter captures the paradox of intimacy. Here the beloved’s awakened heart is wrenched by the lover’s withdrawal or absence, an experience which might be described as a cruel irony or rude awakening. Though the woman is asleep, her heart is awake. However, her slow response to the lover at the door

²⁹ Arminjon’s four-season allegorical framework demarcates Sg 3:6-5:1 as ‘The Summer of the Wedding’, preceded by ‘The Storm of Summer’ in 5:2-6:3 (1983).

³⁰ Placing the Song alongside Genesis, Ricoeur suggests that ‘the poem confers on the interval of innocence the glory of a poetic pause’ (1998:298).

³¹ LaCocque’s references to Hebrew terms highlight that the woman is the one who utters ‘me’, ‘my soul’ or ‘my heart, me’ (1998:244). Davis comments that the Hebrew word *nefesh* for ‘soul’ is always feminine in Hebrew (2000:292).

results in his hasty disappearance and a missed opportunity. On the one hand, this scene exposes the vacillations of the human heart; on another level, it illustrates a spiritual condition traditionally known as ‘torpor’ or ‘spiritual sluggishness’ which often follows times of deep spiritual satisfaction’ (Davis 2000:277). As emotional distress and/or a sense of spiritual abandonment, her loss is described as ‘my heart sank’ or as ‘my *nephesh* failed because of him’ (Trible 1978:148). Given the dramatic tensions of approach and withdrawal, Fisch contends that love in the Song is something to be struggled and striven for more than it is celebrated ([1988]/1990:85). The wounding effect is a clear indication that the beloved is in love which, ironically, ushers her into a deeper and darker night where she looks for her lover but does not find him, where she calls him but he does not answer.³² The second ‘dark night’ is depicted as a more intense suffering than the first – an ardent yearning for consummation (Trible 1978:149) or an agonising lovesickness – as alluded to in the NJB translation of ‘I am sick with love!’. Adding injury to vulnerability, and cruelty to loss, the beloved is beaten and bruised by the watchmen who previously found and helped her. The only resources available to her are her wounded heart and solitary suffering – a painful contrast to her former experience of being ‘faint with love’ which was ‘spoken coyly, in the sweet languor of the lover’s embrace’ (Davis 2000:279). Here, the text speaks of real suffering, failure and loss, the futility of her search, and hostile encounter. It also depicts the anguish of soul, of one who ‘now knows what it means to lose what matters *absolutely*’ (2000:279). Though it seems on the textual level that this dark night is an impasse – a time of unprecedented questioning – the ‘declaration of lovesickness is paradoxically a declaration of her soul’s strength’ (2000:279).³³ Her address to the daughters of Jerusalem is significantly encapsulated in a question – ‘if you find my lover what will you tell him?’ – a question which she personally answers with weak yet strong emotion: ‘I am faint with love’. At this point in her ongoing exodus, the silence of the second dark night awaits the dawn of union.

3.3.4 *Canticle of Primal Ecstasy* (Sg 5:9-8:4)

In the fourth canticle, *delight* is evoked, *oneness* released, and *respect* celebrated.

Following two exquisite *wasfs* in which her ‘beloved’ is described as ‘outstanding among ten thousand’ and his ‘dove’ as ‘perfect and unique’, the vineyard imagery here is the

³² Davis suggests that ‘part of the witness of the Song, then, is that God is not always ready to be found’ (2000:256).

³³ Young-Eisendrath’s chapter on ‘Psychotherapy as ordinary transcendence’ prefers not to label certain experiences as *numinous* or *soulful* in order to avoid a dichotomy between spiritual and secular (2000:134). She suggests that when the drama of psychotherapy, a relationship that is founded on human suffering, leads to awakening and is fully engaged, it always leads to the great spiritual questions (2000:136).

most concentrated, evoking the sense of sheer *delight*. In fact, the quintessence of beauty and the quiescence of simplicity in the fourth canticle are unrivalled in all of Scripture. From this vantage point, the woman's transformation in love is clearly evident as the distance between a neglected vineyard which was being robbed of the fullness of life and the depiction of her body as a vineyard of sensuous fruit and superlative wine is incalculable. It is left to the power of metaphor and graphic imagery to bridge the poetic distance and to capture the lover's particular pleasure in his darling's real vineyard:

Your navel is a rounded goblet
that never lacks blended wine.
May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine,
... and your mouth like the best wine.

In contrast to dryness in the first canticle, darkness in the second canticle, and loss in the third canticle, the *Canticle of Primal Ecstasy* is rapturous. Here, the 'symphony of eroticism' incites the reader to 'hear the visual' and 'see the auditory' for love itself blends sight, sound, sense, and non-sense in ways that extol and enhance the delight of sexuality (Trible 1978:144):

May the wine go straight to my lover,
flowing gently over lips and teeth.
I belong to my lover,
and his desire is for me.
Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside,
let us spend the night in the villages.
Let us go early to the vineyards
to see if the vines have budded,
if their blossoms have opened,
and if the pomegranates are in bloom –
there I will give you my love.
The mandrakes send out their fragrance,
And at our door is every delicacy
Both new and old
That I have stored up for you, my lover. (7:9b-13).

The sensuous vineyard imagery has a pronounced Dionysian flair, with the poet, artist and dreamer showing us 'the life of the spirit as seen through the senses', a world filled with the profusion of nature's fruits, a sensuous world which Johnson notes 'is the divine realm, the garden of the gods' (1987:12). Dionysius, the most important of the Greek gods and certainly the most misunderstood, is referred to as 'the god of wine, the god of abandon, the great liberator, the god of ecstasy' who represents 'the continual rebirth of life in the spring, the irrational wisdom of the senses, and the soul's transcendence' (1987:11). As the 'personification of wine', Dionysius has the ability 'to bring either spiritual transcendence or

physical addiction' (1987:4). May notes that addiction holds us back from our rightful destiny which is freedom, and makes us prisoners of our own impulses and slaves to our own selfish idols. We *displace* our longing for God by trying to fulfil our longing for God through objects of attachments (1998:91-93). He elaborates that the path to true love is not only born of freedom but of difficult choice, choices that involve withdrawal from addictive behaviours that have become normal for us (1998:94-95). The transformative work of the two dark nights (to be elaborated in Chapter 5) helps us to confront the destructive forces, to withdraw from inappropriate attachments, and to come to terms with the loss of the familiar. The dark nights are significant passages in the journey homeward for they effect a purification of desire, liberation from slavery, and a newfound freedom in a taste of union.

In the fourth canticle, the spiritual and the sexual meet profoundly in the vineyard of ecstasy where the beloved's body is transformed into a real vineyard, an echo of the one love or innocent love of the primordial setting – a unifying love that is non-institutional and non-utilitarian. LaCocque's observation that the woman is positively esteemed and praised as *lover* (1998:245), as opposed to her role as wife and mother in many other biblical texts is vividly portrayed in this unitive canticle. The poet would have had to 'step outside' of religious traditions and social conventions in order to reinvest the vineyard with a primal ecstasy; the poem thus enacts the literal meaning of *ecstasy* or *ex-stasis*, which is 'to stand outside of oneself' (Johnson 1987:13). Primal refers to 'the imago-dei' or 'the god-image,' the ancient symbol that flows out of psyche, manifesting our deep-rooted urge toward wholeness and unity and creates in us a sense that the unitive vision is possible (Johnson 1983:59). Primal ecstasy is an experience of the true mystery of romantic love: that bursting of bonds, that transcending of the ego-mind which is akin to religious experience (1983:57-58). Romantic love is thus a way of rediscovering our religious life – by means of recovering our longing for God and discovering God's yearning for us.³⁴ The secret, according to Johnson, is 'to live with and honor both of these powerful energies, which we have mixed together so deliciously and yet so dangerously in the wine of love' (1983:61). A constructive approach to romantic love, he elaborates, is 'to make it a path to consciousness, to live the paradox honestly, and to learn how to honor both of the worlds contained in romantic love: the divine world and the human world (1983:132). Drawing on Dionysian insights on the relationship between romantic love and the soul's transcendence, and between a self-

³⁴ From the perspective of Hebrew poetics, Schökel comments as follows: 'The human experience seeks the help of sense experience in order to approach with it something which is transcendent, in order to express what cannot be expressed' (1998:95).

transcending love and mysticism, the paradoxes of love are embraced and the need to substitute the spiritual for the sexual is diminished. In the fourth canticle, the vineyard metaphor harmonises body and soul and names the embodiment as ‘beloved’ which demonstrates that the path to consciousness consists of honouring sexuality and spirituality and unifying them in one love. Without splitting the intimate and the infinite, hierarchical dualism is collapsed and the mystique of love retained.

Creative tension is intrinsic to the Song because poetry exploits, concentrates, and expands metaphor. Schökel comments that ‘the techniques of poetry pass then to artistic prose and may descend to ordinary language. Thanks to this alternating movement of descent and ascent the life of a language and of literature is kept in tension’ (1988:19). However, where the tension is not maintained, these movements present a potential for distortion through a splitting of the antithesis that results in hierarchical dualism. For example, the poetic is considered higher and spiritual (the intelligible), while the prosaic is treated as lower and secular (the sensible). Poetic tension assumes the co-existence of polarity and infers that differentiation exists for the purpose of union. Kearney offers a creative interpretation of the poetic tension by suggesting that, in the Song, ‘human and divine desire meet and traverse one another, ascending and descending, filling and emptying’ (2006:306). He views desire in the Song as a two-fold movement, as ‘an ontological understanding of desire as a movement from lack toward fullness and an eschatological understanding of desire as a movement from fullness to lack’ (2006:306), which underscores that the desire for human-divine union is mutual and reciprocal. On this basis then, in the ‘crisscrossing of divine lover and human beloved, both are transfigured. Divine desire is embodied. Human desire is hallowed’ (2006:308). With reference to the beloved’s transformation at this stage, the synthesis of polarities is effected on various levels of her psyche through traversing the alternations of distance and proximity, movement and stasis, appearance and disappearance, and speech and silence – also referred to as ‘the phenomenology of illumination and darkness’ (Scheper 1992).³⁵ The beloved’s experience demonstrates Schökel’s point that the ‘immense God, the synthesis of polarities, is experienced by [humans] positively and negatively, by opposing contrasting qualities’ (1988:132).

Given these various points of intersection, it is also important to note Ricoeur’s discussion on the invisible line that separates an ethical religion from a mystical one

³⁵ In his recourse to the Western mystical tradition, Scheper associates the Song’s ‘mythic descent into darkness’ with the *via negativa*, the spirituality of love-longing, and mystical contemplation which is ‘the paradoxically luminous dark night of the soul, the cloud of unknowing (1992:328) – to be elaborated in Chapter 5 and 6.

(1998:292). Elucidating the different settings of texts, he comments that ‘prophecy is inscribed in an ethical sphere where reverential love for God excludes relations of familiarity and tender partnership’, whereas the Song (poetry) places the lovers on a plane of equality, mutual exchange of desire, and pleasure (1998:302). If the prophetic texts are re-read in light of the Song, and the Song alongside the Genesis account of creation, the Covenant relation would be redirected toward mutual belonging of equal partners; at the end point ethical religion moves toward mystical religion (1998:302). Devoid of explicit moral or ethical instruction, the love Song is more mystical and musical than ethical, which explains why Judeo-Christian mystics across the centuries have been captivated by the Song.³⁶ It provides the lyrics, erotics, and poetics of innocent, free and pure love which is found nowhere else in Scripture.³⁷ ‘This is why the language of the Song of Songs turns out to be irreplaceable. Without it, mystical experience would remain mute. This is why the ‘nuptial’ is necessary for such experience’ (Ricoeur 1998:284). As a corollary to Ricoeur’s assertion, without a mystical hermeneutic the mystical music of the Song remains mute. ‘A mystical hermeneutic of scripture,’ according to Kourie, ‘is one in which a direct experience of God, or Ultimate Reality, or the One is the end result. The difficulty of trying to express the inexpressible, to put into language that which is totally beyond language and even beyond thought, cannot be overestimated’ (1998:8). She elaborates that ‘[t]he transformative power of scripture is central in mystical interpretation, effecting dynamic changes and transmutation of character and daily life’ (1998:9). A mystical reading of the Song of Songs therefore presupposes three factors: first, evocation by the Song of Songs text itself for its life-giving and transformative potential; second, a self-conscious involvement with the central symbols of the Song and the biblical tradition; and third, an appreciative understanding of the Song of Songs in the mystico-erotic life of bridal mystics. Since mystical meaning implies ‘mutual possession of the lovers’ (Ricoeur 1998:292), the Song of Songs serves as a mystico-poetic invitation to move beyond the ethical and the religious to the greater reality to which the text points – to God, who is Ultimate Reality and inexpressible Mystery.

³⁶ John of the Cross’ *Spiritual Canticle*, a transposition of the Song of Songs, describes the Beloved as ‘silent music’ and a ‘sounding solitude’ because in the Beloved the soul knows and enjoys a symphony of spiritual music and a sonorous music (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:25-27).

³⁷ Burrows elaborates that poets *sing* rather than explain reality; they offer a different way of being in the world than that of argument or demonstration for what they voice is ‘a music that points toward a passionate way of being in the world and participating in the life of the other’ (2005a:357-358). He questions whether theology can ‘sustain itself in a form bereft of the musicality of language, a prosaic genre no longer edged with strong margins of the inarticulate, a limping literature that is incompatible with song’ (2005a:356). Linafelt cites the power of the Song’s lyricism for a ‘lyrical theology’ that is built on passion and feeling rather than philosophical or discursive categories (2006:305).

What is released? Having traversed the two dark nights, the unitive factor of *oneness* is released for here the ‘most beautiful of women’ and her ‘radiant and ruddy lover’ experience mutual possession, which is the glory of the nuptial. It is this unitive principle which ultimately identifies the woman as *beloved*:

My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to browse in the gardens,
and to gather lilies.
I am my lover’s and my lover is mine;
he browses among the lilies’ (6:2-3).

Her body and herself become *his* garden; she becomes his and he becomes hers. As Tribble notes, possessive adjectives do not separate or dominate; rather, person and place unite and blend in mutual habitation and harmony (1978:153). The NJB rendition of this pericope, that he ‘pastures his flock on the grass and among the lilies’, suggests that the beloved’s search for ‘where he rests his flocks’ (in the first canticle) finds quiescence in her very own vineyard. Here, the search is suspended, and the nearness and dearness of his presence is the positive outcome of all that has gone before. She finds herself in mutual love and mutual belonging, where the metaphorical vineyard is transformed into a ‘real’ vineyard. The self-description of ‘I am my lover’s and my lover is mine’ conveys a homecoming and serves as the inverse of possessiveness in Sg 2:16. Their loving union affirms her uniqueness and blessedness, confers on her stature and dignity, and ennobles her with cosmic beauty: ‘arising like the dawn, fair as the moon, resplendent as the sun, formidable as an army’ (Sg 6:10, NJB). In this unitive phase, she is bestowed with a unique name – the ‘Shulamite’³⁸ – which is not explained in the Song and does not appear elsewhere in the Bible; however, one possible interpretation is that she is ‘a woman at/of peace’, that is, ‘a figure of the soul at peace with her God’ (Davis 2000:289-291). The name ‘Shulamite’ also serves as a play on Solomon and relates to her claim concerning *šālôm* in 8:10, while the proper name ‘Solomon’³⁹ is also a play on the name (Murphy 2000:152). Murphy adds that the term ‘king’ is used explicitly of Solomon in 3:9, 11; while 1:4, 12 and 7:6 refer to the ‘unnamed’ king. Since the lover remains unnamed, the beloved’s designation of him as ‘my friend’ and ‘my lover’ in 5:16 is significant, underscored by the fact that *rē’î* (my friend) is used only once in

³⁸ LaCocque’s chapter entitled ‘The Shulamite’ (1998:235-273) advocates that the dominance of the woman’s voice serves a subversive and iconoclastic role within the biblical tradition.

³⁹ Cited in Sg 1:1,5; 3:7,9,11, and 8:11-12.

the Song (Davidson 2007:603-604).⁴⁰ Its significance lies in her reciprocation of his use of *ra'yati* (my friend) in the first canticle, an indication of primordial oneness and primal ecstasy enjoyed by two lovers who are at the same time companions.

The loving union and intimate communion in the fourth canticle echo 'the Holy of Holies' or 'the Shekinah'⁴¹ and demonstrates that intimacy is not directly accessible but comes at the end of a passage of preparation and purification. The Holy of Holies is used analogically in this present context and does not imply that the spiritual is substituted for the sexual. In the unitive canticle, divine love is manifested in the human embodiment of love and, since the 'Holy of Holies' symbolises the residence or presence of the divine, intimacy on both levels is treated as 'sacred'.⁴² Ricoeur suggests that the terms 'sacred and profane' be used cautiously so as to avoid the connotation that the sexual is profane (1998:298). Landy clarifies that Rabbi Akiba's reference to the Song of Songs as 'the Holy of Holies of all Scripture' protests against the 'vulgarisation of its essential mysticism' and does not necessarily imply 'a rejection of its literal meaning' (1983:14).

What is celebrated? Since ecstasy implies the capacity to 'stand outside of oneself' and see one's beloved as *other* (difference) and as *another* (sameness), mutual *respect* is celebrated. 'Seeing' the other in his/her individuality is an acknowledgement of the person's humanity, mortality, and beauty. It is integral to the journey from self-seeking to self-giving, and is expressed in psychoanalytic terms as follows: 'The test of true individuation is that it include the capacity to relate to another person and to respect him or her as an individual' (Johnson 1983:111-112). The purifying loss of images and withdrawal of projections in the second dark night effects a transformation of perception which frees a person to see the other in his/her uniqueness, and to affirm the other's simple beauty and essential reality. Johnson asserts that 'the beginning of wisdom is a firm grasp of the obvious' (1983:61); furthermore, the art of simplicity, at a basic level, is 'finding meaning and joy in the small, natural, and less dramatic things' and, at its highest level, is 'a consciousness that sees through the confusions we invent to the essential, uncomplicated reality of life' (1983:134). Through the use of natural images set within a sensuous world of two lovers, the ingenious crafting of the

⁴⁰ See Davidson's list of ten different hypocorisms (pet names) for the woman and four epithets of endearment used for the lover (2007:603-604).

⁴¹ Kearney interprets Akiba's regard of the Song of Songs as the 'Holy of Holies' on the basis that 'the Sinaitic epiphany was a moment itself erotically charged' (2006:312). In his discussion of Talmudic and Kabbalistic readings of the Song, he asserts that the Song captures in nuce 'the entire matrimonial and erotic charge of the divine revelation of Torah to the people' (2006:312).

⁴² For a broader discussion on the term, Clément & Kristeva comment that the sacred and the religious are not necessarily synonymous (2001:34).

Song works at both levels – on the tangible level of creation/sexuality and the invisible realm of the divine/spirituality. The fourth canticle breaks through the confusions of terminology with its celebration of the essential beauty of the human body, and by implication, the embodiment of divine love. LaCocque comments that in the Song, nature is not secondary or subordinated to carry a religious message; it is beautiful in and of itself, a discovery which is unique in the Hebrew Scriptures (1998:235-236). Murphy captures the quintessential beauty of the beloved in profound terms: ‘Among works of literature, the Song is without peer, like the woman of superlative beauty whose experiences of love it describes’ (1990:91). ‘What distinguishes the Song most sharply from other works of literature’, he suggests, ‘is not the fact that it takes human sexuality seriously but rather the exuberant, thoroughly erotic, and nonjudgmental manner in which it depicts the love between a man and a woman’ (1990:97). Its theological significance then lies in ‘its unapologetic depiction of love between a man and a woman’ which models an important dimension of human existence, ‘an aspect of life that ancient Israel understood to be divinely instituted and sanctioned’ (1990:100). Based on the beauty of human embodiment and the joy of reciprocal love, the fourth canticle thus engenders the art of simplicity which might be defined as a wisdom that grasps the essentials and renders the transcendent present in a tangible way – a definition which conjoins the gift of contemplation with the grace of incarnation.

The mutual regard of the lovers, as a celebratory phenomenon, achieves aesthetic congruence through the lovers’ intertwined desire. Here, the man’s description of the beloved’s mouth as the best wine matches the woman’s desire for the kisses of his mouth and for a love that is better than wine. Mutual desire is unequivocal in the beloved’s self-description of ‘I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me’. Many Song scholars contrast this verse with the woman’s desire for her husband in Gen. 3:16; LaCocque argues precisely on the basis of Sg 7:10 that the Song is not simply commentary or ‘a complement’ to Genesis, but ‘stands in opposition’ to Genesis (1998:247). The word desire (*teshuqah*) stands out as ‘a rare and radical usage’, according to Davis, occurring in only two other places in the Bible (Gen 3:16; 4:7). It is ‘literally radical’, she adds, because it ‘probes the roots (Latin, *radices*) of God’s intention for human beings’. The Song thus corrects the ancient distortion and restores the original symmetry that obtained between woman and man (2000:294).

Reverence for the *imago dei* in oneself and in the other evokes an important celebratory aspect of the Song, namely, ‘mutual desire and mutual gratification in male-female relationships’ (Exum 2005:92); however, it is radical for it challenges cultural assumptions about gender differences and roles (2005:86). With eighteen verses attributed to

the beloved's voice and sixteen to the lover's, both lover and beloved are portrayed as 'subjects of desire' – an essential aspect for all human beings, no matter their condition or gender (Young-Eisendrath 1999:29). Here, in the context of mutual desire, the beauty, physicality, and sensuality of beloved *and* lover are pronounced. Objecting to the perception of women as 'objects of desire' as well as women's hidden compulsion to be desired, Young-Eisendrath describes desire as 'the sovereignty over our own lives, the right and responsibility to act with free will' (1999:29-32).⁴³ The textual implication is that the beloved's resistance to her angry brothers' sovereignty over her has indeed liberated her for true love which suggests that her 'physic wound' has served a profound role in her transformation in love. At this juncture of her ongoing exodus, her level of self-giving has clearly matured to the extent that she now relates to the lover as 'a subject of desire', reciprocates the depth of his desire for her, articulates in intimate and exquisite terms her admiration of him, and 'names' him friend and lover.

The exclusive relationship of the lovers, based on mutual desire and mutual respect, is another cause for celebration, an exclusivity which is identified by her declaration that she has stored up and reserved 'every delicacy, both new and old' for her lover. Given the NJB's rendition 'There I shall give you the gift of my love', intimacy is viewed as a gift of authentic love. The genuineness of her gift is underscored by the fact that the Shulamite is indeed 'a free woman, but her freedom consists in remaining unswervingly true to the one she loves; moreover, she is faithful to him outside the matrimonial bonds and social demands' (LaCocque 1998:248). In 'storing up' her gift of love, she has resisted the social conventions of arranged marriages, the customary exchange of presents between the two betrothing families, and the supervision of brothers in the engagement and marriage of their sisters (1998:244-245).⁴⁴ Her 'storing up' is conjoined with the reference to her mother's breasts and mother's house, a further indication of her maturity in love. Connecting infantile nutrition and adult eroticism (mother's breasts), and the generative aspects of feminine wisdom and feminine sexuality (mother's house), Eros is acknowledged as a life-giving presence in the origin, birth and development of love. As an affront to her hostile blood

⁴³ In 'The Menace of Female Beauty', Young-Eisendrath elaborates the Greek myth of Pandora (eighth century B.C.E.) and its influence on the concept of woman in Western culture, and her topic of 'Men under the Spell' discusses the intrinsic relationship between male dominance and the power of female beauty (1999:33-56). Also from a Jungian perspective, Ma cites the influence of Confucianism and ancient patriarchal values (*yang*) on Chinese women, and identifies the archetypal Feminine (*yin*) embedded in Chinese myths and legends (2010).

⁴⁴ LaCocque provides an overview of the customs of the Middle East, as well as respective OT texts, to underscore the Song's counter-cultural perspective (1998:244-246; 1998a). For a helpful study on traditional Chinese marriage customs and the attendant tensions between the collective and the individual, see *Footbinding: A Jungian Engagement with Chinese Culture and Psychology* (Ma 2010).

brothers, she wishes that she had known her lover since childhood, a ‘brother’ and kinsman who would not rob her of the essence of love and the fullness of life, a brother whom she would kiss in public as a pronouncement of genuine love and true companionship.

It is clear by the fourth canticle that the accumulative effect of the beloved’s transformation is an echo of primordial condition and a tribute to maternal wisdom. The refrain at this juncture – a homecoming stage of at-one-ness in love – may be considered a reprise: that ecstasy is an experience of being absolutely loved and of reciprocating that sheer gift with the beauty of ‘my gift of love’. A poetic rest at this point in the journey is appropriate in order that the profound mystery of primal ecstasy is savoured and cherished.

3.3.5 *Canticle of Generative Love* (Sg 8:5-14)

In this final canticle, *detachment* is evoked, *consciousness* released, and *responsibility* celebrated.

Detachment is evoked by the word ‘desert’, a metaphor for a graced interval and a gestational period, the place par excellence for encountering divine love and discovering one’s identity as ‘the beloved’.⁴⁵ The desert also refers to a space where detachment is learned for the purpose of mature attachment. Citing Hosea 2:16, Arminjon explicates ‘desert’ as ‘the biblical locus of betrothal’ where the divine lover lures the beloved into the wilderness, speaks at length to her heart, and wakes her up little by little, preparing her for perfect union with him’ (1983:340). ‘Coming up from the desert’, the final season⁴⁶ of unprecedented journeying gives attention to the beloved’s return to the community as a transformed person with a ‘stolen heart’. LaCocque comments that the mention of desert at this juncture is ‘totally unexpected’ following the evocations of vineyards and orchards in the previous canticle (1998a:165). Though seemingly out of place, it is wholly appropriate in relation to the transformative theme of an ongoing exodus. LaCocque connects the motifs of *desert* and *arousal* in the same verse (Sg 8:5) with several passages in Second Isaiah, and suggests that the desert is ‘the midnight before dawn, the expectation before the gift, the interval that will be filled, and hence, through expected concurrence, the gestational desert of Exodus, the place of betrothal par excellence’ (1998a:165).⁴⁷ Having searched and lost, and having loved and found, the beloved ‘comes up from the desert’ as archetype of the

⁴⁵ The theme of desert and wilderness will be elaborated in Chapter 4 in the mythos of the vineyard.

⁴⁶ Arminjon’s designates the former season as ‘The Autumn of the Fruits’ and the final as ‘The Golden After-Season’ (1983).

⁴⁷ LaCocque insists that the one she leans on is not God but her lover; however, the analogical transference is pertinent in relation to the beloved’s transformative journey in love.

love/death paradox of transformation. Fully conscious of what it means to be robbed of life's intended fullness (a symbolic death of the false self) and having tasted love's essential goodness in the heights of the garden, the depths of the dark night, and in the ecstasy of the vineyard, she returns to the community ablaze with the 'mighty flame of Yahweh'.⁴⁸ Based on the exclamation that 'love is as strong as death', the beloved's enduring fame across the centuries serves as a self-authenticating seal and a testament to love's transforming power.

The love/death paradox is explicated by Tribble's reference to the narrative in Genesis 2:4b-3:24, where Life (Eros) means unity, fulfillment, harmony, and delight, while Death (Thanatos) refers to the 'loss of life' through discord, strife, hostility, danger, and disintegration (1978:74). In claiming that 'love is as strong as death', the beloved 'does more than affirm love as the equal of death: 'she asserts triumphantly that not even the primeval waters of chaos can destroy Eros' (1978:161). On Sg 8:6-7, Exum's presupposition is that these two verses hold the key to the poem's *raison-d'être*; she suggests that 'the poem itself is proof that love is as strong as death; it is indeed a lasting testimony of the poet's vision of love' (2005:79). Ricoeur views the 'seal' in 8:6 as 'the sapiential crown' of the song, suggesting that the covenant language ties together the spontaneity of the song and the meditative tone of the declaration. What he considers important therefore is not 'carnal consummation' but rather *the covenant vow* which is 'the soul of the nuptial' (1998:271).⁴⁹ LaCocque highlights that this segment of Sg 8:6-7 is unique in the poem for it is 'the only moment of objectivity, the only foundation' in the poem (1998a:167, citing Rosenzweig 1971). It is here that the allusion to the divine name may be found, and the precise indication of 'a reverse metaphor' where human love is described with terms commonly used for divine love – depicted as a 'flame of Yah[weh]' in its consuming intensity, ardor, and powerful nature (1998a:167, 171). On the basis of Sg 8:6, LaCocque claims that Eros is a 'given' of creation and is a 'sacrament' of divine love for it reflects Agape (1988a:55);⁵⁰ therefore, Agape cannot detach itself from Eros, nor will human eros be the same after having been transfigured by Agape (1998a:76). Kearney adds with regard to the 'all-consuming flame' that 'divinity is the measure of the intensity of eros' and that the 'very unicity and uniqueness

⁴⁸ A similar motif is interwoven into the Emmaus journey where two friends leave 'the centre' (Jerusalem), and discover the risen Lord in the movement away from 'the center'; their transformation is evident in the change from being downcast to returning to the community in Jerusalem with hearts ablaze (Tam 2000:69-90).

⁴⁹ In a discussion of kabbalistic readings, Wolfson explicates the seal of Sg 8:6 as spoken by the soul as well as representing *Shekhinah* in exile, yearning for union with her lover and a wish that she will not be forgotten in times of separation (2006:357-359).

⁵⁰ The LXX uses agape in 8:6, notes LaCocque, which underscores the encyclical's explication of *ahabà* (in the introduction of the present chapter).

of the word' *shalheveyah*, with *yah* as a shortened form of 'Yahweh', appears nowhere else in the Bible, which may suggest 'a fitting code for the transcendent one (*Un*)' (2006:308).

Given the transformation of the beloved's vineyard across the full sweep of the five canticles, the existential exploration identifies Sg 8:12 – 'But my own vineyard is mine to give' – as the key to the poem's *raison-d'être* because the beloved *herself* is testimony to the *transforming power of love*. Paraphrased as 'I am a generative vineyard', her vineyard represents a human life that is lovingly inhabited and fully engaged. Suggested also as the poem's sapiential crown, it provides direction for the existential search, namely, a generative self-giving which brings contentment to her lover and facilitates the incarnational process of *becoming* love. This generative direction stands in opposition to a world-denying orientation which robs both the person and the community of the fullness of life, the essence of love, and the goodness of creation.

In relation to *detachment*, what is evoked in the beloved's return to the community? By relocating the beloved's figurative vineyard (feminine) with the context of literal vineyards (masculine), Sg 8:12 is first of all directed against the brothers of the Shulammitte (LaCocque 1998:244). It is also directed against Solomon; in fact, the name 'Baal-hamon' which means 'master/husband of a multitude' or 'owner of a lot [of wealth]' is a mockery of the poor rich man who oppressed his own people, the husband of many wives and concubines, and the king of harems (Davis 2000:301). Most importantly, the contrast with literal vineyards serves to underscore the pure purpose of the beloved's vineyard:

I am a wall,
And my breasts are like towers.
Thus I have become in his eyes
Like one bringing contentment.
Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon;
He let out his vineyard to tenants.
Each was to bring for its fruit
A thousand shekels of silver.
But my own vineyard is mine to give;
The thousand shekels are for you,
O Solomon,
And two hundred are for those who tend its fruit. (Song 8:10-12, NIV)

The transformed vineyard is characterised by maturity and integrity, strength and peace (*šālôm*), qualities which enable the beloved to stand tall, fend off the condescension of her big brothers, and defuse the common image of male sexual advance as conquest (Davis 2000:301). Since the Song poeticises love 'in its purest form', a love which is 'completely non-utilitarian' (2000:236), it resists all attempts to legislate, exploit, or violate love. Many

levels of existential detachment are implicated by this pure love, particularly detachment from abusive referents, economic greed, and false images of power. Bekkenkamp draws attention to the issue of ‘womanly, maternal, altruistic love’ and cautions against confusing the image of love with false power where ‘powerless women’ are seduced into confusing love with ‘the power of mother-love, gentle influence, non-violence, and the meek who are to inherit the earth’ (2000:77). She interprets love as ‘a heightened state of awareness’ which alleviates the fear of death; it is also ‘a bold adventure’ which leads to a modified view of living and dying (2000:74-75). Tribble adds to the discussion as follows: ‘Never is this woman called a wife, nor is she required to bear children. To the issues of marriage and procreation the Song does not speak. Love for the sake of love is its message’ (1978:162). In the context of marriage, Davidson states that ‘the sexual experience within marriage is not linked with the utilitarian intent to propagate children. Lovemaking for the sake of (married) love, not procreation, is the message of the Song’ (2007:605). Detachment from false images of Eros is also implicated so that the pure love of Eros is distinguished from a damaged human eros. Brenner underscores the point, that ‘violence is a distortion of Eros, a corruption or sublimation’ since its ultimate motivation is physical and social control (1997:161).

What is released? The final canticle releases a *consciousness* which is congruent with its reflective and meditative tone, the beloved’s only moment of objectivity in 8:6-7, and her foundational, yet magisterial statement on love. Sg 8:5 recalls the past, highlights the beloved’s initiative in arousing the lover, and acknowledges ‘mother’ in the lover’s conception and birth. The fact that she desired and ‘sought the one her heart loves’ is treated positively not painfully, which reverses the melancholy and painful consequence of sin in the Genesis account. Another positive implication is that arousal (human *eros*) serves as a key redemptive feature in the inner journey – a journey homeward in both directions. Ricoeur suggests, with reference to Genesis 2, that the maternal home points to an ‘absolute beginning attached to love’ (2000:296). With mother as backdrop to the lovers’ sexual awakening, LaCocque emphasises that the pain and labour of birth in Genesis is transcended in the Canticle by beauty and love; here the handsome couple is regarded as more the *effect* than the cause of procreation (1998a:163), which underscores his point further along that Eros in the Canticle ‘has displaced Thusia (sacrifice)’ (1998a:164). Once again, in addressing ‘psychological complexes’ which are rooted in the rupture between creature and the Creator, between man and woman, and between humankind and Nature, the Song serves as a corrective text and reinstates the sacred significance of intimacy on three levels: the incomparable joy of faithful sexual relationship, the longing for intimacy with God which is a

necessary desire for a healthy soul, and the love of the land which is a sharing in God's love for the earth (Davis 2000:235-237). *Mutatis mutandis*, the 'song of redemption' serves as a unique biblical conduit in the recovery of our original blessing and in the rebirth of primordial images especially in the appropriation of the vineyard as a real, existential project.

On the Song of Songs as a contemporary theological source, Bekkenkamp contends that the 'moving consciousness of its I-persona might provoke a disruption of the logocentricism of theological discourse'; it may induce sensitivity to the sensual and the unknown, and provoke a theology aimed not at finding universal truths, but at connecting 'common, acute particularity' (2000:88).⁵¹ One area of particularity arising from a common, acute 'psychic wound' is the need for a *consciousness* of one's own vineyard which, in lived reality, would be the administration of a gift that requires personal attention, daily nurture, and wise discretion. By implication, the tending one's own vineyard might be considered a spiritual practice whereby we offer our bodies as a living *sacrament*, wholly and pleasing to God, which is our true and proper worship (paraphrasing Romans 12:1). The word 'sacrament' is preferred in the context of the Song of Songs because the word 'sacrifice' is often misunderstood as life denying rather than life affirming. However, their meanings share a resonance for, as Johnson & Ruhl explicate, the origin of the word sacrifice means to 'make sacred or holy', that is, 'the art of drawing energy from one level and reinvesting it at another level to produce a higher form of consciousness' (1999:59). The spiritual practice of being a living sacrament would consist of drawing energy from divine love and reinvesting it at the level of human, embodied love which, by grace, effects harmony within and without, and toward cosmic harmony. Fundamental to being a sacramental presence in the world is the virtue of contentment which 'carries the implication of *content* – to be at home with what you already contain' (1999:IX).⁵² Contentment is 'an inner experience resulting from one's level of consciousness' (1999:18); however, in an age of 'I' consciousness, *humility* (derived from the word *humus*) is required in order to 'soil' the arrogance of modern consciousness and bring it back down to earth by reestablishing an ongoing relationship with the collective

⁵¹ Bekkenkamp states that 'the spiritual dimension of SoS has yet to be created in a continuing construction or reconstruction of a female lyrical tradition' (2000:83). She presents four models of reading the Song; notable is the fourth model which is applicable in dialogic situations among equals and where she asserts the following: 'The opening up of established canons, and the formation of alternative ones, can contribute fruitfully to creating situations in which open dialogues can take place' (2000:89).

⁵² From a Jungian perspective, the psychological goal of human life is the gradual recentering of the personality from the ego to the Self where 'the will gradually subordinates itself to the stronger factor, namely to the new totality figure I call the Self'. The Self is an 'unknowable essence', according to Jung, but it might equally refer to the 'God within us'. True contentment is achieved through an alignment of the ego and the Self, or 'conscious union' which is the term used in depth psychology (Johnson 1994:64-65).

unconscious (1999:12-13). Significantly then, the beloved's transformed vineyard is hers to tend and to give, but not in isolation; rather, it is placed within the context of 'dwelling in the gardens with friends in attendance' (8:13). Here the 'garden' celebrates the psychic movement from a depleted self to life-giving relationships, loving companionship, mature interdependence, and empathy and compassion.⁵³ *Consciousness* is deepened through continued attunement to the lover who desires to 'hear her voice' (8:14). Guenther's observation is therefore perceptive, that 'to inquire how people pray is to ask *the* intimate question' (2000:20). Integral then to spiritual practice is not only self-care, communal life, and soul friendships, but intimate solitude with God where love, joy, and peace blossom. The Song ends with the exclusivity of lover and beloved because true intimacy is their canticle of love. Moreover, their song is an endless cycle; and thus the poem 'has no other choice but to be a ritornello and to start all over again – like the love it sings' (LaCocque 1998a:190).

What is celebrated? Where *eros* is narrowly defined as 'self-seeking' in the early stage and *agape* as 'self-giving' in the mature stage, the transfiguration of human *eros* by *agape* involves the slow work of love. On this basis, transformation in love may be summed up as a journey from self-depletion to self-giving, with *neglect* of the vineyard referring to the 'giving away of self' in compliance to the collective and the *tending* of the vineyard implying the 'giving of self' in creative-generative expression.⁵⁴ Recovering what rightly belongs to the beloved, through spiritual maturation and psychic integration, *responsibility* for 'my own vineyard' is celebrated in the final canticle. With the recurrent theme of transcendent *gift* in the Song as the source of self-giving, this responsibility is implicated as an appropriation of grace – not as self-achievement or arduous human effort. Through the practice of detachment and the *dynamis* of love, grace extends beyond the self because it is the nature of love not only to gratify, but to transform and grow toward its true grandeur. What is the far-reaching impact of the beloved's transformation in love?

Divine Eros is passionate and enduring, consuming and transforming. Thus, the love of the Song cannot be confined or contained, as epitomised by the mythical image of fire.

⁵³ Stevens-Long explicates the fluid, changing nature of the self and emphasises that personal identity is intertwined with the identity of others; she cites Young-Eisendrath when stating that 'the capacity for complex self-reflection in a clear dialogical space will open the door to empathy and compassion for others and oneself, and finally to the experience of interdependence' (2000:171).

