

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE OF GOD**

JOHAN VAN STADEN



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**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CHRISTIAN
EXPERIENCE OF GOD**

JOHANNES H VAN STADEN

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Supervisor: Prof S.D. Edwards

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It is hereby declared that this is my own work, both in conception and execution.

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SUMMARY

A phenomenological study of the Christian experience of God

The influence of existentialism and phenomenology on modern psychology necessitates an accurate description of the experience of God without any preconceptions or bias. This study explores the way Christians experience God. This is done by means of a phenomenological explication of first hand descriptions of six participants. The primary aim of the study is to describe, and come to a better understanding of the experience of God through arriving at a universal structure of this phenomenon.

Firstly an overview of major theoretical developments, and the history of thought pertaining to religious experience, is given. The phenomenological approach, the theoretical foundation underlying the method, and major contributions within the fields of psychology and phenomenology of religion are also discussed.

Six protocols are included on the basis of them being articulate and authentic accounts of the individual experiences. These protocols are analysed by using a phenomenological method of investigation. The first step is to break the protocols down into Natural Meaning Units (NMUs). Thirteen themes are subsequently identified and the NMUs are arranged according to the themes. A psychologically Transformed Meaning Summary for each theme is formulated for each individual.

The identified themes, in order of their significance for the participants, are: 1) Relationship; 2) Paradox/Tension; 3) Love; 4) Development and growth; 5) Creation; 6) Beyond the rational; 7) Direction; 8) Contemplation/Inner feeling; 9) Suffering/Death/Dying; 10) A sense of a presence; 11) Anger; 12) Submission to a higher power; 13) Theological insight. A specific situated structure of the experience is formulated for each person, with a subsequent synthesis or universal structure of the experience to reflect the general experience of the participants. The findings are validated and discussed. The participants rate the extent to which the universal structure discloses their individual experiences at an average of 7.75 on a scale from 0 to 10. The study concludes with some recommendations as to how the findings of this study can be put to use in future research.

OPSOMMING

'n Fenomenologiese studie van die Christelike ervaring van God

Die invloed van Eksistensialisme en Fenomenologie op moderne Sielkunde bevestig die noodsaaklikheid van 'n akkurate beskrywing van die ervaring van God, gestroop van enige vooronderstellings en vooroordeel. Hierdie studie ondersoek die wyse waarop Christene God ervaar. Dit word gedoen deur middel van 'n fenomenologiese analise van eerstehandse beskrywings van ses deelnemers. Die primêre doelwit van die studie is om die menslike ervaring van God te beskryf en sodoende tot 'n beter insig van die ervaring te kom by wyse van 'n universele formulering van die fenomeen.

Daar word eers 'n oorsig gegee van die belangrikste teoretiese ontwikkelings en geskiedenis van denke met betrekking tot religieuse ervaring. Die fenomenologiese benadering, die teoretiese basis onderliggend aan die metode en die belangrikste bydraes op die gebied van Sielkunde en Godsdiensfenomenologie, word ook bespreek.

Ses protokols word ingesluit op grond van die feit dat hulle geartikuleerde en outentieke weer-gawes is van die individuele ervarings. Hierdie protokols word geanaliseer deur middel van 'n fenomenologiese navorsingsmetode. Die eerste stap is om die protokols op te breek in Natuurlike Betekenisvolle Eenhede (NBEE). Dertien temas word vervolgens geïdentifiseer en die NBEE word gerangskik volgens hierdie temas. 'n Sielkundig-getransformeerde opsomming van die betekenis van elke tema word vir elke individu geformuleer.

Die geïdentifiseerde temas, in volgorde van belangrikheid vir die deelnemers, is: 1) Verhouding; 2) Paradoks/Dialektiese spanning; 3) Liefde; 4) Ontwikkeling en groei; 5) Skepping; 6) Buite die rasonele; 7) Rigting; 8) Oorpeinsing/Innerlike gevoel; 9) Lyding/Dood/Sterwe; 10) Bewustheid van 'n teenwoordigheid; 11) Woede; 12) Onderdanigheid aan 'n hoër mag; 13) Teologiese insig. 'n Spesifiek-gesitueerde struktuur van die ervaring word vir elke persoon geformuleer, gevolg deur 'n sintese, of universele struktuur van die ervaring, om die algemene ervaring van die deelnemers te weerspieël. Die bevindings word bespreek en die geldigheid daarvan word gemeet. Die ses deelnemers evalueer die mate waarin die universele struktuur hul eie individuele ervarings blootlê, met 'n gemiddeld van 7.75, op 'n skaal van 0 tot 10. Die studie sluit af met enkele aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

“Of God it is impossible to speak, because He is neither a natural nor spiritual object” (Ott 1974:99). Despite this statement by Heinrich Ott, people have always thought of, and spoken about God. What they said about God reflected their unique experiences of the Wholly Other, always in terms of their existence, their *being-in-the-world*.

During the past two centuries a desire has originated for an adequate description of that experience. In the realm of psychology several theories have been presented to explicate this occurrence. These theories seem to have developed within a prevalent scientific paradigm, always arising from a certain predetermined academic framework or a specific school of thought. The question remains whether these theories are indeed epistemologically valid reflections on a basic human phenomenon. In the wake of existentialism and phenomenology and their influence on modern psychology, it becomes necessary to accurately describe this phenomenon without any preconceptions or bias. The need is to replace the “why?” question with the “what?” question.

The person who wants to talk about God is socially, culturally and historically embedded and is influenced by the prevalent philosophical paradigms. We can thus only talk about God in relation to our own existence, in terms of what He is for me and to me and ultimately in terms of our experience of the Wholly Other. According to James (1902) all knowledge has personal experience as its indisputable source. Van Huyssteen (1987:5) concluded that “uitsprake (oor God is) by benadering waar... (en) voorlopig ... en daarom ook ... begrens en korrigeerbaar”. If we talk about God, we use models of thought from which we derive theories. This study is psychological before theological in its prime focus on personal experiences of God rather than on systematic or scientific reflection of God. It is relevant to theology to the extent to which reflections on such personal experiences are able to be reflectively systematised in terms of theological knowledge and science. It remains, however, a psychological study concerned with human experience. The study is undertaken to come to a better understanding of the way people experience God. This can be done if first hand descriptions of the individual experiences are obtained and explored through the phenomenological method of investigation.

The method is phenomenological as it is concerned with a phenomenon as it is revealed to human beings through their experiences.

The first chapter of the study provides a basic orientation as far as the aim of the study and basic definitions of relevant terms are concerned. A statement regarding the researcher's own (possible) bias concerning the phenomenon under investigation is also made. The second chapter provides a general literature survey of relevant publications on the phenomenon. Initially an overview of major theoretical developments and the history of thought concerning religious experience is given. The chapter continues with a concise description of the phenomenological approach and the theoretical foundation underlying the method. An investigation of major contributions within the fields of psychology and phenomenology of religion which seem relevant to this study concludes the chapter. In chapter three the methodology is discussed. At first a motivation is given for the choice of the phenomenological method of investigation. The research approach is subsequently put into perspective and the research procedure outlined. Chapter four is a description of the actual research and a presentation of the results. The protocols, natural meaning units, identified themes, transformed meaning summaries, specific situated structures, and universal structure form part of this chapter. The results are then validated and interpreted. The study is concluded in chapter 5 with an evaluation of the research and some recommendations are made as to how the results of this study can be put to use in practice and in future research.