⁵⁴ On The Tao of Wisdom, Rosen & Crouse integrate Taoism and the psychologies of Jung, Erikson and Maslow (2000:120-129). Listing Maslow's hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization), Erikson's eight stages of human development, and Jung's concept of individuation, the transformation of the inauthentic into an authentic self and a path to attaining integrity (wholeness) and wisdom (spiritual knowledge) is well presented. Their psycho-spiritual insights demonstrate an integrative approach to transformation.

This paradoxical power of romantic love, namely, its ‘out-of-control quality’ gives us the deepest clue to its real nature. ‘Falling in love’, elaborates Johnson, is an event, deep in the unconscious psyche that happens *to* one. One does not ‘do’ it, control it, or understand it; it just happens (1983:57).⁵⁵ While divine love is a slow and gradual transforming power, its ‘out-of-control quality’ also has the power to burst into flame, surpass human logic, and extend beyond the periphery of self-concern. Moreover, since the blazing fire of love cannot be extinguished by many waters (including the waters of interpretation), the Song’s horizon is limitless epiphany. Au & Cannon purport that ‘the person who is open to self-transcendence is one who believes that grace abounds everywhere and that a dramatic inbreaking of God can occur at any moment’ (1995:9). Lonergan speaks of an ‘other-worldly falling in love’ which Johnston associates with mystical experience – at times a very passionate love which possesses the whole person, creating an enormous longing for the infinite.⁵⁶ He elaborates that existential love is not confined to the erotic or to the purely spiritual; rather, it has its roots in matter and in the body, goes beyond the physical, emotional and erotic, and is open to the cosmic and the infinite. Only through ongoing detachment would the ‘mystical in embryo’ or ‘the existential root’ of love develop into a universal and unrestricted love ([1978]/1997:139). Citing Jung who traced the growth of human love through the stages of biological love (Eve), romantic love (Helen of Troy), devotional love (the Virgin Mary) and mystical love (Sapientia or Wisdom), Johnston concurs with Jung that few people in our day reach the fourth stage. While he agrees that mystical love is incarnational (between human lovers), he advocates an existential longing that breaks into a ‘cosmic or eternal love’ in which the barriers of time and space are united in the cosmic Christ ([1978]/1997:140).

The Canticle’s poetic vocation and enduring enigma are attributed to the Song’s depiction of love in terms of living paradoxes, dramatic tensions and dynamic transformations. Grappling with ‘limit expressions’ and searching its depths are a cause for celebration, rather than argument, as the struggle augments the aesthetic congruence of the poem as a true work of art and attests to the resplendence of love. In lyrical terms, ‘love is a ‘many splendoured thing’. As pure lyric and pure signification, the Song of Songs

⁵⁵ Johnson’s psycho-spiritual explication of romantic love (1983; 1989; 1989a) is applicable to the present theme of human transformation and spiritual maturation (1987; 1991; 1996).

⁵⁶ According to Johnston, an existential anguish that lies at the root of all anguish is related to an existential longing at the root of all longing. Writing in the context of Buddhism, he states that the longing for existential completeness is the greatest good, while the greatest evil is the desire for separate existence ([1978]/1997:137-138). It is significant that the final canticle comes full circle and returns to the context of mother, brothers, and literal vineyards; here, the Shulammitte -- a woman of peace – embodies inner and outer harmony while bringing contentment to the lover.

reverberates backwards to the one love of the Genesis account and forwards to the Johannine assertion that ‘God is Love’. The uniqueness of the Song of Songs is the personal-experiential link between the human beloved and the metaphorical vineyard by means of a biblical metaphor which is rooted in Isaiah’s two vineyards songs and points forward to the True Vine in the Fourth Gospel. With regard to the use of an intersecting metaphor, it is effective as a nexus of divine-human encounter because the poem conceals yet reveals.⁵⁷ By concealing the Source of love (Mystery) yet revealing love in human embodiment (manifestation), its enigma is retained. The intersecting metaphor also functions effectively in relation to the Canticle’s poetic vocation, not only as a poetic prism, but as ‘a poetic womb’: on the one level, as the ‘womb of divine love’ longing for epiphany in human embodiment and, on another, the ‘womb of human love’ yearning for its Source. This intersecting yearning which unites in the beloved, the vineyard, surely evokes the possibility that the poem’s ultimate yearning is for the Incarnation. Retaining the anonymity of the lover is therefore effective as the accent is placed on the essence and invitation of true/pure love, while ‘marriage’ is treated as a metaphor for a unitive love. Through ambiguity, anonymity and expectancy, the poem achieves maximal reverberation and timeless appeal. According to Exum, resistance to closure is perhaps the Song’s most important means of immortalizing love for ‘closure would mean the end of desiring, the silence of the text, the death of love’; ingeniously then, ‘so long as the poem is read, the love it celebrates lives on’ (2005:85, 79).

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of the existential description has been to explore the beloved’s experience in order to obtain an understanding of the human search for love, God, and self. With the metaphorical vineyard serving as hermeneutical key, it is evident that the beloved’s experience within the two poles of Sg 1:6 and Sg 8:12 is transformative, a process which is described as a journey from self-depletion to self-giving, from an initial ‘giving *away* of self’ to the collective to an authentic ‘giving *of* self’ in love. On this basis, the present chapter posits transformation in love as the principal motif in the Song. The existential exploration has adequately identified the beloved as archetypal seeker in the human search and as human archetype for the embodiment and sacramentality of Eros. However, as biblical exemplar, the beloved is unconventional because the locale for the search is the ‘irreligious’ Song of Songs.

⁵⁷ McFague’s insight on the metaphoric process is particularly apt in relation to the Song: ‘A metaphorical pattern for rational human understanding is essentially a dramatic pattern for human knowing and becoming, a pattern which focuses on mobility, open-endedness, and tentativeness in its commitments’ (1982:34).

For this precise reason, a contemporary interdisciplinary approach has been helpful, with psycho-spiritual (Jungian) insights on dreams, inner work, Dionysius, and romantic love informing the existential exploration.

For the sake of succinctness, the table below summarises the existential-descriptive findings under four main sections (in bold):

Key text (Self-description)	Evoked (SD themes)	Released (Graces of Encounter)	Celebrated (Dialogical keys)
I am a neglected vineyard (1:6)	Desire	Awareness	Receptivity
I am his (2:16)	Discernment	Otherness	Response-ability
I am faint with love (5:8)	Descent	Woundedness	Reciprocity
I am my lover's (6:3)	Delight	Oneness	Respect
I am a generative vineyard (8:12)	Detachment	Consciousness	Responsibility

The experiential-existential findings will serve as the interpretive framework in the following two chapters; it would therefore be helpful to recapitulate the methodological approach adopted in the present chapter. The starting point for an existential description of the Song is the beloved *herself* – the locus of transformation in the Song – whose transformation takes place across the full sweep of the eight chapters of the Song of Songs text. For thematic purposes, however, the Song text is divided into five canticles which are explored on the basis of three experiential questions, namely: (1) What is evoked? (2) What is released? and (3) What is celebrated? The five canticles evoke specific spiritual direction components (SD themes) which maintain the focus on the experience of the human subject and, in turn, highlight the inner dynamics of the Song. Each canticle also evokes a particular aspect of the Song's vision of love and, in identifying the celebratory phenomenon, elucidates ways in which transformation contributes to the aesthetic congruence of the poem. A key 'I am' text is identified in each canticle as these descriptions provide the autobiographical cues for describing the beloved's persona, inner discourse, and self-perception. The intratextual link between the 'I am' texts and the respective vineyard imagery serves as the key to an exploration of the metaphorical vineyard because the interpersonal dynamics between lover and beloved pivot on this link. The graces of encounter *released* are directly related to the deepening encounters of love for these graces serve to activate the unconscious and uncover the deeper layers of the self. The release of these graces go hand-in-glove with the dialogical keys or 'givens', for encounter presupposes human readiness and human participation. Through the dynamic interplay of these various elements within each canticle and across the Song of Songs text, the transformative aptitude of the Song unfolds.

Several important experiential-existential insights have emerged which confirm the feasibility of the vineyard as existential project as well as the relevance of the beloved's transformative journey for the contemporary practice of spiritual direction. These insights are delineated as follows: *awareness*, identify the psychic wound of self-neglect in the arousal to love and facilitate nourishing means of receptivity to God (canticle one); *otherness*, attend to dreams, psychological complexes, and destructive socio-cultural-religious influences in calling forth authentic responses of love (canticle two); *woundedness*, revisit the peak experience of the primordial garden and attend sensitively to the subsequent pain of loss in the dark night (canticle three); *oneness*, recover the essential goodness of creation and uncover divine desire at the core of the search; here a homecoming consists of the realisation that 'I am beloved' and 'I belong to God' (canticle four); *consciousness*, reclaim ownership for one's own vineyard and celebrate responsibility for the gift of one's unique life (canticle five); *open-endedness*, the ongoing revisioning of love and the reuse of the Song in 'new speech situations'⁵⁸ (epiphany).

The five SD themes will be employed in the next two chapters for the purpose of testing the validity of the transformative paradigm founded on the Song of Songs. The paradigm will subsequently be referred to as the '5-D paradigm' and is summarised below: *desire*, though often repressed, neglected or debased, is the inner spark that ignites the search for love/God/self and serves as the impetus for the inner journey; *discernment* is the ability to listen to multiple dimensions of the self, attend to dreams, and perceive the eruptions from the unconscious which are often directly related to the divine initiative; *descent* refers to the disclosure of the heart which leads to a peak experience, followed by a deep vulnerability and sense of loss which is a paradox of intimacy; *delight* in the quintessence of beauty and the quiescence of simplicity is a profound effect of a unitive love; it is an experiential taste of our original blessing and primordial condition; *detachment* is a conscious, generative way of being in the world which contributes to the harmonisation of all creation.

In sum, as a *human song*, the beloved is posited as archetype of transformation in love which underscores the aptness of the title '*The Canticle of Spiritual Direction*'. With the Song of Songs as canticle of love, the tending of one's own vineyard is considered a spiritual practice for the purpose of being a living *sacrament* which is wholly pleasing to God and a living *testament* to conscious involvement in life-integration through a self-transcending love.

⁵⁸ In a discussion on the *reuse* of the Song, Ricoeur cites several examples of 'new speech situations' which, through audacious transfer, creates new significations (1998:280), an approach which consists of a maximal exploitation of metaphor.

Chapter 4

A MYTHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE VINEYARD:

The Contextual-Explorative Phase

4.1 Introduction

The second phase of the hermeneutical approach in this dissertation explores the vineyard within the context of Isaiah's 'Song of the Vineyard' (5:1-7) and a 'New Vineyard Song'¹ (27:2-6). Though the vineyard songs represent two distinct historical moments in Isaiah's prophetic ministry, as one literary unit it presents a poetic-prophetic framework for exploring the vineyard as mythological motif. Central to the mythos of the vineyard is the spiritual 'predicament'² or psychic wound of the vineyard Israel. This collective dimension is fundamental to an understanding of the neglected vineyard in the Song of Songs and to positing the vineyard as a locus of divine-human intimacy. The two-fold aim of the present chapter then is to explore the collective consciousness of the vineyard and to draw implications for spiritual praxis.

The mythos of the vineyard is significant for contemporary spiritual direction because the YHWH-Israel relation offers an historical analogy of divine-human intimacy and a symbolic connection for personal narrative. As Guenther states, spiritual direction is '*always* storytelling' (1992:32) and 'the role of the spiritual director is to help the directee to connect individual story with *the* story' (1992:22-39). From the field of spirituality, Sheldrake notes the importance of story as a vital element of human solidarity and of 'the need to enable alternative stories to become part of public history' (2006:17-19). Jungian psychologist Young-Eisendrath highlights the need for 'a mythology or Big Story through which we discover the spiritual meaning of our individual lives' and elaborates that a 'symbolic connection is broken for many people in our era because we have no unifying Big Story that allows us to see our individual purpose in a spiritual context' (1999:157).

The mythos of the vineyard is of great theological import because the YHWH-Israel relationship lies at the core of the Judeo-Christian tradition; however, for the purpose of spiritual direction, a poetics-praxis amalgam will narrow the scope to an exploration of the divine subject as principal agent in transformation, an approach which is consonant with Isaiah's two vineyard songs. The divine subject will be discussed under five sub-headings on

¹ The title is borrowed from Hibbard (2006:176).

² Note Ricoeur's explication of *mythos* as some predicament or plot, Aristotle's usage in describing Greek tragedy in his *Poetics* (1995:57).

the basis of the 5-D paradigm explored in the previous chapter: (1) *desire* and the divine imagination; (2) *discernment* and the divine question; (3) *descent* and divine retribution; (4) *delight* and divine transformation; and (5) *detachment* and divine regeneration.

4.2 The mythological enquiry

The mythological enquiry will not engage the broader topics of myth, such as ‘mythical language’ which explores syntheses with religious texts of other cultures (Schökel 2000:39-62),³ the ‘mythic past’ which treats of theological and philosophical reflections on Israel’s literary tradition and provocative questions of historiography (Thompson 1999:200-292),⁴ linguistic distinctions between myth and metaphor and between phenomenological and symbolic connotations of myth (Caird 1980:220-223), and the psychological concepts of archetypes, active imagination, and mythical adventure (Johnson 1986:153-159).

By way of definition, cognisance is taken of Kourie’s explication of myths for it underpins the present experiential-existential approach to the *mythos* of the vineyard. She asserts that myths not only reveal radical truths about biblical history, they are ‘a dialectic of our inner history’ (1998:5). They speak of ‘the central truth and mystery of the human condition’ because they reflect the workings of the psyche and the deep-felt needs of the human person (1998:5). Furthermore, the language of myth ‘redresses the balance in favour of comparative, symbolic and psychological meaning as opposed to particularistic, literalistic and merely historical’ (1998:5). In the context of the Song of Songs, Kourie’s comment is pertinent, that myths are ‘a finger pointing to what is essentially unknowable’ and are ‘often used as the poetic or symbolic expression of the mystical experience’ (1998:5-6).

The mythological enquiry is sparked by the controversy that the Song of Songs is a ‘non-religious text’⁵ that ‘echoes the rest of the Bible’ (Carr 2003:136),⁶ and uses ‘recycled

³ On the mythical language of the Old Testament, Schökel asserts the following: ‘Myth and mythical language are recognized today for their richness and elemental vigor, and it is no offense to the Bible if we consider it enriched by those components’ (2000:40).

⁴ Thompson states that ‘The Bible’s language is not an historical language. It is a language of high literature, of story, of sermon and of song. It is a tool of philosophy and moral instruction’ (1999:99). Historical problems arise with ‘the question of continuity’ i.e. when reading the Bible’s narratives, ‘are we looking at the means by which a culture and a tradition created continuity and coherence because of the discontinuities of people’s experiences?’ (1999:217-218).

⁵ LaCocque states as follows: ‘There are few, if any, characteristic features that identify the Canticle as a bona fide link in Israelite tradition; only *interpretation* is able to draw a divine melody from that marvelous instrument susceptible of being played in different fashions’ (1998a:30).

⁶ Carr (2003:136) cites the following examples: the woman describes her man as ‘the one my life strength loves’ (1:7) which resonates with the call to love God with ‘all your life strength’ (Deut 6:5); ‘My love is mine and I am his’ (2:16) echoes ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’ (Lev 26:12, Jer. 7:23, and Ezek 34:30).

language' (Davis 2000:231) or 'motifs from Israel's sacred story to enrich its picture of an erotic relationship between human beings' (Carr 2003:136). A more specific experiential enquiry concerns the relationship between the psychic wound of the vineyard and the notion of God's anger. LaCocque points out that the 'unkept' vineyard is interpreted allegorically on the basis of Israel's use of the verb *natar* – 'to keep' (1998a:73). He elaborates that *natar* is used 'for speaking of God: He keeps his anger forever' and also pertains to 'God does *not* keep anger forever' (1998a:73).⁷ A second experiential enquiry is concerned with the relationship between the affective connotation of the vineyard and the love of God. LaCocque highlights that the Canticle's author has, as never before, 'brought us in close contact with the model text of Isa. 5.1, *kerem hayah lîdîdî*, 'my beloved had a vineyard' (1998a:188). Since Isaiah's two vineyard songs elucidate the 'predicament' of divine anger and divine love, these experiential concerns will be addressed in the mythological enquiry. For tactical purposes, Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard will be referred to as the '*encompassing narrative*', the two vineyard songs combined as the '*encompassing song*', and the Canticle, as the '*primary*' or '*embedded song*' – intertextual terminology adapted from Ricoeur (1995:150). For the sake of clarity, '*Canticle*' will be used instead of the Song of Songs.

Since the mythological enquiry is experiential-existential, it is necessary to highlight several factors which pertain to Isaiah's two vineyard songs and which will be assumed in the contextual-exploration. First, the Song of the Vineyard is 'one of the most well-formed in the book of Isaiah' for here the prophet 'displays all his masterly command of language in a sophisticated use of imagery' (Nielsen 1989:89). Second, as demarcated entities, Isaiah 5:1-7 and Isaiah 27:2-6,⁸ present a strong case for intertextuality,⁹ the latter being dependent on the former (Nielsen 1989:87-123; Hibbard 2006:168-181). Third, the Song of the Vineyard fits the early part of Isaiah's ministry, around the eighth century B.C.E. (Williamson 2006:330-332; Nielsen 1989:88), while the 'new song' reflects important themes in Isaiah's postexilic

Note Carr's footnote on how OT texts 'apply the language of human love to the divine-human relationship, while the Song of Songs (re)applies that language in the way it was generally used' (2003:199; also 141).

⁷ LaCocque mentions that the verb is used in Arabic for the keeping of the vineyard; for its religious connotation, he quotes Robert, Tournay, and Feuillet that the verb is 'only used for speaking of God: He keeps his anger forever [sic]' and, as a counterargument in his footnote, states that the texts they quote also say that 'God does *not* keep anger forever' (1998a:73).

⁸ Isaiah 27:2-6 is 'one of the clearest examples of inner-biblical interpretation in all of Isaiah 24-27' (Hibbard 2006:177).

⁹ Gentrup states that intertextuality is 'pointedly effective in Isaiah' (1993:318). See Hibbard's chapter on 'Intertextuality in Isaiah 27:2-13' for an elaboration (2006:168-209).

prophecies (Hibbard 2006:168-181);¹⁰ the Canticle, based on linguistic evidence, is to be dated ‘between the fourth and the second centuries B.C.E.’ (Davis 2000:231). Fourth, Isaiah’s songs are enriched by the prophet’s visionary character, political consciousness, and references to the Mosaic Law (Gentrup 1993:310-323).¹¹ Fifth, a synchronic approach would suffice, on the basis that Isaiah’s figurative language¹² – ‘poetic imagination’ and ‘poetic vision’ (Melugin 2009:7-15)¹³ – is a powerfully emotive and symbolic language on which creative thinkers may draw to develop a ‘theological poetics and mystical aesthetic’ for the vineyard. Finally, with regard to genre, ‘poetic-prophetic literature’¹⁴ in the form of ‘song’ is adequate to distinguish the overall genre of both texts, though small genres will be noted in the discussion.

4.3 A Contextual-Explorative Analysis of the Vineyard

4.3.1 *Desire in relation to the divine imagination (Isa. 5:1-2)*

In the first two verses Isaiah sings *for* his beloved, as follows: ‘My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.’ The vineyard is the hermeneutical key to Isaiah’s ‘love song’, and as a natural image it was familiar to the original audience. As Nielsen writes, the image of the vine and the activities of the vineyard were integral to Israelite culture -- gathering grapes, drying raisins, making raisin cakes, and pressing juice – as well as the seasons and the crucial events of the year, characterized by joy and festivity (1989:77-78). It would have resonated that the vineyard involves much work and that its value was ‘the fruit and the wine’ that could be made from it (1989:77); thus, the original

¹⁰ Hibbard writes: ‘In Isaiah 27, unlike chs. 24-26, all the major allusions are to earlier passages from Isaiah, suggesting that this chapter represents a piece of inner-Isaianic interpretation designed to reinterpret earlier messages in the book in a new postexilic setting’ (2006:169).

¹¹ Isaiah is referred to as ‘the Shakespeare of the prophets’ (Gentrup 1993:321, citing the New Open Bible). He is ‘the most forward looking of the prophets’ and is ‘the most frequently cited Old Testament prophet in the New Testament’; the prophet makes use of various motifs from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, and Davidic history, particularly Exodus, and the Mosaic Law (1993:318-319).

¹² Williamson’s approach with regard to ‘the world of this text’ in the first song is as follows: ‘whether a physical reality lies behind it is beyond our recall’ (2006:331) which underscores the use of Isaiah’s figurative language. He also states that Isaiah’s first song is ‘susceptible to a very reasonable poetic analysis in which form and content are well suited’ (2006:327).

¹³ Melugin explores Isaiah’s poetic imagination and the study of inter/intratextual relationships with synchronic approaches; he states that ‘the guild of biblical scholars has greatly overemphasized diachronic questions and has not paid sufficient attention to the richness of synchronic interrelationships of texts to one another’ (2009:15).

¹⁴ ‘As a literary genre, biblical prophecy, Isaiah being the supreme example, is *sui generis*. ... The only generic convention we can be sure Isaiah follows is that of poetry’ (Gentrup 1993:314).

hearers would have understood the particularity and pains described in the preparation of the vineyard. Though the vineyard is rooted in Isaiah's agrarian culture,¹⁵ he uses the image in an innovative way. Williamson contends that the Song of the Vineyard 'may well be ... the first to use this metaphor', though the way had been prepared for the 'new coinage' by some sources which predate Isaiah; for example, the comparison of Israel to a vine (Hos. 10:1 and Ps 80:9-15) and the image of Israel as God's planting in the land (Exod. 15:17; 2 Sam. 7:10, Pss 44:3, 80:9 and 16) (2006:343). For the purpose of appreciating Isaiah's innovative use of the vineyard as well as the impact of his 'love song', Williamson suggests that the vineyard be taken 'at face value' (2006:335).

The vineyard image has an affective aptitude which, Williamson contends, does not necessarily connote a man-woman or groom-bride 'erotic' relationship. Nielson supports the 'erotic implication' on the presupposition that the vineyard was 'a well-known metaphor for the bride (Sg 1:6; 2:15; 8:12)' or for 'a woman' (1989:89-90), which means that the original hearers would have perceived the vineyard as a woman. According to Williamson, the erotic implication 'seems to be confined to the Song of Songs, and so may not have been a convention as early as Isaiah' (2006:334-335). He elaborates that 'there is no evidence for the use as early as Isaiah of *vineyard* as a metaphor for a (female) lover' (2006:343). Since its usage appeared later in the Song of Songs (2006:339), he argues that it would be incorrect to assume that its usage had achieved wide currency. How the original audience interpreted the vineyard remains an open question. The important point is that the *vine* was already a religious motif and vineyard imagery was rooted in Isaiah's socio-cultural tradition. Drawing a metaphor from a mythological toolbox added cultural weight to Isaiah's plot which, following the structural dynamism of the text, took the original audience by surprise. By concealing the identities of the owner and the vineyard, and by silencing the audience through monologue, the prophet creates maximal poetic space for his provocative agenda which is 'to bring them to acknowledge some point of view that they evidently would not have done had he addressed them directly about the matter' (2006:329). Nielsen's argument is less persuasive that the prophet's purpose was 'to guide the hearers towards one specific understanding of the song, i.e. as a narrative about a man and his wife' (1989:92), and which would have alluded to an 'unfaithful wife' (1989:97).

¹⁵ In Davis' work on *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (2009), she cites Isaiah as 'perhaps the first urban agrarian' (2009:121) and includes insights from Isaiah and the Song of Songs under the theme of 'Visions of Shalom' (2009:168-175).

What is ascertained from the first two verses with regard to the spiritual significance of the vineyard? First, the song *for* his beloved begins with an affective use of the vineyard image. The ‘one I love’ is interpreted as a ‘*dear friend*’ (Williamson 2006:331),¹⁶ or ‘a person close to him’ (Nielsen 1985:90) – whose identity is only revealed later in verse 7 as ‘the Lord Almighty’ (NIV). The Song of the Vineyard is composed on the basis of ‘close friendship’ (Williamson 2006:332), loving knowledge of the owner, practical wisdom of creation, and a critical awareness of contemporary context. These factors qualify the prophet to speak *for* YHWH;¹⁷ they authenticate prophetic utterance and evoke ‘an appreciation of the rhetoric of the passage’ (2006:328).

Second, the vineyard’s fertile beginning echoes the primordial theme of original fertility and is an allusion to the divine imagination. The meticulous care expended in the preparation of the vineyard illustrates the particularity and pains of the divine initiative as well as the aesthetic aspect of the vineyard. The divine desire is that the vineyard be a shared locale of divine-human productivity and its planting on the earth a locus of delight. Isaiah’s love song thus resounds with *Eros* since God creates out of love, or, in the language of pseudo-Denys, ‘creation is the divine ecstasy. It is in the nature of eros, as of goodness itself, to pour out into the other’ (Turner 1995a:67).

Third, as model text – and possibly the first use of the vineyard to signify Israel – Isaiah uses an image that was viewed positively even though it was susceptible to disease and used to describe disintegration and destruction (Isa. 34:4; Jer. 8:13) (Nielsen 1989:77-78). The fruit of the vineyard was indeterminate and unpredictable; in fact, the choice vineyard yielded ‘fetid’, ‘stinking’ and ‘diseased grapes’ that were infested with black rot and had to be destroyed to prevent spread of the disease (Tull 2009:19). Conversely, as a ‘live metaphor’, the vineyard was conducive as an image of transformation and, as the narrative unfolds, worked effectively to communicate a devastating message.

Fourth, the language of the vineyard belongs to a ‘lower’ order – not to the realm of *theoria*, or theoretical knowledge – which is wholly ‘appropriate to the configurational act of work in poetic composition’ (Ricoeur 1995:240). By interweaving natural imagery and strong verbs in ‘a straightforward manner’ (Williamson 2006:336), the universals yielded by the

¹⁶ Thompson states that the divine epithet, *dwdy*, echoes the name of Jerusalem’s legendary King David (*dwd*), and is closely linked to the temple on Mount Zion (1999:372). Along with Davis’ assertion that the inclusion of ‘Solomon’ in the Canticle refers not to authorship but implicitly to *shalom* and the Temple (2000:239), the evidence supports Rabbi Akiba’s coinage of the Song of Songs as ‘the Holy of Holies of Scripture’.

¹⁷ Ricoeur describes prophet as ‘a summoned subject’ and discusses the prophetic vocation in relation to contemporary interest in narrative (1995:262-267). In Isaiah’s song, prophetic vocation and the YHWH-Israel narrative go hand-in-hand, making him an authentic spokesman for the mythos of the vineyard.

‘lower order’¹⁸ draw on the sensual (attentive listening and active imagination), the experiential (practical wisdom or *phronesis*),¹⁹ and the relational (an interactive, shared divine-human project).

Fifth, the use of non-religious and non-gendered language is intended for a diverse audience; in the original context, Isaiah addressed a public gathering of people from the city and countryside (Williamson 2006:331), possibly a festivity (Nielsen 1989:94). His song is therefore invested with an inherent capacity for personal and universal reception and for engendering new uses for the *vineyard*. This ‘surplus of meaning’ allows for the Cantic’s construction of the vineyard metaphor as a locus of intimate human loving as well as a locus of divine-human intimacy.

4.3.2 *Discernment in relation to the divine question (Isa. 5:3-4)*

A change in voice in verse 3 occurs when the owner (through the voice of the prophet) addresses the audience with two questions; firstly, ‘What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?’ and secondly, ‘When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?’ The ‘population at large’ (Williamson 2006:337-338) are summoned to co-judge between the owner and his vineyard, activating the ‘trial image’ (Nielsen 1989:93) and unexpectedly turning the ‘love song’ into a ‘lawsuit’ (Williamson 2006:327; Nielsen 1989:92).²⁰ Williamson suggests that the change in voice and rhythm in verse 3 allows a pause for reflection for it is clear to the hearers that the vineyard has been ‘coded language’ and that some sort of ‘personal relationship’ is involved between the owner and his vineyard (2006:339). At this point though they are not implicated as the figurative meaning of the vineyard had not yet unfolded. Taking her cue from Hosea 2, Nielsen views the lawsuit as ‘a divorce trial’ on the basis that ‘it is possible to hear/read the whole of Isa. 5:1-6 as a narrative about a man and his unfaithful wife’ (1985:94-97). She argues that if the vineyard signified an unfaithful wife, the hearers would have assumed that the verdict was about a woman and not about them. In pronouncing judgment on the woman, they would inevitably be led to

¹⁸ Commenting on Isaiah in general, Carr states that the prophet uses traditional allegory where ‘everyday images are taken as symbols of ultimate reality’ (2003:136); while, in the Song of Songs, the poet uses ‘images of ultimate reality’ to enrich discourse about everyday life’ (2003:136).

¹⁹ Ricoeur cites Aristotle (1995:239) and elaborates that *phronesis*, succinctly described as ‘practical wisdom’, speaks of the good life; Ricoeur asserts that it is ‘poetry’ that nurtures ‘actual practice’ though it shows it ‘in the hypothetical mode of fiction’ (1995:240).

²⁰ Caird makes an interesting observation with regard to the Israelites’ recourse to ‘forensic metaphor’ or ‘legal metaphor’ as follows: ‘Truth, like justice, was for them something to be discovered and maintained in court. It was natural for them, therefore to see through the lens of legal metaphor any attempt to arrive at religious truth’ (1980:158). Isaiah exploits this method in his attempt to convey a message about truth and justice.

judge themselves when the correct judgment emerged; as co-judges then, it would be too late to put forward a defense or reverse the judgment (1989:102). Whichever way it is interpreted, by concealing the identity of the owner and the vineyard, Isaiah's plot is clearly to bring home a guilty verdict. Nielsen asserts that Isaiah's intention is 'to *pronounce judgment* on the hearers' (1989:101).

The What? and Why? questions silence the audience and accentuate the divine perspective. The answer to the first question is obviously rhetorical and the second has no convincing answer (Williamson 2009:339); thus reaction from the audience is 'completely missing' (2009:329). Since the owner does not call for 'repentance', neither are the people given a chance to repent, 'repentance' is not the prophet's purpose *per se* (2009:330). The silence of the audience underscores Gentrup's observation that in prophecy the dialogue is 'one-way'. Most of the time YHWH speaks *to*, not *with*, the interlocutors. He 'addresses but is not usually addressed' (1993:313). Drawing on this rhetorical device, Isaiah's plot is directed toward a *fait accompli* for the prophet 'wishes them to agree with the Lord's verdict that they are guilty of far-reaching social injustice, and that their destruction is a fair punishment or consequence' (Williamson 2009:32). Conversely, in the overall context of the encompassing songs, the silence serves as a ploy to hold the audience at the mercy of the divine. As Thompson elaborates, this method belongs to an intellectually coherent cluster of motifs implicit in the *via negativa* (1999:244), the dark night of the soul or the metaphor of exilic wilderness as a time of testing and rebirth (1999:222), and new life and resurrection (1999:244-247).²¹

What are the practical implications of discernment and the significance of divine questions in spiritual praxis? First, the use of imagery facilitates discernment, as evidenced in the summons to the people to judge for themselves and to arrive at their own conclusion. Nielsen highlights that imagery and the lawsuit co-operate 'to include the hearers in the narrative' and means that they are required to participate and 'enter into an interpretation of what is said' so that they 'make it their own and see reality through it' (1989:100-101). The 'performative function'²² of the trial image works in such a way that the hearers 'take it over

²¹ Writing on how Bible texts are formed, Thompson's asserts: 'Divine mercy needs a story that establishes the object of mercy as worthy of damnation. How else is mercy divine?' (1999:389).

²² Nielsen describes the performative function as a counterpart to information as follows: 'The speaker utilizes the image's performative power in such a way that the result, if it succeeds, becomes participation. The speaker performs a speech act which – if it succeeds – becomes a language event for the hearer' (1989:57-58).

as their own perception of reality' (1985:65-66)²³ and in this way a 'convincing judgment' is delivered (1989:101).

Second, the effective use of imagery involves a recognition of the 'process of metaphorization' that is at work 'to guide the [hearers] and to engender in [them] the capacity to pursue the movement of metaphorization beyond [their familiar reception]' (Ricoeur 1995:160). For example, the 'encoded' vineyard – a 'highly developed metaphor' with 'high correspondence' (Caird 1980:166)²⁴ – is exploited to indict the very people of YHWH's choice, which confirms Ricoeur's assertion that metaphor is 'an 'odd predication that 'transgresses the semantic and cultural codes of a speaking community' (1995:161). In light of this 'odd' predication of metaphor, positing the vineyard in the Canticle as a locus of divine-human intimacy might transgress the 'semantic and cultural codes' of the contemporary interpretive community which prefers the sexual interpretation. In discerning the 'spiritual meaning' of the vineyard, it is important to note that practical wisdom or *phronesis* is discerned at the 'intersection between the world of the text and the world of the reader' (1995:240). Drawing on Nielsen's 'performative function' of imagery, the engaged reader would need to enter into an affective mode, engage the erotic images and language of the Canticle, earnestly desire the divine lover, and be consciously involved in the spiritual dimension of one's own vineyard in order to arrive at an authentic conclusion.

Third, working with emotions is ingredient to discernment, a skill which might be sharpened in accompanying and following 'the interpretive dynamism of the text itself' (1995:161). In the present song, the creative use of the imagination, suspending premature judgment and presuppositions, noticing the delicate tensions and dynamic movements of a text, identifying key questions, accommodating silent pauses, and allowing oneself to be addressed and provoked describe the present process of 'literary accompaniment'. The movement from ease to dis-ease, from a love song to a lawsuit, and from the 'euphoric' to the 'dysphoric' (1995:160) is intentionally oriented toward the verdict 'you are the man!' – much to the original audience's discomfiture (Williamson 2006: 328).²⁵ For the contemporary reader, Isaiah's first song is perplexing for it highlights an existential and spiritual

²³ 'Imagery can be reused in another context, with possibilities of new interpretation and new evaluation of the informative and the performative function respectively' (Nielsen 1989:65-66). She elaborates on the importance of 'the dialectic between the informative and the performative functions, in the sense that imagery is the bearer of information that can be derived from the image without thereby exhausting it' (1989:58).

²⁴ Caird's explication of 'high development' is pertinent to the present text: 'There is no surer index of the linguistic awareness of an author than the degree to which he exploits imaginatively the ramifications of his own imagery' (1980:189).

²⁵ The reference is to Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Sam. 12:1-7 and to Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21.

predicament, namely, the relationship between the indeterminacy of the vineyard and the *aporia* of divine ‘powerlessness’.²⁶ Moreover, the ‘dynamism of progressive defeat’ which, in semiotic terms, is a *dysphoric* course, ‘one that fails to unite its subject to its object’ (Ricoeur 1995:152)²⁷ evokes a sense of helplessness and hopelessness – a divine-human predicament which is poignant in the present text.

Fourth, feeling generates meaning, particularly when ‘facing into hard questions’ (Guenther 1992:45). Isaiah’s summons to co-judgment is provocative and confrontative, and is perhaps unsettling; however, resistance to penetrating questions deprives the reader or listener from working with perplexity and *aporia*. Through discernment of feelings (or affect), a kind of self-understanding is released not only ‘in front of the text’ but ‘in the face of God’, a self-understanding that leads inexorably to *phronesis*; or, as Ricoeur asserts: ‘The amplitude of the world of the text requires an equal amplitude on the side of the *applicatio*, which will be as much political praxis as the labor of thought and language’ (1995:235). If ‘human existence is political existence’ the *applicatio* of the vineyard would include ‘facing into hard questions’ about the human condition and actively addressing the purposes of healing, wellbeing, restoration, and transformation of the created order. Thompson’s point, for example, is apt that the Song of Songs and Isaiah take the image of the vineyard ‘in a quite different direction’ to Hosea, Ezekiel and Jeremiah’s harsh judgment on ‘Yahweh and his wives’ by presenting Jerusalem as Yahweh’s garden on earth (1999:372).²⁸

Fifth, discernment in spiritual direction engages *phronesis* rather than the speculative which makes the ‘unanswered’ divine questions of What? and Why? pertinent to spiritual praxis. The What? serves as an invitation to *recollection*, that is, the gathering of oneself to remember God; while Why?’ evokes an *examination* of self for the purpose of being remembered in God.²⁹ In Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle* she writes that ‘recollection is a preparation for being able to listen ... so that the soul instead of striving to engage in discourse strives to remain attentive and aware of what the Lord is working in it’ (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:329). The drawing inward is a prerequisite for honest self-

²⁶ See Ricoeur’s chapter ‘On Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology’ in which he offers suggestions on the integration of ‘the speculative *aporia* into the work of mourning’ (1995:249-261).

²⁷ This quote is taken from Ricoeur’s essay on ‘The Narrative-Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen’ (1995:151-160) which recalls Isaiah’s song of the vineyard.

²⁸ The ‘poetics of politics’ includes gender issues. It is beyond the scope of the present research to explore other OT prophets, their gender-powered nuances, and ways in which the Canticle reverses the prophetic tradition. LaCocque (1998; 1998a), Davis (2000), and Carr (2003) have done excellent work on these topics, underscored by Tribble’s work (1978).

²⁹ Davis dedicates an entire chapter to ‘Rupture and Re-membering’ in addressing the relationship between ecology and spirituality (2009:8-20).

examination and a preparation to be present to God and self. Quietude reduces striving and disposes one to remember the One who is at work re-remembering the disparate parts of the self. Furthermore, a drawing inward facilitates the reception of truth, that is, the disclosure of who God is (and who we are in God). Truth, writes Thompson, ‘is revealed to those with the patience and training to see what is already there’ (1999:287).³⁰ Rather than speculation, truth becomes the work of *phronesis*, which, adapting the poet Rilke’s words, is to ‘live our questions’, to ‘live the questions now’, and to ‘be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves*’ (1934:35). In discerning truth and facing into hard questions, spiritual direction grounds what and why questions in human experience and maintains a presence to what is.

Sixth, discernment develops sensitivity ‘to what is there’, which includes the hard questions of social injustice, cries of despair, and bloodshed. Rilke recognises that a reflective way of living is not easy and thus writes: ‘it is clear that we must hold to what is difficult; everything alive holds to it’ and, as Nature proves, it finds its way by being ‘characteristically and spontaneously itself’ (1934:53). In spiritual praxis then, a ‘crop of good grapes’ calls for an awareness of that which is ‘characteristically and spontaneously human’ vis-à-vis the inhumane and dehumanising. It is interesting then that Isaiah’s use of the vineyard draws on the ‘characteristically human’ and the ‘spontaneously natural’ and shows that the loss of such awareness and interconnectedness is devastating. Tull underscores this point in her comment that ‘metaphors from the natural world fade into inaccessibility not when plants themselves become archaic but when human awareness lapses’ (2009:29). By implication, discernment or spiritual awareness includes a recollection on the ways of nature and an examination of human responsibility (personal and collective).³¹

4.3.3 *Descent in relation to divine retribution (Isa. 5:3-7)*

Given the summons to co-judgment and the poignancy of the what and why questions, it is surprising that no judgment or sentence is explicitly pronounced. Instead, the text highlights

³⁰ With reference to the biblical tradition of *torah*, which is loved and mediated upon day and night, wisdom and discernment are learned skills. Ancient authors had a respect for language and what inspired them, and ‘their hubris was tempered by the awareness of their ignorance of things divine’ (Thompson 1999:286).

³¹ The perspective from Chinese wisdom is well illustrated by Au & Cannon, that the way of nature is integral to *wu-wei* or ‘the way of effortless action’ (1995:146). They describe *wu-wei* as ‘a form of intelligence that allows a person who understands the dynamics of human affairs to use the least amount of energy to deal with them’ (1995:147). *Wu-wei* is especially helpful in addressing humanness, compassion, and forgiveness, as well as effecting change through the prayerful practice of recollection and examination. Also see Fischer on the legacy of Noh Soo-Bock: ‘Her forgiveness was her best revenge, and her acceptance was her best resistance’ (1999:156) -- a Korean woman’s story of Japanese soldiers during the Second World War.

the owner's 'frustrated expectations' (Williamson 2006:328), peculiar resolution and bizarre action. Two viable options would have been expected with regard to the condition of the vineyard: first, most husbandmen would work toward solving the problem of diseased grapes; or second, the owner could have summoned the 'personified vineyard' to repentance (2006:329). Neither of these suffice, as evident in the five unequivocal determinants that follow: 'Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, ... I will break down its wall, ... I will make it a wasteland, ... I will command the clouds not to rain on it.' The owner's drastic action is clearly that of retribution, as the neglect, lack of protection, and unequivocal action would result in the total destruction of the vineyard by various forces: first, overgrowth of the vines through the lack of pruning and care; second, smothering of the vines by briars and thorns; third, invasion by external usurpers, internal exploiters, and wild animals; and fourth, drought would cause it to become a wasteland and a wilderness.

Descent in the first song plummets in verse 7 when, in 'elevated language' rather than 'standard prose' (2006:326), the prophet declares that 'the vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.' Judah and Israel, Williamson suggests, is to be taken as a whole – as the people of God – for 'Israel' is 'Isaiah's most common use of Israel' (2006:343). Here, the Lord's 'garden of delight' is juxtaposed with a vineyard of disappointment, and a devastating outcome intensifies the severe irony of the love song-turned-lawsuit in the final words of the encompassing narrative: 'he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.' Nielsen elucidates the phonetic similarity in Hebrew between 'justice' and 'injustice' and between 'righteousness' and 'a cry' which makes the 'yield of bad fruit' even more devastating (1989:88). From a fertile vineyard to a barren wasteland, the disturbing theme of descent may be paraphrased as follows: 'the owner looked for a crop of good grapes but the vineyard yielded bloodshed.' It is this state of the vineyard that describes *in nuce* the psychic wound of the 'unkept' vineyard and the severity of God's anger.

The movement of descent is textured by a complex paradox. On the one hand, the divine is 'brought down to earth' in the actions of digging, clearing, building, and looking, which portrays God as actively present and creatively involved in the vineyard. On the other, immanence presents a God who is not immune to and unaffected by the diseases and recalcitrance of humanity, hence 'frustrated expectations'. The paradoxical is further complicated by the fact that both the preparation and the destruction of the vineyard are attributed to the work of God, which suggests that the 'active hand' of God

(presence/*kataphasis*) as well as the ‘withdrawal of God’s hand’ (absence/*apophasis*) participate in preparing the ground for transformation. Drawing on the contingent and precarious nature of the vineyard, rather than the hardy, self-reliant, vigorous, and evergreen olive tree (1989:77), the paradoxical provides the potential for transformation, which makes the vineyard highly conducive as a metaphor for Israel (cf. Isa. 1:8; 3:14; 5:1-7; 27:2-6). Nielsen highlights the paradox that ‘the vine is able to connote the election and the greatness as well as the judgment and the insecure position’ (1989:77). By intertwining the contingency of human responsibility and the precariousness of nature, and juxtaposing greatness and frailty, Isaiah depicts in a realistic way ‘the refractory nature of man’ (Ricoeur 1995:182, citing Alter).³² Since the Song of the Vineyard avoids a pious³³ or illusory poetics, it serves as a model text for the mythos of the vineyard and for elucidating the predicament of the YHWH-Israel relationship. Ricoeur’s assertion is apt that ‘a theology that confronts the inevitability of the divine plan with the refractory nature of human action and passions is a theology that engenders narrative’ (1995:182).³⁴

The confrontation between the divine plan and the refractory nature of Israel engenders ‘dark theology’³⁵ or ‘dark narrative’, a principle that is illustrated in the vineyard’s disintegration from a ‘fertile hillside’ to a ‘wasteland’, or its descent from ‘the age of innocence’ to ‘the age of experience’. This spiraling descent exemplifies Ricoeur’s reference to ‘the collusion between the inevitable divine plan and the unpredictability of human contingency’ (1995:183). However, both the confrontation and the collusion serve the purposes of transformation and give birth to motifs and images of the *via negativa*, such as wasteland, wilderness, desolation, and darkness. Following the Song of the Vineyard, divine-human confrontation and collusion are depicted in ‘the perilously momentous realm of [Israel’s] history’ (1995:183, citing Alter), that is, in the ‘exilic chapter’ where, according to the Targum, God removed the *Shekinah* from the favoured people.³⁶ The only redemptive feature amidst the harsh retribution of the present text is emotive, that is, the hint of ‘a tender

³² Ricoeur cites Alter’s *Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981:33).

³³ Note in Isaiah 6:1 that he identifies with the people as ‘a man of unclean lips who lives among a people of unclean lips’, providing a model for human solidarity between cojourner and seeker.

³⁴ See the four traits or resources of ‘narrative theology’ (Ricoeur 1995:329-240) which would fit Isaiah’s songs, namely: the ‘*art of emplotment*’; ‘*narrative intelligibility*’; the ‘*role of tradition*’ or ‘the phenomenon of traditionality’; and ‘*meaning*’ that invites reader response (1995:240).

³⁵ Thompson discusses ‘the motif of hopelessness’ and ‘dark theology’ in relation to how the New Israel emerges from a ‘dead stump’ (1999:244-247).

³⁶ The Targum’s rendering of Isa. 5:1-7 refers to the punishment as the removal of God’s *Shekinah*, the demolishing of their sanctuaries, the exile, and the silence of the prophets (Nielsen 1989:103). It is beyond the present focus to explore the exile and the series of woes that follow the Song of the Vineyard.

intimacy' in the words 'garden of delight' (Williamson 2006:343). While the 'tender intimacy' offers a glimmer of hope in the *aporia* of dark theology and along the *via negativa*, divine tenderness also implies that God is not unaffected. Since creation is an ecstatic outpouring of love, the 'confrontation and collusion' leaves God 'stripped' of God's original intention for the vineyard and inflicted with 'a wound of love'. Given these intonations of the spiritual journey, the Song of the Vineyard is an important text for understanding the psychic wound of the 'unkept' vineyard.

In terms of spiritual praxis, Isaiah's 'dark song' of the 'unkept' vineyard is informative because it treats of the tensive nature of the divine-human relationship and the existential implications of being 'created in love and for love'. In the wilderness experience then, it is important to hold the creative tension between the 'refractory nature of humanity' and the 'tender intimacy of the divine'. If not, the underlying mystery will become foreign and forgotten, particularly if it be eclipsed by the futility of 'bloodshed' and the perplexity of 'cries of distress'. Tull underscores this creative tension with an allusion to the mystery of nature: 'Perhaps our viewing vegetation as comatose says less about plants and more about our own awareness' (2009:32). The wilderness is a prayerful time to attest that humankind, like vineyards, 'yields fruit that may be diseased or potentially sweet and sustaining, a species that can flourish again even when it appears all has been lost' (2009:32). The gift of the wilderness experience (the unkept vineyard) is an awakening to gratitude, that is, to observe how nature goes about providing for our needs (2009:32). Through daily recollection on the mystery that sustains all life and a regular examination of 'my own vineyard', it also instills a consciousness of 'our original vocation to till and keep the soil' (2009:33) and a 'renewed affiliation with the rest of creation' (2009:34). To reiterate, 'what?' and 'why?' questions in the wilderness invite us to remember God and to be re-membered in God for the wilderness ultimately serves to deepen faith, hope and love. Hopkins captures these themes in timeless poetry: '[N]ature is never spent; [t]here lives the dearest freshness deep down things' (Phillips [1986]/2002:128).³⁷

4.3.4 *Delight in relation to divine transformation (Isa. 27:2-6)*

In the new vineyard song, an allegory of the YHWH-Israel relationship (Hibbard 2006:17), Israel is depicted as 'a fruitful vineyard'. In the post-exilic song God is found 'standing in a different relationship to the vineyard' (Tull 2009:19), which 'opens the possibility of a new

³⁷ From the poem God's Grandeur, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works* (Phillips [1986]/2002:128).

and different relationship between YHWH and Israel' (2006:181). The primary cause of the new or different relationship is 'YHWH's changed attitude and behavior' toward the vineyard (Hibbard 2006:180). Divine transformation in the new song is interpreted on the basis of the intertextual connection between Isaiah 5:1-7 and Isaiah 27:2-6, a connection which 'is almost universally recognized by exegetes' (2006:177). Nielsen suggests that the new song is 'an extension of the original vineyard song', though they 'stand in an antithetical relationship to one another' (1989:117). On the two songs as '*contrasting texts*', Nielsen states that the first song is 'characterized by Yahweh's wrath and judgment, while the later describes the end of the wrath – or rather its shifting on to those who threaten the people – and the positive future to follow' (1989:119). Hibbard asserts that the reversal of YHWH's conduct and attitude toward the vineyard, particularly the reversal of God's anger, is 'the key to the intertextual relationship between these two texts' (2009:179), and thus the reprise of the new song.

Transformation across the two songs hinges on the issue of YHWH's wrath: 'I have no anger'. Related to YHWH's 'absence' of anger is the offer of peace and refuge which is non-existent in the encompassing narrative, but is significant here because the vineyard is 'still potentially opposed and inimical to God's ultimate design for it' (Hibbard 2006:180). 'Peace' is reinforced with a double emphasis, 'come to me for refuge' and 'make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me.' The invitation serves the purposes of transformation because, in the first song, the case of the 'briers and thorns' was a 'sign of judgment'; however, in the new song, their 'negative' presence is 'an opportunity for God to offer refuge and peace to the vineyard' (Hibbard 2006:180). The undesirable elements of 'briers and thorns' or 'weeds and thistles' is a 'distinctly Isaian' usage (2006:174), and no consensus exists whether these refer to the community or to external enemies. Hibbard entertains the possibility that it could be 'a symbolic literary construction that is unattached to a specific historical situation' (2006:175). Nielsen suggests that it 'leaves open an opportunity for the enemies to make peace with Yahweh' (1989:119),³⁸ which might imply a universal invitation if her suggestion be taken that it also means 'seek asylum with' (1989:119).

What is the spiritual significance of divine transformation, particularly the metaphorical shift from the vineyard as a cause of disappointment to a locus of delight? Nielsen encapsulates an important shift in the following statement: 'In Isa. 5:1, it is the

³⁸ Whether these negative forces refer to internal or external enemies depend upon the historical situation in which the text is employed; according to Nielsen, it is most probable that Isa. 27:2-6 was 'originally directed against groups which were interpreted as enemies, but for whom there was still a possibility of repentance' (1989:121).

beloved who is positively connoted; in Isa. 27:2 it is the vineyard' (1989:118).³⁹ By implication, the identification of God as 'beloved' is transposed to the 'beloved vineyard' in the new song. Through this 'transformation in love', the vineyard is conferred with its original dignity as 'the garden of delight' and its original intention of fecundity. Moreover, God's choice planting is re-remembered according to divine providence as follows: 'I watch over it; I water it continually, I guard it day and night.'

Transformation is also evident in the different kinds of divine labour extended, namely, the modes of effort and effortlessness. In the first song, YHWH's initial pains and hard work in the preparation of the vineyard may be likened to the work of meditation (recollection and examination), while the constant replenishment in the new song shares a kinship with contemplation (resting and receiving). According to Teresa of Avila, meditation requires much effort and 'tires the intellect' while contemplation is the experience of spiritual delight and sweetness (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:323-324).⁴⁰ Another interesting difference in the new song is that the Lord does not 'look for' but 'watches over' the vineyard, thus replacing the element of 'expectation' with care and consolation. Have the Lord's expectations been lowered, or has the vineyard matured? Has the contingent nature of the vineyard been reconsidered, or have God's people suffered enough in the wilderness of exile? Questions are muted, in fact, non-existent in the new song. However, consistent with 'non-pious' poetics, the new song retains the presence of negative or undesirable elements. Nielsen suggests that the presence of 'briers and thorns' implies admonition and purification, processes that are necessary and integral for the vineyard's budding and blossoming (1989:122). As a consolation, and another evidence of transformation, the Lord would actively guard and 'keep' the beloved vineyard in the face of negative and destructive elements, as follows: 'I would march against them in battle; I would set them all on fire.' Leene's explication of this verse is particularly helpful: 'YHWH wages war whereas He has no anger' (2000:213); furthermore, drawing on the relation to Isaiah 27:7-9, he translates the paradox as follows: 'YHWH does strike, yet His striking need not be deadly' (2000:213). This paradoxical element of fire in the vineyard sheds light on the flame of YHWH in the Canticle, a burning love that is as strong as death and a blazing fire that is not deadly.

³⁹ Nielsen (1989:121) suggests that the description of the vineyard in Isa. 27:2 as 'fruitful' could infer desire and cites Exod. 20:17; Prov. 6:25; Song 2:3. Given that the vineyard refers to YHWH's people and not to a woman, the erotic implication, which she 'strongly emphasized' in Isa. 5:1-7, does not disappear in the new song but has 'a moderating effect' (1989:121). This is another reason for taking the vineyard 'at face value'.

⁴⁰ In *The Interior Castle*, Teresa uses the image of 'two fountains with two water troughs' to distinguish between meditation (effort) and contemplation (effortless) (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:323-324).

What is the significance of divine transformation for spiritual praxis? By conferring belovedness on the vineyard and emphasising divine consolation, the new song demonstrates the ‘very different logic’ of the divine nature (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000:14).⁴¹ God ‘transgresses’ the law of retribution by transcending it with a paradigm that works realistically *with* human contingency (briers and thorns); in this way, the vineyard songs communicate ‘the conviction that the divine plan, although ineluctable, gets realized only by means of ... the refractory nature of man’ (Ricoeur 1995:182). Divine logic then is the key to Isaiah’s poetic-prophetic paradigm of transformation, a factor which is best illustrated by juxtaposing divine ineffability with human indeterminacy. Thompson, writing in the context of I Isaiah (1-36) and II Isaiah (40-55), advocates the ‘extraordinary’ aspect of the divine as follows: ‘In theology, as in fiction, only a forgiveness that forgives the unforgivable will do. Isaiah’s text as a whole, ‘expresses the ineffability of divine mercy through the forgiveness of the unforgivable’ (1999:388-389).⁴² Furthermore, it is the wisdom of song⁴³ that best communicates the ineffability of divine mercy and the tenderness of divine delight, a principle echoed in Leene’s assurance of the divine inbreaking: ‘Whereas in the town of chaos the song of wine died down (Isa. 24:9), YHWH himself will break into a new song about his vineyard in the future (Isaiah 27:2ff)’ (2000:217). Modeled then on divine transformation, Isaiah’s paradigm portrays YHWH not as a static and remote God, but as principal agent who breaks into human history with a new song and with ‘a very different logic’, a God who is intent on transforming disappointment to delight and perplexity to peace.

Divine transformation is also ascertained in Isaiah’s image of God over time which emerges from and mirrors his historical context.⁴⁴ Nielsen elaborates three phases for Isaiah’s use of the vineyard image: first, the original utility situation which was to pronounce the necessary judgment; second, in the eighth and sixth centuries (Exilic period) to communicate the ‘connexion between bearing wild grapes and being destroyed’; and third, a moulding of a new message and a development of the old image to console and admonish the ‘generation

⁴¹ One of the tenets of Carmelite spirituality is that God’s love ‘follows a very different logic’ (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000:14).

⁴² On I and II Isaiah, Thompson explicates how Isaiah’s prose text ‘reflects a fictional setting, not an historiographical excursion’ (1999:389). He adds: ‘As the Bible’s God, however, is ineffable, I Isaiah must be dependent on Isaiah II, and therefore must come later, both thematically and functionally’ (1999:389). The present approach of combining the two vineyard songs as one movement demonstrates the ineffability of the divine, particularly in relation to the ‘predicament’ of the YHWH-Israel relationship.

⁴³ See Ricoeur’s discussion on ‘The Hymn’ (1995:178-180) in which he explicates the polarity between narrative and hymn, and the power of praise.

⁴⁴ While historical context is important, Thompson elaborates rather on how literature ‘plays with the metaphors that experience has created for us’ – for example, the myth of exile and the motifs of destruction, wilderness, return and new life (1999:218-219).

that experienced the home-coming from the Exile' (1989:122). The vineyard as a natural image and mythological motif has an aptitude to engender new transformations because the characteristic of the vineyard image is that it 'has been receptive to reinterpretation, and that it has occasioned a *production of a new text*' (1989:123). Its 'surplus of meaning' is therefore used in a transformative way to communicate Isaiah's experience and perception of God's activity (or lack of activity) in the world, which underscores Thompson's preference for dealing with 'emotions of metaphor, not history', that is, to consider '*recurrent emotions that we experience every time we encounter a text*' (1999:388).⁴⁵

Images of God (as well as metaphors, myths and symbols) require continual reflection over time because descriptions of God are intricately tied to the human experience of God.⁴⁶ Ricoeur, for example, critiques the representation of God 'as legislator and judge' and argues that it is 'neither the first nor the last of the representations that make up religious symbolism' (1995:299). It is significant that in the encompassing narrative, primordial goodness and the 'sense of originary creation' (1995:299) precede Isaiah's representation of God as judge. Furthermore, as one 'encompassing song', Isaiah's paradigm begins with 'originary creation' and opens out to an eternal present, which offers a lens to perceive God 'from the angle of anticipation and not just from that of remembrance' (1995:299). This continuum is pertinent for a spiritual reading of the Cantic which begins 'in the middle of nowhere' and remains open-ended with a sense of anticipation. On the level of spiritual praxis, Isaiah's songs illustrate an important faith principle, stated by Ricoeur as follows: 'The God of beginnings is the God of hope. And because God is the God of hope, the goodness of creation becomes the sense of direction' (1995:299). Through the ineffability of divine mercy and a 'very different logic', the mythos of the vineyard preserves 'the sense of directionality in spite of ... evil' (1995:229). Moreover, with the anticipation of the budding and blossoming and filling of the earth, Isaiah's paradigm of transformation symbolises a 'cosmic order' and 'an ethical order' which is reconcilable in the God of hope (1995:229).

Transformation of images also occurs through 'creative repetition', that is, a mode of thought that 'dominates the whole work of second Isaiah' (1995:175). Elaborating on the terms 'creative repetition' and 'anticipation', Ricoeur states: 'The new is not anticipated as

⁴⁵ Thompson's presupposition is that the Bible's primary interests 'are not historical ones'; rather, the Bible is concerned with 'the nature of God's integrity, his unity' (1999:228).

⁴⁶ Aberbach offers an apt example: 'With Judah's submission to Assyria, biblical prophecy reached its high point in the poetry of Isaiah, a potent blend of hard moralizing and tender lyricism, of theology and aesthetics, history and universal truth' (1993:27). He elaborates how in crisis, the prophets would hark back to idealized images of Yahweh, such as 'early marriage' and 'happy childhood' of the nation, and suggests that Israel's 'mythologized history seems to have grown in proportion to the severity of the military threat' (1993:31).

radically different but as a sort of creative repetition of the old' (1995:175). The concept of 'creative repetition' is exemplified in the 'feminine' adaptation of the vineyard. Leene points out that the vineyard in Isaiah's new song is 'feminine', though 'usually a masculine word' – a peculiarity which 'may be connected with the fact that the vineyard is personified as the beloved of YHWH' (2000:209).⁴⁷ Since the Canticle transposes the collective-allegorical interpretation of the vineyard (Israel) to the personal-existential (woman), the beloved's vineyard is not 'radically different' but rather 'holistically embodied' (spirituality and sexuality). As mythological motif then, the vineyard provides continuity between the original (fertile) and the eschatological (fruitful), and the mythos of the vineyard traces the continuum from 'remembrance' to 'anticipation'. Similarly, through 'creative repetition', the branches of the mythos of the vineyard extend to 'the vineyard as locus of divine-human intimacy'.

If a 'radical difference' is to be argued between Isaiah's vineyard and the Canticle's vineyard, it would be on the basis of 'the something' uniquely supplied by the Song which is the 'exuberant celebration of *eros*' (Turner 1995a:41).⁴⁸ The 'something', and thus the radical difference, is 'the natural, spontaneous, but also reflectively apt, human model for divine love' which is 'love in its erotic expression' (1995a:41). It is this exuberant celebration of divine and human love as well as its paradigm of transformation in love that counteracts the notion of God's anger. Integral then to the work of spiritual direction, as Chapter 6 will elaborate, is the importance of journeying with images of God. The transformation of images involves the identification of 'negative' experiences and destructive perceptions of God, co-discerning 'the footprints of love'⁴⁹ in personal narrative, allowing oneself to be 'pierced', healed, and 'wounded by love' through a new paradigm or song,⁵⁰ and resting in the ineffability of divine mercy.

4.3.5 *Detachment in relation to divine regeneration (Isa. 27:6)*

Because the vineyard is continually watered and nurtured by divine providence, its fructification is anticipated as follows: 'In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom, And fill all the world with fruit.' According to Nielsen, though the plant image

⁴⁷ Leene explicates in a footnote that the 'word-for-word quotation from the song of the well Num 21:17 in Isa. 27:2 could have contributed linguistically to the femininity of the vineyard' (2000:209).

⁴⁸ Turner highlights that it was 'not in spite of the Song's eroticism, but because of it,' that medieval commentators warmed to this text (1995a:41).

⁴⁹ *The Footprints of Love* (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000) is a study of the key themes of John of the Cross' mystical path of love and is subtitled: 'John of the Cross as Guide in the Wilderness'.

⁵⁰ Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs writes about a 'piercing' of love that effects a longing and yearning for God; being 'wounded by love' belongs to an erotically charged spiritual interpretation of the Song (Carr 2003:142).

is not stated, in the context of the preceding verses ‘it is only logical to imagine a vine that grows, spreads and bears fruit’ (1989:119). If it is the vine, the new (postexilic) vineyard song will be sung one day by the hearers (1989:120). Hibbard suggests that verse 6 ‘summarizes the song and applies it explicitly to Israel’ (2006:171), and Leene points to the significant contrast between the ‘filling of the face of the world’ by ‘a budding and blossoming Israel’ and the despoiling of the same ‘face of the earth’ in Isaiah 24 (2000:217).

What are the incarnational implications of divine regeneration, particularly for the vineyard as existential project? First, disintegration is part and parcel of the spiritual process, but so is regeneration. As Tull comments, ‘The regeneration of plant life serves not only as a metaphor but also as a concrete sign of human regeneration’ (2009:26). Isaiah’s new song therefore ends with a reprise of a vibrant image of Israel and provides a sense of direction for the spiritual journey beyond the ‘exilic’ or wilderness phase. For example, through divine regeneration the psychic wound of the collective past (mythos) is transformed into the ‘wound of love’ in the Cantic. The effects of divine-human intimacy overflow into the budding and blossoming of other forms of incarnational love and extend outward and beyond toward ‘filling the earth with fruit’ through mission and mysticism. For example, divine generativity reverberates in John of the Cross’ ‘spiritual cantic’, that God ‘always remaining the same, renews all things’ and thus ‘the soul always walks in festivity inwardly and outwardly, and it frequently bears on its spiritual tongue a new song of great jubilation in God, a songs always new’ (*The Spiritual Cantic*, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:672). Isaiah’s generative theme therefore hints at the flowering of mysticism, inwardly and outwardly, which will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Second, the fruit of divine regeneration is a ‘good crop’ of righteousness, justice and peace. Tull states that ‘Isaiah directly and pervasively employs plant imagery to tie human spiritual and societal health to environmental well-being’ (2009:27). Davis compares the ‘source of bitter disappointment’ that the vineyard (Israel) was to God in Isaiah 5:1-7 with the recurrent emphasis on ‘care’ of the vineyard in the Cantic and ‘proper disposition of its fruits (2:15; 6:11; 7:12; 8:12), which suggests that the Cantic reverses ‘the painful history the prophets recount’ (2000:244-245). Furthermore, Davis considers it probable that the Song ‘was inspired by Third Isaiah’s vision of Jerusalem as the bride in whom God delights, and that the Song is at one level a highly imaginative amplification of that image’ (2000:268). From an experiential perspective, the beloved, or the Shulammitte, embodies the ‘*shalom*’ of Jerusalem which represents ‘prosperity, well-being, peace, wholeness’ – a focal point of Israel’s prayer (Ps. 122:6) (2009:169). Interpreting the *shalom* in a wider framework,

Melugin's assertion is apt that Isaiah 'proposes a symbolic world by means of which a faith could develop a particular identity and relationship with God and fellow humans' (2009:10), and a symbolic world in which human life is transformed (2009:8). Moreover, Isaiah's poetic vision includes 'a vision about politics, about the restoration of justice in the social and political order as YHWH's most sacred intent' (2009:9).

Third, divine regeneration is gratuitous, and is epitomised by Isaiah's innovative and paradigmatic use of the vineyard which provides 'guidelines for further experimentation' and engenders new uses for the vineyard (Ricoeur 1995:240). Rooted in original goodness (my beloved's vineyard), Isaiah transforms the vineyard image into a locus of delight (a beloved vineyard), and thereby poeticises the directionality of the goodness of creation. Through this 'transformation in love', Isaiah offers a poetic-prophetic paradigm of transformation – a paradigm that provides 'a new logic of hope that breaks through the logic of sin' (1995:206). The overriding factor is that God, the principal agent in transformation, ensures the regeneration of all creation in spite of evil. Given this gratuitousness, it might be asserted that Isaiah's poetic vision and transformative paradigm are founded on the 'economy of the gift' (1995:293), the 'logic of superabundance' (1995:300), and the 'supraethical' quality of the law of love (1995:301), important existential principles that will be explored in the next chapter.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the mythos of the vineyard through the lens of Isaiah's two vineyard songs so as to ascertain the spiritual significance of the vineyard. The contextual-exploration focused on the divine subject as the principal transformative agent in the YHWH-Israel relationship, engaged the 'process of metaphorization' in Isaiah's use of the vineyard, followed the structuring dynamism across the sweep of the two vineyard songs, and analysed Isaiah's poetic-prophetic paradigm of transformation as exemplar for the mythos of the vineyard. The findings conclude that the mythos of the vineyard informs the understanding of the vineyard of divine-human intimacy on four levels, namely: the positive, the negative, the unitive, and the creative, and are summarised below:

The *positive aspect* of the vineyard is derived from two sources: first, its association with a love song to God, the beloved friend who is intimately known and the creator who is actively present; and second, its connection with primordial goodness. The vineyard's original fertility alludes to the ecstasy of creation (*Eros*), which aptly describes the vineyard as an object of divine delight. The meticulous planting of the vineyard on the earth is an

imprint of the divine imagination, and thus a choice metaphor for the people of God's choice. By virtue of its fruitive potential, the divine intention for the vineyard is a shared locale of divine-human productivity. The affective dimension infers the role of *eros* in divine-human intimacy, from which positive images of God are derived such as creator, artist, lover, provider, and the vital source of life. In the language of spiritual praxis, positive images and positive experiences are encapsulated by the term *kataphasis*.

The *negative aspect* lies in the contingent nature and indeterminate fruit of the vineyard as well as in the possibility of it becoming a wasteland and a wilderness. A 'bad yield' of inhumane acts of injustice, heinous crimes of bloodshed, and the exploitation of creation goes contrary to the vineyard's original creation and divine expectation, the consequence being an untended and unprotected vineyard. Human contrariness produces 'dark theology', epitomised in the destruction of the vineyard, the rupture in the divine-human relationship, the psychic wound in the collective consciousness of God's people, and a deep woundedness in the heart of God. On this dark path, representations of God such as judge and legislator are perceived as harsh, destructive and negative, producing the notion of God's anger. 'Negative' experiences, however, give birth to the motifs of the *via negativa*, namely, desolation, desert, dark night, death, wilderness, wasteland, exile, punishment, purgation, purification, and retribution. The wilderness is a time to face personal and collective shadow⁵¹ and to ground theological questions in life experience and in the human experience of God. *Phronesis* therefore informs the practice of recollection and examination and *apophasis* deepens faith, hope and love.

The *unitive aspect*, as evidenced in the movement from dysphoric to euphoric or from desolation to consolation, is ultimately dependent on the divine as principal transformative agent. Given the refractory and unpredictable nature of humankind (which requires continual admonition and purification), the restoration of the vineyard and the preservation of creation are attributed to the ineffability of divine mercy. The unitive aspect affirms the 'very different logic' of divine love, assuring that God is not powerless and the human condition is not hopeless. In conferring belovedness on the vineyard, reinvesting the vineyard with divine delight, and offering a present and eschatological hope, human participation in the unitive experience involves remembering and anticipating God.

⁵¹ *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* (Johnson 1991) includes a helpful chapter on 'Romantic Love as Shadow' (1991:59-94).

The *creative* and generative aspect of the vineyard as mythological motif suggests a continuum of knowing God intimately as beloved friend and of anticipating God as ‘the source of unknown possibilities’. In finding its ‘originary rootedness and belonging-to’, the vineyard anticipates the budding and blossoming of new usages for the vineyard that are ‘characteristically human’, ‘spontaneously natural’ and ‘intrinsically loving’. In this respect, the metaphorical vineyard in the Cantic (the human beloved herself) is ‘creative repetition’ *par excellence* for she exemplifies the principle of regeneration (‘my own vineyard is mine to give’) in the face of disintegration (‘my own vineyard I have neglected’). Embedded with the ‘poetic-erotic’ seeds of divine love, her vineyard has budded and blossomed in the mystico-erotic literature of the Judeo-Christian tradition and contributed to the flowering of Christian mysticism based on love,⁵² which augments and revises the mythos of the vineyard. To reiterate, the creative-generative effect is engendered by the vineyard as ‘live metaphor’ as well as by the function of ‘myth’ which is ‘performative’, a ‘living reality’, and which ‘is referential in the same fashion as metaphor is referential’ (Caird 1980:224).

Two important implications for contemporary spiritual direction have emerged from the exploration of the mythos of the vineyard, which will be incorporated in Chapter 6. First, Isaiah’s ‘encompassing song’ is a model text for divine transformation for it demonstrates the extent to which God will go to restore, preserve and expand the beloved vineyard. With God as principal transformative agent,⁵³ Isaiah’s poetic-prophetic paradigm provides a parallel to the Cantic’s poetic-erotic paradigm of human transformation. The two paradigms function as dialogical or ‘singing’ partners in divine-human encounter, with the Cantic serving as exemplar for human responsiveness to God. For example, in contrast to singing *for* the divine beloved in the encompassing song, the human beloved sings *to* the ‘one my soul loves’, highlighting the dialogical components of immediacy, intimacy, and ecstasy.

Second, as an informative text for spiritual direction, particularly with regard to the prayerful process of recollection, examination, and contemplation, the Cantic serves as a redemptive response to the ‘*what?*’ and ‘*why?*’ of divine questioning. Noteworthy is Davis’ assertion that ‘the Old Testament represents the condition of the land as the single best index of human responsiveness to God’ (cited by Tull 2009:27). In the Cantic, the ode to the land

⁵² In *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (1995), Johnston states that ‘Authentic Christian mysticism is based on love’ (1995:72), an important assertion in his exploration of the mystical tradition from an East-West perspective.

⁵³ The fundamental motif in John of the Cross’ approach to spiritual direction is identified as follows: ‘the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls’ (*Living Flame of Love*, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:691), to be elaborated in the next two chapters.

is superlative and human responsiveness *par excellence*, which begs the question: ‘Is the Song of Songs poetically and lyrically ‘the single best index’ of human-divine intimacy?’ Reading the two paradigms in parallel, the Song of Songs represents a search for a narrative unity within the biblical canon. What the mythos of the vineyard brings to the Canticle is a ‘song of a beloved vineyard’ which reverberates with the plenitude of remembrance, invitation, and anticipation. In this way, the vineyard as mythological motif exemplifies the connection between ‘personal story’ and a ‘unifying Big Story’.

Chapter 5

A MYSTICAL APPROACH TO THE VINEYARD:

The Contemplative-Unitive Phase

5.1 Introduction

The contemplative-unitive phase, the third phase in the hermeneutical approach in this dissertation, adopts a mystical approach to the vineyard with particular reference to John 15:1-17. The two-fold aim is to understand the *person* and *paradigm* of Christ as encapsulated in the symbol of the vine and to interpret the vine as core symbol of Christian mysticism. The presupposition is that the symbol's primary level of meaning concerns the person of Christ, as indicated by Jesus' self-referential description 'I am the true vine' (Jn 15:1); and the secondary level of meaning concerns spiritual praxis, namely, a lived Christian mysticism that pivots on the imperative 'remain in' (mentioned eleven times in Jn 15:1-10). The significance of the mystical approach is that it underscores Jesus 'the true vine' as the contemplative-unitive culmination of the vineyard motif on the presupposition that the *I AM* sayings portray Jesus as 'the fulfillment and even the embodiment of ... Old Testament and Jewish concepts' (Ball 1996:269).¹ The mystical approach therefore offers a New Testament interpretive framework for divine-human intimacy and is essential for the construction of a Song of Songs paradigm for Christian spiritual direction in the next chapter.

The proposed mystical approach is congruent with the early Church Fathers' interpretation of *mustikos* which refers to 'the hidden interior meaning of the text: the secret or mystery of Christ' (Waaajman 2002:854).² The adjective *mustikos* is 'related to *musterion*, both of them etymologically rooted in *muein* (to close one's eyes or lips)' (2002:854). With Christ as the mystery, the accent will be placed on 'the ineffability of the divine mystery' rather than on 'the ineffability of *mystical experience*' (McIntosh 1998:136),³ and the term '*mustikos*' will be used as a generic term to refer to 'the mystery' or 'the mystical'. Admitting with Ricoeur that 'symbols give rise to an endless exegesis' (1976:57),⁴ the present chapter will narrow its focus to five experiential-existential aspects of mysticism for the purpose of

¹ Ball's study explores the significance of the use of *I AM* in relation to the Old Testament (1996:278-279).

² Waaajman summarises various arguments and reflects on the controversial phenomenon of mysticism (2002:845-860), which is outside the scope of the present chapter.

³ On the theological import of mystical writings, McIntosh concurs with Turner (1995:4, 245-253) that medieval mystics offer a critique of religious experiences, 'pure experientialism' and 'contentless' mystical expression (1998:137). Mystical texts and subjective experience, he suggests, ultimately speak of 'the reality of the One encountered. Not to recognize this is to muzzle the theological power of the mystics and to de-legitimize their theological perceptions' (1998:140).

⁴ Ricoeur's chapter on Metaphor and Symbol is particularly helpful in understanding symbolism (1976:45-69).

spiritual direction, namely: (1) *desire* and the grace of union; (2) *discernment* and the need for purgation; (3) *descent* and the essence of contemplation; (4) *delight* and the gift of communion; and (5) *detachment* and the goal of mysticism. Integral to the 5-D exploration is an elucidation of Jn 15's unitive-fruitive paradigm of transformation.

5.2 The mystical enquiry

Contemporary discussion on the Fourth Gospel is broad, addressing multifaceted issues such as the beloved disciple (Brown 1979), love relationships in the Johannine tradition (Segovia 1982), a Jewish perspective (Reinhartz 1991), a psycho-spiritual approach (Sanford [1993]/1995), symbolic narratives (Lee 1994), symbolism (Koester 1995), allusions to the Song of Songs (Winsor 1999), and Wisdom's friends (Ringe 1999), to name a few. Schneiders' study (1999) places emphasis on encountering Jesus and, by way of background, offers a helpful synopsis on the contemporary discussion (1999:23-47). It is beyond the scope of the present approach to engage these topics, suffice it to delineate several presuppositions which will underpin the mystical enquiry.

First, epitomised by the beloved's yearning and seeking, as well as the poem's dynamic movements toward culmination, the Song of Songs' poetic vocation includes a search for epiphany. Presupposing that epiphany refers to the Incarnation, the present enquiry will be underpinned by the following question: *What is the significance of the vine as mystical symbol for Christ and as core symbol for Christian mysticism?*

Second, the persona of the beloved in the Song of Songs is developed in the Fourth Gospel in the testimony of John the Baptist, the 'friend of the bridegroom' (Jn 3:29-30),⁵ and in the spiritual intimacy of 'the beloved disciple. Origen, who wrote the first Christian commentary on the Song of Songs, contends that 'no one can understand the fourth gospel who has not lain on the breast of Jesus as did the beloved disciple' (Johnston 1995:260-261). The beloved disciple's spiritual acumen is directly related to his transformation in love, for as Brown elucidates, he achieved his identity in 'a christological context' and it was his growth in 'christological perception' that made it possible for the community to identify him as the one whom Jesus particularly loved (1979:33).⁶ As a literary gift to the Christian community, 'the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple' (Schneiders 1999:62) is a unique version of the

⁵Green regards John the Baptist as 'the ideal model for a good spiritual director' (2000:10) because, as 'friend of the bridegroom', he recognized his subordinate role as 'the voice but not the Word' (2000:95). He also considers John of the Cross a 'friend of the Bridegroom' and 'kindred spirit' to John the Baptist (2000:91-111).

⁶ Brown finds it significant that this disciple makes his appearance by name only in 'the hour' (13:1) when Jesus, having loved his own, 'now showed his love for them to the very end' (1979:33).

tradition, namely, ‘that of the Beloved Disciple, to which the other evangelists did not have access’ (1999:4). Within the ambit of spiritual intimacy, the ‘Gospel of the Beloved Disciple’ enriches the mystical enquiry for it releases a ‘theological poetics and mystical aesthetic’.⁷

Third, the Song of Songs and the Fourth Gospel share a mystical and metonymic affinity. Schneiders, for example, refers to the Fourth Gospel as a ‘spiritual gospel’ because ‘the mystical or unitive character of Christian discipleship is the most salient in this Gospel’ (1999:1).⁸ Winsor treats the Song of Songs as ‘evoked text’ and contends that ‘[t]he Johannine intertextual relationship to the Song is *metonymic* and the allusions therefore intend to call up the entire Song’ (1999:49-50).⁹ If the Song of Songs is the ‘evoked text’, then the reverse is correct that the Fourth Gospel is the contemplative-unitive text.

Fourth, symbolism is ‘[t]he most important literary-theological feature of John’s Gospel’ and is ‘*a* if not *the* primary hermeneutical key to its interpretation’ (Schneiders 1999:36, 63). Koester identifies the vine as a ‘core symbol’ which ‘appears only once in the Gospel’ and states that ‘its significance is evident in a single context’ (1995:5). He elaborates that the ‘primary level of meaning’ in Johannine symbolism ‘concerns Christ’ and the ‘secondary level of meaning’ concerns ‘Christian life’ or ‘discipleship’ (1995:13), which will be adapted to ‘Christ, the Mystery’ as primary level of meaning and ‘Christian mysticism’ as secondary level.