1.2 Aim of the study

The true nature of reality will remain both unknown and unknowable to us (Spinelli 1989). The ultimate goal of this study is thus not an investigation of a phenomenon called "God", but to present an adequate explication of a person's experience of this phenomenon in order to come to an understanding of the question: "What does it mean to experience God?" In the neglected realm of experience we can (re)discover and come to grips with the meaning of being human. As part of the universe we live in we are the meaning creators. We need to explicate the essence, structure or form of human experience as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques. The aim of phenomenology is an unbiased study of things *as they appear* so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience. The reader should ultimately come away with an impression of: "I have a better understanding of what it means for someone to experience God".

The first hand descriptions of the individual experiences will be obtained and explored through the phenomenological method of investigation. Through a psychologically transformed description of the unique structures in each specific context it will be possible to arrive at a valid general description of the phenomenon. The general structure will be of value to the understanding of the meaning of a specific human experience. It will benefit future research on religious and related phenomena and contribute to psychological theory and application. It will be of added value if the study contributes to a divergence from the Cartesian split in modern theology and psychology of religion. The study will aim towards a contribution to the discipline of psychology with theological interpretations restricted to their experienced essences.

The specific aims of the study are:

- a) to describe and come to a better understanding of the experience of God through arriving at a universal structure of this phenomenon;
- b) to apply systematically the phenomenological method of investigation;
- c) to present the research in such a format as to stimulate further research on the phenomenon;
- d) to contribute to the field of phenomenological psychology;
- e) to facilitate personal growth for the researcher - the most important aspect of phenomenological research is not the findings but the process of discovery! (*To travel is better than to arrive* - Robert M Pirsig 1989:157).

1.3 Definition of terms

1.3.1 God

This study will be limited to the experience of God embodied in the Christian tradition. A similar study could be done on any other religious affiliation including Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist. The notion, however, is that the experiences of different religions vary tremendously and the scope for this study has to be limited in order to explicate basic homogeneous descriptions of one specific phenomenon.

For the same reason the experience of God will be explicated and not the experience of, say, faith or religion that in themselves already are interpretations and descriptions of the God experience - or at least could be. In this radical sense the original and characteristic form of religious experience is a consciousness, a sense or feeling that is not to be identified with either

belief or practice (cf. James 1902; Mouton 1990). The God experience is the immediate and unmediated phenomenon under investigation.

1.3.2 Experience

The term *experience* is chosen before behaviour as the study is more specifically concerned, and therefore biased, with the qualitative, immeasurable, spiritual aspects of the God phenomenon. The term *experience* is chosen to reflect the essential psychological nature of this investigation. The study will deal essentially with what might be called a continuing awareness or experience of God and not the more ecstatic, momentary and sometimes seizure-like experiences that are often reported. The interviewees were, however, not limited to particular types of experiences in their responses and accounts.

The word *experience* and its Latin translation *experientia* derive from the Greek *empeira*. In classical Greek philosophy, the empirical or experiential mode was considered to be less significant for cognition and evaluation than was reason, which gave “form” to experience and expressed its “essence”. With the Renaissance and the emergence of modern scientific inquiry, however, greater attention was focused on firsthand doing and undergoing and on views claiming less than absolute certainty. The term *empiricism* came to denote either an appeal to forms of experience considered to be foundational for various human concerns; or, more broadly, to stress the experimental method and denote a general attitude of realism in the negotiation and appraisal of human involvement in the world. The word *empirical* in this study will thus be used with circumspection to reflect all these factors and meanings.

1.3.3 Phenomenology

The term ‘phenomenology’ is partly derived from the Greek word *phainomenon* (plural *phainomena*). *Phainomenon* literally means ‘appearance’, that is, that which shows itself (Spinelli 1989:2). Phenomenology, thus, is literally the *study of that which appears*.

It seems important to differentiate phenomenological *philosophy* from phenomenological *psychology*. Polkinghorne (1989) explains that phenomenology, as a philosophy, has been concerned with providing descriptions of the general characteristics of experience, with a particular focus by existentialists and humanists on the experience of being human. Phenomenological psychology is a perspective that acknowledges the reality of the realm of experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge and selects for study the phenomena relevant to psychology,

such as the experience of God in the present study. While constantly being aware of the insights of *existentialism* and *phenomenological philosophy*, the use of the term *phenomenology* in this study will denote an emphasis on the relevance it has to psychology. This relevance emerges in two ways: (a) by holding that human behaviour is an expression of experience; and (b) by providing a way to investigate human experience in a methodical, systematic, and rigorous way.

1.4 Research bias

At this point it seems important for the researcher to acknowledge his own bias as a theologian concerned with a phenomenological psychological investigation into the pure, naïve God experiences - the original and immediate human experience of God. Churchill (1990:52) shows how Merleau-Ponty indicated the impossibility of a complete suspension of perspectivity, the latter being an essential feature of any act of consciousness. Once we have recognised our assumptions we can develop a critical attitude towards them. Some phenomenological bracketing seems valuable, if not essential. The study is not concerned with the researcher's own naïve assumption whether God exists or not (as term, concept, absolute etc.) but the investigation is simply concerned with descriptions of the *experience of God* i.e. the phenomenon as experienced in its primordial original reality - individually and collectively.

Expectations and assumptions will, as far as possible, be suspended to focus on the primary experiences, but the researcher remains part of the research and "... how can any possible judge or critic help being biased in favour of the religion by which his own needs are best met? He aspires to impartiality; but he is too close to the struggle not to be to some degree a participant, and he is sure to approve most warmly those fruits of piety in others which taste most good and prove most nourishing to *him*" (James 1902:305).

Spinelli (1989:171) indeed admits that phenomenological psychology also has its own assumptions. We are after all active constructors of our experience and not, as behaviourists suggest, passive reactors to environmental stimuli. As active interpreters of our experience, we are led to acknowledge our experiential responsibility as *beings-in-the-world*. The researcher will thus not be an investigator in the strict sense of the word but rather a participant, bracketing personal preconceptions without sacrificing or negating personal beliefs and views. Although our worlds remain separate and distinct, the interpretative process allows us to share, to some extent, the phenomenal world that each of us creates. The researcher's personal account

of his experience of God will therefore also be included among the descriptions for explication.

1.5 Résumé

The first chapter of the study provided a basic orientation as far as the aim of the study and basic definitions of relevant terms are concerned. A statement regarding the researcher's own (possible) bias concerning the phenomenon under investigation was also made. In the chapter that follows an overview will be given of some of the major contributions relevant to the scope of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There is a large array of literature in psychology and psychology of religion and numerous scholars have studied the experience people have of God. The following look at some major studies and theories in this area is by no means exhaustive, and rather cursory at best. The main intent of this overview, however, is to provide the reader with an impression of the variety of research in this field. If a psychologist is to conduct a scientific analysis of a religious phenomenon, it seems essential that he or she remains open to a wide range of hypotheses.