Fifth, Jesus is considered ‘the source text’ of Jn 15:1-17, the reason being that ‘it is difficult to determine which particular passage, among many, is the primary source of reference for the Johannine concept of the vine’ (Ball 1996:241).¹⁰ It is worth noting that Isaiah was a primary source in the shaping of John’s language, ideology and Christology,¹¹ and also had an influence on Jesus’ religious vocabulary. For example, Jesus’ use of the term

⁷ Tracy makes an important observation that the Fourth Gospel is ‘a narrative that is more like an oratio’, its rhythmic character ‘releases an attentive reader to meditate even while following the narrative’ (1994:128), which lends itself to a mystical interpretation and an experiential encounter with the text.

⁸ Schneiders takes up the nuptial theme of the OT and the Canticle with respect to Jn 4 and suggests the resurrection narrative as a climax which expresses ‘the new covenant union between Jesus and the symbolic representative of the Johannine community’ (1999:35).

⁹ With reference to Jn 12:1-8 and 20:1, 11-18, Winsor demonstrates that the images, motifs, and vocabulary of the Song of Songs ‘are the matrix for the Johannine anointing and resurrection appearance narratives’ and asserts that ‘those Johannine community members most directly responsible for the tradition behind the written narratives evidently based their oral version of the accounts on the Song’ (1999:1).

¹⁰ Ball suggests Psalm 80 as a starting point (1996:241), yet comments that it ‘can in no way be seen as the sole source for the Johannine vine imagery, even though some of the similarities are striking’ (1996:243). He highlights certain parallels between Jn. 15 and Isa. 5:1-7 (1996:243), yet comments that Jer. 2:21 ‘speaks of a vine rather than a vineyard and so provides a closer verbal link with John 15’ (1996:246).

¹¹ With reference to Isaiah, Ball writes: ‘no other Old Testament prophet is given such personal attention by John’ (1996:266); John founds his understanding of Jesus’ identity on the words of Isaiah and ‘expected his audience to be familiar with Isaiah’s thought world’ (1996:268).

‘beloved’ in Mk 12:6 – ‘beloved son’ or ‘son whom he loved’ – is ‘ultimately derived from Isa. 5:1’, the Song of the Vineyard (Aus1996:6, 56-57),¹² a term which Luke associates with Jesus’ baptism (Lk 3:22).

Sixth, the contemplative-union phase focuses on the stage ‘beyond the beginnings’¹³ which is synchronous with the ‘second half of the individuation process’ and is also ‘the beginning of contemplative prayer’ (Welch 1990:89). This is a time for a deepening, interior exploration about the meaning of life and of one’s place in the world. In Welch’s psycho-spiritual integration of Jungian insights, he elaborates that the task in the first half of life is the development of a ‘persona’ (and a religious persona) as part of healthy development and the formation of a unique personality, while the second half of life – through the symbol of the ‘night’ – invites ‘a healing and a deepening of life’ (1990:88).¹⁴

From a spiritual direction perspective, Green observes ‘two moments’ on our journey when spiritual direction is particularly necessary: ‘when we are just beginning, and when we move into the strange world of the dry well or dark night’ (2000:78). In the early stages of the journey, he recommends the *Spiritual Exercises* since Ignatius ‘is a master in the laying of a good foundation’; however, for ‘prayer beyond the beginnings’, for ‘any person who wishes to grow in the love of God’, and for cautions on ‘bad or incompetent direction’ (2000:91), Green recommends John of the Cross as ‘especially valuable’ (2000:80). The Spanish Carmelite offers a tried-and-trusted frame of reference because, as Matthew asserts, ‘Love is John’s area of expertise’ (1995:109).¹⁵ His experiential insights on ‘the essence of contemplation’ and his ‘spiritual reading of Scripture and reflection’ have but one purpose: ‘arriving at an understanding of the transformative action of God in the human soul’ (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000:7).¹⁶ Drawing on the mystical doctor then, and interweaving the mystical exploration with spiritual direction insights, John of the Cross will be referred to as ‘Juan’¹⁷ in the present chapter in order to avoid confusion with ‘John’s Gospel’.

¹² In Mark 12:1, 9 (the Parable of the Tenants), Jesus referred five times to the Song of the Vineyard and ‘creatively reworked the material from Isaiah’ (Aus 1996:6).

¹³ This is also the subtitle of Ruffing’s work on spiritual direction (2000). Of particular relevance are her two chapters on love mysticism (2000:95-154).

¹⁴ Welch’s insights on the two stages are elaborated in two works, on Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross respectively: *Spiritual Pilgrims* (1982) and *When Gods Die* (1990).

¹⁵ John of the Cross is an ‘authority on the mature stage of contemplative prayer’ and a theologian both creative and solidly rooted in the church’s fifteen-hundred year long tradition’ (Green 2000:71).

¹⁶ John of the Cross viewed contemplation as ‘the core of the Carmelite life’ (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000:7).

¹⁷ ‘Juan’ is derived from the Spanish ‘Juan de la Cruz’, in the introduction to John of the Cross by Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman (2000:1-15).

5.3 A contemplative-unionive culmination of the vineyard

5.3.1 *Desire and the grace of union (Jn 15:1-4)*

The self-referential description 'I am the true vine' symbolises Jesus' person, in relation to his Father 'the vinedresser' and his followers or disciples 'the branches'. *I AM* places the accent on the *person* of Jesus, the symbol's primary level of meaning; furthermore, it substantiates the *paradigm* of Jesus. The paradigm is personal and relational, and is characterised by 'remain in me'; where 'me' (the person of Jesus) refers to imperative and invitation (remain in). With the verb 'remain' repeated four times and the preposition 'in' five times, the paradigm is also *unionive*, encompassing three levels of mystical union: first, union between Jesus and his Father; second, union between Jesus and his followers; and third, union of the Father, Jesus, and his followers.

What is the significance of the vine as symbol for mystical union, and what is the relationship between desire and the grace of union? It is important to state at the outset that the experience and expression of union with God is ineffable precisely because it is mystical.¹⁸ Juan emphasises that 'it would be foolish to think that expressions of love arising from mystical understanding ... are fully explainable' and implies that mystical experience cannot be captured in ordinary words or rational explanations, 'only in similitudes' (*Spiritual Canticle*, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:469-470).¹⁹ A second important point is that the Word is ineffable, as Teresa exclaims in her *Meditations on the Song of Songs*: 'For one word of [God] will contain within itself a thousand mysteries, and thus our understanding is only very elementary' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:210).²⁰ Given the ineffable nature of the subject, yet the possibility that it can be somewhat conveyed in 'limit expressions' such as similitudes and symbols, words and images of Scripture, a brief elucidation of symbolism is in order as a basis for interpreting the mystical dimension of the vine.

On Hebrew poetry, Schökel notes that the poet 'does not proceed with the help of logical reasoning to reach God, but he discovers [God] in symbolic manifestations' (1988:132); the reason is that the symbol is 'the proto-language of transcendent experience, and thus also of religious experience. [It] does not provide intellectual information, but

¹⁸ McIntosh states that what is mystical 'is not the inner experience of the Christian but the hidden meaning and transformative understanding discovered in Christ' (1998:43). As spiritual director and mystical theologian, Juan writes from the point of inner experience and Scripture, that is, a contemplative and transformative understanding of the divine action in lived experience.

¹⁹ In this chapter and henceforth references to John of the Cross' works will be abbreviated as follows: *The Spiritual Canticle*, as 'SC'; *The Living Flame of Love*, as 'LFOL'; *The Dark Night*, as 'DN'; and *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* as 'Ascent'. All quotations are sourced from Kavanaugh & Rodriguez: 1991.

²⁰ See Teresa with respect to her attitude of 'humility' in approaching the Bible (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:210).

simply mediates communion. The symbol cannot be reduced to a collection of concepts' (1988:11); however, biblical symbols are the indispensable basis for theological reflection. He adds, that when dealing with Hebrew poets of an 'oriental imagination', it is important to pay attention to the 'formless experience' behind the images since '[b]y means of the image the author understood what he had experienced and expressed it and it is the image which he intends to put across' (1988:100-101).²¹ Ricoeur comments that 'there is no symbolic knowledge except when it is impossible to directly grasp the concept'; furthermore, given the indirect grasp and the symbol's 'surplus of signification', it 'assimilates rather than apprehends' (1976:55-56). Koester underscores the latter point in stating that the root meaning of the word 'symbol' is 'to put together' suggesting that the symbol brings together apparent contradictions (1995:27).²² Ricoeur explicates that 'symbol does not pass over into metaphor', as follows: 'Metaphor occurs in the already purified universe of the *logos*, while the symbol hesitates on the dividing line between *bios* and *logos*. It testifies to the primordial rootedness of Discourse in Life. It is born where force and form coincide' (1976:59). In other words, metaphor is 'a purely linguistic reality,' while symbol, 'which stands on the threshold between reality and language', participates in the former and gives rise to the latter (Schneiders 1999:67). Conveying the significance of earthly reality, Ricoeur states that the symbol has 'roots' and is 'bound to the cosmos' (1976:69, 61), which is underscored by Koester's comment that Johannine symbolism uses 'earthly images' to bear witness to 'divine realities' (1995:2). Schneiders distinguishes between 'sign' and 'symbol', and defines the latter as '(1) a sensible reality (2) which renders present to and (3) involves a person subjectively in (4) a transforming experience (5) of transcendent mystery'(1999:65-69). For the purposes of a mystical approach to the vineyard, Schneiders' definition of symbol is condensed as follows: the symbol is rooted in earthly reality and renders present the transcendent in a limited and sensible mode, thus simultaneously revealing and concealing what it represents (1999:67). Given these insights, what is the mystical aptitude of the vine? How does the core symbol serve as 'an indirect grasp' of the hidden mystery who is Christ?

The vine assimilates the mystical and the incarnational in the introductory statement 'I am the true vine' because it conjoins divine reality (*I AM*) and earthly reality (the vine), as well as Jesus' unique identity (true) and his role in humanity (the vine). Ball makes an

²¹ In this sense, Davis' suggestion of the Song of Songs as 'an iconographic text' is applicable since the tradition of icons is associated with the 'oriental imagination' of the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

²² Tracy writes on synthesis in mystical theologies in relation to *Logos*, *eros* and *agape*, and in the New Testament itself. Citing Nygren, synthesis is implicit in the Johannine tradition (1994:97).

interesting observation that the *I AM* sayings ‘without an image concern Jesus’ *identity*, while those with an image concern his identity as it is worked out in his *role* among humanity’ (1996:258). Combining Jesus’ identity and role, the symbol of the vine is like the force of gravity – it holds and grounds the truth that Jesus is ‘what God, Creation and [Human]kind have in common’ and, as the intersecting point, it symbolises that Jesus ‘is the linchpin of the universe’ (Smith 1987:62). The symbol assimilates *logos* (that which is revealed and articulated) and *mustikos* (that which is concealed and ineffable).²³ The *Logos*, introduced in the Prologue (Jn 1:1-18), however, is not a mere metaphor or purely linguistic term because the divinity (1:1-4) and humanity (1:14) of Jesus are stressed (Ball 1996:280). The Logos is the preexistent One²⁴ and God’s spoken Word in the Son (Jn 1:1-4),²⁵ who is also the Incarnate Word of God in whom is light and life. Jesus the ‘true vine’ therefore embodies *bios*(reality), *logos* (language), and *mustikos* (interstice); thus, in Jn 15 Jesus is posited as source text, hermeneutical key, and core symbol. Schneiders asserts: ‘In John the great symbol of God is the Word made flesh, that is, Jesus. The Gospel is the literary symbol of Jesus, that is, the ‘place’ of our encounter with him and through him with God’ (1999:36). In a scriptural sense, *logos* serves as threshold to *mustikos* by involving a person subjectively in a transforming encounter with the hidden mystery, the living Word. On the Early Church Fathers, McIntosh points out an important presupposition, that with Christ as hermeneutical key, the exegetical process ‘is referred to as mystical, and the knowledge itself comes also (for Origen) to be designated as such. In effect the exegetical process itself becomes the mystical journey in which communion with the loving Christ (encountered through scriptural meditation) leads the Christian towards God’ (1998:43).

The symbol assimilates the divine mystery and the mystery of creation. Smith elucidates that God speaks ‘internally and silently, within the Trinity’, ‘externally and aloud in the creation of the universe’, and ‘historically, in the person of Jesus’ (1987:62, 71). The significance of the vine is that symbolises these three dimensions: the silent sap and hidden vitality of the vine (the divine source); the organic and tangible form of nature (the vine); and the historical human context (the Incarnation). Rooted in the internal discourse of the Trinity

²³ Citing Hillman, ‘we hover in puzzlement at the border where true depths are. Rather than an increase of certainty there is a spread of mystery, which is both the precondition and the consequence of revelation’ (Welch 1990:27).

²⁴ John the Baptist’s proclamation (Jn 1:15, 30) encapsulates the Fourth Gospel’s ‘very high Christology’, an ‘exalted christology of pre-existence’ that ‘never appears even on Jesus’ lips in the other Gospels’ (Brown 1979:26). This belief in the pre-existence of God’s Son formed ‘the key to the Johannine contention that the true believer possessed God’s own life’ (1979:109-110).

²⁵ The ontological identification with God is the basis for Jesus’ use of the *I AM* sayings and for John this is also the basis for his Christology (Ball 1996:280).

and embodied by Jesus, the symbol is thus conferred with a mystical aptitude. Ricoeur states that ‘The sacredness of nature reveals itself in saying itself symbolically. The revealing grounds the saying, not the reverse’ (1976:63). The divine utterance ‘I am the true vine’ therefore affirms the sacredness of the symbol and the sacredness of creation. Continuing with Ricoeur: ‘In the sacred universe the capacity to speak is founded upon the capacity of the cosmos to signify. The logic of meaning, therefore, follows from the very structure of the sacred universe’ (1976:62). By extension, rooted in the discourse of the Trinity, the *logos* of the vine proceeds from the *mustikos* of the symbol in order to render present the transcendent in a limited and sensible form. In this sense, Jesus is *epiphany par excellence* of both divine and earthly reality – the Living Symbol and Archetype of the Self.²⁶

Having established the mystical aptitude of the symbol, an exploration of mystical union follows and is informed primarily by mystical theology. Given that the ‘true vine’ is divine, one with the *I AM* (John 7:28-29; 8:14-19, 58), a unity that is ontological and functional (Ball 1999:278), the vine encompasses both the person and paradigm of Jesus. The unity of person and paradigm, of speaker and speech, is founded on the unity of the Trinity, and is explicated in Eckhart’s terms as follows: ‘The Father expresses the whole of his reality in the Son, and the Son reflects that back with total truthfulness, so that God is not divided or diminished by his self-expression, but remains one and undivided within himself’ (Smith 1987:54). What is the role of the Holy Spirit? ‘If the Father and Son are the mystery of the *oneness* between speaker and speech, the Spirit is the mystery which ensures that they do not become two Gods, but remain one God’ (1987:54). Jesus’ unity with the Father is therefore not only ontological and functional, but mystical.

With the mystical relation, the ‘true vine’ embodies Trinitarian *eros*, in addition to *logos* and *mustikos*. McIntosh, citing Dionysius, elucidates divine *eros* as follows: ‘Trinitarian *erōs* is constitutive of God’s existence; in other words, if God ‘comes to abide within all things’ this is no change or abandonment of God’s deity, for to give away life and dwell in the other is the very definition of the Trinity (1998:49).²⁷ Since God eternally and ecstatically exists in other, Trinitarian *eros*, along with *ekstasis*, is paradigmatic for ‘abiding in unity’ yet ‘going out in multiplicity’ which suggests that the vine’s primary level of union is Trinitarian (the mystery of Jesus and the Father in the Spirit) and its secondary level of

²⁶ In Welch’s chapter on ‘Christ, Symbol of the Self’ (1982:191-216), he expands the concept that ‘*Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self*’ as well as Jung’s conviction that ‘Christ is the still living myth of our culture’ (1982:193).

²⁷ Since Trinitarian *eros* is ‘the effulgence of God’s triune relationality and order the cosmos itself has a sacred mutuality and order’ (McIntosh 1998:50).

union is between the Triune God and creation (vinedresser, vine and branches as a mirror image of the Trinity). Mystical union is thus paradoxical, that is, the Trinity expresses itself in the movement of ‘remaining within yet going out’, with the tension held in perfect harmony, ecstasy, and tranquility.²⁸ In the union of the Trinity and in union with creation, the ‘true vine’ as mystical intersection embodies the rhythm of ‘remaining within’ the Father, yet ‘going out in multiplicity’ to the individual branches and beyond, through fruitfulness which gives birth to community.²⁹ This mystery highlights a particular aspect of Jesus’ person, namely, the *archetypal mystic* who, in vital unity and rhythmic generativity, presents a paradigm of mysticism that is *unitive* and *fruitive*. Mystical union might therefore be described as the dynamic of ‘remaining within’ yet ‘going out’, and is played out in daily life as inflow-outflow and repose-activity (Smith 1987:54-55). As underscored by Eckhart, this ‘mystery of going out yet remaining within operates in creation, in mystical union, and in enlightened activity in the world’ and ‘is the key to all spiritual life’ (1987:54).

From a spiritual direction perspective, the imperative to ‘remain in me’ or ‘remain in the vine’ alludes to the stage ‘beyond the beginnings’, and is indicated by two factors: first, the imperative implies that the disciples *do* nothing other than ‘remain’; and second, they ‘are already clean’ because of the word spoken by Jesus. Brown offers an interesting insight in this regard: ‘In all three Synoptics discipleship is marked by *doing* the will or word of God... but for John 8:31: ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples’ (1979:129).³⁰ Furthermore, he remarks that the stress on ‘repentance/reform (*metanoia/metanoiein*) that is so much a part of the Synoptic proclamation of the kingdom ... is not found in John’ (1979:130).³¹ With reference to Waaijman’s stages of ‘conformity in Christ’, it could be said that the disciples had already passed the stage of ‘formation-reformation’ and were ready for ‘transformation in conformity’ and ‘transformation in love’ (2006:41-53).³² By ‘remaining in’ – rather than *doing* – the transformative emphasis at the stage ‘beyond the beginnings’ is on mystical union, that is, being conformed *to* Christ, being *in* Christ, being *like* Christ, and

²⁸ This Trinitarian principle informs a definition of contemplation as ‘maximum generation of energy, held in maximum equilibrium, or rather, infinite generation of energy in infinite equilibrium’ (Smith 1987:55-56).

²⁹ With regard to Jn15, Ball suggests that the emphasis is on ‘what Jesus offers to the disciples’ (1996:274) and on ‘the fruitfulness of the individual disciples and not of the vine as a whole’ (1996:247).

³⁰ Brown cites Mark 3:35; Matt 12:50; Luke 8:21, in contrast to John 8:31.

³¹ Here Brown cites Mark 1:4, 15; 6:12, and comments on John 15:3: ‘what cleanses is the word spoken by Jesus. ... No specific sins of behavior are mentioned in John, only the great sin which is to refuse to believe in Jesus (8:24; 9:41)’ (1979:130).

³² Waaijman suggests that ‘conformity in Christ is part of a comprehensive, multilayered process of transformation’ (2006:41), and delineates five layers of transformation based on John of the Cross’ teaching.

being-in-love³³ because the grace of union ‘leads us to actually *resemble* God in some measure, to become to a certain extent like [God]’ (Smith 1987:21). How does a person dispose him/herself to the depths of being, which is directly related to remaining in the Vine? At the stage beyond the beginnings – the stage of the inner journey – the Spirit draws people into the depths of personhood so that God would find a home within them, which implies two principles: being with Jesus and being at home with Jesus. The disposition of ‘remaining in’ is essentially a kind of receptivity to God which is ingredient to deepening union with God. Juan counsels that ‘the practice of beginners is to meditate and make acts and discursive reflection with the imagination’. However, when a person becomes ‘accustomed to spiritual things and acquired some fortitude and constancy, God begins to wean the soul ... and place it in the state of contemplation’. In this state, God is doing the work; God ‘is the agent; the soul is the receiver’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:685). Mystical union is a grace and an outflow of Trinitarian *eros*. Abiding in all things and existing ecstatically in creation, God desires to disclose the divine nature to human beings, to bestow a new kind of knowing – a ‘direct, immediate, intuitive’ knowledge (Smith 1987:18-19). The purpose of ‘divine weaning’ therefore is to bestow the grace of intimate and intuitive knowledge. It is attainable if we are willing and ready to receive it, ‘if we truly desire it’ (1987:21), and if we dispose ourselves in humility and transparency to God. The beloved in the Song of Songs is exemplar in this regard: ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth’ which may be paraphrased as ‘let him speak to me mouth-to-mouth’.³⁴ With regard to the grace of mystical knowledge, Juan writes that ‘There is no reason to marvel at God’s granting such sublime and strange gifts to souls he decides to favor. If we consider that he is God and that he bestows them as God, with infinite love and goodness, it does not seem unreasonable’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:638-639). Juan encourages receptivity to God in the simplicity of faith and love; or by simply ‘remaining in’.

5.3.2 *Discernment and the need for purgation (Jn 15:5-8)*

Holding the tension of ‘remaining in the Father’ while ‘going out’ to the cosmos in the fullness of his Self (Incarnation), Jesus the *archetypal human being* is the focus of the present section. In Jn 15:5 Jesus is symbolised by ‘the vine’, which draws attention to his identification with humanity. By excluding the word ‘true’, the inference is that his followers

³³ Borrowed from Johnston’s use of Lonergan’s term ‘being-in-love’ in his *Mystical Theology* (1995).

³⁴ The bride’s desire for the kiss echoes the giving of the Torah at Sinai, where God spoke ‘mouth to mouth’ with Moses, cf. Num. 12:8 (Davis 2000:242).

already have knowledge of the truth that Jesus is the Mystery and that the grace of mystical union is availed to them. In verses 5-8, Jesus expands the imperative of 'remain in me' with a conditional 'if'. Two positive consequences for remaining in him are delineated: first, much fruit will be borne and second, their desires would be fulfilled and their prayers answered: 'ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you'. The negative consequence is 'branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned'. The fact that Jesus mentions 'if' infers the likelihood that at times his followers would encounter resistances and hindrances to abiding and remaining. The imperative, however, is given by the archetypal human being who identifies with humanity in weakness and struggle, by the 'true vine' who remains receptive to the Father's transformative work: 'He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful' (15:2).

Relating the 'negative aspect' to spiritual praxis, discernment pays attention to the effects of being disconnected from the vine. In Sanford's psycho-spiritual explication of the vine, he interprets the 'branch that can bear no fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine' as the 'ego has little vital life of its own' unless it remains connected to 'the Centre'. Cutting and pruning refer therefore to the pain and suffering that the ego undergoes in the growth toward 'understanding, creativity, and the capacity to love' ([1993]/1995:281).³⁵ Sanford suggests that '[t]he fruit of the vine that is produced when the vine is healthy is analogous to the fruits of the life of individuation, that is, the life that is lived consciously, with a living connection between ego and the unconscious' ([1993]/1995:281). Along the path of individuation, the false or illusory aspects of the ego are confronted. Felt as pain and suffering, purging confronts the ego's possessive tendencies, weakens its exterior edifice, and dismantles self-constructs in order that the polarity between the ego and the unconscious be wed in psychic wholeness. Since psychic marriage and spiritual marriage are interrelated, Sanford posits that John 15 is 'pure mysticism, concerned with the mystery of the transformation of the soul through union with God, and is one of the most important passages in the Bible for the idea of deification' ([1993]/1995:279).

Deification in Jn 15 is suggested by fruitfulness, an aspect of resemblance between the vine and the branches and the congruence between the ego and its Centre: 'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples'. Resemblance is the transforming effect of mystical union; by extension, by not remaining in

³⁵ Sanford comments that 'there is a ruthlessness in the spiritual world just as there is in the natural world' and contends that '[t]here is no room in a true religion for any sentimental ideas about God'; the 'dark side of God' therefore serves to counteract egocentricity and childishness ([1993]/1995:282).

the vine, fruitlessness becomes the contra-side of deification. Deification or divinisation may therefore be described as ‘being rooted and grounded in the Word spoken, echoing and vibrating within us, and ‘becoming’ that Word so that *its life is our life*’ (Smith 1987:64).³⁶ Exemplified by Jesus the archetypal human being, deification is a life of divine-human epiphany where the divine life is lived in an authentic human way and one’s unique human life is lived in a divine way. It is a life of becoming who I am in the divine *I AM* and experiencing the outflow of that union in all aspects of life. The process of deification is a long road of transformation which means that impasses and seasons of ‘disguised’ fruitlessness are part-and-parcel of the spiritual life. Many factors militate against the inner journey, which suggests that the imperative to ‘remain in the vine’ involves the development of an awareness of God’s presence in daily life. Juan encourages us to see ‘a God-content in the negativity of life’ and to view struggles and difficulties as ‘coming from the hand of God, for the person’s good’ (Matthew 1995:78). Drawing from his spiritual direction teaching, three areas of discernment are elaborated in exploring the graced but difficult and painful path of purgation, namely, hiddenness, nothingness, and woundedness.

Since God is hidden though never absent, the aspect of hiddenness is significant because the imperative to ‘remain in’ represents a ‘shift to an inner orientation’ (Welch 1990:103). The practice of ‘interior recollection’ enables a person to attune to the mystery who is God, one’s Centre. Juan writes that ‘God is so close to you. Desire him there, adore him there. Do not go in pursuit of him outside yourself’ for ‘by seeking him within you, you will enjoy him more securely and more intimately’ (SC, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:480). Seeking the hidden God means simultaneously exploring one’s ‘unconscious’ depths or ‘deepest centre’ since the ‘[t]he soul’s center is God’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:644-645); or, according to Eckhart, the ‘Ground of the Soul’ (Smith 1987:45).³⁷ The purpose of interior recollection is to find one’s home in ‘the bosom of the Father, that is, the divine essence [who] is alien to every mortal eye and hidden from every human intellect’; therefore Juan advises people to not seek ‘elevated spiritual communication or feeling or knowledge’ nor ‘sensible devotion’, but to seek God who is hidden (SC, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:478-479). As an illustration, he comments that the beloved in the early part

³⁶ This ‘growing participation in divine life’ has ramifications for the ‘emergence of human potential’ for, according to Welch, ‘[h]uman divinization means that the intellect and will in some way share in God’s knowing and loving’ (1990:63) He states with reference to *The Living Flame of Love* that ‘John’s description of his experience as a divinization process, a sharing in the knowing and loving of God, is an exposition of the core of our Christian faith’ (1990:45).

³⁷ The ‘Ground of the Soul is a constant theme in Eckhart’s writings’ and is particularly pertinent to an understanding of personhood (Smith 1987:45).

of the Song of Songs (Sg 1:7) requested a revelation of ‘the essence of the divine Word’, and offers a mystical reflection as follows: ‘the Father does not pasture anywhere else than in his only Son, for the Son is the glory of the Father. ... The Son is the only delight of the Father, who rests nowhere else nor is present in any other than in his beloved Son. He rests wholly in his Son’ (1991:479). Jesus the archetypal human being exemplifies what it means to remain and rest wholly in the Father and to embody God’s life, therefore, by his life, words and works, Jesus comes to be known as ‘the man whose existence is determined by the God he proclaimed’ (Ricoeur 1995:231, citing Pannenberg).³⁸ It is on the strength of Jesus’ remaining wholly in the Father that he issues the imperative ‘remain in me’ and echoes the divine invitation: ‘ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you’. What is the significance of asking and desiring in relation to the presence of God, hidden from the intellect?

Since God desires union with creation and God seeks divine-human epiphany, it is important to discern divine *eros* (the Triune yearning) in human *eros* (striving, seeking, desiring, searching, and asking). Juan points out that ‘God is the principal agent’ in leading and guiding the soul; therefore, ‘if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:684). He elaborates that ‘the desire for God is the preparation for union with [God]’ and thus the soul needs solitude and silence so as to be passive with a simple, loving attention to God (1991:683, 686). What is the hindrance to ‘remaining within’, and what aspects need to be purged, pruned, or cut off? The key is to loosen one’s grip, to let go of the familiar and the fixations, and to give God access to one’s depths.³⁹ One area of letting go is the reliance on or attachment to the intellect. Juan suggests that the seeker prepare to terminate discursive reflection and the activity of the senses so as not to be tied to any particular knowledge, satisfaction, pleasure or apprehension, while the cojourner should ‘strive to disencumber the soul and bring it into solitude and idleness’ so that God would speak ‘secretly to the solitary and silent soul’ (1991:690-691).

A second key component of discernment is coming to terms with *nothingness*, as indicated in Jesus’ statement: ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ (Jn 15:5). Admitting that we can do nothing apart from God but also acknowledging that God is no ‘thing’, the element of nothingness renders one empty, poor and powerless. The interior emptiness provides a

³⁸ See Ricoeur’s discussion on Jesus as the point of intersection on the ‘naming of God’ (1995:231).

³⁹ Juan’s stress is ‘not on launching out, but on letting go; not on grasping, but on ‘the nakedness and emptiness there is in faith and hope and love of God’’ (Matthew 1995:99). In comparing individuation (Jung) and contemplation (Juan), Welch comments on ‘shifts of horizon for the individual consciousness’ which come partly through ‘a listening in the dark’; the processes of conversion are also a psychological experience which ‘is passive because the ego does not structure or control the experience, and as a matter of fact, usually feels negated in the process’ (1990:116).

creative space for the divine inworking, for as Juan writes, the ‘soul must journey by knowing God through what [God] is not rather than through what [God] is,’ that is, by ‘drawing it away from its natural props and boundaries and raising it above itself’ to the ‘incomprehensible God’ (Ascent, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:268). Experienced on various levels of the self (body, mind and spirit), the emptying, purging, and cleansing of natural props and boundaries effect a ‘dryness’ and ‘profound suffering’.⁴⁰ Experientially, nothing seems to satisfy and nothing seems to work; the familiar way of knowing, being, doing and relating seems to disintegrate. While it is a time of profound uncertainty, it is also a time when ‘no thing’ begins to work. The appropriate response is to disarm oneself, and to hang onto ‘no thing’ – which is pure faith – because ‘God is the doer of all without the soul’s doing anything’; the person’s ‘sole occupation’ at this stage is to ‘receive from God, who alone can move the soul and do his work in its depths’ and to be attentive to the divine movements in the soul (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:644). While the person may feel disoriented by the unfamiliarity of ‘doing nothing’ in prayer, Juan assures that ‘Even though they do no work with their faculties, they achieve much more than if they did, for God is the agent’ (1991:701).

The purgative aspect is referred to as ‘pure negation’ or ‘spiritual poverty’, which refers to a radical ‘renunciation of all corporeal and temporal things’ and a ‘dispossession of spiritual things’ because the path to God is not ‘the broad road of one’s own consolation’ (1991:691,667). Rather, it is ‘a narrow way that leads to life’, a path which Juan refers to as *nada* (characterised by poverty of spirit) and a ‘dark night’ (Ascent, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:102-103). *Nada* is the way to optimal receptivity because the capacity of the soul is deep and ‘because the object of this capacity, namely God, is profound and infinite’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:681). For Eckhart who considers that God is ‘neither this nor that’ (Smith 1987:45), the spiritual life ‘consists precisely in the *withdrawal* of projections’ in order ‘to touch the naked reality of God’ (1987:32). ‘Transformation in conformity’ means then ‘that our concepts of God will be undergoing continual change and transformation throughout life’ (1987:39) and ‘our gods will die’ (Welch 1990). The corollary is the discovery of who I am, that is, ‘the true, the permanent self’ emerges when ‘we become aware of’ and ‘detach from our various projections and activities which are not *us*’ (Smith

⁴⁰ Juan points out that in the early stages of purgation, the flame of the Spirit is ‘extremely oppressive’ and persons suffer great deprivation and feel heavy afflictions in the spirit that ordinarily overflow into the senses. The person also feels wretched and distressed and the flame is experienced as consuming and contentious (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:648).

1987:48). The ‘nakedness and emptiness’ experienced in the will, intellect, and memory, according to Juan, is a ‘dark night’. It is termed ‘dark’ because the path to divine union is a journey in faith; that is, ‘by believing and not understanding’. Juan asserts that God is reached ‘more by not understanding than by understanding’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:691-692); or, drawing on Eckhart, we can unite with the ultimate Reality and understand it ‘only in darkness and silence, in a kind of unknowing knowing’ (Smith 1987:41).⁴¹ The fruit of nothingness and emptiness, dryness and powerlessness, is ‘a deeper, life-giving truth’ (1987:35).⁴² From Juan’s perspective, it reorients our affections and purifies the faculties as follows: the thirst for the ‘waters of God’s wisdom’ is the object of the *intellect*, the hunger for the ‘perfection of love’ is the aim of the *will*, and the ‘yearning for the soul’s possession of God’ is the void of the *memory* (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:680-681).

A third aspect of discernment in the contemplative stage is *woundedness*, inferred by ‘the branches that are thrown into the fire and burned’. Matthew suggests that the ‘real wound is our need for God, and God himself must be the cure’ (1995:70). How can our need for God be healed by God the cure? Broadly speaking, Juan’s teaching on the dark night describes *in nuce* the wounding effects of purgation that lead to the cure. Welch states that the dark night ‘is contemplation’ (1990:95);⁴³ and, in the early stages, ‘dark contemplation’ is ‘painful to the soul’ because the soul becomes ‘a battlefield’ through the purgation of imperfections (DN, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:375, 402). Juan describes two nights of purgation. First, the *night of the senses* or the first night refers to a purgation of the sensory part of the soul (sensible appetites for the external things of the world, the delights of the flesh, and the gratifications of the will). Its purpose is to bring the senses into harmony with the spirit (Welch 1990:95), particularly those ‘voluntary (or willful) and inordinate’ and habitual appetites which are ‘not directed at least in some way toward giving honor and glory to God’ since these are a hindrance to union (Ascent, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:104). This difficult experience happens to many people and is located at the stage of beginners (Welch

⁴¹ On mystical consciousness, McIntosh suggests that the silence or absence encountered by the mystic is elicited by God’s *speech*, that is, ‘the superabundance of the originary theo-logical event, namely the eternal begetting of the Word – and its expression in the crucified ‘inarticulacy’ of our humanity in Christ’ (1998:138).

⁴² Smith states that ‘[a]theism and rationalism strip away the projection and leave us with nothing. That leads to nihilism and despair (1987:35).

⁴³ Welch explicates the main tenets of Juan’s teaching through an integration of Jungian psychology; on the unconscious, his chapter on The Dark Night and Contemplative Prayer is particularly helpful (1990:89-117). He delineates several ways in which Juan uses the image of the dark night (1990:72) and compares in considerable detail the spiritual and psychological dimensions of the dark night from the perspectives of John of the Cross and Carl Jung.

1990:72); in other words, as in the ‘first night’ in the Song of Songs, the ego needs to ‘go out of itself’ and find its connection to the Centre. The *night of the spirit* or the second night is much more difficult and happens to a few people (1990:95). As in the ‘second night’ in the Song of Songs, where loss, abandonment, and ‘failure of soul’ left the beloved ‘wounded’ and ‘faint with love’, strong purification is preparation for ‘the highest degree of union’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:651). It is the Holy Spirit who ‘wounds the soul by destroying and consuming the imperfections of its bad habits’; yet also cures it (1991:648). In stating that ‘the more wounded the lover, the healthier the lover is’, Juan views the paradoxical woundedness as ‘completely healthy in love’ for in this way a person ‘is transformed in love’ (1991:660). Since transformation ‘in the night’ is effected on various levels of psyche and spirit, where the person confronts shadow, encounters neglected areas of personality, ‘comes into consciousness’⁴⁴ and is nourished and energised (Welch 1982:115), the experiential process is considered mystical because purification prepares the person for a self-transcending love which, as the next section will elucidate, is union with God in love.

5.3.3 *Descent and the essence of contemplation (Jn 15:9-12)*

The present pericope introduces ‘love’ for the first time in the discourse on the vine and refers explicitly to the primary union of love between Jesus and the Father which overflows into a secondary union between Jesus and his followers: ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love’ (15:9). With ‘love’ repeated eight times in five verses (four times as a verb and four as a noun), the suggestion is that divine love is the essence of contemplation. The present section focuses on Jesus as *archetypal lover* on the basis of Jesus’ repeated use of ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘my’. Climaxing in Jn 15:13’s statement on the greatest love (*Agape*),⁴⁵ Jesus’ descending love is paradigmatic for the relationship between contemplation and incarnation; in addition, it is exemplar for the rhythm of ‘remaining in yet going out’.

It is helpful to clarify what is meant by ‘union in love’. Juan distinguishes between ‘actual union’ which is ‘always a passing phenomenon’ and ‘habitual union of love’ which ‘is compatible with everyday life, less intense in form’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:635). In another place, he speaks of a ‘union of love alone’ and ‘union with an

⁴⁴ Exploring Teresa’s *Interior Castle*, Welch cautions that the ‘descent is to be made in the light of consciousness so that treasures may be illumined and retrieved. ... The unconscious life of an individual is the womb where rebirth may take place, but it is also the place where a person may be bewitched, caught in collective, instinctual living’ (1982:130).

⁴⁵ *Agape* is ‘the gift of God’s love in Jesus Christ: it is given; ... sheer grace which ennobles, empowers, elicits Christians to love God and neighbor in the self-sacrificial manner that God has first loved us in Jesus Christ’ (Tracy 1994:94).

inflaming love' (1991:647); the terms of endearment in the latter include 'spiritual betrothal', 'spiritual marriage', 'beloved-Lover', bride-Bridegroom, Spouse, etc. As a biblical text, the Song of Songs is exemplary for 'union with an inflaming love' because of its intense eroticism and consuming passion. With respect to the natural and organic symbolism of Jn 15, 'habitual union of love' is more applicable and is foundational to intimacy and mutuality in love (to be elaborated in the next section). In a sense, as *logos* is the threshold to *mustikos*, 'habitual union of love' is the gateway to 'union with an inflaming love'. This is not to limit the divine initiative though for if contemplation is simply 'a secret and peaceful loving inflow God' the Holy Spirit, 'if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love' (DN, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:382).

The habitual union of love has a communal dimension, as indicated by the connection between the imperative 'now remain in my love' and the command to 'love one another as I have loved you', and is underpinned by the indwelling of the Trinity (Jn 14:5-27). Juan paraphrases the Trinitarian abode as follows: 'For [God] declared that 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would take up their abode in those who love [God] by making them live the life of God and dwell in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Jn. 14:23]' (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:639).⁴⁶ By 'remaining in my love', the indwelling Trinity empowers persons to live their human life in a divine way (by 'remaining in' love) and to live the divine life in a human way (by 'going out' in love). The unitive love of the Trinity underscores Juan's contemplative framework for spiritual direction, which may be paraphrased as follows:⁴⁷ God is the spiritual director, Jesus is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the principal agent (1991:695-701). Though Juan does not include 'Jesus the Beloved', it is wholly appropriate on the basis of his *Spiritual Canticle*.⁴⁸

The imperative to 'remain in my love' places the accent on Jesus the embodiment of divine love, or Jesus as archetypal lover. What is the significance in experiential terms of the contemplation of Jesus' love? Since 'pure contemplation lies in receiving' (1991:688), we

⁴⁶ With the particular focus on John of the Cross' works in the present chapter, Teresa of Avila has hardly been consulted; however, it must be noted that her mystical experiences 'penetrate to the deepest content of the Biblical texts' and center on such themes as 'God's truth and fidelity, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, union with Christ in both His humanity and divinity, and the peace of Christ' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:211).

⁴⁷ Juan's reference to God as 'chief agent' and the Holy Spirit as 'principal guide' appears to be used interchangeably.

⁴⁸ Other alternatives include 'Soul Friend' based on Teresa's view that Christ 'is always [a] person's companion' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:401); 'Primordial Word', as Juan 'was driven to find words for the primordial Word he was hearing in his contemplative experience' (Welch 1990:28), and the Celtic reference to Jesus as 'secret *anam cara*' is also apt (O'Donohue 1997:36-37).

receive and perceive ourselves through the eyes of the *archetypal lover* who is the Image of God. The 'divine gaze' enables us to embrace the unique image of God that we are and to love the self in God.⁴⁹ It is the basis for any healthy relationship, for as Welch states, 'I cannot move toward the self while I am loathing the self I am experiencing' (1982:125-126).⁵⁰ Or, as Smith writes: 'No person can live properly with others unless he has also learned to live with himself' (1987:115). As we get a personal sense of God's 'loving gaze' resting on us, we are enabled to look at ourselves in God and to perceive all creatures in that way; then we become 'true contemplatives' (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000:138). Thus, Christian enlightenment – or a transformed perception – is the graced capacity 'to see the world in God' and 'to see the world as God sees it' (Smith 1987:65).

Since love 'produces likeness in the lover' (Ascent, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:105), lovers of God view themselves through the loving gaze of God, live according to the 'rule of love'⁵¹ and walk the 'road of love'. With Jesus the *archetypal lover* as paradigm for a *Person* fully loved, fully human, and fully alive in God (paraphrasing Irenaeus),⁵² the Incarnation serves as the rule and road of Christian love. Thus, by 'remaining in my love', the glorious imprint of the archetypal lover is a *person* who has learned 'the secret and paradoxical art: to go out, yet remain within; to exert power, yet exercise restraint; to transcend, yet remain within oneself; to be in movement, yet be in total repose', which is the truest reality of God and of the Human Self (Smith 1987:56). This focus on the Human Self, or on the humanity of Christ, does not undermine the mystery of divinity. In fact, it augments the grace of mystical union, for, as Smith asserts, '[t]he mystery of God's Incarnation is also the mystery of our deification' (1987:77). He elaborates that 'Jesus is supremely mysterious; but then, so are we. ... Once we stop seeing Jesus as a mystery, we also stop seeing ourselves as a mystery; and that means we have lost hold of the truth' (1987:74). The mystery of being human is encapsulated in Eckhart's 'Ground of the Soul' which is 'the true image of God' in the human person (1987:45). The discovery of this mystery is fundamental to our spirituality for it 'affects our whole notion of what it means to be a *person*, what it means to be *human*'

⁴⁹ Juan knows that we cannot change through 'an ascetical regimen in our lives. Only a more powerful love can invite us to move from our deteriorating situation' which he learned 'by slowly accepting the invitation of a deeper love'. Juan therefore encourages 'a relaxed grasp on life. He advises a letting go of what we are hanging onto for dear life. He counsels detachment from the idols of our life' (Welch 1990:203).

⁵⁰ Writing in Jungian terms on Teresa's emphasis on self-knowledge, Welch discusses the encounter with our shadow and how important it is that we come to know ourselves.

⁵¹ The 'rule of love' refers to the 'road of love' which is less about 'much effort and exertion' in which we 'meet the demands of God' and more about 'a journey on which we ever more deeply let ourselves be loved by God, in the realization that his love is unconditional' (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2000:26).

⁵² Irenaeus claimed the following: 'The glory of God is the human person fully alive' (O'Donohue 1997:159).

(1987:44). Embracing the paradox, Juan encourages people to ‘fix their eyes entirely on Christ’ and not on ‘some other novelty’ for in Christ ‘you will discover even more than you ask for and desire’; consequently, in Christ, we become more human: ‘behold him, become human, and you will find more than you imagine’ (Ascent, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:230-232). Juan’s focus on Christ, his incarnational approach, as well as his spiritual guidance resonate with the Fourth Gospel and is clearly evident in the following statement: ‘For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested and revealed to you by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom and reward’ (1991:231).

The Incarnation informs Juan’s practice of spiritual direction as follows: ‘we must be guided humanly and visibly in all by the law of Christ, who is human. ... Any departure from this road is not only curiosity but extraordinary boldness’; thus, with a cautious approach, yet placing a high value on the role of the cojourner/spiritual director, Juan states that ‘God is so pleased that the ... direction of humans be through other humans’ (1991:232-233). This onerous task of spiritual direction is not one of *control* of people,⁵³ but is facilitated by an understanding of ‘true and pure spirit’,⁵⁴ through a loving and gentle approach,⁵⁵ with ‘great tact and open eyes’, and skills which are acquired through discretion, knowledge, and experience (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:696, 684-685). Contemplation therefore is to spiritual direction what the vine is to the branches. The cojourner needs to ‘remain within’ (loving presence) while ‘going out’ (listening practice). Where contemplation is a ‘simple, loving awareness’ of God, it facilitates ‘a profound silence of the senses’ and ‘a deep and delicate listening’ (1991:686-687). Through loving attention, contemplation brings to the practice of spiritual direction ‘a loving wisdom and knowledge of God’ which is graciously bestowed and ‘passively received’ (1991:686). Furthermore, bearing in mind that God leads individuals along different paths, the cojourner practices contemplation in all areas of life and so obtains an intimate knowledge of the rhythms of nature, of God’s presence in the world,

⁵³ For people desiring ‘to advance in recollection and perfection’, writes Juan, they should ‘advert that God is the principal agent’, ‘take care into whose hands they entrust themselves’ and be aware of ‘three blind guides who can draw [the soul] off the road: the spiritual director, the devil, and the soul itself’ (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:684-685).

⁵⁴ In the knowledge, discretion and experience of ‘true and pure spirit’, contemplation goes beyond one’s ‘natural capacity’ of meditation, discursive reflection and use of the imagination toward a receptivity to the loving inflow of God -- or ‘loving knowledge’ (1991:685-686).

⁵⁵ Admonishing a rough and rude, as well as a prideful and presumptuous, approach to spiritual direction, Juan uses metaphors such as ‘the little foxes that destroy the flourishing of the vineyard’, a ‘blacksmith who hammers and pounds with the faculties’, and a blind guide who ‘tyrannizes souls’ and ‘deprives them of their freedom’, thus refusing to trust that ‘God leads each one along different paths’ (1991:690-697).

and of the mystery of being a unique human being. Juan therefore delineates experiential knowledge in three areas: how to journey, how to discern the signs of God's work, and how to adapt to the Lord's method of procedure (Ascent, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:103).⁵⁶

Contemplation is not to be equated with 'illuminism' which posits that 'only absolute passivity leads to contemplation', that is, 'the direct inworking of God' for 'from beginning to end the spiritual way is both active and passive' (Waaijman 2002:915). In the context of Jn 15's unitive-fruitive paradigm, contemplation enhances the rhythmic yin-yang movement of receptivity and repose (*yin*) for the purpose of fruitful activity and true generativity (*yang*).⁵⁷ Contemplation of divine love does not produce 'inertia or lack of energy' (Smith 1987:55); on the contrary, contemplation is energising because '[a]ction, in the true sense, is only possible for one who has penetrated to the true Self, the Ground of the Soul, and has learned to act from that centre. ... Genuine action is never determined from without, but arises spontaneously and freely from within' (1987:48).⁵⁸

Genuine contemplative action is demonstrated most profoundly in the volitional 'laying down of Jesus' life for his friends', the total gift of Jesus in agapic love. Contemplation therefore does not bypass the Cross; instead it invites a deeper level of union with God which is to become one with Jesus in his death and suffering – and in his exaltation. Schneiders highlights that in the Fourth Gospel, the Paschal Mystery is presented as 'a transformation of the passion from *kenōsis* to glorification' (1999:57).⁵⁹ The term 'lifted up' is a hermeneutical key in this transformation for as Koester explicates the term 'holds together the physical and transcendent dimensions of the crucifixion because it refers both to physical elevation and exaltation in glory' (1995:210). Thus, Jesus' death 'is his exaltation' and 'the supreme manifestation, the final and definitive revelation of who he is and what God desires for humankind' (Schneiders 1999:57). On the cross, his 'self-possessed declaration' is summed up as 'It is consummated' which means that 'everything God had sent Jesus to do

⁵⁶ For a succinct overview of Juan's teaching on spiritual direction, see Waaijman's section on 'The Viewpoint of the Accompanist' (2002:911-920); also Green's chapter which addresses 'the danger of the blind guide' (2000:71-90).

⁵⁷ *The Way of Paradox* is a succinct work on Eckhart's mystical theology, or, according to its subtitle: 'Spiritual Life as Taught by Meister Eckhart' (Smith 1987).

⁵⁸ A similar rhythm is applied in the practice of *tai chi* – of meditation for the purpose of movement, and movement for the purpose of meditation (Liu 1986:3-9). Note the complementarity of guiding/leading, exhaling/inhaling, cosmos/body, movement/rest, reproduce/preserve, going/coming, strong/gentle – for the purpose of longevity. In the context of Jn 15, does Jesus not speak of fruit that will last?

⁵⁹ In John's account 'Jesus returns to the Father on the cross. His death, which is his passing into divine glory, is his 'ascension' or 'his exaltation' (Schneiders 1999:57). In contrast to the resurrection in the Synoptics which is Jesus' vindication by God, what is conveyed here is 'the divine reversal of the ultimate *kenōsis*, or abasement of Jesus in death by crucifixion' (1999:57).

has been accomplished' (1999:57). Culminating in the crucifixion, Jesus' life and death glorifies the Father, which underscores Koester's statement: 'The term *glorify* is broader in scope than *lift up*' (1995:211). The exaltation of Jesus suggests that mortification leads to deification, that is, through 'the perfection of the spiritual life of union with God', a 'new' and transformed self 'lives the life of God', which is to love with divine affection, be moved by the Holy Spirit to live the life of love, and God's will and the soul's will become one in a union of love (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:670-671). Through union with Jesus in his death, suffering and glorification, God's will and the person's will are united in love. In this deepening identification with Christ, Juan refers to deification as a person who 'has become God through participation in God'; he elaborates that this 'substantial conversion' into God is a death to 'all it was in itself, which was death to it' (1991:671). If the union of wills is produced by love, then a death that defies human logic but which characterises the 'logic of divine love' produces likeness in the lover (deification). Citing Eckhart, 'if detachment makes us similar to God', then 'true mysticism' is 'union with God, brought about by my total surrender of self' (Smith 1987:95, 105).⁶⁰ Contemplation – as the 'secret ladder of mystical theology' – is thus a double movement in prayer: an ascent in contemplation and a descent in incarnation, which Juan elucidates as follows: 'Communications that are truly from God have this trait: They simultaneously exalt and humble the soul' (DN, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:436, 439).⁶¹ The Paschal Mystery is thus the apt symbol for a self-transcending love because sharing in the apophysis of the Cross and in the exaltation of Christ brings 'new patterns of life and consciousness which have their consummation in the Resurrection and Pentecost' (McIntosh 1998:136).⁶² Jung's assertion is correct: 'There is no birth of consciousness without pain' (Welch 1982:129) as his explication of 'the birth of the self' is grounded in the symbolic expression of the crucifixion (Ma 2010:143). Furthermore, Jung's concept of 'the third', or the experience of the transcendent, is arrived at through the passion of crucifixion and resurrection (2010:149). He observed that when the conflict is endured to the end and 'a creative solution emerges which is produced by the constellated archetype', the nature of the solution accords with the

⁶⁰ Smith suggests that the way to learn detachment is to 'proceed by easy stages, surrendering one by one the things that hold me fettered' (1987:105).

⁶¹ Juan refers to 'secret wisdom' as 'a ladder' that is used for both ascent and descent' (DN, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:439).

⁶² Writing on mystical texts, McIntosh draws an interesting parallel: 'If the event of mystical *textualization* is analogous to the Incarnation, and the struggle of the *interpretive process* is a kind of sharing in the apophysis of the Cross, so also the ongoing realization of *mystical meaning* draws one into those new patterns of life and consciousness which have their consummation in the resurrection and Pentecost' (1998:136).

foundation of the personality, psychic wholeness, and the embrace of the conscious and unconscious; and therefore transcends the ego (2010:149).

5.3.4 *Delight and the gift of communion (Jn 15:13-15)*

Deification involves a ‘new pattern of life and consciousness’, the ‘new’ suggested in the present context is Jesus’ revelation of his ‘whole self which invites a ‘profound intimacy’ and ‘a relationship of equality’ (Johnston 1995:291). In giving his life for his ‘friends’, Jesus demonstrates that he is the *archetypal friend* who imparts ‘everything’ he had learned from his Father (v 15). His experiential insight and embodied wisdom form ‘a living knowledge’, an intimate knowledge that, ‘in the deepest sense, means communion’ (Smith 1987:19). The grace of divine friendship, accompanied by the gift of mystical communion, completes the joy of Jesus the archetypal lover and engenders a new joy in the human beloved. Schneiders writes that the ‘ultimate realization of [the] mystery of loving union is *friendship*’, a friendship ‘which grounds the mystical spirituality into which this Gospel invites its readers’ (1999:54), and she explicates the ‘intense love-ethic of the Johannine community’ as ‘rooted in [a] *fraternal/sororal relationship*, which is the fruit of Jesus’ sharing of his life with them’ (1999:54).⁶³ Thus, no longer addressing his followers as ‘servants’, Jesus the master and mentor descends in order that his friends ascend, in this way establishing a mutuality and equality of relationship which is fundamental to intimacy and ecstasy.⁶⁴ Tracy comments that the ‘Johannine incarnational model’ of love ‘emphasizes the ‘mutuality’ factor in love and the cosmic reality of God’s descending love in the *Logos* and human ascending love in the Christian community’ (1994:99).

This ‘extraordinary union in friendship’ (Schneiders 1999:54) goes hand-in-hand with loving obedience as inferred by Jesus’ words: ‘You are my friends if you do what I command’ (v.15), which raises the question of *gift*. Ricoeur questions ‘the oddity of the discourse of love’, that is, the ‘disturbing imperative form’ which ‘commands’ and ‘orders’ a feeling and makes loving God and neighbour an obligation (1995:318) He resolves the ‘oddity of the imperative’ with reference to the Song of Songs⁶⁵ arrives at the conclusion that the commandment to love ‘springs from the bond between God and the individual soul’ and is summed up as ‘Love me!’(1995:319). In other words, ‘[t]he commandment that precedes

⁶³ Schneiders’ concept of ‘fraternal friendship’ as a model for spiritual direction is summarised in the Literature Review.

⁶⁴ Ruffing’s chapter on mutuality with God cites men and women mystics and offers suggestions for spiritual direction on the use of images for both the masculine and feminine consciousness (2000:125-154).

⁶⁵ Ricoeur’s citation of the Song of Songs (1995:318-325) is based on Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* (1971).

every law is the word that the lover addresses to the beloved: Love me!’ and ‘this is a commandment that contains the conditions for its being obeyed in the very tenderness of its objurgation: Love me!’ (1995:319). ‘Love me!’ is both a strong imperative and a tender invitation which is best interpreted within the framework of ‘the poetics of love’ (1995:324), the ‘poetic use of the imperative’ and the ‘poetic use of the commandment’ (1995:320). Ricoeur’s critique offers several important insights which pertain to the *gift* of divine friendship. First, religious symbols proceed from ‘the economy of the gift’, which suggests that the ‘giftlike character’ of symbols such as the Torah and the Cross ought never to be eclipsed by the doctrine of ‘satisfaction’ or the ‘logic of equivalence’ (1995:299-300).⁶⁶ Second, since the primordial language of love precedes the command to love, the gift that ‘engenders obligation’ effects a movement away from ‘self interest’ toward ‘a welcoming attitude toward the other’ (1995:299-300). Third, because the law proceeds from the economy of divine love, Judeo-Christian symbolism is ‘supraethical par excellence’ and thus critiques ‘moralizing reduction’ (1995:297).⁶⁷ Fourth, the kinship between the command ‘Love me!’ and ‘the song of praise’ avoids reducing the command to a ‘moral imperative’, an ‘obligation’, or a ‘duty’ (1995:320).

The mystical communion of ‘spiritual espousal’ expresses the ‘song-like’ response to ‘Love me!’ Echoing the Song of Songs, Juan explicates the deeper level of divine-human friendship of Jn 15:15 as follows: ‘Since there is no way by which he can exalt her more than by making her equal to himself, he is pleased only with her love. For the property of love is to make the lover equal to the object loved’ (SC, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:584).⁶⁸ Having exalted her in love, the beloved’s preoccupation is love: ‘I no longer tend the herd, nor have I any other work now that my every act is love’ (1991:584). Here, all one’s sensory and spiritual energies are being directed toward God, or as Juan writes: ‘Everything I do I do with love, and everything I suffer I suffer with the delight of love’; thus, in divine friendship or ‘spiritual espousal’, a person ‘ordinarily walks in the union of love of God, which is a habitual and loving attentiveness of the will to God’ (1991:586).

⁶⁶ Ricoeur states that the ‘logic of superabundance’ which pervades the New Testament is opposed to the ‘logic of equivalence that governs everyday morality’ (1995:300), thus the commandment to love one’s enemies is ‘not ethical but supraethical, as is the whole economy of the gift to which it belongs’ (1995:301).

⁶⁷ In Tracy’s definitions of terms, he comments on *nomos* that it is ‘loves expression through a fulfillment of law’ and elaborates that the term is ‘[o]ften (mistakenly) thought by Christians to represent Judaism’s notion of love;’ however, it is ‘genuinely representative ... of the role of law as an expression of the love of God in both Judaism or Christianity’ (1994:95). He asserts that ‘no reader of the New Testament can fail to note that authentic love is presented as both pure gift and radical command’ (1994:99).

⁶⁸ These sentiments of love ‘are not cheap romanticism but the result of mystical contemplation of the heights and depths of Reality’ (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaijman 2002:140).

In relation to the gift which engenders obligation, an appropriate sanjuanist response is the reciprocal ‘gift of oneself to the Beloved’ (1991:538), or the gift of the ‘self-in-love’. Three helpful insights are extracted from *The Spiritual Canticle* (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:618-619) to elucidate the ‘poetics of love’. First, in ‘the consummation of the love of God’, ‘[t]he soul’s aim is a love equal to God’s’ which suggests that the beloved seeks ‘to love God as purely and perfectly as he loves her in order to repay him by such love’; the underlying reason is that ‘lovers cannot be satisfied without feeling that they love as much as they are loved’. Second, though the beloved’s love for God is immense, it is only in the ‘transformation in glory’⁶⁹ that she will ‘reach this equality’ in love.⁷⁰ Third, echoing the Song of Songs, Juan writes that God gives to the beloved God’s love and it is God who shows her how to love as she is loved. That quality is ‘to love purely, freely, and disinterestedly’. Even the strength to love God is given to the beloved so that she may love God ‘with the very strength with which [God] loves her’. If God’s love is a gift so that God would be loved with God’s love, how would a person fulfil the tender command to ‘Love me!’ with God’s love? The radical prayer at this stage of mutuality would be to ‘ask the Father in my name’ for a capacity to ‘Love me!’ with the strength and purity of divine love.

It stands to reason that the sharing of Jesus’ whole self and of his experiential wisdom engenders obligation because *theosis*⁷¹ or deification permeates one’s whole life. Christian mysticism therefore consists of living the divine life in an authentic human way by having the life, light and love of God living within; in sum, of being *in-Christ* and having Christ live in me (Gal 2:20), which is Paul’s ‘articulation of mystical union with the risen and glorified Lord’ (Kourie 2009:235-245).⁷² With the person and paradigm of Jesus as biblical rationale, mysticism is an overflow of love that is not reducible to the moral, the ritual, and the institutional. This is underscored by the fact that the Fourth Gospel weaves profound theological elements into ‘a seamless whole that is essentially mystical and immediate rather than ritual or institutional’ (Schneiders 1999:56).⁷³ Love mysticism cannot be domesticated

⁶⁹ Transformation in glory ‘belongs to the life after this life. ... We only catch a glimpse of it to the degree that our transformation in love contains a sketch of the transformation in glory’ (Waaigman 2006:46).

⁷⁰ God’s love is never an achievement on our part; thus transformation in love is a key component of contemplation. As ‘created human beings we are not able to truly love’ and, no matter how magnanimous our love, we ‘can never break out of or leave behind this framework of our creaturehood’ (Blommestijn, Huls & Waaigman 2000:152).

⁷¹ On the basis of the Early Church Fathers’ teaching, *theosis*, deification or divinisation is summed up as ‘God became human, so that we can become God’. The scriptural basis is 2 Peter 1:3-4 which is to participate in the divine nature; other references include Jn 1:12, Rom 8:29, 1 Cor 13:12, 2 Cor 3:18 and 1 Jn 3:2.

⁷² Kourie contends that the term *in-Christ* is ‘a crucial hermeneutical principle’ for understanding the major tenets of Paul’s teaching, including his mystical thought (2009).

⁷³ Schneiders mentions that the word ‘Church’ is not found in this Gospel (1999:60).

and confined because love proceeds from the Trinitarian economy of otherness; by extension, the gift of the self-in-love proceeds from the lover-beloved relationship to loving others. Encompassing the personal and communal dimensions, the law of love unfolds beyond the ‘solitary I-Thou conversation’ toward ‘an other than oneself – a neighbor [and a friend]’ (Ricoeur 1995:319).⁷⁴ The inner experience of ‘Love me!’ is thus brought to visibility in ‘loving one another’, a double movement which describes the Law *in nuce* (Mt 22:34-40). It is this double movement of loving God and loving others which underscores Christian mysticism as a life of loving union with God and life-giving communion with all.

5.3.5 *Detachment and the goal of mysticism (Jn 15:16)*

In this final section, Jesus is presented as the *archetypal cojourner/spiritual director* who embodies the qualities of ‘knowledge, discretion and experience’ in the guidance of his friends: ‘You did not choose me but I chose you’. Jesus possessed an intimate knowledge of God, self, and the world as he had journeyed with people as friend, mentor and teacher; he had observed his friends in multiple contexts of life, and shared common human experiences with them alone and in the crowds, in homes and on the streets. As archetypal cojourner/spiritual director, Jesus exemplifies detachment by attending to the needs of his friends, preparing them for their vocation, providing direction for the way ahead, and instilling confidence that their vocation would bear lasting fruit. He also avails them to the primary spiritual means for fruitfulness, namely, radical receptivity to God through the exercise of bold prayer and pure faith: ‘Then the Father will give whatever you ask in my name.’ Culminating with the command to ‘love one another’, the incarnational motif demonstrates that Jesus does not isolate his friends in attachment to himself; on the contrary, their vocation of love is a continuing-incarnation of Jesus’ person and paradigm. Stemming from the divine vine, the immediate produce and lasting fruitfulness resemble ‘the true vine’. Thus, in the present context, ‘the vineyard’ is posited as a locus of Christian community; or more specifically, as a community of Christian love based on spiritual friendship.

With Jesus’ unitive-fruitive paradigm, detachment is an essential virtue, detachment being diametrically opposed to a myopic life of egocentricity and complacency. What then is the role of detachment in relation to the goal of Christian mysticism? By remaining in the vine, fruitfulness flows from habitual union in love and mystical friendship with Jesus who in the ‘eternal going out and returning, is the Archetype of all rhythm’ (Smith 1987:70) As in

⁷⁴ Ricoeur uses ‘neighbor’ only, but ‘friend’ is added as it is appropriate in the context of Jn 15.

the cycles of nature, fruitive activity is dependent on the ‘rhythm inherent in things’ (1987:69), that is, a rhythm of self-replenishment by the Source and self-giving to the world in love. The contemplative learns from Jesus the *archetypal rhythm* the ‘very strong’, ‘rather rugged’ and ‘fiery’ virtue of detachment that leads to ‘total, unconditional giving, limitless love’, a virtue that is evident in the whole context of life (1987:98-99).⁷⁵ Detachment is thus a robust virtue, not a cold and aloof disposition; it is fired by divine love, ‘disinterested’ and free, and imbued with the giftlike character of the love commandment.

Detachment is the fruit of Jesus’ transforming love which evinces a ‘vision of divine beauty’ – or God’s glory – a consequent to the ‘sheer grace!’ and the ‘I-don’t-know-what’ of the dark night.⁷⁶ Juan considers the aspect of beauty as ‘proper to love’ and a cause for ‘rejoicing in the Beloved’ because the ‘perfect enjoyment of God in eternal life’ is inextricably bound to the attainment of ‘the vision of ourselves in [God’s] beauty in eternal life’ (SC, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:611-612). Since love produces likeness in the lover, a transformed perception envisions the cosmos as a ‘theophany’ of God – a sacred universe where the distinctive and reciprocal play of unique creatures ‘together reflect the infinite play of divine persons’ (McIntosh 1998:50).

Christian mysticism is directed toward the great consummation in love. Given that the Fourth Evangelist is ‘a consummate theologian and writer’ (Schneiders 1999:57), the detached contemplative anticipates the flowering and consummation of the vine. Ultimately, consummation rests on the Resurrection for, as Matthew asserts, ‘All the lines of the Christian enterprise converge towards the absolute encounter with the risen Christ’ (1995:65). The vineyard as locus of communal Christian love (*koinonia*) serves as a place of encounter with the risen Christ, and is the key to Jesus’ ongoing presence in the world where its task is ‘to be, through love, Jesus’ bodily presence’ (Schneiders 1999:62); hence the gift of the Spirit of Jesus in the Holy Spirit (Jn 14-16). In relation to the practice of spiritual direction as a place of encounter, spiritual accompaniment assists seekers in finding their home in the Trinity, in remaining in Christ the hidden mystery, in being tutored by the Spirit in all of life, and in bringing glory to the Father whose Beloved Son is *the* gift par excellence. Thus, the fruit of the vine ultimately flows back to its source: the Triune God, the *mysterium*.

⁷⁵ See Eckhart’s teaching on the positive and negative aspects of detachment, that is, we are to detach *from* in order to become ‘virginal and detached, wifely and kindled with fire’ (Smith 1987:109-111)

⁷⁶ Juan’s poem *The Dark Night* encapsulates transformation of the beloved in her Lover which is also a transformation in beauty (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991: 358-359).

With Jn 15's unitive-fruitive paradigm of transformation, *mustikos* leads inexorably to *koinonikos* which implies that Christian mysticism is a gift to the whole human family. Brown's point is noteworthy that the Fourth Gospel is 'not an in-group manifesto meant as a triumph over outsiders'; rather, its goal is 'to challenge the Johannine community itself to understand Jesus more deeply' (1979:62). Understanding Jesus deeply also includes attention to the 'physical body of Jesus' which McIntosh suggests is a body that makes possible 'the linguistic relationality of speaking the other and loving the other, of being absolutely for the other in love and freedom which makes God who God is' (1998:83). The linguistic relationality embodied in Jesus underscores the principle that Trinitarian relationality is the biblical paradigm for *koinonikos*. It follows that in the recovery of 'a true sense of self' – which is the image of God in the human person – that 'one exists no longer as 'my' self but ourself, in the mutuality of love, the play of lover and beloved that enacts the eternal play of the Trinitarian persons' (1998:83).⁷⁷ *Koinonikos*, as defined by a communal 'ourself' and manifested in the web of human relationships, provides glimpses, touches and tastes of divine-human epiphany in the here and now. Together *mustikos* and *koinonikos* underscore the sacramentality of the vineyard as locus of communal Christian love.

In incarnational terms, Christian mysticism is both an intimate and an infinite mystery that is habitable in the present life. Mystical experience in this sense 'is experience of the immanence of the wholly other God', not as 'a transcendent Other' but as 'an immanent Self' (Perrin 2007:239).⁷⁸ Therefore, the goal of Christian mysticism 'is not primarily an act of union or a particular moment of encounter with the Other but rather, it is to live one's entire life *in the mysterium* called God' (2007:241). Since the *mysterium* is God, the mystery is a living paradox and a synthesis of antithesis – an infinite and intimate mystery because 'God is primarily the *mysterium* in virtue of God's self-bestowal, not in terms of particular or partial knowledge we may have of God' (2007:241). Mysticism is best understood then 'not through the intellect, the act of knowing the *mysterium* by the expression of particular knowledge, as through feeling, the dynamic of experiencing and living the *mysterium*' (2007:241). Given Perrin's emphasis on living *in* the mystery, it would be correct to assert that while the 'union of inflaming love' is perhaps enjoyed by fewer people, the 'universal vocation to mysticism' is for everyone for 'all are called to be in love with God in an

⁷⁷ McIntosh is referring to the 'passion mysticism' of writers like Hadewijch who discover and recover themselves in relation to the divine (1998:83).

⁷⁸ The immanence of God is essential for Asian spiritual direction. For further reading, see Keel on *Meister Eckhart: an Asian Perspective* (2007) for an understanding of the resonance between Eckhart and the Asian non-dualistic worldview.

experiential way'; in other words, 'the human family is called to become being-in-love' (Johnston 1995:255). The potential of the vine is the flowering of a Christian mysticism based on love for, as Johnston asserts, 'mysticism that is not rooted and grounded in love cannot be called Christian' (1995:61). Christian mysticism, however, is not another 'ism', but rather, a way of love that is sourced by Jesus' transforming love, substantiated by a biblical poetics of love, enfolded in loving human relationships, and oriented toward transformation in glory. For the contemplative, the consummation in love is the mystical horizon; or, as Johnston exclaims, 'the mystical journey reaches its climax in a Trinitarian experience of love. The human person – and, indeed, the human race – is united with the Son and in the Spirit cries out, 'Abba, Father!' (1995:254).⁷⁹

5.4 Conclusion

Having explored the mystical symbolism of the vine in Jn 15:1-17 through the 5-D transformative lens, it is evident that the *person* and *paradigm* of Jesus are central to the interpretation of the vine as core symbol of Christian mysticism. The findings encapsulate the major tenets of a lived Christian mysticism as well as the progression of the unitive-fruitive paradigm of transformation. The results are now discussed.

First, the grace of mystical union is rooted in Trinitarian *eros*. The Triune God who abides in unity yet exists ecstatically in the created order seeks a home within the human heart. God draws people in different ways, guides them along unique paths and bestows the necessary graces that effect deepening union with the Triune God. In Jn 15, Jesus' imperative to 'remain in me' serves as an invitation to a lived experience of union with Christ the Mystery who is both revealed (*logos*) and concealed (*mustikos*). The imperative to 'remain in me' rests on the unique identity and role of Jesus as the intersecting point between God and creation – as the Centre of the cosmos as well as a person's inner Centre. Held in union with the Father by the Holy Spirit, yet going out into creation as the spoken and incarnate Word of God, Jesus is first and foremost the *archetypal mystic* who embodies *logos* and *mustikos*, *eros* and *ekstasis* and, in the rhythm of 'remaining in yet going out', provides a paradigm for a lived mysticism — a rhythm which Eckhart suggests is the key to the spiritual life.

Second, purification serves the transformative purpose of conformity to the *archetypal human being* who lived the divine life in an exemplary human way and his unique human life

⁷⁹ The context for Johnston's Trinitarian emphasis is Jn 10:30. He states that 'the incarnate Word is not the last stage in the mystical journey' and elaborates that the contemplative who is united with Jesus can also say, 'I and the Father are one'. On this understanding, Jesus draws human beings into the life of the Trinity.

in God's way. At the stage 'beyond the beginnings' – or the second phase of human individuation – the shift to an inner orientation is effected by a 'confrontation with the unconscious'. The imperative to 'remain in me' is therefore significant because spirituality at this stage is characterised more by *being* than by *doing*. Experientially, the inner journey often involves a 'dark night' when God draws seekers by 'a way they know not' in order that they come to know 'the who' of the incomprehensible God. On the basis of sanjuanist spiritual direction, the dark unknowing is a deepening knowledge of God as Spiritual Director, Jesus as the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit as Principal Agent. The dark night of purgation facilitates the painful yet liberating withdrawal of projections, illusions and false images of God, self and others. Enlightenment occurs when, through the loving gaze of God, we discover our true self and our true image in God – that we are beloved.

Third, the essence of contemplation is encapsulated as divine love on the basis that Jesus is the embodiment of divine love. The imperative to 'remain in *my* love' pivots on the love between Jesus and the Father, a union of love and a union of wills which demonstrates Jesus' obedience and surrender even unto death. Jesus, the *archetypal lover* who is fully loved, fully human and fully alive in God produces likeness in the beloved, accompanies a person in habitual union of love, and exemplifies a self-transcending love through the total gift of himself-in-love. In the contemplation of divine love, the Paschal Mystery serves as an embrace of paradox: of ascent and descent, contemplation and incarnation, exaltation and humiliation, and deification and mortification. With the death of Christ as love par excellence, loving God and loving one another becomes the visible expression for 'remaining within while going out', which leads to the summation that Christian mysticism is loving union with God and life-giving communion with all.

Fourth, divine-human friendship is accompanied by the gift of mystical communion. As *archetypal friend*, the rabbi, master and mentor descends so that 'the servant' be elevated to 'friend'. Moreover, as divine wisdom personified, Jesus shares his whole self and imparts his experiential wisdom to his friends, thus providing an incarnational model of spiritual friendship that is characterised by mutuality and equality. In the language of bridal mysticism, the metaphor of 'spiritual espousal' captures the delight of mystical communion, that is, the profound intimacy and ecstasy of the lover-beloved relationship. Evoking the Song of Songs, the gift of divine friendship engenders an obligation to love which is summed up by a more subtle and tender divine imperative, namely, 'Love me!' John of the Cross' *Spiritual Canticle* illustrates that, in the consummation of love, loving obedience is transfigured by the total gift of the self-in-love to the Beloved. In fact, the gift is a return of

God's love to God because God's love is a grace. On the communal level, since the command to love another proceeds not only from 'the economy of the gift' but also from the Trinitarian 'economy of otherness', human relationships provide real contexts for bringing to visibility the inner experience of 'Love me!'

Fifth, the goal of a lived Christian mysticism calls forth a radical detachment from egocentricity and complacency. The goal, in the immediate context of Jn 15:16, is 'to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last' and the detachment evoked is radical because the vocation of love is a continuing-incarnation of the person and paradigm of Jesus. As *archetypal cojourner/spiritual director*, Jesus attributes calling and vocation to the divine initiative: 'I chose you' which reiterates that the continuation and fruitfulness of love is a divine occupation. Retaining the emphasis in the final section on the Father as provider and his followers as recipients reinforces the imperative to 'remain in me', Jesus exemplifies detachment by ensuring that his friends are not left in the isolation of an individualistic faith; rather, they are to exercise love within a vibrant community of spiritual friendship and Christian love. This communal dimension demonstrates the inexorable movement of *mustikos* toward *koinonikos* and suggests an ever-expanding circle of love. The horizon of Christian mysticism then is the Great Consummation in love. Meanwhile, the contemplative awaits the transformation in glory by 'remaining in yet going out', praying with limitless love for the harmonisation of all creation in the Triune God, and performing 'acts of love' which contribute toward the flowering of a Christian mysticism based on love.

The mystical exploration has demonstrated that the vine renders present the transcendent reality which lies hidden in the interstices between the semantics and the non-semantics of the symbol. The mystical symbolism of the vine therefore serves as imperative and invitation to remain in Christ the hidden Mystery whose paradigm of transforming love is unitive and fruitive. With the vine as core symbol of Christian mysticism, I summarise a lived Christian mysticism as incorporating four aspects, as follows: a *way of truth* that is sourced by union with the indwelling Trinity; a *way of paradox* that emanates the archetypal rhythm of 'remaining in yet going out'; a *way of love* that jubilates in the gracious friendship of Jesus; and a *way of life* that augments the communion of Christian love. In the final analysis, the mystical enquiry rests on the premise that Jesus Christ is divine-human epiphany par excellence, which leads to the conclusion that the Incarnation is the contemplative-unitive culmination to the Song of Songs' search for epiphany.

Chapter 6

A SPIRITUAL DIRECTION APPROACH TO THE VINEYARD:

The Creative-Constructive Phase

6.1 Introduction

The appropriation of the Song of Songs in contemporary spiritual praxis is the primary focus of the fourth phase of the hermeneutical approach in this dissertation and is thus termed ‘a spiritual direction approach to the vineyard’. The aim in this final phase is to locate transformation in love (the *formal object*) within the context of the vineyard as existential project (the *material object*) by means of a creative-construction of a Song of Songs paradigm for spiritual direction, and is underpinned by the following experiential question: *How does the beloved’s transformation in love in the Song of Songs inform the contemporary spiritual journey?* The findings in the present chapter provide the rationale for transformation in love as the *raison-d’être* for spiritual direction and the feasibility of the Song of Songs as a biblical paradigm for spiritual direction.

6.2 The spiritual direction approach

Since a spiritual direction approach to the vineyard is experiential-existential, it is necessary to delineate several presuppositions with respect to a poetics-praxis amalgam in the construction of a Song of Songs paradigm. First, the spiritual direction approach is *integrative* and encompasses the multiple approaches explored in chapters 3, 4 and 5, for these methodologies provide a theological interpretation of the beloved’s vineyard on both sides of the Song. It is within this wider biblical framework that transformation in love is explicated, namely, that the Song of Songs retains the primordial language of love (*eros*), sustains the yearning for a transcendent love (*mythos*), maintains the mystique of divine-human love (*mustikos*), and contains the conditions for the continuing-incarnation of love in the world (*kosmos*). Integrated in the creative-constructive phase, these four characteristics demonstrate that spiritual direction involves a multiplex listening approach: on the levels of *eros* (emotions, the imagination, the ego, and the body); *mythos* (personal narrative, collective history, and socio-religious-cultural traditions); *mustikos* (poetic intercourse and *second-naivete* discourse); and *kosmos* (unique human embodiment and authentic engagement in the world).

Second, the spiritual direction approach is *invitational* given that the Song of Songs’ unique biblical poetics is untypical of biblical verse and gives no instruction or exhortation

(Alter 1985:185-186). Since the Song is devoid of any command to love, the present chapter adopts ‘a poetic use of the invitation’ rather than Ricoeur’s ‘poetic use of the imperative’ (as discussed in Chapter 5), on the presupposition that the poem entices the reader through a subtle *invitation* to ‘Love me!’ (God the divine lover). Since no typical biblical or religious instruction is given in the Song of Songs, the spiritual direction approach follows suit and therefore opens out to a full and free play of emotions, invites the interplay of sensuality and subjectivity, and evokes a full engagement with God in all of life’s invitations.