Initially an overview of major theoretical developments and the history of thought concerning religious experience is given. This is done to put the current study in a historical perspective. The chapter continues with a concise description of the phenomenological approach and the theoretical foundation underlying the method. An investigation of major contributions within the fields of psychology and phenomenology of religion which seem relevant to this study concludes the chapter.

2.2 Historical perspective

2.2.1 Classical Greek antiquity

The most basic philosophical question is: "What is real?" (Spinelli 1989). According to Allen (1985:30-31), Parmenides (born *ca* 510 bc) was the first Greek philosopher to contrast reality, achieved by logical reasoning, and appearances, given by our sense experience. From his thinking arose the famous contrast in Greek philosophy between *being* and *becoming*.

Plato (*ca* 427-347 bc) suggested that people had access to two worlds, the material and the ideal; but that the only real one was the world of ideas, the physical world being merely a copy or shadow of it; and that man's greatest virtue therefore lay in escaping from the material world (e.g. his body) into the world of ideas (soul), which alone was eternal (Deist 1984).

It seems very important for the sake of this historical overview to consider Plato's suggestion that we are already in possession of knowledge of which we are not conscious but which we will readily recollect if carefully prompted (Flew 1979).

Kruger (1984) calls Plato the father of a representational theory of reality. This means that when one looks at an object, one does not see the object, but a *representation* of reality. The reality may be said to have representation in the *mind*. Plato contended that our experiences are imperfect representations of the things that do exist in reality. He suggested that the world that we experience does not exist in the form in which we experience it.

Aristotle (382-322 bc), on the other hand, gave precedence to the observable world. He was thus much more of a *rationalist* than Plato (Kruger 1984). Consciousness, for Aristotle, arose in the intercourse between the person and the environment. Man's perception of the environment through the sense organs must therefore, in the first place, give rise to experience, i.e. to the contents of the "mind". From this follows one of his most important ideas, namely that the human mind at birth is a blank slate or *tabula rasa*.

2.2.2 Biblical views

The Old Testament does not argue abstractly about the existence of God or the possibility of knowing the presence of God and experiencing God. Solely based on scriptural evidence from the Old Testament it is not clear what the experience of God was like for humanity. From non-Biblical literature it is clear that the experience of God and the interpretation thereof seemingly changed according to the social circumstances people encountered e.g. during the rise of the monarchy and the exile to Babylon. In times of war God became the great warrior and in times of a surge for power God became the great emperor (the idea of a national God). The experience of God was also inevitably linked to experiences of poverty, suffering, and repression. At first God was an impersonal entity, viewed from a distance. A need for a more personal God developed, someone with whom you can have a relationship, not unlike the relationships people have with one another. A need developed for a God who understood the plight of the people and with whom they could identify (Gillespie 1988).

God throughout the scripture asserts presence and power. Perhaps Job's questionings as recounted in the Bible are the exceptions. Even though God did not respond to Job's accusations and questionings at a time and in a way that Job would have preferred, God did manifest Himself to Job. God appeared to Job as a natural phenomenon, a thunderstorm, and spoke to him

“out of a storm”. This theophany was an overwhelming experience for Job, one that transformed his concept of the Almighty and gave Job a new understanding of his creaturely condition (Cummings 1980).

The experience of God in the Old Testament usually takes the form of direct encounter experiences. The motivational force of this encounter experience seems always evident. Jeremiah was commissioned after seeing God. Israel was asked to enter into a covenantal relationship and become the light to other nations through the fire and smoke of Sinai. Ancient Israelites claimed that their knowledge of God was the result of God’s initiative. They “knew” God because of God’s self revelation to them.

In the New Testament people evidently experience God through learning the effects of these experiences. *Ex fructibus eorum*, “by their fruits”, becomes the injunction. This is analogous to William James’ induction: “By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots” (1902:28). St. Paul’s flashing experience and encounter with God on the road to Damascus is one of the few direct encounters with God recounted in the New Testament.

2.2.3 Early Christian tradition

During the first centuries of church history the fledgling and frequently persecuted Christian church defended itself against its enemies and despisers by appealing to universal experiences and insights, which were then placed in a new framework (Berkhof 1986). Perception through the senses had already taken a functional place in the scientific consciousness of the time. Experience as a way of knowing clashed head-on with dogmatic perception. The works of Clement, Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Pelagius reflected the rational-dogmatic view, and it was not until Augustine (354-430) that religion was perceived to be based in experience (Veldsman 1990).

According to Allen (1985:39-89) Augustine gives credit to the Platonists for enabling him to overcome in his journey to Christianity the hindrance caused by his own inability to conceive any reality that was not sensible. The notion that the Good gives vision to our intellect as the sun gives sight to our eyes is the germ of Augustine’s view that knowledge of eternal things requires divine illumination. Augustine harbours the view that God illumines the mind and consequently he is able to achieve some knowledge of eternal truths from sensible things since what is insensible cannot otherwise be known to the senses (Augustine never explains very precisely how our minds are illumined by the eternal truths).

2.2.4 The Middle Ages

After a period in which the fundamental role of the religious experience in theological reflection had taken a low profile because of the break between the antique and medieval ages, this consciousness was resumed by, among others, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). In his extensive writings on mysticism he doesn't concentrate on sensory perception but on interhuman relations and religious experience as spiritual experience.

Reality, according to the mystics, is ultimately one and therefore the human spirit, to become one with the divine spirit, must follow a path either of personal unification or of unification by (mutual) love (Deist 1984:165). For Bernard, this spiritual journey is perceived by the inner senses. Jantzen explains Bernard as follows:

Experiences of God are not to be sought for their own sake, for their delightfulness, or out of intellectual curiosity. They are to be sought only and solely as the opening of the heart to God in communion with Christ through scripture and sacrament, which is the pathway of increasing union with God.

(Jantzen in Veldsman 1990:328)

In the experience induced process to unification the religious subject stays passive, sensing that this experience is a gift of God's grace that precedes all human activity. In an embracing and enclosing way religious experience becomes the source and transformer of religious life.

In contrast with Bernard the medieval Scholastics retained the distinction between the literal sense and the mystical sense. According to Weber (1988) the great issue of Scholasticism, initiated by Anselm, was the existence of the general concepts contained in or presupposed by every judgmental proposition (*genus* and *species*). From this search for the type and validity of the process of knowing came two different views: *Realism*, which was influenced by Plato, and *Nominalism*, which represented the application of the logical, epistemological and ontological thought of Aristotle.

The influential scholastic philosopher, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), was primarily influenced by Aristotle. In his theological writings he showed to what a considerable extent it was possible to combine Aristotelian positions in philosophy with Christian doctrines in theology. Aquinas considered the highest power of the soul to be rationality. This power gives a person

the ability to think. From this notion follows his attempt to find rational bases for God's existence. His most famous contribution to the philosophy of religion is his *Five Ways or Proofs of the existence of God* (Flew 1979:17-20)

Kruger (1984:24) shows how Aquinas divided rational power into two primary classes: (1) passive intellect, and (2) active intellect. Because of passive intellect, we have consciousness and awareness. The active intellect on the other hand is the basis of willing and voluntary action. Because of the active intellect we can act and make choices. Aquinas, therefore, sees man as being in the last instance free. Kruger points to the fact that this way of thinking touches upon the great controversy of modern psychology between the determinism in human events of the Freudian and behaviourist persuasion, and the humanists, phenomenologists, and existentialists who regard freedom as one of the basic dimensions of being human.