Third, the spiritual direction approach is *incarnational* on the basis that the poetry facilitates a kind of self transcendence of *double entente* where the beloved *herself* is not only represented as a vineyard, but becomes a ‘real vineyard’ (1985:202).¹ This transformation of the metaphorical to the real provides the hermeneutical cue for positing the vineyard as a project of life-integration through a self-transcending love. The incarnational view presupposes a holistic treatment of the human beloved and it is therefore suggested that sexuality be treated as the vineyard’s vehicle and spirituality its tenor. Caird describes *vehicle* as ‘the thing to which the word normally and naturally applies, the thing from which it is transferred’, and *tenor* as ‘the thing to which it is transferred’ (1980:15).² Bearing in mind that the vineyard refers to the beloved’s bodily self, sexuality is the normal and natural interpretation of a literal reading of the vineyard; however, on the basis of a holistic approach, spirituality is suggested as ‘the thing to which the metaphorical vineyard may be transferred’ (as the present dissertation has thus far highlighted). Referring to metaphor as a lens, Caird suggests that when looking at one object through a lens we concentrate on the object and ignore the lens (1980:15). When viewing the human beloved through the lens of a ‘live metaphor’ like the vineyard, the distinct entities of sexuality and spirituality are grasped as one which means that these vital aspects belong together and are to be treated as complementary aspects of a living soul and a whole self.

Fourth, the spiritual direction approach adopts an *analogical* approach to the vineyard, an appropriative method which, according to Ricoeur, augments the meaning of the text through ‘new uses and reuses of the text without claiming that the analogical meaning was preexistent in the text’ (1998:277). Presupposing that analogical transference refers to ‘a second movement’ stemming from the *use* of the text and not first of all from its explication

¹Alter’s reference to the beloved’s body as a *garden* is adapted in the present context to *vineyard*. He elucidates the relationship between the landscape and the beloved’s body, that is, the fluidity between the literal and figurative (1985).

² Caird credits the terms *vehicle* and *tenor* to Ogden and Richards (1980:15).

(1998:278), the analogical approach ‘reads *off*’ the spiritual sense from the literal (Turner 1995a:133)³ which does not deny the sexual interpretation⁴ but attends holistically to the sexual and spiritual. Analogical transference then is not a reading *into* the poem but a reading *off* the poem, which means that the appropriative meanings and contemporary usages derived do not alter the poem’s intrinsic meaning. A ‘reading *off*’ presupposes that the Song of Song *performs* as a mystical text (McIntosh 1998:130-146) and is a valid and feasible approach for, as Williams asserts, analogy is ‘fundamental to literal reading and reflects an interpretive confidence that this text can be followed on my terms as reader’ (2000:52). Analogy allows for flexibility for it stretches language to fit new applications; simply stated, it is ‘a matter of teaching an old word new tricks – of applying an old label in a new way’ (Soskice 1985:64). Since the vineyard as existential project is intended for *use* in spiritual praxis and *new uses* in spiritual direction, it stands to reason that the creative construction of a Song of Songs paradigm is self-implicating.

6.3 A Song of Songs paradigm of transformation

The proposed paradigm adapts the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality which Fox delineates as follows: Path I, the Via Positiva; Path II, the Via Negativa; Path III, the Via Creativa; and Path IV, the Via Transformativa (1991:18; 1995). The descriptions of these paths will not be repeated here, suffice it to say that Fox asserts that the Four Paths are biblical and represents a distinct paradigm shift from Plotinus’ (A.D. 205-270) threefold path of purgation, illumination, and union (1991:17).⁵ Creation spirituality rejects the threefold path as inadequate on the grounds that compassion rather than contemplation is the goal and that ‘delighting in’ rather than ‘turning away’ from the created order is *what matters* (1991:17). The present research concurs with Fox and, as elucidated in Chapter 5, Christian mysticism is described by the rhythm of ‘remaining in yet going out’ through a double movement of loving union with God and life-giving communion with all.

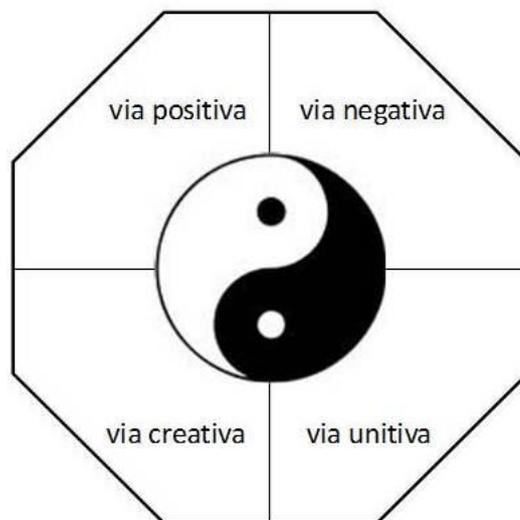
A second reason for the choice of the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality is that it is adaptable to the beloved’s transformative journey in the Song of Songs, with particular

³ For an elaboration on how mediaeval commentators construed human *eros* as a type of the divine *eros*, and the arguments related to ‘reading *off*’ the typological sense from the literal, see Turner’s chapter on ‘The Logic of Typology’ (1995a:127-157)

⁴ The analogical approach is quite distinct from the traditional allegorical interpretation which rules out the sexual interpretation. Carr, as just one example, addresses the allegorical approach and contends that the Song of Songs as an ‘encoded’ description of the YHWH-Israel relation violates too many other aspects of the text (2003:136).

⁵ For an elaboration of these paths, see Perrin (2007:248-257).

respect to the ‘five canticle structure’ elaborated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. A distinct departure from Creation Spirituality’s Four Paths though is that the Song of Songs paradigm posits *one* transformative journey which is comprised of four seasons, namely, the *via positiva*, the *via negativa*, the *via unitiva*, and the *via creativa*. The four seasons across the full sweep of the ‘five canticles’ represent a long-range project of life-integration through a self-transcending love, though each season in itself is a deepening, spiraling transformation with unique characteristics. The content and order of the paths also differ substantially from Fox’s Four Paths because the interpretive framework is the Song of Songs, the focus is the experience of the archetypal seeker, and the purpose is the practice of spiritual direction. The paradigm is illustrated as follows:



Situated at the core of the four seasons paradigm is the yin-yang symbol which consists of two fishlike figures within a circle: one black, the other white. According to Liu, the black fish represents *rest* and is called *greater yin* and the white fish representing *movement* is called *greater yang* (1986:6-7).⁶ The black circle within the white fish is referred to as *lesser yin* and the white circle within the black fish as *lesser yang*. The yin-yang symbol is deemed appropriate because it represents mutation rather than stasis, that is, the alternation of rest and movement, of meditation and exercise, of night and day, and of dark and light – a dynamic paradox which lies at the heart of nature’s rhythm and of daily life. It is therefore apt as a symbol of the mystical rhythm of ‘remaining in yet flowing out’ (as elucidated in Chapter 5) and is placed at the core of the Song of Songs paradigm because the interplay of paradox, which Turner suggests is ‘the tension of *eros* itself’, is essentially transformative (1995a:85).

⁶ Liu refers to the yin-yang symbol as the T’ai Chi T’u or Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate.

The symbol therefore signifies dynamic movements and shifts of mood across the four seasons as well as the paradoxical tensions within each transformative season. The little circles within the contrasting fish-like figures suggest that the other ‘contains within itself its opposite, and also continuously originates from its opposite in a smooth, never-ending cycle’ (Liu 1986:6-7). This continual interconnecting principle is fundamental to the embrace of paradoxical elements such as human and divine, sexuality and spirituality, feminine and masculine; in other words, co-existence implies that a part of one is found in the other and that one exists in relation to the other and to the whole. The larger circle illustrates a person’s capacity to live the tension of the opposites and is an apt symbol for the search for wholeness, that is, a transforming ‘I’ who journeys through all the seasons of life in ongoing human transformation and spiritual maturation. According to Johnston, an empty or open circle is a symbol for God and a symbol of nothing (*todo y nada*); it is an important Buddhist symbol which symbolises zero and infinity, a reconciliation of the opposites, emptiness that is *sunyata*, as well as enlightenment (1995:170-171). The translucence of the paradigm presupposes the penetrability of life by the infinite Mystery, the divine *I AM* who is the container and custodian of the soul, the principal transformative agent who is never neglectful of souls (LFOL, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:691).

The contents of the Song of Songs paradigm and characteristics of each season are encapsulated in the table below, demonstrating a deepening transformation across the four seasons. The shaded area highlights the *poetics* of the paradigm, while the clear area refers explicitly to the spiritual direction conversation (*praxis*).

Season	<i>via positiva</i>	<i>via negativa</i>	<i>via unitiva</i>	<i>via creativa</i>
Text	Sg 1:1-2:7	Sg 2:8-5:8	Sg 5:9-8:4	Sg 8:5-14
Experience	<i>kataphasis</i>	<i>apophasis</i>	<i>ekstasis</i>	<i>poiesis</i>
Approach	metaphorical	mythological	mystical	missional
God-given	<i>eros</i>	<i>mythos</i>	<i>mustikos</i>	<i>kosmos</i>
Process	yearning	seeking	finding	birthing
Self	I am neglected	I am wounded	I am desired	I am
Prayer	recollection	examination	contemplation	incarnation
Art	imagination	story	poetry	body
Progression	use of images	loss of images	true image	imaging
Grace	awareness	otherness	oneness	fruitfulness

The following section elucidates the Song of Songs paradigm through a brief description of each season and elaborates its respective use in the conversation between cojourner and seeker in the contemporary practice of spiritual direction.

6.4 A creative-construction of a Song of Songs paradigm for spiritual direction

6.4.1 Via positiva (Sg 1:1-2:7)

The first season is described by the key word *kataphasis* which refers to positive affirmations about God in word, symbol, image, and nature (Perrin 2007:113). Sg 1:2-2:7 is introduced as the *via positiva* because the archetypal seeker's experience of the lover in this season is kataphatic. The *kataphatic* way seeks experiential knowledge through visions, feelings, imagery, words, and other sensate or symbolic forms, and is marked by substantial experiences and a sensate assurance of the divine (May [1982]/1992:12-13). The *kataphatic* experience 'feels like romantic love and transforms and sublimates passion in ongoing and ever deepening intimacy with God' (Ruffing 2000:96). It also induces awe, wonder, and mystery not only of God but of nature and of all beings (Fox 1991:18). Since humans and plants share a common origin in divine decree (Tull 2009:20), the person yearns for a rebirth of primordial goodness and original fecundity. The *via positiva* therefore echoes the divine desire and the divine imagination of the 'garden of creation' in the Genesis story.

The Song of Songs' transformative journey begins with human desire: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth' which suggests human *eros* as the springboard for the four seasons paradigm. The erotic expressions of affection and adoration, the aesthetic mode of lyrical poetry, and the exotic images of natural beauty incite awe, wonder, and praise, demonstrating that *kataphasis* is a celebration of primal sensuality. Alter states that 'only in the Song is the exuberant gratification of love through all five senses the subject' (1985:202); and Falk adds that there is 'probably nothing more essential to appreciation of poetic effect in the Song than a readiness to respond to sensuality' (1990:161). The luxuriant and exotic metaphors along the *via positiva* infers that metaphor is an affective and effective means of activating the senses for, as Saliers states, 'loving God requires the interanimation of all the available senses' (2005:335).

Human *eros* is magnified and intensified through the beloved's *yearning* for a self-transcending love, and its significance for spiritual direction is that the longing for a *kataphatic* experience of God in the early stages of spiritual direction is quite typical. Teresa of Avila states that people initially crave *contentos*, that is, the 'consolations of God' rather than the God of consolation. *Contentos*, accompanied by grace, 'have their beginning in our

human nature and end in God' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:272).⁷ The abbreviation 'G.O.D.' is a helpful, contextualised way of making the distinction, namely, the craving for the *goods of desire*⁸ which is immediate rather than the *God of desire* who is infinite. This yearning for self-gratification, however, is an experiential trigger and a transformative principle. Barry's elucidation of 'the affective principle' underscores this point, that the building of a positive spiritual identity through experiences of a loving, creative God is the firm foundation upon which a developing relationship with God is built (2001:72, 73).⁹ In the first season, exploring a seeker's desires and spiritual yearning, in the context of existential needs, activates the neglected parts of the self, gives voice to the hidden depths which long to be heard, and prepares the person for healing and transformation.

With *eros* as a God-given or one's God-connection, spiritual direction engages the seeker not only as 'a speaking being'¹⁰ but as an amatory subject,¹¹ the purpose being that the seeker's primitive dimension and primal energies be released in order to reach the depths of the innermost self. Kristeva's semiotic approach is recommended because semiotics is concerned with 'drive-related and affective meaning organized according to primary processes whose sensory aspects are often nonverbal' and is a way of 'gaining access to more archaic affective representations and accessing the drama that underlies symbolic representations' (1995:104). Since *eros* is transformative, spiritual direction attends to the amatory subject's drives and affections as the raw material of unique personhood. Seekers often come to spiritual direction with an unarticulated yearning. Through prolonged neglect of the inner self, confusion over the drama of deep-seated drives, and the chaos of inordinate affections, they are more accustomed to or more comfortable with the *symbolic*, which Kristeva refers to as 'the discursive practice that adheres to the logical and grammatical rules of speaking' (1995:104). Furthermore, while astute in the propositional, cognitive and theological dimensions of religion and theology, seekers yearn for experiential and intimate knowledge of God which means that a fresh and delicate approach is necessary to reverse

⁷ Contrasted with spiritual delight (*gustos*) which are received 'passively' in the *via unitiva*, consolations (*contentos*) have their beginning in God and overflow to human nature' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:272).

⁸ G.O.D., the abbreviation for 'Goods of Desire', is a retail store in Hong Kong geared to authentic Asian tastes. The name G.O.D. is derived phonetically from the Cantonese colloquialism 住好嘞 which means 'to live better' (see the website www.god.com.hk).

⁹ See the chapter 'Attachment Psychotherapy and God Image' (2007:57-58) on negative attachment models and the importance of developing positive images and relational patterns with God.

¹⁰ For Kristeva, language is inseparable from the beings that use it. Like language, speaking beings are a process, constituted through a variety of different processes, including subjectivity and internal experiences.

¹¹ See Kristeva's use of this term (1987:152) in her chapter on Bernard of Clairvaux: Affect, Desire and Love (1987:151-169). For a discussion on Kristeva's semiotic approach in relation to Eros, see Wolfson's chapter on 'Suffering Eros and Textual Incarnation: A Kristevan Reading of Kabbalistic Poetics' (2006).

traditional thought patterns, socio-cultural-religious conditioning, and worn-out personal presuppositions and practices. Since the ‘poetic and imaginative dimensions of religion come before its propositional, cognitive and theological dimensions’ (Welch 1990:16, citing Greeley & Durkin 1984), the activation of the imagination is an affective and effective skill for evoking the playfulness and creativity of the inner child. Kristeva states that the *imaginary* is ‘the representation of identification strategies that mobilize the image of the body as well as the ego and the other’, and it is the *imaginary economy* that makes the *subject of enunciation* come forth (1995:103-106).¹² The Song of Songs is a literary tool par excellence for plumbing the semiotic layers of desire and accessing the archaic layers of personhood for the Song serves as a literary index for the poetic and imaginative dimensions of divine-human intimacy. Moreover, its absence of law, command and ritual allows for a flexible, playful and safe approach.

How would the Song of Songs be used in engaging the amatory subject? The spiritual direction conversation, in somewhat similar vein to the prologue of the Song of Songs, begins in the middle of nowhere, attunes to the present, and focuses on immediacy. Lacking in knowledge of the seeker’s history, a skilful and unobtrusive way of accessing ‘drive-related and affective meaning’ is by means of the vineyard metaphor because a ‘live metaphor’ opens up an imaginary world and activates the ‘revelatory function’ (Ricoeur 1995:223). The ‘live metaphor’, according to Ricoeur’s use, ‘refigures the world and recasts the parts, trying to offer a new world in which to dwell and act, a world where dwelling and acting would be possible’ (Abel 2008:186). Transposing the emphasis of the primordial garden (as discussed in Chapter 3), the refiguring and recasting of one’s own vineyard offers a locus of divine-human love. As an existential project, the vineyard metaphor connects spiritual yearning with the imagination, the body, the ego, and the other, and disposes the whole person for a kataphatic experience of God. The play of metaphor is conducive to exploring the yearning for union with God and the longing for wholeness as spiritual direction ordinarily employs the use of artwork, Christian icons, imaginative prayer, creative imagination, and nature objects to access the un-lived parts of the self, uncover deep desires, and ‘raid the inarticulate’ of the inner world. In cooperation with the Spirit, these cathartic and therapeutic means

¹² Imaginary refers to a creative appropriation of metaphor. The chapter on ‘Confrontation with the Unconscious’ (Jaffe 1961:194-225) is essential reading on Jung’s work with his inner images and its decisive influence on his life. Johnson’s *Inner Work* (1986) is a helpful Jungian approach to dream work and active imagination. Rizutto writes extensively on the role of imagination for mental health in *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1979), critiqued by Jones’s chapter on ‘Psychodynamic Theories of the Evolution of the God Image’ (2007:33-55).

awaken the transcendent dimension in a person – the level of deep feeling where the intuitive and the cognitive meet. The exploration of images is not an exercise in fantasy; rather, the specific intention is of reaching the deeper roots of human freedom in order to increase the person's capacity for union and communion with the Triune God.¹³ As Michael & Norrisey purport, 'One might say that activating the transcendent dimension of the Feeling Function is the basic goal of all prayer, since the purpose of prayer is to establish a personal relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This is what religion and prayer are all about – to bring us to an experience of union of love with the person of God' (1991:102).¹⁴

The neglected vineyard is an indication of the seeker's existential condition; here the primary affect or self-description is expressed in the phrase *I am neglected*. The spiritual direction conversation might explore the seeker's experience of being a work-horse, darkened by the sun, and a slave to the social master. It is essential that the person's psychic wound be uncovered because the painful semiotic material identifies the triggers for transformation, namely, *need, desire, prayer, and images*. Drawing on the archetypal seeker's experience in the Song of Songs, the felt tensions between the demands of the collective and the depletion of personal resources trigger the *need* for proper self-care, greater attention to the body, and the longing for rest and replenishment; hence the drawing to spiritual direction. The negative and oppressive familial, social, employer and institutional relations bruise and batter the ego and awaken the *desire* for a more humane, authentic existence; hence, a timely inbreaking of God so that the inner work might be pursued. Where the *prayer* life of the dry, malnourished self is lacking vitality and longing for an affective experience of God, kataphatic forms of prayer and aesthetic alternatives to the mundane are explored. The seeker's present *image* of God is also an important soul cue; for example, the image of the Shepherd-Lover suggests a drawing to nature, the need for a more pastoral and replenishing environment, a longing for the tenderness of divine love, and a readiness to be led to new pastures.

¹³ On 'Ignatian Contemplation: The Use of Imagination in Prayer' (2001:91-105), Barry explicates that, through experience, Ignatius learned that God could use his imaginative powers to draw him into a new way of life (2001:95). English suggests that Ignatius' *Contemplatio* is 'the best place to start' in an appreciation of images and posits that 'Ignatian spirituality invites us to open up to the gradual blossoming of an extraordinarily exalted image, not only of God, but also of the human person and all creation' (1995:246). Jones elucidates in 'Spiritual Direction as Imagination' that the creative use of imagination is to form accurate images of ourselves and the world ([1982]/1999:97-116). Also note 'Not Words Alone: Spiritual Direction and Visual Images' (Hedberg 2000:153-170), and Vanek's Jungian approach in *Image Guidance: A Tool for Spiritual Direction* (1992). For praying with icons, see Williams (2002, 2003a).

¹⁴ *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* provides a discussion on the 'inferior function' of personality and ways of activating the 'transcendent dimension' in prayer, a helpful integration of Jung's typology and prayer (Michael & Norrisey 1991:91-102).

Through an admission of self-neglect and self-depletion, the seeker might become fixated with the external circumstances and insist on solutions to rectify or improve his/her present predicament. However, essential in the *via positiva* is the facilitation of spiritual replenishment and the application of the affective principle; if not, the seeker might resort to or revert back to seeking fulfillment in inordinate attachments. As Johnson cautions: ‘Addiction is the negative side of spiritual seeking’ (1987:vii).¹⁵ Spiritual replenishment and the affective principle are suggested by the image of the Shepherd-Lover (Sg 1:7-8) and of the lover as an oasis or ‘a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En-Gedi’ (Sg 1:14); as well as the experience of delighting and sitting in his shade, being refreshed and strengthened by sweet fruit, and resting in a loving supportive embrace (Sg 2:3-7). Through receptivity to divine love, the affective principle is facilitated by the prayer of *recollection* where attention is given to the *presence* of the divine lover rather than to solutions. Spiritual direction is thus a time dedicated to be *with* God and to speak interiorly *to* God rather than conversing *about* God. While the seeker disposes him/herself in quietness to the presence of God, the prayer of recollection asks for the particular grace¹⁶ of *awareness*. Awareness is facilitated through rhythmic breathing which focuses on the body, reduces verbosity and human striving, and gathers the wandering and disparate parts of the self. Rhythmic breathing and prayerful silence allows one to feel one’s present state of being, attune to inner discord, and relax rather than strive to ‘appease the gods’. Through the cojourner’s personal attention and kind hospitality,¹⁷ the person is safely held and securely known so that trust in a loving God is engendered. Within this sacred space, the pain of neglect may be felt and the psychic wound articulated so that ‘the shade of the divine lover’ is availed to the seeker. Through the grace of *awareness*, the person begins to hear the ‘whistle’¹⁸ of the Shepherd-Lover who graciously responds to the enunciation: *I am neglected*.

Spiritual direction invites the seeker to give conscious attention to one’s own vineyard in the prosaic of ordinary life which would involve making conscious choices on several

¹⁵ The contra-side to spiritual yearning is craving the opposite and seeking fulfillment in material wealth, power and acquisition (Johnson 1987:20-21). May discusses the importance of self-affirmation in a chapter on ‘Psychodynamic Changes in Spiritual Growth’ ([1982]/1992:94-102).

¹⁶ The practice of ‘asking-for-the-grace’ is borrowed from Ignatian forms of prayer, a prelude that is essential in the Ignatian structure of a prayer period. Fleming explicates the dynamic interplay between the grace prelude (what we desire) and the colloquy (what relationship with God we are enjoying) in the early stages of a retreatant taking the Spiritual Exercises. Spiritual growth is viewed in terms of grace received, which involves a natural progression and is evidence that grace builds upon grace (2004:23-24).

¹⁷ For the role of hospitality in spiritual direction, see Guenther (1992) and Hay (2006).

¹⁸ Welch cites Teresa of Avila’s whistle of the shepherd in explicating the Carmelite foundation for God pursuing us in love (1996:76).

levels: first, the *body* calls for appropriate means of self-care through a rhythm of rest and work, meditation and exercise, eating and fasting, and receptivity and generosity; second, the *ego* needs to be willing to be stretched beyond the limited, self-conscious ‘I’ through regular spiritual direction, new encounters with life, confrontations with the status quo, and eruptions from the unconscious; third, in relation to *the other*, the seeker would need to identify the angry brothers and the oppressors (Sg 1:6),¹⁹ learn to discern the negative voices of the collective by being conscious of negative inner movements,²⁰ address destructive and abusive ‘I-It relationships’,²¹ and be open to appropriate means of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and fourth, the seeker develops an attentiveness to *the Other* who woos and draws individuals through all the circumstances of life and invites people to a radical transformation in divine love.

In the *via positiva*, the focus is on the affective use of the Song of Songs, the kataphatic experience of God, and the growth in self-knowledge and self-care in order that the neglected vineyard be tended and loved. Progressively, the live metaphor performs the ongoing exodus out of the inward-looking self which suggests that the cojourner be ready to discern the possible onset of the dark night of sense particularly when attending to the seeker’s feelings of dryness, malnourishment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment. Where applicable, the cojourner would affirm that God the principal agent is mobilising the person’s body, senses, and ego through difficult life circumstances and is secretly preparing the seeker for a more intense and intentional *search* for ‘the one my soul loves’ (Sg 3:1-3). The cojourner does not arouse the seeker to love but encourages resting and replenishing until such time that the divine lover comes leaping and bounding like a gazelle over the mountains.

6.4.2 *Via negativa* (Sg 2:8-5:8)

The second season is encapsulated by the word *apophasis*, that is, the limitation of what can be known directly or even indirectly about God because God transcends the human capacity

¹⁹ Fischer’s chapter on ‘Violence against Women: The Spiritual Dimension’ (1988:154-174) is a sensitive treatment of the reality of violence and its influence on spirituality.

²⁰ In a chapter on ‘Discernment’ (1988:113-132), Fischer suggests several aspects of discernment which include a focus on body messages and emotions, social and cultural conditioning, and reflective exercises for prayer and journaling.

²¹ Jewish philosopher and mystic Martin Buber differentiates between ‘I-It’ and ‘I-You’ relationships, the former refers to treating people as objects for utilitarian purposes, while I-You treats the other as a person – in his/her own right, not as a projection of the self. See Au & Cannon’s brief discussion on power as the shadow side of intimacy (1995:118-119), where Buber is discussed.

for knowing or naming God (Perrin 2007:113).²² The *apophatic* way seeks that which ‘lies behind, beyond, or hidden within all sensory or intellectual representations’ (May [1982]/1992:12), acknowledges that God is beyond all language and all images, and is thus ultimate Silence or a dark un/knowing. The *via negativa* is framed within Sg 2:8-5:8 because the beloved passes through two dark nights²³ in her search for the lover. Following the *via positiva*, the mood is one of extreme intensity through the loss of consolations or the ‘felt sense of God’ (the night of sense)²⁴ and, on a deeper level, of utter vulnerability to Mystery and the experience of abandonment which ironically leaves the person ‘faint with love’ (the night of spirit). The primary affect in both nights is encapsulated in the words *I am wounded* for, having tasted the divine presence and savoured the divine touches of love, the beloved is left wounded by the ‘absence’ of the divine lover. The pain of absence is at the same time a mysterious presence (or deep hiddenness) for the wound of unknowing engenders a dark knowing; the reason is that ‘the night’ is a night of deepening faith and ‘the wound’ is a wound of deepening love. Here *contentos* no longer satisfy; instead, *nada* (nothing) becomes the essential ingredient for transformation.

Since the *via negativa* involves purgation, trials and mortification, the cojourner would need to discern if this is a ‘kairotic’ moment for a positive disintegration through the night of faith or if it is a psychological depression which requires psychotherapeutic facilitation.²⁵ Particularly at mid-life and beyond, or Fowler’s ‘conjunctive faith’ stage,²⁶ the *via negativa* is a season for a descent into the abyss of faith; or, as Welch explicates, the first phase of life is ‘the outer journey to adapt to the collective’ while the second phase is ‘the inner journey which carries one into the personal and collective layers of the unconscious’, the transformative purpose being a ‘return to conscious living with more of one’s self expressed in the conscious personality’ (1982:96). The divine initiative at this stage is thus an invitation to *individuation* which Jung states ‘is a process of *differentiation* having for its goal

²² Perrin (2007:112-113) lists several writers from the apophatic tradition, beginning with John Chrysostom (347-407), Dionysius in the sixth century, the anonymous English fourteenth century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and John of the Cross on *nada* whom Johnston notes has been referred to as ‘the doctor of nothing – *doctor de la nada*’ (2000:68)

²³ See Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 of this dissertation for John of the Cross’ reference to ‘the night of sense’ and ‘night of the spirit’.

²⁴ Rolheiser writes on the purification of awareness which is based on John of the Cross’ paradigm (1994:65-88).

²⁵ In May’s chapter on ‘Encounter: Human Responses to Deeper Spiritual Challenges’ ([1982]/1992:83-112) he notes six helpful distinctions between the dark night and depression; the chapter on ‘Disorder: Psychiatric Syndromes’ ([1982]/1992:149-178) offers supplementary reading for spiritual direction.

²⁶ Tam discusses Fowler’s seven stages of Faith Development Theory in a chapter on ‘Synergy in Human and Spiritual Development’ (2007:91-122), from a spiritual direction perspective.

the development of the individual personality' (1982:96). In order to know how to journey with the seeker, it is important that the cojourner explore the seeker's personal narrative and be acquainted with the background to the seeker's psychic wound. Since personal narrative forms the mosaic for an authentic spiritual journey, *mythos* is explored because the seeker's history with God and collective myths constitute the individual's worldview. The *mythos* of the vineyard, as explored through the lens of Isaiah's two songs of the vineyard (in Chapter 4 of this dissertation), is an example of a collective, cultural and historical experience of God. With the predicament of the YHWH-Israel relation as an analogy, spiritual direction attends to the seeker's negative feelings toward God which arise from perplexing life experiences.

Mythos is concerned with 'the narrative unity of a life' because, as Ricoeur observes, 'we are always in the process of revising the text and constructing several narratives about ourselves, told from several points of view' (1995:308-309). Since life is 'open-ended' or 'open at both ends' (1995:309), the Song of Songs is an exemplary text because it is open at both ends, in search of a 'unifying Big Story' within human, historical contexts. With respect to the affect of *I am wounded*, Isaiah's songs of the vineyard demonstrate that *mythos* is often characterised by punitive images of God, experiences of wasteland, wilderness, and exile. Seekers at mid-life might be weighed down by questions of what?, why? and what more could I have done? The *mythos* of the personal wasteland, the journey in the wilderness, or the suffering of exile unpack the psychic wound and uncover deep-seated causes for inhibitions and resistances to God's new initiatives. The process of differentiation from the collective might be painful; however, through attention to the psychic wound, the divine lover calls forth the individual to a shared vineyard and to the experience of otherness from which new images of God are formed. The drawing of the individual to a more conscious and intentional way of being in the world takes place in secret and unfamiliar ways, which accounts for the descent into the unconscious. The cojourner would discern God's 'subversive' ways along the *via negativa* and point to the imperceptible presence of the Other in the midst of suffering and in spite of evil.²⁷ Isaiah's New Song of the Vineyard addresses the 'wasted' and wounded vineyard by affirming the vineyard as the beloved of God and its potential for fruitfulness. It also assures God's restoration of a once fecund choice vineyard.

The *apophatic* way incites the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, a way of praying that differs from the exuberance and celebration of the *kataphatic* way. One of the

²⁷ Fitzgerald's chapter on 'Impasse of the Dark Night' ([1986]/1996) and May's work entitled *The Dark Night of the Soul* (2004) are helpful contemporary resources.

challenges for contemporary spiritual direction is to help seekers ‘live the question’ and ‘love their questions’ by developing a ‘living prayer’ along the *via negativa*. The prayer of examination (or Ignatius’ *examen* of conscience) is a means of discerning patterns of relating to God by observing inner movements of *consolation* (feelings of joy and peace which lead one toward God) and movements of *desolation* (feelings of sadness and anxiety which inhibit trust in God and often lead one away from God). Barry describes the movements of consolation as being ‘in tune with’ and desolation as being ‘out of tune with’ God’s intention (2001:115-136). Ignatius’ daily examen²⁸ helps one to pay attention to one’s interior movements, discern the operations of grace, identify the enemy within, and gently confront one’s inhibitions and resistances to the divine invitation. Praying ‘the Jesus prayer’, repeating a short mantra, or singing Taize prayers are also recommended as these require less mental effort and induce a staying power and sustainable development in the dark night of the soul. Most importantly, asking for the grace of *otherness* is crucial if one is to attune to the mystery that underlies all things, say *no* to negative voices and patterns, and give a full *yes* to the divine initiative.

In exploring the affect *I am wounded*, the key component that arises from a prayerful remaining in the dark is that of *seeking*. As exemplified by the archetypal seeker’s intense search ‘all night long’ for the ‘one her soul loves’, her yearning for love becomes intentional and it is the wound or void that propels her to rise from her bed. What accounts for the mythos of the archetypal search? Davis states that it is rooted in the Old Testament command to love Lord God with all one’s heart, soul and strength (Deut 6:5). The impetus for the *search* then is the dialectic of self and other, or a self in search of the other, with the vineyard serving as locus of ‘divine browsing’. As the mythological approach elucidated, the mythos of the vineyard is rooted in divine *eros*; it traces the collective image of a choice vineyard, via the wasteland, to an eschatological hope of a fruitful vineyard. However, in the Song of Songs, the archetypal search hinges on lover/loved. Ricoeur therefore emphasises the ‘nuptial metaphor’ (1998), LaCocque states that the seminal and controlling symbol of the Song is the erotic mutual quest of ‘he’ and ‘she’ (1998a:30), and Fisch explicates the dynamic intensification of the ‘metaphor of *search*’ ([1988]/1990:85). How is *seeking* to be facilitated in the practice of spiritual direction?

²⁸ The Daily Examen, as a time of heightened awareness and an examination of self in the infinite love of God, is elucidated in two chapters in *The Christian Ministry of Spiritual Direction* (Fleming 1988:312-315).

First, bearing in mind that the *via negativa* is a calling forth of the undiscovered self and the unlived life through differentiation from the collective, the cojourner would explore the search for God as an integral search for self which is necessary for emotional maturity. Ricoeur refers to ‘a kind of otherness that is constitutive of selfhood’ and suggests that ‘the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other’ (1992:3). In the spiritual dimension of the Song of Songs, the other refers to the divine lover and, on the grounds that ‘an antecedent meaning has always preceded me’, the spiritual search ‘excludes founding oneself’ (1995:224). The prayer of examination therefore asks for the grace of otherness and is underscored by the beloved’s search in the first night which culminates in her ‘being found’ (Sg 3:3-4). Finding her original belonging in the Other evokes the desire to return to her ‘mother’s house’, which infers a redress of earthy ‘rootedness and belonging-to’ (1995:222). *Mythos* therefore includes a revisit to the seeker’s family-of-origin in order that the negative impact of the ‘angry brothers’ (patriarchy) be addressed and the role of ‘mother’ (the feminine) assessed. As explicated by Tam’s use of Satir’s Model of Family Therapy in spiritual direction (2007), family-of-origin issues mould a person’s God-image and influence patterns of relating. The intense *seeking* of the second night is a stripping of well-worn presuppositions and false images of God for the purpose of freedom from an unhealthy attachment to the dominant collective.

Second, the cojourner would need to be cognisant of socio-cultural-religious influences as collaborators of ‘a lesser god’ and ‘a lesser self’ for, as Welch states, ‘We cannot grow past our god; a lesser god means a lesser self’ (1996:45). Seekers often admit to having lost their sense of self in socially conditioned I-It relationships and having neglected their soul in the activism of work and ministry. The consequence is a repression of heart longings and soul needs within a religiously-constrained intellectualization. May observes that *intellectualization* ‘often takes the form of talking about spirituality as a way of avoiding spiritual experience’, while *rationalization* ‘uses well thought-out justifications for devaluing or misinterpreting threatening insights or experiences ([1982]/1992:87). Having identified the seeker’s inhibitions and resistances, the cojourner would counteract modes of intellectualization and rationalization with the fresh signs of ‘spring’, namely, the new initiatives by the Other who comes ‘bouncing and leaping like a gazelle over the mountains’ and primitive images which emerge from the unconscious. Through active imagination and dream work, which are required to engage imaginative visions and the descent into the unconscious (Sg 2:8-3:11; 5:2-8), the ‘inferior’ or ‘fourth function’ which represents our unlived life would be released for, according to Jung, this function is ‘always one’s God

connection' (Johnson 1987:53-60; 1986:8). Here the intimate degree of otherness calls forth the seeker to a deeper and fuller engagement with God and life, which implies that the cojourner would be sensitive in discerning when the seeker is ready to 'come out of hiding', rise from his/her bed, and search intensely for the Other – only to first 'be found'.

Third, the intentional search releases the 'destructive little foxes' that cause havoc in the seeker's vineyard.²⁹ Through an exploration of painful experiences of love³⁰ and the 'shadows of the heart', the cojourner invites the seeker to befriend negative emotions and move toward God in faith, hope and love (consolation) rather than turn away in despair (desolation). Through a 'Spirituality of the Painful Emotions', the seeker finds courage to voice his/her pain, suffering and injustice, and is given freedom to express fear, anger, shame, guilt, grief and depression (Whitehead 1994). Dismantling 'the objects of our manipulation that dissimulate the world of our originary rootedness' (Ricoeur 1995:223) includes the deconstruction of harmful socio-religious-cultural constructions.³¹ Though painful and purifying, the purpose of the radical confrontation with loss and the destruction of false images is that the budding vineyard becomes a fecund space for the reconstitution of selfhood, the re-remembering of an original belonging, and the discovery of a life-project wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities (1995:223).

Fourth, in the intense search for God, the cojourner would need to attune to the seeker's capacity for intimacy because 'love is soul-work of the most demanding kind and calls forth sustained effort from the core of our being' (Davis 2000:259).³² *Apophasis* purifies and deepens *kataphasis* by reducing or withdrawing the craving for the temporal and increasing the appetite for the spiritual and substantial. For example, the archetypal seeker 'looked for him but did not find him; she called him but he did not answer' (Sg 3:1-2) which underscores the notion that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'. Absence or withdrawal engenders an insatiable longing for union and communion with God, which is satisfied by nourishment (meditation) and inebriation (contemplation). On the verse: 'Eat, O friends, and

²⁹ A chapter on 'Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy and God Image' (Hoffman 2007:105-137) offers examples of how therapy uncovers the darker side of reality and discerns the controlling forces and constraints that inhibit growth through the creative utilisation of tensions, anxieties, and paradox.

³⁰ Note the illuminating case studies in *Image of God Handbook* (2007) which deal with the need for people to consolidate images of themselves as lovable and/or of God as loving (Noffke & Hall 2007:68).

³¹ *Footbinding* presents a psycho-spiritual perspective of Chinese cultural conditioning (Ma 2010). Ruffing elaborates gender differences in intimacy with God. She suggests that men be aware of their social power and need to relinquish the idolatry culturally constructed for him (2000:130), while most women do not need metaphors of self-emptying and abasement, but rather images that strengthen their sense of self and agency (2000:132). *Transforming Fire* suggests ways in which women can use anger creatively (Fischer 1999).

³² Guenther elaborates in 'Midwife to the Soul' (1992:82-108) particular ways of attending to the new life in the seeker and of developing awareness of the transition periods of birth giving.

drink; drink your fill, O lovers' (Sg 5:1), the French mystic Francis de Sales (1567-1622) suggests that *meditation* is like *eating* which requires effort and chewing on the Word; while *contemplation* is effortless as well as pleasurable and is likened to *drinking* (Davis 2000:275). The intense search for divine love is therefore oriented toward the feast and inebriation of contemplation; however, the operations of grace in the Song of Songs are paradoxical. The yin-yang symbol is therefore appropriate as the core rhythm of the Song of Songs and the heart of daily reality. A similar principle applies in the growth of psychic integration where the embrace of paradox is essential for inner unity.³³ Intimacy and vulnerability, finding and losing, joy and sorrow, ebb and flow are alternations to be honoured because God is the giver of Godself – 'appearing' and 'browsing' as a 'felt presence' among the lilies (*kataphasis*) and disappearing into 'hidden silence' and 'dark unfamiliarity' (*apophasis*) – the divine lover is to be received as sheer gift.³⁴ The night of spirit invites the seeker to a transforming intimacy through radical vulnerability, as follows: 'Open to me, my sister, my darling' (Sg 5:2). It is radical because, as Rolheiser notes, the dark night of spirit is a purification of the faculties of intellect, will, and personality/ego for the purpose of a new way of living by faith, hope and love, that is, beyond the natural movements and instincts of our heads, hearts, and egos (1994:77-81). The new way of living involves learning to let go, an essential ingredient for an innermost capacity to love. Spiritual direction would therefore facilitate ways of listening for the One who is hidden in the dark, lurking in the shadows, and wooing the beloved.