2.2.5 The Reformation

After the Middle ages the face of science changed dramatically. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), among others, contributed considerably towards this change. Opposing the traditional Aristotelian notion of experience, Bacon demanded that access to reality by means of experience should not be subjective and arbitrary, but methodically controlled (Veldsman 1990).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) similarly rejected Aristotle for substantial theological reasons (Weber 1988). He also rejected scholastic theology (Veldsman 1990). In his reflection on experience, Luther brings into account the totality of human existence. In his opinion experience should, however, always be seen in close relation with the scriptures. No direct experience of God, independent from the Script, is ever possible. The *sola scriptura, sola fides* of Luther included a focus on personal experience of divine grace, authenticated by scriptural authority. Personal experience, in turn, provided a basis for revision of the dominant received understanding of the relations of faith to practice and of grace to good works.

The concept of experience is not explicitly raised in the works of John Calvin (1509-1564). As with Luther, religious experience and the Scripture are viewed as inseparable. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) experience never really features as a way of knowing the divine. In Platonic vein this knowledge is somehow naturally implanted in the human mind:

That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance has indued (*sic*) all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man, being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.

(Calvin [1559] 1989:43)

Many of the “left-wing” or “Anabaptist” Protestant groups felt that both Lutheran and Calvinist forms of Christianity, at least in their official theology and polity, did not stress with sufficient clarity or force the fundamental role of the religious consciousness and experience of the individual believer. In this consciousness and experience, affective elements were deemed to be of basic importance. Piety was associated with warmth of conviction, and pietism appeared as both the central theme of certain separate Protestant groups and as the basis of reform movements in certain Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican groups (Power 1992).

2.2.6 The Enlightenment

Descartes' (1596-1650) famous proposition, *cogito ergo sum*, was the primary principle in the beginning of the Age of Reason during the middle of the seventeenth century. Cartesianism was immediately recognised as a challenge to the Aristotelianism which still held sway in most European countries.

Descartes argued as follows: Thought cannot doubt itself. No other statement about ourselves is comparably free from contradiction. The criterion of truth is the clearness and distinctness of the idea. We deduce this from the character of our fundamental conviction. No idea is so clear as the idea of God. Since it is not derived from sense experience, and is not fashioned by our own act, it must be an innate idea implanted in us by God himself (a notion shared by Plato and Calvin). To think of God is to imply his existence. Descartes was of the opinion that our knowledge of both the natural and the supernatural is rooted in human reason; they have a common source, and neither has an overriding authority (Cragg 1960:38-43).

As a rationalist Descartes asked himself what is unequivocally real and distinct about the world, and his answer to this was that no matter what you did, you could not deny that the things or the world had *extension*. The world of extension, i.e. the *res extensae*, is what natural

science talks about. Kruger (1984:27), however, poses the question: "... what then about what is called subjectivity, the *res cogitans*?" According to Kruger this was left to psychology and it forms the basis of the dilemma of modern psychology.

Of the opponents of Descartes, John Locke (1632-1704) probably had the greatest influence. Kruger (1984:29) believes that his influence in the psychological sphere is felt very strongly even today. Locke rejected the theory of innate ideas which stems from both Plato and Descartes. In the footsteps of Aristotle he argues that the mind at birth is a blank slate or *tabula rasa*. Experience is like pen marks on white paper and whatever thoughts, concepts and images we have, depend upon our experience. He pointed out that we are taught about God by our parents and other elders when we are toddlers. For Locke, both the denial of Cartesian innate ideas and an epistemology grounded in experience were necessary if the newly emerging empirical sciences were to have the authority needed for their findings to be taken seriously as genuine knowledge.

The meaning of the experience of God to John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, is frequently described as Lockean in its epistemology. Runyon (1992:189) quotes Wesley as saying that "there is nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses". But does this mean that there is no road to God other than through the senses? Runyon is of opinion that Wesley decisively modified Locke at this point. Wesley seemingly recognised that spiritual reality is a realm which the *physical* senses are not competent to mediate. Wesley proposed what might be called a *spiritual empiricism*. According to this thought there are "spiritual senses", whose function is to provide access to the world of the Spirit. Using this notion, Wesley developed a doctrine of religious experience directly parallel to the Lockean doctrine of sense experience. Spiritual sensation operates in strict analogy to physical sensation. Just as the physical senses do not provide knowledge of the empirical world except as they are acted upon and stimulated by sense data, the spiritual senses have no knowledge or acquaintance with God and spiritual reality except as the Divine Spirit acts upon them. The spiritual senses remain obscured, unused until such time as they are "activated" by the life-giving Spirit and the image of God is renewed in us. Here communication and mediation by the reading of Scriptures, prayers, preaching, the sacrament etc. play a major role. Wesley steadfastly resisted notions of the knowledge of God which are immediate within the subject and independent of social mediation. Wesley adhered to the Lockean description of the two sources of knowledge: sense impressions and reflection on sense impressions.

Locke's greatest criticism came from David Hume. He argued that Locke's confident rationalism, when pressed to its logical conclusions, led nowhere. Hume destroyed the basis for the glib rationalism of the early part of the century (Cragg 1960:168). A fresh start was necessary, and in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) it achieved notable results.

Deist (1984:136) illustrates that Kant was of the opinion that, although all our experience of phenomena - as manifestations of the material world - is solely by sensory perception, all human knowledge - as the form of that perception - is wholly determined and created by the human mind.

Cragg (1960:252) shows that, in addition to the realm of "phenomenal" reality, Kant recognised another, that of "noumenal" existence (*noumenon* = the [unknowable] thing in itself, as opposed to the appearances of a phenomenon [Deist 1984:174]), and deliberately restricted the scope of the former in order to establish the latter. Insight, then, is really more important than exact scientific knowledge, and Kant insisted that what our moral experience discloses carries us far beyond the truths which phenomena reveal. Cragg quotes Kant's famous statement: "to deny *knowledge* in order to leave room for *faith*".

Russel (1985:48) explains how Kant favoured the idea of an *a priori* knowledge that is not purely "analytic". Kant regarded the physical object, which he called the *thing in itself*, as essentially unknowable. What can be known is the object as we have it in experience, which he called the *phenomenon*. The phenomenon, being a joint product of us and the thing in itself, is sure to have those characteristics which are due to us, and is therefore sure to conform to our *a priori* knowledge.

2.2.7 The nineteenth century

Kant opened the way for developments in the nineteenth century. Allen (1985) shows how Hegel (1770-1831) tried to overcome the severe limitations Kant placed on knowledge, namely history. Hegel believed that none of the earlier philosophers looked to history as the manifestation and realisation of the ultimate reality. For Hegel, history is the progressive self-unfolding and self-realisation of the Absolute. Kant's attempt to restore objective connections between particulars turns everything we experience into phenomena or appearances, and we are cut off from any knowledge of reality. In fact, the subjects we are aware of as ourselves are themselves phenomena or appearances. What is behind the phenomenal subject is unknown and unknowable. What is thus behind the *noumena* is unknown and unknowable. We have

knowledge of appearances at the price of not being able to say anything about what is behind the appearances.

Hegel suggested that reality is a continuum, with nothing separate and unrelated. To grasp reality we should not approach it with categories of thought considered abstractly, as Kant did; we should see logic and the categories of thought in the historical process. We should recognise that, in the historical process, the ultimate reality, the Absolute, is realising itself. Reality is the process of becoming fuller, more articulate.

Peter C Hodgson (1984) offers another angle to denote the way Hegel surmounted the limitations of Kantian critical philosophy. In his research on Hegel, Hodgson suggests the possibility of two ways of entry to the Hegel system: the phenomenological and the logical (or speculative). According to this view speculative thinking holds as basic principle that a coherence exists between consciousness and its object. The ultimate object of consciousness is the absolute and thereby the absolute constitutes the very consciousness of itself. In this sense, knowledge of the absolute is the absolute itself. Phenomenology, on the other hand, knows that things appear to consciousness; they are “phenomena” of consciousness and are knowable only as such. Hodgson indicates that Hegel argued that the presupposition of phenomenology is the speculative identity of consciousness and its absolute object, which is the condition of possibility for knowing any objects at all. This speculative insight is consequently known to *us* who are carrying out the phenomenological operation, but is not known to the consciousness being observed. As a result of the dialectic of these two ways Hodgson coins the term *speculative phenomenology* to describe Hegel’s system. The representation of the appearance of God to consciousness is hence carried in certain forms: immediate knowledge of faith, feeling, representation, thought. God is thus defined as being there for consciousness, as object, as appearing, as being “represented” in the world. Hodgson admits that the success of the mediation of the two forms is still debatable.

Also opposing Kant in the first half of the century was the highly influential theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). According to Mouton (1990) he arose because of the desire for an accurate explication of religious experience. Weber (1988) compares his influence with that of Augustine. He explains that Schleiermacher demonstrated a unique category of religion, the “feeling and intuition of the universal”. The absolute, eternal, pure Being does not reveal itself to objectivising reason, nor to sensitivity, but to a totally embracing behaviour and feeling.

Mouton is of opinion that Schleiermacher's ascription to the realm of feeling marked the start of modern Protestantism's habitual emphasis on the knowledge of God as being inward and experiential. Schleiermacher hoped to demonstrate the inapplicability of Kant's contention that our experience is structured by the categories and thoughts we bring to it. For Schleiermacher, "descriptive accuracy is to be obtained and reductionism is to be avoided by insisting on the immediacy of religious experience, and on its radical independence from beliefs and practices. It is a moment in human experience which remains unstructured by, though it is expressed in thoughts and actions" (Proudfoot, quoted by Mouton 1990:347).

Mouton shows that this theory of the immediacy of religious experience is epistemologically inadequate, although descriptively accurate, by using Pannenberg's distinction: "Psychologically" (from the subject's point of view) the experience seems to be immediate and non inferential, but "logically" (as most contemporary philosophers of religion would agree) it cannot be totally independent of concepts, beliefs, grammatical rules and linguistic practices. For Schleiermacher, the religious moment in consciousness can be accurately described only as a feeling of absolute dependence.

Criticism of Hegel's convictions that there is a continuity between all things, and that reason has the power to uncover that continuity, came mainly from the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Kierkegaard claimed that Hegel had forgotten what it meant to be an existing human being (Allen 1985). He also attacked organised Christianity, which seemed to be a secure custodian of Western man's spirituality, for its hypocrisy (Kruger 1988).

According to Allen (1985:244) Kierkegaard protested that Christians had forgotten what Christianity is. In his description of what it means to become a Christian, Kierkegaard developed an original analysis of human existence which significantly influenced the twentieth century movement known as existentialism which in turn has influenced theology. Kruger (1988:27), as indeed many others do, regards Kierkegaard as the actual founder of existentialism.

Kierkegaard's greatest contribution towards the aims of this study is his contention that choice or decision is the most important feature of human existence. Veldsman (1990:334) explains that Kierkegaard regards religious experience as an irrational leap wilfully executed in the innermost being of the individual in a paradoxical manner. From this follows that religious consciousness is a matter of choice. This notion of freedom of choice would in the decades to come play a vital role in the dawning of existentialism and phenomenology.

The second part of the nineteenth century is characterised by fierce criticism against religious consciousness. Consider the criticism of Feuerbach ("God is humanity's highest real or projected self"), Marx ("Religion is the opium of the people"), Freud ("The basis of religion lies in anxiety over the father figure"), and Nietzsche ("God is dead").

2.2.8 The twentieth century

In the wake of the criticism of religious experience of the latter part of the nineteenth century, the focus shifted to man's moral experience, the human conscience, or awareness of values, which enables one to discover one's responsibilities and failures. Because all these approaches threaten to reduce God to a reflected image of a higher human ego, many European theologians after the first world war, especially those under the influence of Karl Barth, banished the concept of experience from dogmatics. Experience was considered to start with God and is not to be founded in human existence. Experience as a way of knowing God was rejected.

On the other side of the ocean, the American, William James (1842-1910) took a pure existential stance from what he considered the phenomenon of religious experience. James is claimed to be the father of phenomenology (Kruger 1984:46). James (1902) did not concern himself with "second-hand religious life", communicated by tradition, determined in fixed forms by imitation and retained by habit. He searched rather for the original experiences which were the pattern setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct - "One can count the times a person prays, goes to church etc. but that tells us nothing of his experience of God" (James 1902:17). James considered the subconscious and non-rational to hold primacy in religious reality. Instinct leads, intelligence does but follow.

Barth and his followers would presumably strongly disagree with this line of thinking. The existentialists like Paul Tillich (1886-1973), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), however, changed the face of philosophy and theology. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the central figure in the development of the Phenomenological movement, contributed considerably towards this shift in thinking. To the question where the roots or beginnings of knowledge were to be found, Husserl's first and most obvious answer was: in the "things", the *Sachen*, the phenomena in the customary sense, to which all our concepts ultimately referred. This was the period of his celebrated "turn to the object" which eventually was supplemented by a "turn to the subject". Through this he aspired

to supply by his phenomenology a philosophy “free from presuppositions” (Spiegelberg 1965a). Husserl’s views on God will be discussed in 2.5.1.

Martin Heidegger may be regarded as inaugurating existential phenomenology in his book *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) first published in 1927, although Heidegger himself did not want to be identified as either an existentialist or phenomenologist, but rather a “thinker of Being”. Heidegger was a pupil of Edmund Husserl but his philosophy is very different from Husserl’s. In *Being and Time* he claims that he has taken first steps towards recovery of the “question of Being”. He does this by a study of the way human beings exist. He refers to our being as “Dasein”.