Fifth, within the I-Thou-You triadic relationship of spiritual direction, the *via negativa* incites an insatiable longing God, which is to be handled with acute sensitivity and the utmost propriety because the I-You encounter between cojourner and seeker intensifies the search for 'the one my *nephesh* loves'. While the Thou, or the present wholly Other, is the crux of spiritual direction, grace works in harmony with human presence. An affective and effective I-You encounter is a shared experience of divine love which means that the cojourner's presence and embodiment influences the quality of spiritual direction. Young-Eisendrach asserts: 'There is nothing that comes to us without our involvement in it; that is the kind of beings we are' (1997:17), which suggests that the cojourner, as a sacramental presence, is conscious of his/her use of language, images, body, and ambience, points the seeker

³³ On the art of embracing reality, Johnson & Ruhl comment as follows: 'It is our inability to see a hidden unity that is problematic. To accept paradox is to earn the right to unity' (1999:75).

³⁴ God wants to give us all of Godself, but God cannot, both because we are not God and because we resist the gift (Barry 2001:185).

continually to God the principal agent, and ensures that inappropriate behavior and undue transference on the part of both cojourner and seeker be avoided as far as possible.³⁵

Sixth, the gift of the *via negativa* is a solidarity with the whole creation through the groaning of suffering; it is an intimate experience of God, particularly the God who suffers with us, who is present in human suffering, and wounded in love. Through real experiences of suffering³⁶ and of living the Paschal Mystery, the cojourner identifies with the ‘wound of love’, is tutored in the paradoxes of life, and develops the qualities of ‘knowledge, discretion and experience’ which John of the Cross recommends (elucidated in Chapter 5). The focus of Mystery must be maintained in the *via negativa* in order to ensure that the seeker’s ‘budding vines’ are not prematurely pruned or intentionally cut off through fear of the numinous.³⁷ The season of negation calls for quiet, silent, and loving attention toward God, a kinship with Jn 15:1-17’s contemplative principle of ‘abiding in’ or ‘remaining in’ the mystery of the incomprehensible God (*apophasis*). Isaiah’s songs of the vineyard reverberate with the assurance that transformation takes place imperceptibly in the silence of undergrowth and, like John of the Cross, the cojourner affirms that God is the director of the soul and principal agent in transformation, performing the sublime and transformative work through the purgative aspects of hiddenness, nothingness, and woundedness. The seeker, now strengthened in a purified faith, hope and love, is left ‘faint and wounded with love’ until ‘the question’ emerges of how divine love surpasses other loves (Sg 5:9-6:3).

6.4.3 *Via unitiva* (Sg 5:9-8:4)

Yearning and seeking form the springboard for the *via unitiva* for here the blossoming vineyard is pregnant with longing and ready for reciprocal loving. The third season is a time of *finding* experiential answers to love’s questions within one’s own vineyard, namely, the unfolding of one’s true image as the beloved of God through the recognition that *I am desired*. The unitive season is expressed in mystico-erotic terms, and is characterised by the word *ekstasis* because the gift of the *via unitiva* is a recovery of archetypal or Dionysian joy

³⁵ The dangers and risks, cautions and boundaries, implications of transference and counter-transference are explicated by May ([1982]/1992:125-148), Ruffing (2000:155-180), Young-Eisendrath (2000:133-144), and Wehr (2000:47-61).

³⁶ Several chapters in *Carmel and Contemplation* (Culligan & Jordan 2000:137-380) help understand the transformative purpose of suffering from John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila’s experiences.

³⁷ Not only seekers, but cojourners might be ambivalent toward supernatural or mystical experiences. Ruffing’s chapter on ‘Searching for the Beloved: Love Mysticism in Spiritual Direction’ (2000:95-123) delineates several challenges and helpful suggestions in dealing with the numinous.

(Johnson 1987:58).³⁸ Derived from the root *ex stasis*, ecstasy is a Dionysian quality and refers to ‘an emotion too powerful for the body to contain or the rational mind to understand, a moment of stepping outside daily life and experiencing spiritual ecstasy’ (1987:13). The operative grace is *oneness* – a mystical union and psychological *wholeness* which is effected through the loving inflow of God (the sanjuanist view of contemplation). Oneness and ‘poetic intercourse’ share a kinship; in the context of the ‘non-religious’ Song, ‘poetic intercourse’ is an apt alternative term to contemplation because the mystico-erotic (*mustikos*) is veiled in symbols and similitudes (as John 15’s symbol of the Vine demonstrates).

What is the significance of ‘poetic intercourse’ at the unitive stage of the journey and what is its relevance for spiritual direction? Poetic intercourse accounts for ‘reading *off*’ the mystical aesthetic dimension from a lateral or surface reading of the Song because ‘intercourse’, in its connotative sense, entails several aspects; namely the intimate knowledge of something which involves your whole being; an experiential knowledge and a certain intimacy which is likened to sexual intercourse; a radical face-to-face presence of one thing to another; the temple, worship, and acts of harmonising the forces of heaven and earth; and a knowledge of God that is impregnated with love (Rolheiser 1994:60).³⁹ Following the sense of loss and abandonment in the dark night of spirit, the divine impregnation of love is felt to the core of one’s being; it ignites body and soul, effects a radical face-to-face recognition of both lover and beloved, harmonises the inner forces of heaven and earth through an embrace of paradox, and results in deep awe and humility. Intercourse also infers Eckhart’s notion of ‘God being birthed in the soul’, that is, the presence of Christ as a loving force within us, and of knowing and experiencing the reality of God within (Smith 1987:6). Poetic intercourse is thus the contemplation of the Image of the divine lover within (Sg 5:10-6:3) and the harmonising of body and soul in an exclusive vineyard of delicacy and delight (Sg 6:4-8:4).

Divine-human intercourse is best facilitated by the use of poetic language and, following Ricoeur, is recommended for several reasons: it breaks with everyday language, opens up a new world, invites the seeker to understand himself or herself within a creative space, and develops a self capable of inhabiting this world by deploying one’s ownmost possibilities there (1995:232). Poetic language not only breaks with regular conversation,

³⁸ Johnson states the following: ‘Because we have so effectively removed the Dionysian experience from our world, we can no longer look for it outside ourselves. Instead we must turn inward to find the archetype of ecstasy’ (1987:63). He elaborates three psychological disciplines for getting in touch with Dionysian joy: active imagination, dreamwork, and ritual (1987:63-95).

³⁹ See Rolheiser for a brief history of the word ‘contemplation’ in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and the Western mystical tradition (1994:60).

discursive thinking, and common religious terminology, but it provides a fresh way of speaking and relating, of evoking a poetic enclave of intimacy and ecstasy, and mystically-erotically connecting body and soul. Poetic intercourse releases a new kind of freeplay, a *second-naivete* or post-criticalness (Rolheiser 1994:57)⁴⁰ following the collapse of worn-out presuppositions in the *via negativa*. The unitive stage creates a fresh space for ‘naming God’ because ‘poetry is a suspension of the descriptive function’ (Ricoeur 1995:122), the suspension being ‘the wholly negative condition for the liberation of a more originary referential function’ (1995:222). The suspension opens the field of a non-descriptive reference to terms such as ‘lover without a name’,⁴¹ *I AM*, ‘Presence’, ‘Mystery’, or simply ‘Silence’ for its effects, in Nietzsche’s terms, ‘an immaculate perception’ (Burrows 2005a:25). Contemplation then is not a vacuous gaze, but ‘a direct, open-eyed presence free from thought projections – a clear perception of things-as-they-truly-are’⁴² – and with a ‘specific intent towards God’ (May [1982]/1992:11-12).⁴³

The spiritual direction conversation invites poetic intercourse or *second-naivete* discourse given that the occupation of the shepherd is also ‘the play of intercourse’ (Tribble 1978:157). The shepherd-lover offers shade and replenishment in the *via positiva*; however, progressively the humble image of ‘shepherd-lover’ (affection) as well as the regal stature of ‘kingly lover’ (admiration) transform to intimate images of lover, friend, and bridegroom (jubilation). The mature stage of the journey is characterised by mutuality and friendship with God (Barry 2001:182-185),⁴⁴ as well as increased participation in God’s concerns (a union of wills). In the Song, the unitive stage depicts the tenderness of the divine lover’s ‘stolen heart’ as well as the radical invitation to the ‘bride’ (Sg 4:8-9). The ‘dialectics of divine *eros*’, which Turner suggests is essentially Dionysian (1995a:62), is the *raison-d’être* that *I am desired*, beloved of God, and created for loving union and life-giving communion. The metaphorical, mythological and mystical approaches to the vineyard therefore posit divine *Eros* and the divine imagination as the Source of the choice vineyard. In the *via unitiva*, the

⁴⁰ In his discussion on contemplation, Rolheiser adapts Ricoeur’s use of the term *second-naivete* to mean a *post-criticalness* (1994:57).

⁴¹ McIntosh’s chapter on ‘Lover Without a Name’ (2005: 215-223), as well as Burrows’ ‘Words that Reach Into the Silence’ (2005) and ‘Raiding the Inarticulate’ (2005a), elucidate the relationship between mystical ‘unsaying’ and language.

⁴² May equates contemplation with *intuition* in the classic sense and distinguishes intuition from its common usage of ‘sixth sense’ or a ‘hunch’ ([1982]/1992:12).

⁴³ In distinguishing between the ‘classic terminology’ of prayer and ‘meditational techniques’, May asserts that ‘prayer always needs to have some specific intent towards God’ ([1982]/1992:11).

⁴⁴ Ruffing devotes a whole chapter to ‘Mutuality with God’ (2000:125-154), citing several examples from the mystics such as Hadewijch, Mechthild, Teresa of Avila, and Ignatius.

seeker realises that he/she is the one being sought by a loving God, and therefore echoes the archetypal seeker's experience as follows: 'His desire is for me' (Sg 7:10). Ruffing notes that God's yearning for us precedes our yearning for God and our desiring originates in God's desiring us; thus, all that we do in spiritual practice leads to the experience of God's desiring us because desire, when uncovered, expressed, and recognized, 'all lead to the Divine Beloved at the core' (2000:11, 111). Foregrounded as human *eros* in the Song, it is the hiddenness of divine *Eros* which is the operative grace in the transformative process of yearning, seeking, finding and birthing.

The aspect of *finding* is based on the discovery of my true identity in divine love, my uniqueness and name, my original rootedness in divine desire, and the freedom to relate to God in the fullness of adulthood (Sg 6:3-13; 7:10-13). The *eros* of human yearning finds ultimate epiphany in *mustikos*, that is, in Christ, the unitive-contemplative culmination of the Song of Songs. In the mature stage, Jesus is experienced as the Beloved or the Bridegroom, hence the elucidation of John 15:1-17 (the mystical symbolism of the vine) as the New Testament text for Christian mysticism. In Christ, it becomes apparent that the self-transcending love of the Song is a union between 'heaven and earth' (Sg 6:10); and that the language of *eros* is a language of polarities, a language in which the transcendence of dichotomies is achieved (Turner 1995a:58-59). This transcendence is captured in the unitive stage as 'I am my lover's and my lover is mine' (Sg 6:3) and 'I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me' (Sg 7:10). According to Welch, spiritual marriage is 'an archetypal image symbolizing the goal of our human longing for union with the 'other' (1982:188). Spiritual marriage or divine-human union, the psychic marriage of the masculine and feminine, as well as Jung's union of the conscious and unconscious poles of personality are therefore located at the *via unitiva* for these are archetypal expressions of wholeness (1982:165).⁴⁵

In the Song's erotic model of the love of God, *eros* finds its fulfillment experientially in the mystico-erotic. Turner illustrates this point by citing the monks, that it was *because of* not *in spite of* the Song's eroticism that the monastics' interest in the Song was aroused (1995a:19). They found a mode of expression for their spiritual aspirations in the erotic poetry of the Song because the concept of love as a yearning or longing – as an *amor-desiderium*, or, in Greek, *eros* – exactly expressed what they wanted by way of a language of

⁴⁵ Welch explicates psycho-spiritual wholeness in his chapter on 'The Marriage of Masculine and Feminine' (1982:165-190).

love (1995a:20).⁴⁶ Scheper posits that the mystics become ‘our most reliable phenomenologists of the world of the poem’ because they were able to ‘give themselves up to the erotic poetics of the Song as neither the traditional moralizers nor the modern humanist critics have been able to do’ (1992:328). He cites John of the Cross, particularly the *Dark Night of the Soul*, as offering ‘the most fully elaborated evocation of the experience of the love of God in terms of the erotic love lyrics of the Song of Songs, infused with images of the living flame of love’ (1992:331). John’s mystical and psychological insights are unrivalled in many respects as they are based on his felt experience, and therefore translate into psychologistic readings (Turner 1995:176-178). Since the mystics are the most reliable phenomenologists of the Canticle’s mystic-erotic symbols, it is to their writings that a mystical reading turns for an experiential exegesis of the Song. For example, in Kearney’s overview on the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila in relation to the Song of Songs, he interprets Teresa’s as the most incarnational, as follows:

In this, she might be said to be most faithful not only to Christ’s own message of ‘enfleshment’ (ensarkosis) but equally to the message of the Shulammite’s song, as voiced by Jewish as well as Christian interpreters. For Christ and the Shulammite sing from the same theoretic sheet. The divine cries out to be made flesh in both the testimony of the Shulammite bride and of the incarnate Nazarene. Teresa by doing justice to both, restores the hyphen between Judeo and Christian, where it belongs. Divine desire is, she shows us, but another name for this hyphen (2006:332-333).⁴⁷

In the Song of Songs, *mustikos* is overtly erotic and ecstatic; in short, it is Dionysian. Teresa refers to the experience as *gustos* – spiritual delight which far surpasses *contentos* – for it originates in God and overflows to human nature (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:272). The beloved in the Song of Songs exclaims *gustos* in her description of the lover: ‘his mouth is sweetness itself’ (Sg 5:16); the reason it is sheer delight is that the altogether lovely and wholly desirable One drinks deeply from the wine of her love (Sg 7:8-9). Spiritual delight is the sheer gift which comes through contemplation, or poetic intercourse. At the unitive stage then, the seeker tastes the wonder of *I am desired* by God and delights in the grace of mutuality with God. In exploring radical desire, the mystico-erotic facilitates an experiential *finding* – that we are beloved of God and maturing as a friend and spouse of God. Through

⁴⁶ Turner suggests that the monks’ eschatology was rooted in their sense that their life of partial withdrawal from the world situated them at a point of intersection between this world and the next, between time and eternity, between light and dark, between anticipation and fulfillment (1995a:20).

⁴⁷ Welch’s *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* (1982) does justice to Teresa’s exceptional contribution to mysticism and spiritual direction.

respectful attention to sexuality, we allow God to love us fully in our humanity and, in embracing and honouring who we are in God, we reciprocate by loving God with all our being. Leech writes that union with God is a process that demands a profound degree of self-knowledge and maturity and involves the integration of sexuality with the rest of life; therefore ‘true religion requires the maturing of the instincts and the emotions’ (1980:113).⁴⁸ The spiritual director/cojourner must face his/her own sexuality and sexual needs, and be a person who is on the way towards sexual integrity and wholeness; that is, one who is experienced in the passions and has integrated into his whole personality the need for physical contact (1980:113-114). Rolheiser associates sexuality with divine fire and suggests that spirituality is ‘ultimately, about what we do with that desire’ (1998:4) because spirituality helps us to channel our sexuality correctly (1998:182).⁴⁹ Johnston asserts, with reference to John of the Cross, that one enters into spiritual marriage with the all-holy God only through the purifying terrors of the dark night in which sexuality is annihilated and reborn (1995:230). Through transformation, true eros-love becomes a unitive power which brings together elements that really belong to each other, which infers that the human body is the sacrament of a person, a sacrament which points beyond itself to a profound unity between persons (Sheldrake 2001:84).⁵⁰ In both spiritual marriage and psychic marriage, the unitive principle is *mustikos* because the dynamics of human-divine intimacy take place on various levels of the existential self, gradually bringing all levels of the self into harmony (Ruffing 2000:97). Spiritual direction therefore involves a multiplex of listening skills which attend to sexuality and spirituality in order that we recover our choice vineyard and unique *imago dei* (Sg 6:8-9), a spiritual union and psychological wholeness of being fully human, fully loved, and fully alive in God. Thus, in the emphasis on the true self in spiritual direction, body and soul, psyche and spirit must be held together because the aim of spiritual direction, according to Leech, is ‘the achievement of wholeness of life, an integrated personality, in which the inner and outer [person] are united’ (1980:108-109).

In attending to the numinosity and ecstasy of the mystico-erotic, two aspects are crucial: first, *human transformation* because authentic religious experiences are graced

⁴⁸ Leech posits the area of sexuality as crucial to the entire discussion on true religion (1980:113-116). On a different note, Fischer suggests drawing a sexual lifeline, a reflection on events which contribute to a person’s sexual identity (1988:25). Young-Eisendrath’s *Gender and Desire* (1997) offers important insights for men and women regarding the myth of Pandora, or the problematic of women as the object of desire.

⁴⁹ Liu discusses the production, retention, transformation, and circulation of sexual energy in relation to the complementary practices of meditation and *tai chi* (1986:132-145).

⁵⁰ Also see Whitehead (2009) for an understanding of *eros* as pathways to God.

encounters which effect transformation within and beyond the seeker's sphere of influence;⁵¹ and second, *spiritual maturation*, that is, ways in which God is drawing the seeker into deepening union and communion within the concrete situations of life. It is in the daily living of the Paschal Mystery that paradox is embraced and dichotomies transcended. Or, as Leech asserts: 'It is in the integration of the inner and outer worlds that true spirituality is clearly distinguished from the false' and this integration is also the 'real distinction between mysticism and psychosis' (1980:108).⁵² The efficacy of the mystico-erotic along the *via unitiva* is manifested in tangible ways in the *via creativa*, where the vineyard is 'relocated' as a real project within the web of human relationships and the wider sphere of creation.

6.4.4 *Via creativa* (Sg 8:5-14)

Fox describes *the via creativa* (Path Three) as follows: 'In our generativity we co-create with God; in our imaginative output, we trust our images enough to birth them and ride them into existence' (1991:18). In the framework of the Song of Songs, the *via creativa* is located at the fourth season for here the beloved returns from the wilderness burning with a love that is stronger than death (Sg 8:5-6), and singing of strength, peace, contentment, maturity, integrity, and generosity (Sg 8:10-12). These characteristics of psychic wholeness form the basis for her engagement with *kosmos*;⁵³ they also allude to a stage of living creatively and generatively in the world and in anticipation of epiphany. With the transformation of the metaphorical vineyard into a 'real' vineyard, the suggested art form at the *via creativa* is the body. Here, the spiritual component of *birthing* is indicated in the words 'I have become in his eyes' (Sg 8:10), from which the profound sense of '*I am*' is derived. The real vineyard therefore represents a unique life that is differentiated from the collective, a beloved who returns to the community with a transformed consciousness, a profound sense of gratitude, and an irrevocable responsibility for her 'own vineyard'. How does the *via creativa* inform the existential project and in what ways would it be facilitated in spiritual direction?

⁵¹ Biblical examples include Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Jesus' disciples, and the apostle Paul, to name a few; they illustrate the transforming effects of a radical 'intercourse' with God who is known in Love (John 1; 1 John 1), yet revered as Mystery (2 Cor. 3-4; Col. 1-2). Mystics such as Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross have had a marked influence on spiritual direction through the ages and across religious traditions.

⁵² James' laborious task in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1961) is to obtain an understanding of these two phenomena, from an empirical perspective, and is a classic text. Taylor (2002) critiques several of James' presuppositions from a contemporary perspective particularly the overemphasis of personal experience to the neglect of the communal aspect of religion.

⁵³ *Kosmos* refers to the whole creation and is borrowed from Koester's work on symbolism in the Fourth Gospel (1995:249). In relation to transformation, it also refers to personality integration and psychic wholeness.

Spiritual direction based on the Song of Songs paradigm is first and foremost *a poetic science*⁵⁴ which integrates art and science, spirituality and the humanities, contemplation and incarnation. In relation to *tecknē*, poetic science is not a technique or a ‘means-end model’; rather, it has an end beyond itself which, in the context of the Song of Songs, is a continuum of epiphany. Since ‘poetry invites, but does not compel, insight’ (Trible 1978:16),⁵⁵ poetic licence is required to make the transfer from poetry to life. *Poiesis* is therefore an apt term for the authentic transfer of the metaphorical vineyard to a real vineyard for it refers to ‘a *making*, a fashioning’ (Ward 2003:60). In transposing the Song of Songs as a ‘Canticle of Spiritual Direction’, *poiesis* (as well as the poetic science corresponding to it) may be likened to a musical score that requires execution (Ricoeur 2005:219).⁵⁶

Following the *via unitiva*’s ‘immaculate perception’, *poiesis* is based not on ordinary vision but on the contemplation of divine love. This vision does not obscure or repress the divine invitation to ‘Love me!’⁵⁷ On the contrary, one’s own vineyard is fashioned as a life project of loving God and a life-giving project for all creation. Since ‘God’s making is an extension, or procession, of God’s self’, the creative expression of one’s own vineyard is imbued with ‘a theological aesthetics centred upon the incarnation of Christ’ (Ward 2003:41-43). With Christ as the Image of God, *poiesis* is an ongoing transforming activity that images divine beauty. Ward elaborates ‘an aesthetics of living in which to apprehend the beautiful is to become beautiful’; he regards beauty as ‘an operation, a co-operation’ (2003:38) – a ‘co-operative operation (a *synergia*) rather than a property’ – and adds that ‘there is nothing that cannot be made to tender its beauty as the beauty of God’ (2003:60-62). By implication, each individual life has the capacity to render divine beauty present by cooperating with grace and by appropriating the gifts which God gives to each person for the journey. Where divine love is enfleshed in ‘a particular, historical person who has been graced by the transcendent’, the transformed vineyard is a living testament to a transformation that ‘delights and divinizes’ while continuing to ‘live fully this human, historical life’ (Hardy 1992:143-146). At the *via*

⁵⁴ Ricoeur distinguishes between *tecknē* as a ‘means-end model’ and *poiēsis* (poetic science), *praxis* (practical science), and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) (1992:173-174). The context of his discussion is an admission of polysemy or a kind of plurality in Aristotle’s use of *theōria*, *praxis*, and *poiēsis* which suggests an ‘analogical unity of action’. Ricoeur attempts to give to Aristotelian *praxis* and to his own concept of ‘power-to-act’ a unitary function for the entire field of human experience’, as opposed to a philosophy which is quick to ‘unify the field of human experience from on high’ (1992:312-313).

⁵⁵ Rather than limiting a subject, poetic language seeks fullness with a connotative, not a denotative, emphasis (Trible 1978:15-16).

⁵⁶ Ricoeur states that a poem is like ‘a work of music in that its mood is exactly coextensive with the internal order of symbols articulated by its language’ (1976:69).

⁵⁷ For a further discussion on this ‘commandment’ or ‘plea of the beloved’ in relation to conscience and conviction and in living well *with and for others*, see Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* (1992:350-355).

creativa one's unique story is beautified; or, as Fox suggests, creation spirituality 'elicits the artist from every person' because the basic spiritual discipline in the creation tradition is 'decidedly not ascetism but the development of the aesthetic' (1991:34, 21). In fact, if 'the true artistic operation that issues from a proximity to Christ requires a certain surrender and re-cognition' (Ward 2003:46), then aesthetics is not only an offshoot of *ascesis* but it inspires the practice of detachment. The radiance of Christ's glory – or an immaculate perception – means that 'all things are present in Him and are not seized upon by artistic reproduction, but only received as gifts' (2003:47). Within this economy of divine grace and human co-operation, Ward asserts that 'The artist is not the Romantic genius – the artist/priest is every person'; moreover, the artist is 'a portrayer of living forms' and is required to make 'a portrait', not 'a copy' (2003:45). According to Fox, aesthetic development invariably involves 'a return to our origins' and 'constitutes a rebirth of the self' which suggests that the transformative purpose of the 'new creation' is to *know who we are* and to *live who we are* (1991:34, 25). As the archetypal seeker exemplifies, the birthing of the *I am* is the work of divine transformation; thus, in loving union with the divine *I AM*, being who I am in God is beautiful. The recognition of one's own beauty is directly related to 'the paradisaical – creation is re-cognized in terms of its Christic orientation and perfection' (Ward 2003:43). In Christ, transformation in love is a re-cognition of who I am and thus a discovery of 'my canticle', or 'my' Song of Songs. Divine beauty therefore 'makes manifest giftedness and a participation in an eternal mystery, and it is the function of human beings in their own making to articulate that praise within creation' (2003:44).

Where are the aesthetic resources of *poiesis* to be found in 'putting artistic work at the service of reality' and 'in adoration of God' (2003:63, 46)? According to Hardy, God is the source of love who gives all the qualities and gifts necessary to effect a life of divine-human union within each person's unique life story; however, we too must love God in return for it is the human person's love for God that enables one to receive and keep these gifts in all their harmony and beauty (1992:145).⁵⁸ Every individual life is gifted and graced with varying degrees of *eros* (semiotics/imaginary), *mythos* (semantics/story), *mustikos* (romantics/poetry), and *kosmos* (aesthetics/body); these givens converge in 'my own vineyard' for the purpose of loving God fully in the here-and-now. At the *via creativa*, the transformative journey is viewed as a psychic movement toward wholeness, harmony, and clarity, the three characteristics of beauty articulated by Thomas Aquinas (Egan 2000:245). In retrospect, the

⁵⁸ Hardy refers to John of the Cross' *Spiritual Canticle*, 30:9 (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:594).

dark night is an education for beauty and an affirmation of the goodness and sacramentality of creation because the grace of the dark night restores a person's capacity 'to know the truth, to love the good, and to see the beautiful' (2000:249, 255). *Through* contemplation of Christ's radiance, *in* participation in Christ's own glory, and *by* being made beautiful in Christ's Beauty (Ward 2003:59), 'my own vineyard is mine to give' is sung in adoration of God and in the service of creation. Since beauty is a *synergia*, not a property to be grasped, detachment is the contra-side to power, pride, prestige, and possession. By inference, 'the idol' is replaced by 'the icon', for 'all things, in God, exist iconically' (2003:50).

The *synergia* of artistic operation/co-operation 'remains fundamental to the whole economy of deification' since *theoria* and *poiesis*, the pillars of theological phenomenology, are profoundly implicated in *theosis* (2003:50, 63). With the Song of Songs as biblical-poetic paradigm (*theoria*) and spiritual direction as a poetic science (*poiesis*), the transformed vineyard is facilitated as a conscious project of life-integration through an embodiment of divine-human love. Here, soul and body are united, and the vital and the cognitive profoundly inform each other (2003:55-56). Human embodiment is implicated because 'the ensoulment of the body means that the more profound the participation in the divine, the more intensely the body becomes what it is' (2003:60). At the *via creativa*, the 'ensoulment of the body' becomes a form of art and is derived from the archetypal seeker's expression of her 'becoming' in corporeal terms, as follows: 'I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment' (Sg 8:10). Where delight in the human body is illumined by divine *Eros*, one's own vineyard becomes a locus of divine-human pleasure and a resurrection song of 'glorification and doxology' (2003:60). Asceticism therefore gives way to pleasure and 'nothing remains to be done with this beauty but to enjoy it' (2003:60, 58). Enjoyment teaches one to receive, discern and choose because 'to become beautiful is to be schooled into choosing well' (2003:61-62); by implication, choosing well is illumined by knowing the truth, loving the good, and seeing the beautiful. In the Asian context, holistic choices for body-and-soul care include aesthetic practices such as meditation, tai chi, art, nature, tranquil music, Chinese calligraphy, painting, silent retreats, eating in silence, etc.; these practices deepen the capacity to know, love and see what is there, and to choose simplicity. They also restore the balance between self-giving (active yang) and self-care (restful yin), a vital rhythm inferred in Tribble's comment that 'work and play belong together in both the garden of creation and the garden of eroticism' (1978:157).

The interplay of solitude and work is fundamental to *synergia* and is indicated by the privacy between lover and beloved at the end of the Canticle. Intimate solitude and loving

union with God give the word *missional* a particular direction. It ‘deepens the appreciation of being human’; it ‘participates in the ongoing divine activity of redeeming the world’⁵⁹ and ‘in the ongoing work of incarnation’ (Ward 2003:53, 63). It suggests that the vineyard serve the *kosmos* with passion and compassion by engaging humanity’s liberation from self-preoccupation (power, prestige, possessiveness, and pride) toward the harmonisation of all creation in the Triune God. Barry offers a wide purview, as follows: ‘The more intimate we allow God to become, the more like God we become. [...] Thus, our love becomes more universal and embraces all that God dreams for our world – a harmony of all people in a harmonious world’ (2001:184). Fleming discusses Ignatian Contemplation as coming ‘from above’, a prayerful means of observing from God’s stance, identifying God’s perspective on our everyday events, and noticing the invitations to experience and be involved with God in the world (2004:57). Welch asserts that ‘the work of justice begins in contemplation’, on the basis of John of the Cross’ view that union with God does not remove one from the world’s concerns, but drives one ‘deep into the thicket’ of the world’s suffering (1996:143,148). The seventh mansion of Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle* suggests that Mary and Martha join together in showing hospitality to the Lord and in the prayerful service of drawing souls to God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:448).

Poiesis is relational, where metaphor is transposed back to its extralinguistic reality, that is, to the lived experience that is brought to language (Ricoeur 2005:220). Relocated within the intricate web of familial relationships and the wider community, the beloved’s vineyard is characterised by the essence, fullness, and goodness of ‘pure love’. The *poiesis* of the vineyard enhances the *kosmos*, particularly through ‘loving relationships’, which is the theme of the vineyard metaphorically (LaCocque 1998a:73). Since loving human relationships are ‘a primary indicator of who God is – the ultimate lover’ (Dreyer 1994:126), spiritual direction would uncover the need for loving relationships and facilitate liberation from destructive I-It relationships. One suggestion would be to invite prayerful reflection on the Song of Songs⁶⁰ as the Canticle models human love on divine love and demonstrates that love between a man and a woman is ‘a flame of Yah’ (LaCocque 1998a:176). Since the Song

⁵⁹ ‘Theological aesthetics cannot be divorced from ethics’ (Ward 2003:61). Also see Williams’ chapter on ‘Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics’ (2000:239-264).

⁶⁰ Further suggestions include the Genesis story of creation; the role of Mary and Joseph; the humanity of Jesus; the ‘touching stories in the gospel; the marriage feast of Cana, the importance given to marriage and family in Jesus’ Jewish community (Dreyer 1994:131). On sexuality and intimacy within Christian marriage, see Davidson’s discussion (2007:592-604) where he views sexuality as the flame of Yahweh and states that the Song of Songs, as the Holy of Holies, is the supreme statement on the theology of sexuality in the Old Testament or on ‘paradisal love’ (2007:607-632).

treats of the sacramental nature of sexuality as well as ‘the sacramentality of all of nature’, the conversation would include sexuality as ‘a sacrament of God, a sacred locus where we discover ourselves, other persons and all of creation in God’ (Dreyer 1994:129-131). The recovery of the sacramental concerns *kosmos*, or the whole, since ‘eroticism is not confined to the human or even to the human-divine sphere of relationality but lies close to the heart of creativity and thus of cosmology’ (Burrus 2006:xx). By extension, the erotic effulgence and superlative beauty called forth in the Song may be authentically applied to divine-human intimacy, loving human relationships, and ecological responsibility.⁶¹

Poiesis is an outflow of wisdom, a virtue that is developed through the seasons of yearning (*eros*), seeking (*mythos*), finding (*mustikos*) and birthing (*kosmos*). Wisdom is integral to the Song of Songs’ enduring passion: ‘a love that is as strong as death, unyielding as the grave, and burns like a blazing fire’ (Sg 8:6-7). The ‘secret wisdom’ of mystical theology is an infusion of love, which leads Johnston to refer to *Sapientia* (wisdom) as ‘mystical love’ and to personify her as ‘the Shulamite of the Song of Songs who is to be loved with unlimited spiritual passion forever’ (1995:235, 293).⁶² The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, of which the Song of Songs is a part, encapsulates ‘the cosmological, feminist vision of creation spirituality’ (Fox 1991:14), a factor which underscores the relevance of the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality for the Song of Songs paradigm. Bowe comments that Wisdom Literature focuses on the whole of God’s creation and is therefore more *cosmopolitan* and *ecumenical* than the story of Israel’s salvation history that dominates the Law and the Prophets’ (2004:38), which infers that the wisdom of the Song of Songs is highly relevant for spiritual direction in a postmodern context. Furthermore, Bowe elaborates that no gospel story has been more influenced by the Israelite Wisdom tradition than the Gospel of John whose portrait of Jesus is ‘the story *par excellence* of the incarnation of Wisdom’ (2004:39), which highlights the significance of the mystical symbolism of the Vine in human transformation and spiritual maturation. Fitzgerald observes that John of the Cross is radically influenced by the Wisdom texts of pre-Christian Judaism which fashions his understanding of Jesus, God, and the divine dynamic of human transformation. Juan embraces the identification made by the New Testament writers of Jesus as ‘divine Wisdom

⁶¹ The ecological crisis has precipitated new theological modes which address human domination of the earth, the overemphasis of personal salvation to the neglect of concern for the planet, and an integral theological structure of God, humanity, and the natural world. Contemporary themes are addressed in *The Wisdom of Creation* (Foley & Schreiter 2004) and *Earth, Wind, & Fire* (Dempsey & Pazdan 2004).

⁶² For an East-West perspective, note Johnston’s chapters on wisdom in *Mystical Theology*: ‘Wisdom through Love’ (1995:91-102), ‘Wisdom and Emptiness’ (1995:155-172), and ‘Wisdom’ (1995:300-325). His extensive reference to John of the Cross demonstrates the relevance of sanjuanist wisdom for Asian spirituality.

(Sophia)' or as 'Sophia incarnate' ([1986]/1996:436-437). Fitzgerald refers to wisdom (Sophia) as *a person* rather than a concept or an attribute, a summoning 'I' not an 'it' (2000:283) – and is underscored by Johnson's reference to *hokmah* in Hebrew and *sophia* in Greek, a biblical portrait of Wisdom that is consistently female ([1986]/1996:372).

Poiesis has the aptitude for contextualisation within different socio-cultural-religious contexts since the Song of Songs is imbued with the transformative-generative potential of ancient Wisdom. The Eastern path to wisdom, according to Johnston, is through emptiness (*kenosis*). Comparing Christian and Buddhist perspectives on wisdom, he states that both traditions emphasise emptiness; however, the *kenosis* of Jesus as biblical exemplar and the *nada* of John of the Cross from the Christian mystical tradition demonstrate that the characteristic of the Christian tradition is the *personal*, namely, Christ, who is the wisdom of God (1995:155-172). The wisdom of the Song of Songs has to do with the *human soul*, not dualistically separated from the body, but 'the true self, the core and centre of the person, the innermost being that longs for God' (1995:208). The Song of Songs paradigm is particularly pertinent with respect to Asian spiritual direction⁶³ because the yin-yang symbol at the core of the transformation process represents a journey toward wholeness through the purification of *kenosis* (hiddenness, nothingness and woundedness) and through the embrace of paradox. Ching discusses wisdom from the perspective of Wang Yang Ming (王陽明, 1472–1529),⁶⁴ a NeoConfucian sage who broadened the quest for wisdom by freeing it from a narrow, academic focus on intellectual and rational knowledge and including the emphasis of innate knowledge, meditation and silence, and confronting life on all its levels (1976:72-73). Wisdom, according to Ching, is *a constant becoming* that can only be acquired *paradoxically*. Its starting point is the *mind-and-heart*, or the *self*, which 'is both given and to be created, possessing the seed of perfection and yet in need of continual purification, finding and fulfilling itself through testing itself in the ebb and flow of stillness and activity which makes up the whole life' (1976:73). Wisdom then is both a given and a cultivation, that is, the

⁶³ The Song of Songs has served as devotional literature for deepening intimacy with Christ in the Chinese Christian context, as illustrated in two short commentaries: *Union and Communion* (undated) by CIM missionary James Hudson Taylor I (1832-1905); and *The Song of Songs: The Divine Romance between God and Man* (1993) by Chinese Church pastor Watchman Nee (1903-1972). *Union and Communion*, formerly published by Moody Press Chicago (undated), has been re-titled *Intimacy with Jesus* and published by OMF International (2000). It is available in Chinese, as follows: 在香草山上：讀雅歌的心得 (1968 香港：基督教文藝出版社). Nee's devotional commentary on the Song of Songs was originally published in 1945 in Chungking, China and based on his sermons of 1934. It is published in Chinese, as follows: 歌中的歌 (1969 台北：福音書房).

⁶⁴ As contemporaries, note the contrasts between the Western mystic and the Chinese sage; for example, the wisdom tradition of John of the Cross (1542–1591) is based on knowledge as faith and love in a personal God.

realisation of ‘what we already possess in potency’ and what is ‘extended through a process of unfolding and becoming’ (1976:73-74).⁶⁵ It seeks ‘the harmony and purity of the mind-and-heart, perfect in its spontaneity, true to its pristine nature’ (1976:73). This harmony requires a certain detachment or *kenosis*, namely, letting go of enslavement to the rational which, according to Ma, involves ‘a reconnection to the pure *yin* as the source of the true *yang*’ (2010:155). Through a process of ‘returning-beginning’, one returns to ‘the Source, the root of one’s original personality, to regain the beginning of one’s life’ (2010:155). With its roots in the primordial beginnings of the Earth and the soil, Taoism fills the vacuum created in the collective psyche by the dominance of the *yang* principle, the masculine world view, the impersonal worship of *Tian* (Heaven), the rationalistic ethical outlook of Confucianism, and the patriarchal, patrilineal structure of Chinese society (2010:154-155). Ma elaborates that the Taoist alchemical opus represents a way of psychological liberation as the ‘inner elixir’ aims for ‘the experience of *tao*, the birth of a new consciousness’ (2010:155).

Holding the wisdom of *kenosis* and the richness of *poiesis* in delicate balance, spiritual direction facilitates the process of the human being *becoming* fully human. The vineyard’s signification of a sacred trust and sacramental project is directly related to the transformative re-cognition that ‘I am’ and ‘I have become’, rather than ‘I have done’ or ‘I have achieved’. In the Hong Kong context, spiritual direction would focus on a recovery of 心性, that is, one’s ‘heart nature’ or ‘heart and nature being’ (Lee 1992:106-120). Through the reconnection with the ‘urgings of the heart’ (Au & Cannon 1995),⁶⁶ a gradual unifying of the self (mind-and-heart) brings congruence between intuitive and intellectual knowledge and between being and doing.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in facilitating the balance between receptive/contemplative *yin* and extroverted/active *yang*, the seeker’s inner source – the *chi* (氣) or vital energy – is accessed.⁶⁸ In Christian terms, the vital source is the fire or felt presence of the Holy Spirit’s inworking. May suggests that *Spirit* implies ‘the vital, dynamic

⁶⁵Autobiographical data on Ching’s process of becoming may be found in *The Butterfly Healing: A Life between East and West* (1988). Her struggle with the integration of body and soul, East and West is discussed in Ma’s chapter on ‘Julia Ching: a journey from East to West and back again’ (2010:106-118).