The highly influential scholar of the New testament, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), is indebted to Heidegger’s philosophy. Bultmann claimed that the gospel is distorted because it is presented in terms of a pre-scientific cosmology. He suggested that the Bible should be demythologised in order that the gospel itself may be made accessible to modern people.

For nearly half the twentieth century existentialism was the only contemporary philosophical current with which theology had any vital contact. Phenomenology touched theology only indirectly through the phenomenologies of Heidegger and Sartre (Allen 1985:254). Since the second world war, however, phenomenology has had a significant influence on Christian theology, especially for the access it gives to pure phenomena.

In this light the works of Carl Jung (1875-1961) are very important. To a certain extent his theorising remains caught in the Cartesian and realist heritage of the nineteenth century and he is therefore tempted to endorse the natural scientific vision of reality. The highly original phenomenological reading of Jungian psychology by Roger Brooke (1991) demonstrates nevertheless that Jung’s thoughts are highly significant within the paradigm of modern phenomenological psychology.

Jung opposed the Aristotelian view that the mind is originally a *tabula rasa* and he insisted that all perception and knowledge are personally structured. To explain this he made use of the Kantian distinction between the *noumena* and *phenomena*. Because all experience of, or thought about the world is viewed as psychological, he concludes that we therefore have no direct access to the ‘real world’ but only to psychic images which may or may not be accurate representations of that world. In a certain sense, there is nothing that is directly experienced except the mind itself (Brooke 1991).

Martin Buber pointed out that Jung identifies himself with the view according to which "God does not exist absolutely, that is, independently of the human subject and beyond all human conditions". In these terms, God becomes a function of the unconscious. The influence of the unconscious upon us is then the essence of the religious phenomenon (Mostert 1976).

In the footsteps of Ernst Bloch, the theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1926-) maintains that potentiality transcends reality. Moltmann (1979) claims that anxiety and hope are both ways of experiencing the possible. Like many of his contemporaries his theology and experience of God was greatly influenced by the horrors of the Second World War: "And those of us who survived those years and who came back from the camps and hospitals were certainly burnt children who from then on shunned the fire" (Moltmann 1979:8).

For Moltmann (1979:8) the experience of misery and forsakenness and daily humiliation gradually built up into an experience of God: "God in the dark night of the soul - God as the power of hope and pain". Through these experiences Moltmann's theology of hope revolved. This means that the experience of God is completely and entirely an experience of hope - a looking forward and a forward direction. He sets an eschatological (the doctrine of the last things) horizon for the realisation of hope.

During these times Dietrich Bonhoeffer also had an intense awareness of God in the context of forsakenness and desolation. From his prison cell in these times Bonhoeffer (1971:361) wrote: "Only the suffering God can help us". In his *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1971) he also recounts how, in the final years of his life in Hitler's Germany, he struggled to keep hope alive, to believe in God's providence in spite of personal set-backs and the war situation in general. He fiercely criticised the cynics who had no concern for the eschatological hope and were consumed by the present moment.

Whereas Moltmann's theology of hope was against an existentialist interpretation of theology, the Liberation theology of pre-democratic South Africa focussed on the existential reality of human lives. Liberation theology interprets theology from the viewpoint of the politically and socially oppressed, according to whom God assists in liberation from oppressing powers in order to live as free human beings.

Here the context of South Africa determined a specific experience. In this particular context the phrase "Black Theology" was coined. Manas Buthelezi (in De Gruchy 1986:158), a Lu-

theran theologian, explains that it “comes out of an attempt to characterise by means of a word or phrase the reflection upon the reality of God and his Word which grows out of that experience in which the category of blackness has some existential decisiveness”. Because of the collective reference of “non-whites” as a negative or shadow of whites and the accompanying implication that they were created in the image of the white man and not of God, there was a “need for the substitution of a ‘non-white’ theology with a ‘black theology’ or a theology of the image of God in order to put the question of human identity in a theological perspective”.

Another form of contextual theology is currently found in feminist theology, initiated mainly by Dorothy Sölle and Sally McFague. The feminists stand on the shoulders of the existential theologians and liberation theologians. They propose that people today stand in a personal relation to God and that the teachings on God from the past should be reinterpreted in terms of a new human experience of God. Feminist theology wants to free traditional models of God from male domination. Current theological models should be broken down in order to talk in a socially and contextually effective way about God. A new dynamic language is needed to express the unique experience of God. In this light, no experience of God can be separated from what God is presently doing in history. The way we perceive the world will likewise, somehow, be reflected in the individual’s experience of God.

Runyon (1982:187) remarks that “experience is after all the medium through which religious reality is transmitted” and continues to show how, in Europe, a new post-Barthian interest was signalled by the 1974 lecture of Gerhard Ebeling who, at the founding meeting of the Scientific Association for Theology, complained about what he called the “*Erfahrungsdefizit in der Theologie*”. Runyon (1982:186-187) is further of opinion that, in the United States, “the religious empiricism of Dewey and Whitehead in theological circles kept the question of experience alive”. But here also new dimensions have been added by recent attention to new elements in religious experience. To the aforementioned black experience and women’s experience, Runyon adds aesthetic experience as a genuine source of fresh possibilities in the question of experience in constructive theology.

The paradigm shift in the philosophy of science gives rise to a fresh look at phenomena, also religious phenomena. Any attempt towards responsible and authentic research should take note of the development within science and the current interest in experience and meaning. This confirms the need for a new approach in the study of the Christian experience of God.

2.3 The underlying theory of Phenomenology

2.3.1 Introduction

As human beings, we attempt to make sense of all our experiences. Through our mental acts, we strive to impose meaning upon the world. The central figure in the development of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), denied that natural science was the only form of science that could exist. He wanted to develop a science of phenomena that would clarify how it is that a certain phenomenon is experienced and presents itself to our consciousness. He investigated consciousness as intentionality and concluded that consciousness always intends an object. His philosophy was to have a profound influence on thinkers of such magnitude as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gabriel Marcel, and Martin Heidegger. Phenomenology speaks the language of people's pre-reflected self-understanding rather than interpreting a given phenomenon after preconceived patterns. It discloses and unveils human existence as intrinsically linked and connected, describing and making explicit the primary human experience of persons as co-constitutors of their world. (cf. Kruger 1988; Patrik 1994; Spiegelberg 1965a; Spinelli 1989).

Unlike many philosophical theories which propose systems of ideas that are meant to explain reality, phenomenology does not claim to have an explanation of the world or human nature; it does claim a method for describing (not explaining) human consciousness. The distinction between description and explanation is, for phenomenologists, the difference between attending to what is immediately given in consciousness (description), as opposed to inferring the causes of what is immediately given in consciousness (explanation) - in other words, description is a detailed account of what appears; explanation an account of what caused that which appears (Patrik 1994).

2.3.2 The phenomenological approach

According to Spiegelberg (1965b:656) the first objective of the phenomenological approach is the enlarging and deepening of the range of our immediate experience. The reclamation of the immediate phenomena under the watchword *to the things themselves* has been the leitmotif of phenomenological research. Hence Husserl's aspiration to supply by his phenomenology a philosophy "free from presuppositions".

Heidegger's term *Dasein* (literally meaning 'being there') depicts that human existence is tied inseparably to the world. This position argues that we are aware of our existence and this awareness reveals an inseparable relationship between existence and the world. In using the term *Dasein* we are speaking of a 'presence' in the sense of the world being present to humans and humans being present to the world and fellow human beings. *Dasein* cannot be defined without referring to the world; neither can the world be defined without referring to *Dasein*. Our being-in-the-world means that we are always fully 'present', fully involved in our experience of the world, things and fellow humans (Kruger 1988; Spinelli 1989).

The urge of phenomenology is to re-establish contact with the raw material of life itself, the primary experience of *Dasein*. It attempts to rediscover and re-experience life itself directly underneath the layer of secondary scientific constructions. What we want to see clearly and describe adequately is *how people themselves experience their own world*. Phenomenology refers to this aspect as *intentionality* (Krüger 1982). Every human mental activity is directed to (*intended* towards) the world out there; also, the world out there is the world-as-it-is-experienced-by-me. The slogan *to the things themselves* therefore means 'to the things as experienced things in human consciousness'. If we carry this approach over to the study of the psychology of religion, we could say that the phenomenologist would focus, not primarily on God in Himself, but on God-as-X-sees-Him, or God-as-group-Y-experiences-Him. As epoché and eidetic reduction becomes pure and complete, God will presumably speak for Himself. The phenomenon should be allowed to show itself and to be seen in the very way in which it shows itself.

Because the act of consciousness is intentional, human beings have an original or pre-scientific understanding of being-in-the-world. We have a certain self-understanding and are inclined to interpret our own lives accordingly. We can, most of the time, not only describe our experience, but also what it means to us and evaluate it. The purpose of phenomenological research, also in this study, is to produce systematic descriptions of that which constitute the activity of consciousness.

2.3.3 The phenomenological method

Any attempt to formulate the essentials of phenomenology seems a futile task for the many different interpretations and insights. There is, however, little disagreement among phenomenologists that the most characteristic core of phenomenology is its method (Spiegelberg 1965b:655). Different researchers apply their procedures in slightly different ways so that the

phenomenon under investigation may best reveal itself. In essence, the phenomenological method in psychology is concerned with the rigorous description of phenomena as they appear (Stones 1986).

The basic tenets of phenomenology constitute a set of two basic techniques, which Husserl called the phenomenological reduction and the eidetic reduction (Patrik 1994). The phenomenological reduction (or *epoché*) urges us to set aside our initial biases and prejudices of things, to suspend our expectations and assumptions, in short, to bracket all such temporarily and as far as possible so that we can focus on the primary data of our experience. In other words, the technique of *epoché* urges us to impose an 'openness' on our immediate experience so that our subsequent interpretations of it may prove to be more adequate. Once engaged in the phenomenological reduction, the phenomenologist can neither attribute a reality status to the phenomenon under study nor infer the existence of something else as a cause or effect of the phenomenon. The phenomenon should emerge as it appears in conscious experience, and that will clear the field for the seeing of essences.

The second methodological technique that is central to phenomenology is the eidetic reduction (Patrik 1994:41). With the eidetic reduction, the phenomenologist attempts to identify the essential structures of human consciousness, rather than the fleeting ephemeral content or the purely personal features of individuals' consciousness. All the possible variations of the phenomenon under study should be imagined. Although these variations are probably infinite, Patrik suggests that as many of these as possible are imagined. Churchill (1990:53) calls this technique "eidetic intuition" because through a process of "intuition of essences" the researcher moves from concrete thematisations of an experience to more generally typical themes, seeing common themes running through different characterisations of the same phenomenon. The ultimate goal is to arrive at universal horizons of human experience.

Phenomenology is able to provide a constructive alternative in terms of praxis to the traditional natural scientific approach, but only if the emergence of an essential description of the phenomenon is not distorted. Stones (1986:155) lists four criteria that any form of phenomenological inspired research, in his view, should fulfil: 1) The research interview situation should entail a description of experience or meaning-structure, that is, it should focus on the phenomenon in its lived-world context; 2) Explication of the protocols should be concerned with the meaning of the data from the participant perspective; 3) Essential themes should be extracted in their varying manifestations; 4) The dialectic between approach, method, and content should be maintained. Spiegelberg (1965b:659) suggests the following steps in the

interpretative process: 1) Investigating particular phenomena; 2) Investigating general essences; 3) Apprehending essential relationships among essences; 4) Watching modes of appearing; 5) Watching the constitution of phenomena in consciousness; 6) Suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena; 7) Interpreting the meaning of phenomena.

Since phenomenologically oriented research methodologies will always, according to Stones (1988:155), remain in the neophyte stage, each method developing specifically in a dialogue with the phenomenon to be explored, Polkinghorne's (1989:46) (very basic) outline of the general format for the phenomenological investigation of consciousness ought to suffice (for the moment):

1. Gather a number of naïve descriptions from people who are having or have had the experience under investigation.
2. Engage in a process of analysing these descriptions so that the researcher comes to a grasp of the constituents or common elements that make the experience what it is.
3. Produce a research report that gives an accurate, clear, and articulate description of the experience.

It is important not to lose sight of the process of discovery in the attempt to grasp concepts and translating the phenomenological approach into praxis. Churchill describes how Heidegger himself warned against the error of confusing thoughtful reflection with the rote application of propositions stated by others. The trick, Heidegger says, "is not to listen to a series of propositions, but rather to *follow the movement of showing*" (Churchill 1990:51). This study will attempt to follow the movement of the phenomenon under investigation by allowing the phenomenon to show itself.

2.4 The experience of God: Psychological perspectives

2.4.1 Introduction

There is a large literature in the psychology of religion and many psychologists have studied the experience people have of God. The following survey of some major studies and theories in this area is by no means exhaustive, and rather cursory at best. The main intent of this overview, however, is to provide the reader with an impression of the variety of research in this

field. If a psychologist is to conduct a scientific analysis of a religious phenomenon, it seems essential that he or she remains open to a wide range of hypotheses.

2.4.2 The Analytic point of view

Psychological models of religious experience find their roots in the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and variations from scholars like Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and Erik Erikson. Examination into religious experience by these analysts has focused on the more unconscious motives for certain religious feelings and actions. True motives which move us to do what we do and experience what we experience apparently are those that are hidden deep in the unconscious mind.

Pruyser (1960) reminds us that psychoanalytic studies of religion have a special character, conceptually as well as methodologically. They seemingly are basically studies of motivation for religion, and the person's set of beliefs and practices are approached from the point of view of wish fulfilment, drive control, primary- and secondary-process thinking, object relations, the genesis of conscience and the ego ideal, and the economics of libidinal and aggressive urges. Because the word "symptom" in psychoanalysis covers an almost infinite range of possibilities, religion can be approached as a symptom. Pruyser also notes that one of Freud's first case studies, that of the wolf man, contained some interesting notes on the role of religion in psychopathology.