⁶⁶In their discussion on wholeness, Au & Cannon address several issues which resonate with the Asian context, namely: codependency, perfectionism, envy, and overwork – and an explication of *wu-wei* as innate wisdom, the way of least resistance, and ‘The Way of Effortless Action’ (1995:146-150).

⁶⁷In a chapter on ‘Chiu Chin: the beheaded martyr’, Ma describes the symbolism of ‘to cut off my head’ in relation to her own innate, intuitive nature that had been thoroughly overshadowed by Western, academic training (2010:92-105).

⁶⁸Liu offers a succinct understanding of the yin-yang principle; as well as the interplay between meditation and effective action, *tai chi* and focused attention. Meditation and movement channel one’s vital energy or *chi* as good health requires a balance between yin and yang forces within the body (1986:5-15). Meditation also engenders attitudes which affect lifestyle, nutrition, eating habits, and the expenditure of energy (1986:84).

force of being, that which is given by God and brings the soul into living reality’, while the ancient words *ruach*, *pneuma*, *spiritus* and the Sanskrit *prāna* refer to ‘energy and power’ ([1982]/1992:7). Along the *via creativa* then, the person becomes more in tune with the Spirit, the way of wisdom, the rhythms of nature, and the joy of being human. Since *soul* or *nephesh* reflects the essence of one’s existence and represents the ‘whole, living being of an individual person’ ([1982]/1992:7), a ‘soul person’ may be described as a living being in whom the divine Spirit and the human spirit are ‘fully in act’. The ‘full act’ of constant becoming takes place within the ebb and flow, the messiness and miraculous, the doubts and doxology of ordinary life. By honouring the Paschal Mystery and encountering life’s daily paradoxes, transformation takes its course. The key lies in living one’s questions with patience and echoing *Deo Gratias* because the re-cognition of who I am in God and who I am becoming in this world is the fruit of loving obedience and the grace of loving union – the mystery of ‘I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you’ (Jn 14:20).

In relation to the True Vine and a lived Christian mysticism, *poiesis* addresses the need for a symbolic life. Jung critiques the extroversion and pragmatism of contemporary life as follows: ‘We have no symbolic life, and we are all badly in need of the symbolic life. Only the symbolic life can express the need of the soul – the daily need of the soul’ (Leech 1980:108).⁶⁹ With the Incarnation serving as New Testament epiphany, the Beloved satisfies the deep needs of the soul because the ‘kiss’ and ‘friendship’ which the human beloved ardently desired is realised in Jesus. Teresa of Avila wondered whether the beloved ‘was asking for that union so great that God became man, for that friendship that he effected with the human race’ (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:221). The mystical symbolism of the Vine is foundational to understanding this gift of divine friendship as it exemplifies the unitive principle of ‘remaining in yet going out’ as well as the fruitive aspect of ‘remaining in my love’ which produces communal Christian love and spiritual friendship. The notion of *mystery* though is most fully developed in the Pauline letters (Johnston 1995:24), where the term *in-Christ* encapsulates Paul’s vital expression of mystical union, the kernel of his ‘mysticism of grace’, and ‘the major leit-motif of Pauline thought’ (Kourie 2009:235-245).⁷⁰ It is fitting that Paul the mystic adopts the metaphor of *bride* for the Church, and uses

⁶⁹ On the symbolic life, Welch (1982) explores Teresa’s image-filled *Interior Castle*, and demonstrates that image is a key for entering Jung and Teresa’s writings; since both were perceptive observers of human interiority, their works contribute to an understanding of Christian individuation (1982:1).

⁷⁰ In addition to explicating the salient features of a mystical reading of Paul, Kourie examines within postmodernism the nature of mysticism, the relationship between mysticism and scripture, current methodological diversity in scriptural hermeneutics, and the role of biblical spirituality (2009:235-245).

marriage as an analogy of Christ's relationship to the mystical Body, the Church (Eph 6). It is also from the Pauline Canticle of Love (1 Cor 13) that the 'theological virtues' of faith, hope, and love are derived. *Church* as a communal symbolic life for the follower of Christ is vital because the metaphor of bride is embedded with the *eros*, *mythos*, *mustikos* and *kosmos* of the Song of Songs; it therefore provides the individual seeker with a 'unifying Big Story' in the Triune God as well as a 'union and communion' with the saints and martyrs of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The experience of God for a Christian mystic like John of the Cross was always rooted in the life of the Church, nourished by the sacraments and the liturgy (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1991:27). Spiritual direction explores a symbolic and sacramental life through a cooperative synergy between the seeker's 'own' vineyard and the wider context of marriage, the family, and the church, bearing in mind that the vocation of the vineyard is love, the journey is deepening transformation and maturation, and the goal is the harmonisation of all creation in the Triune God.

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of the present chapter has been to apply a spiritual direction approach to the vineyard as a basis for a creative-construction of a Song of Songs paradigm for spiritual direction. The constructive phase is centred on four essential components of the Song text, namely: yearning (the primordial language of *eros*); seeking (the *mythos* of the search for divine love); finding (the *mustikos* of spiritual marriage); and birthing (the continuing-incarnation of love in *kosmos*). With the textual dynamics and human dynamics converging in the beloved, multiple levels of listening are required in order to engage the seeker's vineyard in spiritual direction, namely, the body, story, poetry, community, and epiphany. Having maintained the focus on spiritual praxis, the beloved's transformation in love has been adequately transposed from the Song of Songs and treated as an existential project, for a two-fold purpose: to posit transformation in love as the *raison-d'être* for spiritual direction and to test the validity and feasibility of the Song of Songs as a biblical paradigm for spiritual direction. The key findings of the transformative paradigm are delineated below under 'four seasons'.

The *via positiva*, or the *kataphatic* way, attends to the condition of spiritual dryness through the primary self-description 'I am neglected' and explores feelings of depletion, dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Metaphorised as 'my own vineyard I have neglected', the existential tensions of ordinary life serve as psychological triggers and transformative keys in spiritual direction. The seeker, though often unable to articulate heart matters and unaware of soul needs, is thirsting for affection and affirmation, a *kataphatic* or positive spiritual

experience, and the consolations of God (*contentos*). Sg 1:1-2:7 is identified as the *via positiva* because here the person's perception of God is positive and the encounters with the Shepherd-Lover bring feelings of consolation and romantic love. The experiential focus in the first season is to maximise the person's God-given *eros* (the Song's primordial language of love) through a semiotic approach (Kristeva) which means that the cojourner's essential work in the early stages of the person's journey is the exploration of yearnings in a way that mobilises the ego, the imagination, the body, and the other. A sensitive play of metaphor is apt at this stage; in the case of the vineyard as 'live metaphor' it is apt for it represents an individual life, introduces a sense of immediacy and transparency, evokes the inner child, and attends to the impact of 'angry brothers'. Preparing a seeker for a *kataphatic* experience of the Shepherd-Lover is facilitated through spiritual replenishment as well as the application of the 'affective principle' of building a positive spiritual identity. The prayer of recollection encourages a quiet and receptive disposition and engenders interior communication *with* God rather than conversation *about* God. The particular grace to pray for in the first season is the grace of awareness because the experiential and intuitive knowledge of God effects a much-needed self-awareness and self-knowledge of one's real needs, desires, prayers, and images. This grace also prepares a person for a deeper, intentional search for God.

The *via negativa*, also referred to as the *apophatic way*, is framed within Sg 2:8-5:8 because the two dark nights of the beloved's ardent search are located in this pericope. Through the experience of negation, suffering, darkness, and unknowing, the inner void or 'felt sense of God's absence' is the purifying 'presence' of a self-transcending love. Following *kataphasis*, the purification incites an insatiable longing for the divine lover, a feeling described as 'I am wounded'. The wound of love and the night of faith are God's subversive ways of drawing the seeker toward a shared vineyard for the purpose of deepening faith, hope and love. A psycho-spiritual approach (particularly active imagination and dreamwork) is helpful along the *via negativa* because the individual is being called from the collective to an individuated faith. This transition involves a descent into the unconscious and into the abyss of faith in order to discover one's God-connection within. Jungian psychology refers to this 'God-connection' as the 'transcendent function' or the 'fourth function' which is our un-lived life. Seeking the Other, or the longing for union with the divine lover, is integral to the search for self which implies that the spiritual direction conversation explores the seeker's original selfhood/lovedness and rootedness/belonging-to in God. Personal story, socio-cultural-religious contexts, and family-of-origin are revisited because this living mosaic provides an intimate understanding of the psychic wound, of past experiences of love, and of

the myths that mould a person's image of God, self and others. As the *mythos* of the vineyard elucidated (Isaiah's Songs of the Vineyard), the search for a transcendent love is deeply and historically embedded in the personal and collective unconscious. The task of co-discernment is to notice the new initiatives of the divine and the operations of the grace of otherness because an individuated faith would need to attend to inhibitions and resistances to love and gently dismantle negative constructions of God. The prayer of examination (or Ignatian *examen*) is a suggested means of attuning to one's 'God connection' and noticing God's presence within because it helps in discerning one's movements toward God (consolation) as well as movements away from God (desolation), particularly in the night of purification which brings unprecedented trials of life and mortification of soul. The grace of otherness is an essential means of experiencing the mystery that underlies all things, namely, God the principal agent who is directing the soul toward mystical union and psychic integration. The *via negativa* echoes experiences of wasteland, wilderness or exile in the mythos of the vineyard and, through the beloved's intense search in the two nights, demonstrates that the Song sustains the yearning for a transcendent love.

The *via unitiva* is a season of *ekstasis*, of 'standing outside oneself'. Since the Song captures in erotic symbolism and in Dionysian ecstasy what ordinary language fails to capture, *ekstasis* is best engaged by the innovative modes of poetic intercourse and second-naive discourse (Ricoeur). At this mature stage, contemplation as the loving inflow of God is a spiritual delight (*gustos*) for mutuality and friendship with God is a mystico-erotic experience, depicted in the intimate images of lover, friend and bridegroom. The realisation that 'I am desired' suggests that the divine yearning precedes our human search for God and that the divine lover longs for union with human beings. Spiritual direction therefore explores divine Eros in human eros for the purpose of disposing the seeker for a radical face-to-face presence to God and for the impregnation of divine love which, by grace, effects a finding of one's true self, namely, one's identity, name, uniqueness, image and belonging. *Mustikos* is at the heart of the *via unitiva* because union with God (or spiritual marriage) is concerned with spiritual fullness and psychological wholeness; that is, the integration of sexuality and spirituality, the conscious and unconscious poles of personality, the psychic marriage of masculine and feminine, and the inner and outer person. The embrace of paradox and the transcendence of dichotomies are experienced in the body, the psyche, and the spirit which means that the tensions of ordinary life and the complexities of human relationships are to be holistically engaged in spiritual direction. The mystico-erotic terms of endearment point to

Jesus as the Beloved and to the Incarnation as epiphany to the Song of Songs, illustrating that the Song maintains the mystique of divine-human love.

The *via creativa* is the season of incarnation and birthing for here the beloved returns to the community of her brothers with a consciousness that her vineyard is hers to tend and to give, which is a clear indication of her transformation. Transformation is echoed in the words ‘I have become in his eyes’ and suggests not only a physical and sexual maturity, but the experiential realisation of the *imago dei* which is who I am. The dual aspect of knowing who I am and living who I am provides the cue that the vineyard is a project of life-integration, an individuation which brings ‘wholeness, harmony and clarity’ (Aquinas). Moreover, in union with the *I AM*, the vineyard represents a unique human life that embodies divine love and images divine beauty, an important factor which exemplifies that the Song contains the conditions for the continuing-incarnation of love in the world. The emphasis in the fourth season is thus on the body as primary art form. With the Song of Songs serving as biblical-poetic paradigm (*theoria*) and spiritual direction as a poetic science (*poiesis*), the body is profoundly implicated by *theosis* because transformation divinizes and delights in such a way that the person develops a symbolic and sacramental lifestyle based on knowing the truth, loving the good, and seeing the beautiful. Wisdom, a given and cultivated virtue, reflects the cosmological vision of the Song and treats of the sacramental nature of human sexuality as well as the sacramentality of all creation. *Poiesis* allows for contextualisation of the unique vineyard within contemporary socio-cultural-religious contexts, while the missional aspect orients the vocation of love toward the harmonisation of all creation in God, which Barry encapsulates as follows: ‘If we have a deep experience of God’s divine indwelling in all things, then we will indeed find God in all things and tend to reverence all things and people and ourselves’ (2001:188).

In sum, since God indwells all things, and with divine love as fundamental motif and transcendent gift, the ‘most unbiblical book’ is revered as ‘the Holy of Holies of all Scripture’. The uniqueness of the Canticle is its poetic invitation to ‘Love me!’ – a tender invitation which remains ‘as strong as death’ because the ‘spark of Yah’ is enkindled in human hearts. The Song’s poetic invitation is invaluable because its archetypal search for love/God/self offers a paradigm for transformation in love that traverses the seasons of life, a transformation that delights and divinizes a person toward union with the *I AM*. Through the magnitude of the divine yearning and the continuum of the human journey, the Song’s mystico-poetic vocation finds epiphany in contemporary human lives. The Song of Songs is therefore highly conducive as a canticle for spiritual direction.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The Song of Songs is considered by many contemporary scholars as biblical literature with a hermeneutical challenge par excellence. This dissertation affirms the greatness of the Song of Songs as biblical literature, where ‘greatness of literature’ is determined by ‘its ability to convey new moral insights which are unexpected, which address the existential situation of the reader and which are continuous (in some respect) with the culture from which they emerge’ (Ryba 1992:11). The Song of Songs has an extraordinary capacity to convey fresh images and transformative insights which address our contemporary context, are continuous with the biblical tradition, yet expand the interpretative horizon for new uses and reuses of the Song. Its poetic vision enhances vitality and harmony, mutuality and reciprocity, mysticism and sacramentality, which suggests the biblical love song’s capacity to serve as poetic enrichment and spiritual nourishment within contemporary contexts. Adopting an interdisciplinary experiential approach, and with appropriative intent, the research therefore explores the poetics of the Song and demonstrates the high correspondence between the world of the poem and its extralinguistic reality. Identifying the beloved’s metaphorical vineyard as the nexus of the poem and the point of integration for the sexual and spiritual dimensions of the Song, the research posits that without the Song of Songs our sexual and spiritual lives would be poetically impoverished.¹ It would be fitting to conclude that the Song of Songs epitomises ‘*wonderment, fabulation and idealization*’, three ‘mental acts which play a constitutive role in culture, in general, and literature, in particular’; where *wonderment* invokes the true/intelligible, *fabulation* the beautiful/meaningful, and *idealization* the good/ideal (1992:4-5).²

Presupposing divine love as the fundamental motif in the Song of Songs, and in journeying with the human beloved, the Song of Songs is now described as the song of the soul: an intimate mystery to be loved and an infinite mystery to be lived. At best, the present dissertation may be defined as a contemplation of divine love and a celebration of human

¹ Schneiders observes that, with a non-dualistic view of the human person, ‘constructive postmodernism’ may be ‘the intellectual climate in which spirituality as an academic discipline will finally discover breathable air’ and it is ‘perhaps a context in which Christian spirituality [...] can find dialogue partners’ (2005:21). The same applies to the Song of Songs. With an emphasis on contemporary poetics, the Song of Songs is conducive to a postmodern spirituality – a context for a possible second flourishing of the Song.

² Ryba explicates this three-fold circuit in Tymieniecka’s theory of literature – essential elements in literature that are constituted within human experience. Tymieniecka’s theory offers engaging insights on ‘human-beingness’ that could be developed for an aesthetic appreciation of the Song (1992:3-26)

transformation in love; and it is from this divine-human vantage point that a new use or reuse of the Song of Songs is suggested. The distinctive feature of this research project is twofold: first, it represents a poetics-praxis amalgam of the Song's leitmotif of love which is based on a transformative approach to the Song of Songs and enriched by interdisciplinary experiential insights from the practice of spiritual direction; and second, it offers a biblical paradigm for human transformation and spiritual maturation which is appropriate for use in contemporary spiritual direction. The remainder of this conclusion gathers the threads and delineates the major outcomes of the research, the value of the research, and suggestions for further investigative studies.

7.1 Major outcomes of the research

7.1.1 A transformative approach to the Song of Songs

The transformative approach adopted in the present research pivots on the vineyard metaphor, which only touches on one facet of the lover-beloved relationship. However, the insights obtained with regard to the Song's transformative use of metaphor, its poetic mythology of the vineyard, its mystical epiphany in relation to Christ, and its composite beauty as a spiritual itinerary are invaluable. The challenge of interpreting the Song of Songs through an experiential framework and translating its poetics of love for spiritual praxis cannot be underestimated; reflexively, the challenge of facilitating a conversation between spiritual direction and the Song of Songs has been groundbreaking, especially since biblical literature on spiritual direction is sparse. The complexity of the research task, however, does not detract from the poem's profound simplicity which, as the research elucidates, has the capacity to render the transcendent present in ordinary reality.

The interpretive framework for a transformative approach to the Song of Songs is an experiential 5-D paradigm (desire, discernment, descent, delight, and detachment), the result of three engaging questions brought to the Song of Songs, namely: What is evoked?, What is released?, and What is celebrated? Employing the transformative 5-D paradigm in an exploration of the beloved's vineyard in the Song of Songs, in Isaiah's two songs of the vineyard, and in John 15's symbol of the True Vine, the research elucidates a poetic-erotic paradigm, a poetic-prophetic paradigm, and a unitive-fruitive paradigm, respectively. These three paradigms provide a biblical rationale for transformation and, given their validity and feasibility, transformation in love is posited as the principal motif in the Song of Songs and the *raison-d'être* for Christian spiritual direction. In testing the 5-D paradigm intrabiblically, Chapter 6 locates the *formal object* of the research (transformation in love) within the wider

framework of the *material object* (the vineyard as existential project) and constructs a Song of Songs paradigm for contemporary spiritual direction. Citing four key moments in the beloved's transformative journey in the Song of Songs, the paradigm is characterised as a transformative path of four seasons, namely: *via positiva*, *via negativa*, *via unitiva*, and *via creativa*. Furthermore, in locating paradox at the heart of the poem, the yin-yang symbol is placed at the core of the paradigm, as it is representative of daily reality (the phenomenology of night and day, dark and light, etc.). Employing multi-disciplinary interpretive skills, psycho-spiritual input, and mystical insights, the research demonstrates the validity and feasibility of the Song of Songs as biblical-poetic paradigm for contemporary spiritual direction.

7.1.2 *The experiential scope of the journey*

A transformative approach to the Song of Songs elicits a transformative journey which is paradigmatic of the human search. Open at both ends the poem echoes 'the age of innocence' and engages 'the age of experience'; it also encapsulates the poetics of a 'paradise lost, paradise regained'. The journey stretches as far back as the history of beginnings, to the place of absolute births in Genesis where, with the appearance of the woman, language is born as 'speech', and discourse with admiration (Ricoeur 1998:296-297). Moreover, with the man's cry of jubilation in Gen. 2:23: 'This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh', song is born. The primordial song jubilates in the intimate gifts of creation, the inextricable oneness and connectedness with the other, and the innocence of *eros* which is 'clothed with divine approbation' (1998:297). As Chapter 3 of this dissertation elucidates, the Song of Songs reopens this enclave of primordial love, recounts the myth of original blessing, and sings of an ongoing rebirth at the very heart of ordinary, everyday existence (1988:299). Acclaimed as the most excellent Song, the poem is an enactment of a love par excellence and a literary embodiment of creation's essential goodness and life's intended fullness. Given the sense of immediacy in the poem, the possibility is evoked of an ongoing rebirth of primordial love in the very heart of ordinary, everyday spirituality; the poem thus incites a yearning for the Source of love at the very heart of reality, which is the unnamed Mystery of the poem. With these elements of original truth, beauty, and goodness (and the intrinsic wonderment, fabulation and idealization of the poem), the Song of Songs addresses our spiritual predicament, psychic wounds, and psychological complexes, and provides a biblical poetics for the recovery of God's intention for humanity. Furthermore, the Song points toward epiphany and provides a direction of hope and regeneration based on God's delight in

creation (Trinitarian *eros* and *ekstasis*) and on the underlying mystery of Nature – a biblical rationale for loving all creation in God.

7.1.3 *The Song of Songs as paradigm of paradigms*

Concurring with Wolfson, the present dissertation brands the Song of Songs as ‘the paradigm of paradigms, that is the book that, paradigmatically, demonstrates the paradigmatic nature of paradigm, the duplicity intrinsic to the play of metaphor’ (2006:349). More than any other biblical book, the Song of Songs plays freely and flamboyantly with metaphor and, in this ingenious way, enunciates a poetic wisdom which is founded on the convergence of the literal (sexual) and the figurative (spiritual). In the present research, the convergence of the sexual and the spiritual in the beloved’s vineyard is congruent with the Song’s paradigm of primordial love (the garden); the vineyard as existential project thus encompasses sexuality and spirituality. Through the creative use of analogical transference as well as the use of an intersecting metaphor to serve as the organon for different configurations of love, the integral approach allows the tensions of ascending/poetic and descending/prosaic movements to converge in the vineyard. Poetic convergence in the Song underscores several principles of mystical union: an extraordinary transcendent love seeks habitation in the beloved vineyard; God comes to birth in the soul; the Trinity finds abode in human lives; and the vineyard is a sacramental project. In optimising the duplicity intrinsic to metaphor and arriving at a sexual-spiritual integration, the research designates the vineyard as ‘the metaphor of metaphors’ in the Song of Songs. Furthermore, the research indirectly addresses the legacy of dualisms attached to the Song. By identifying the yin-yang rhythm as a dynamic principle of the poem, the Song’s enduring enigma and textual ambiguities are embraced. Instead of splitting the antitheses of human and divine, sexuality and spirituality, *agape* and *eros*, *logos* and *mustikos*, my approach reflects the paradigmatic nature of the Song as a paradigm of lived reality. Real integration takes place at the level of experience which is to live one’s sexuality and spirituality within the *mysterium tremendum*, where God the *mysterium* is a living paradox and a synthesis of antitheses. The Song of Songs, as paradigm of paradigms, thus serves as biblical paradigm for human transformation and spiritual maturation.

7.1.4 *The poetic vocation of the Canticle*

The exploration of contemporary interpretations of the Song’s leitmotif of love (Chapter 2) identifies the poetic vocation of the Song of Songs as twofold, namely: it serves as a poetic prism of love which refracts multivalent meanings of love, and therefore calls for multiple

readings of the love motif; and, second, it is a poetic phenomenon of love in search of epiphany in human lives and in every generation, with a concomitant transformation across time. The transformative potential of the poem is attributed to a phenomenon of inner transformation, dramatic tensions, and incremental movements which move toward some culmination. Its enduring enigma is a lack of didactic spelling out of historical referents, a perpetual immediacy and transparency, and a resistance to closure.

The poetic vocation of the Canticle gives rise to three interfacing approaches to the vineyard, namely, the metaphorical, the mythological, and the mystical; and, consequently, to a journey of the vineyard metaphor on both sides of the Song. The three approaches locate the vineyard on three levels of spiritual praxis: in the Song of Songs, as locus of intimate loving, with *eros* as the focus of the metaphorical vineyard (Chapter 3); in Isaiah's two songs of the vineyard, as locus of divine-human intimacy, where *mythos* is rooted in the YHWH-Israel relation (Chapter 4); and in Jn 15:1-17, with the *mustikos* of the Vine as the symbol of Christian mysticism, Christ is paradigm and exemplar for Christian love, communities of Christian love, and spiritual friendship (Chapter 5). The multidimensional approach to the vineyard correlates with the beloved's transformative journey, namely, *eros* (yearning), *mythos* (seeking), *mustikos* (finding) and *poesis* (birthing) – aspects captured in the Song of Songs Paradigm (Chapter 6). The Song's poetic vocation extends to a search for the poem's contemplative-unitive culmination which is identified as the Incarnation of Christ. As divine-human Epiphany, Christ brings to the human community and all creation the embodiment of divine *eros* and the overflow of Trinitarian *ekstasis* (Chapter 5). Thus, where the Song of Songs is treated as a poetic prism of love, the poetic vocation of the Canticle incites a yearning for the divine lover and engenders love mysticism.

7.1.5 *The Canticle's poetic invitation to love*

The 'non-religious' Song of Songs is an exemplary biblical text for spiritual direction because it is deeply mystical in its invitation to divine-human intimacy. Following the Song, spiritual direction is regarded as a *poetic science* which explores the essence of love, the fullness of life, and the goodness of creation beyond the boundaries of the prescriptive, propositional, and practical. The biblical rationale is that the Song of Songs is devoid of any imperative or prescription – a unique feature in Scripture and thus a unique invitation. A discussion on the law of love in relation to the economy of the gift, as well as the poetic use of the imperative in relation to Jesus' commands to 'remain in me' and to 'love one another', elucidates the distinction between imperative and invitation (Chapter 5). The Song's poetic

invitation is multiplex and polysemantic, which is encapsulated in Chapter 6 as follows: it retains the primordial language of love (*eros*), sustains the yearning for a transcendent love (*mythos*), maintains the mystique of divine-human love (*mustikos*), and contains the conditions for the continuing-incarnation of love in the world (*kosmos*). These four unique components of the Song of Songs suggest a multifaceted listening approach in spiritual direction, namely: on the levels of *eros* (emotions, the imagination, the ego, and the body); *mythos* (personal narrative, collective history, and socio-religious-cultural traditions); *mustikos* (poetic intercourse and *second-naivete* discourse); and *kosmos* (a whole, transformed self uniquely embodied in an individual life). The implication is that the cojourner would need to become acquainted with the Song's poetic vocation, poetic invitation, and poetics of love in order to find a creative collaboration with spiritual praxis.

7.1.6 *Eros as principal transformative agent in the Canticle*

Given the Song's poetic invitation to love, the research maintains that Eros is not reducible to dogma or doctrine. It would be a grave injustice to impose any restriction on the poem which disengages Eros. By muting its sensuality, spontaneity and musicality, the Song would be relegated to 'a text of texts' within the biblical canon. Instead, the Song's enduring enigma is accompanied by *incantation* which maintains the 'tension and jouissance, repetition and infinity' of the amorous dialogue (Wolfson 2006:351, citing Kristeva 1987:63). The interplay of incantation and jouissance heighten the aesthetic appreciation of the Song because the poem's paradoxical tensions, yearning for union and epiphany, and the alternation of presence and absence are intense and real. With incantation at work and play, the 'joyful, quivering passion of the Song of Songs' (Kristeva 1987:60) is not repressed or obscured; instead, the Song evinces a 'pure joy' wherein reality is imagined and the imagined is real (Wolfson 2006:352). In harmony with Eros then, the vineyard as existential project becomes a joyous, passionate work. The ebullience is sheer grace and is sustained by 'the economy of the gift,' the tender and subtle invitation to 'Love me!', and the reciprocal gift of 'my love' to the Beloved. Within the Trinitarian economy of otherness and in intimacy with the Beloved, the quivering passion becomes a love as strong as death and a mighty flame of Yahweh. Spiritual direction therefore heightens sensuality so that love is unimpeded and flows back to its Source of Trinitarian *eros* and *ekstasis* (Chapters 4 and 5). Through the seeker's growth in Otherness, the blossoming of intimacy with the Beloved, and the intensifying of *joi*, spiritual direction testifies to the Song of Songs as a contemplation of divine love and a celebration of human transformation in love.

Integral to the role of Eros as principal agent and the intrinsic maternal wisdom of the poem, the research also identifies the Song of Songs as a poetic womb (Chapter 3), the ‘womb of human love’ yearning for its Source and the ‘womb of divine love’ yearning for epiphany in human encounter. With the Incarnation of Christ serving as ultimate Epiphany, Eros yearns that God would come to birth in the soul through a divine impregnation that is transformative, and which gradually brings deeper contemplation of the life of Christ and deeper identification with Jesus in the Paschal Mystery.

7.1.7 The real vineyard as living sacrament and living testament

The appropriative bent and existential content of the vineyard metaphor highlight the deep irony of the Song, namely, its aptitude for embodiment and incarnation. A *poiesis* of the vineyard as existential project is therefore implicated, that is, the care of ‘my own vineyard’ and the cultivation of my individual life project. With regard to story, the journey of metaphor in the present research provides a model for exploring personal narrative from the perspective of the immediate (through a live metaphor like the vineyard), the past (myths and mythological motifs), and epiphany (mystical symbols). The multidimensional approach to the vineyard provides a wide lens for viewing personal story and for finding meaning within a large, unifying story of Scripture and the biblical tradition. The *poiesis* of the vineyard therefore involves conscious involvement with the biblical and mystical tradition, a contemplative integration of the Song’s primordial symbolism, and an authentic appropriation within the intricate web of human relationships, soul friendship, self-care and intimacy with the divine lover. The incarnational implications for the vineyard as existential project are delineated in the final section (detachment) of Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6; and the orientation or direction of the journey is cited as the harmonisation of all creation in God. In celebration of a transformed self, the responsibility for one’s own vineyard is considered a grace, a gift, and an art – the development of an aesthetic lifestyle whereby the vineyard becomes a sacrament which is wholly pleasing to God and a testament to conscious involvement in a project of life-integration through a transforming love. The Song of Songs as ‘iconographic text’ provides a window to a poetic setting of the vineyard, yet mediates between the imagined and the real. The value of this ‘iconographic text’ is that it invites one to look at one’s vineyard and beyond – to perceive its original dignity, fertility and beauty. While the icon is composed of the fragmentations of our broken existence, its composite beauty portrays the vision of psychological wholeness, union with God, and harmony within the cosmos.

7.2 Value of the research

The research highlights the multivalence of the Song of Songs as biblical paradigm for spiritual direction, on several levels: the human subject (locus); human yearning (focus); the human search (journey); the dynamics of human transformation and spiritual maturation (process); the aspects of life-integration and union with God (purpose); and a life that is opened out to epiphany (direction). Three areas are delineated below which summarise the value of this research for contemporary spiritual direction.

7.2.1 *Transformation in love as raison-d'être for Christian spiritual direction*

The beloved's transformation in the Song of Songs is the basis for positing transformation in love as the *raison-d'être* for Christian spiritual direction. Framed within the two poles of Sg 1:6 and Sg 8:12, the transformative process is described as a journey from self-depletion to self-giving, with neglect of the vineyard referring to the 'giving away of self' in compliance to the collective and the tending of the vineyard implying the 'giving of self' in creative-generative expression. The early stages of the journey are described as inward looking, self-preoccupied and possessive; however the ongoing exodus gradually effects a conscious and authentic self-giving. The research identifies Sg 8:12 – 'But my own vineyard is mine to give' – as the key to the poem's *raison-d'être* because the beloved herself is testimony to the transforming power of love. The testimony is the experiential realisation that one is fully loved, fully human, and fully alive in God; in turn, the generative vineyard in Sg 8:12 represents 'my gift of love to the Beloved'. The giving of self at this mature point is one of dispossession or detachment, and is viewed against the backdrop of Ultimate Gift: of Jesus giving up his life for his friends (Jn 15). Similarly the realisation of who 'I am' is inextricably related to remaining in Jesus the True Vine, the divine *I AM* (Chapter 5).

The beloved's journey demonstrates unequivocally that human transformation and spiritual maturation begin where we are, with our patterns of neglect, distorted desires, psychic wounds, psychological complexes, spiritual predicament, and restless yearning. Spiritual direction cooperates with the Spirit in exploring various levels of the existential self and bringing a gradual harmonisation (psychic and spiritual) which impacts on our way of being in the world. The long road to deification – of living who 'I am' in union with the divine *I AM* – is a graced journey and a mystical path of love. It is transformative because the interior/experiential knowing comes through graces of encounter and in awakening to the *mysterium tremendum* in daily life. The transformative processes, dynamics and essential elements for the practice of spiritual direction are elaborated in Chapters 3-6 of this

dissertation, suggesting ways of facilitating the seeker's journey from self-neglect (the entry level of spiritual direction) toward a life of creativity and generativity (unfolding epiphany).

7.2.2 Clarification of Christian Spiritual Direction

Contemporary Christian spiritual direction is an interdisciplinary art of spiritual accompaniment, a graced practice of co-discernment, and a contemplative space for divine-human encounter. The art involves a multiplex of listening skills within the seeker-God-cojourner relationship and requires presence to God within the multifaceted dimensions of daily life, while grace effects a heightened awareness of ordinary reality in relation to Ultimate Reality. Contemplative space disposes the whole person to transforming encounters with God through receptivity to divine love, openness to the Spirit's direction, and friendship with Jesus the Beloved. The conversation explores vital ways of being human, with particular attention to loving union with God and life-giving communion with others for the purpose of becoming a passionate and compassionate presence in the world. The grace of sustained spiritual direction is an authentic self, nurtured with holistic self-care and healthy spiritual practices, and lived in adoration and anticipation of the ineffable God who is Mystery.

In relation to the Song of Songs, Jesus the Archetype personifies the wonder of being fully loved, fully human, and fully alive in God, as the Incarnation serves as Epiphany and the Paschal Mystery as symbol of Ultimate Gift. In journeying with the Beloved Archetype in all of life, the cojourner (or spiritual director) attends to the interior life, is seasoned by solitude and contemplation, and obtains the essential knowledge, discretion and experience for journeying with others. With the charism for guiding seekers in deepening faith, hope, and love, the cojourner becomes an *anam cara* – a friend of the soul and a friend of God.

Based on the paradigm of the Song of Songs, spiritual direction is termed a poetic science because its experiential approach invites, evokes, and invokes. With the Holy Spirit as principal agent, discernment intuits the divine invitation, evokes human yearning, and responds to the divine initiative for the purpose of human transformation in divine love. The cojourner facilitates the integral search for love, God and self by engaging the seeker's desires, needs, prayers, images, and story. The process invariably attends to dryness and disconnection (depletion), the healing of psychic wounds and psychological complexes, the painful purification of dark nights, and the deconstruction of false images of God, self and others. The gradual recovery of one's true self in God (*imago dei*) is the delightful discovery of oneself as beloved of God, toward an intimate union of being who I am in the divine *I AM* (deification). With the Trinity serving as paradigm for loving relationships and human

community, spiritual direction facilitates the creative-generative art of *poiesis*; that is, becoming a unique embodiment of divine love, a living sacrament in the world, a living testament to conscious involvement in a project of life-integration, and a catalyst in the beautification and harmonisation of all creation in God.

7.2.3 *The Song of Songs, Christian spiritual direction and Christian mysticism*

My point of departure has been the Song of Songs because the beloved as archetypal seeker speaks in ‘non-religious’, anonymous, and experiential terms, a voice that is accessible to the general Christian populace. The value of this dissertation is that it augments the Song of Songs’ accessibility to contemporary readers because it bridges the gap between text and experience, poetry and praxis, spirituality and sexuality, mysticism and spiritual direction, medieval and twenty-first centuries. The Song of Songs finds deep resonance and an unparalleled flourishing in the mystical, medieval, monastic tradition; hence the inclusion of insights from the works of John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and Ignatius of Loyola. The research serves to introduce love mysticism to Protestant seekers who are new to spiritual direction and unfamiliar with a rich practice that has been influenced by Western mystical traditions. Contemporary seekers would benefit from this research, particularly those who long for the kind of authenticity and intimacy in the Beloved which exemplary mystics enjoyed, albeit through immense suffering and dark nights. With its human dynamics, theological poetics, and mystical aesthetic, as well as the inclusion of a few pertinent illustrations from Asian spirituality, this dissertation serves as an interdisciplinary-intercultural resource on the Song of Songs, Christian spiritual direction, and Christian mysticism. In sum, it is biblical and human enough, mystical and practical enough, and ‘non-religious’ and theological enough to engage contemporary cojourners and seekers.

7.3 Stimulus for further investigative studies

Given the foregoing conclusions, it is evident that the present research applies broad brushstrokes to the iconographic text of the Song of Songs. Several suggestions for ongoing studies in the Song of Songs and spiritual direction are delineated below. First, a comparative study of Teresa of Avila’s spiritual itinerary in her *Interior Castle* and my proposed Song of Songs’ spiritual itinerary would provide experiential insights for spiritual direction, namely: the integral aspects of knowledge of God and self-knowledge in the inward journey; the correspondence between the ‘interior castle’ and the vineyard in the understanding of interiority; the value of images and archetypal symbols in contemplative prayer; ‘Christian

individuation' as a maturation process of psychic wholeness and union with God; and the radical transformations and significant moments that result in an incarnational mysticism. Second, ongoing studies in the Song of Songs and John of the Cross' *Dark Night, Spiritual Canticle, and Living Flame of Love*, particularly the aspect of transformation in love, would underscore my emphasis on the paradigmatic and transformative nature of the Song of Songs, the close correlation between the biblical love song and Juan's love for the Beloved, and the relevance of sanjuanist mystical theology for contemporary Asian spirituality. Given the particular way in which contemporary works on John of the Cross inform the present approach to the Song of Songs, this dissertation highlights the value of the sanjuanist model of spiritual direction for Asian contexts. Particular areas include the following: the essence and substance of our worth as the beloved of God is that God is the soul's centre; the way of negation as contemplation ignites and purifies rather than eradicates desire for God; the wound of love is a paradoxical awakening to the inexpressible logic of divine love in the midst of suffering and purgation; and with God as principal agent in divine-human encounter, and within the constancy and ineffability of divine love, spiritual direction affirms the yin-yang of daily reality as a transformative principle. Since the bride-bridegroom theme lies at the heart of Teresa and John's teaching, these two sixteenth century Spanish Carmelites remain unrivalled as classic sources on the topic of the Song of Songs/love mysticism/spiritual direction, which evokes a third suggestion. If this dissertation is developed with a specific Asian focus and deeper socio-cultural-religious insights and sensitivities, this research might stimulate a greater love for the Songs of Songs, a deeper appreciation for Carmelite spiritual direction, as well as a contextualisation of the vineyard as sacramental project in family, marital, and local church contexts. Fourth, a more intensive Jungian-psychoanalytical study of the Song of Songs which includes aspects of romantic love, myths, the inner journey, Eros, Dionysius, etc. would inform 'a spirituality of romantic love' and 'a spirituality of sexuality'. Fifth, further studies in the resonance between Creation Spirituality and the Songs of Songs would illuminate the search for our original blessing, a passion for creation, and a biblical-aesthetic lifestyle within a postmodern context.

Finally, having focused on the *human beloved* throughout the research, the conclusion is that the Song of Songs is indeed the song of the soul. The value of *The Canticle of Spiritual Direction* will unfold as cojourners and seekers find in the Song of Songs the music and lyrics of their soul, for it is in journeying with the beloved in the Beloved that we come to the interior knowledge of being called 'the beloved' and of experiencing the *mysterium tremendum* of the Song of Songs.

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