According to Hood (1992), Freud was indebted to Feuerbach for his firm belief in the ability of a purely natural scientific explanation to illuminate both the process and content of religious beliefs. Elsewhere, Hood (1989) mentions another aspect in which Freud was indebted to Feuerbach: his acceptance of Feuerbach's theological supposition that theology is disguised anthropology. This simple inversion necessitates that one's experience of God be rooted totally in one's life experience, distorted and misinterpreted as "of God".

Simply stated, Freud viewed religion as originating in the child's relationship to the father, and thus in many cultures God is viewed as a Heavenly Father. In *The future of an Illusion*, Freud states that religious ideas, which are given out as teachings, "are not precipitates of experience or endresults of thinking: they are illusions, fulfilments of the oldest strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind" (Freud 1961a:30).

Freud (1961a:42) also asserts that religious ideas entail not only wish fulfilment but also important historical recollections. These historical recollections include infantile recollections of helplessness for which parents can provide adequate solace. According to this view religious doctrine tells us the historical truth - though subject to some modification and disguise - whereas our rational account disavows it. Freud's God, however, is reason or *Logos*. All other gods will have to be discarded for this God, because, in Freud's words: "... in the long run nothing can withstand reason and experience, and the contradiction which religion offers to both is all too palpable" (Freud 1961a:54).

In a paper called *A religious experience* (1961b), Freud affords an example of how he applied the psychoanalytic method to an experience of God. He quotes from a letter of an American physician who urges him to reconsider his stance on religion. The physician told Freud of his determination to discontinue going to church after he had witnessed a "sweet-faced dear old woman" being carried to a dissecting table. He could not reconcile the existence of God and the doctrines of Christianity with this image. A voice, however, reportedly spoke to his soul urging him to reconsider the step he was about to take. In the course of the next few days he apparently had several more clear revelations, hence his appeal to Freud. In his explanation, Freud contended that the "sweet-faced dear old woman" in truth reminded him of, and roused in him a longing for his mother. As this sprang from his Oedipus complex, he immediately had a feeling of indignation against his father. It consequently met with the predetermined fate of the Oedipus complex: complete submission to the will of God the father

An Austrian psychiatrist who parted ways with Freud, Alfred Adler, emphasised the role of goals and motivation in his Individual Psychology. According to Nielsen (1997) one of Adler's most famous ideas is that we try to compensate for inferiorities that we perceive in ourselves. Apparently a lack of power often lies at the root of feelings of inferiority. One way that religion enters into this picture is through our beliefs in God, which are characteristic of our tendency to strive for perfection and superiority. For example, in many religions God is considered to be perfect and omnipotent, and commands people likewise to be perfect. If we too achieve perfection, we become one with God. By identifying with God in this way, we compensate for our imperfections and feelings of inferiority.

Our ideas about God are important indicators of how we view the world. According to Adler these ideas have changed over time, as our vision of the world - and our place in it - has changed. Nielsen describes how much of Adler's writing is devoted to social movements. In this context, religion is important in at least two ways. First, Nielsen prompts us to understand

that Adler is interested mainly in the idea of God as a motivator, and not in the question of whether or not God exists. What is important is that God (or the idea of God) motivates people to act, and that those actions do have real consequences for ourselves and for others. Adler suggests that we are left with two options. We can either assume that we are at the centre of the world - both ours and God's - and that God will care for us as we wait passively for attention, or we can assume that we are the centre of the world, and actively work to achieve society's interest. Adler's point is that if we assume that we have power over our surroundings, then we will act in ways that benefit the world around us. Our view of God is important because it embodies our goals and directs our social interactions. The second way that religion is important is that it exerts a great influence on our social environment, and is important as a powerful social movement itself. Compared to science, another social movement, religion is more advanced because it motivates people more effectively. According to Adler only when science begins to capture the same religious fervour, and promotes the welfare of all segments of society, will the two be more equal in people's eyes.

Carl Jung, as ever against Freud who approached religion both from the psychological and the philosophical angle, states that he restricts himself "to the observation of phenomena and I eschew any metaphysical or philosophical considerations" (1969b:6). This rather phenomenological standpoint is concerned with occurrences, events, experiences - in a word, with facts.

Elsewhere Jung (1969a) insists that what we know of the world, and what we are immediately aware of in ourselves, are conscious contents that flow from remote, obscure sources. We live immediately only in the world of images. The validity of psychic facts cannot consequently be subjected either to epistemological criticism or to scientific verification. Jung then puts the question: "Is a conscious content present or not?" If it is present, then it is valid in itself. Science can apparently only be invoked when the content claims to be an assertion about something that can be met with in the external world; we can appeal to epistemological criticism only when an unknowable thing is posited as knowable. Jung uses the God experience as example: "Science has never discovered any 'God,' epistemological criticism proves the impossibility of knowing God, but the psyche comes forward with the assertion of the experience of God. God is a psychic fact of immediate experience, otherwise there would never have been any talk of God" (Jung 1969a:328). Jung proposes that the fact is valid in itself; it can be the most immediate and hence the most real of experiences, which can be neither ridiculed nor disproved. So long as the experience of God does not claim universal validity or assert the absolute existence of God, criticism seems impossible. For Jung, the experience of God has

general validity inasmuch as almost everyone knows approximately what is meant by the term "experience of God".

Jung (1969b) defines religion as a careful and scrupulous observation of a dynamic agency or effect that is not caused by an arbitrary act of will. On the contrary, it apparently seizes and controls the human subject, who is seemingly always rather its victim than its creator. In this view the experience of God is always explained as being due to a cause external to the individual. In short, Jung conceives of religion as the condition of the person brought about by his/her submission to power(s) higher than ourselves. He also makes it clear that by the term "religion" he does not mean a creed. He considers creeds to be codified and dogmatised forms of original religious experience. In the same vein he regards the practice and repetition of the original experience to have become a ritual and an unchangeable institution (Jung 1969b).

The focal point in Jung's understanding of religious experience is the contents of the collective unconscious, known as archetypes. He even insists that the existence of an archetypal God-image is the most we can assert about God psychologically (Jung 1969b:59). That it is a very important and influential archetype is, however, evident. It's relatively frequent occurrence and the fact that it is a powerful agency not caused by an arbitrary act of will ensures its inclusion into the category of religious experience.

In *Answer to Job*, Jung (1969c) edifies this idea when he maintains that it is only through the psyche that we can establish that God acts upon us and furthermore that we cannot tell whether God and the unconscious are two different entities. For Jung, both are border-line concepts for transcendental contents, but he is convinced that there is in the unconscious an archetype of wholeness which occupies a central position which approximates it to the God-image. The archetype peculiarly produces a symbolism which has always characterised and expressed the Deity. These facts make possible a certain qualification of his above thesis concerning the indistinguishableness of God and the unconscious. Strictly speaking, the God-image does not coincide with the unconscious as such, but with a special content of it, namely the archetype of the self.

Another psychoanalytic contention that concedes a perspective on religious experience is the concept of hypnotic phenomena. Walker (1988) cites a case of a person who has learnt and practised self-hypnosis. After she had learned the instantaneous relaxation method of self-hypnosis, she remarked that she almost felt guilty because what the saints of history achieved only after years of arduous struggle - that is, a mystical sense of the ineffable - she reportedly

was able to achieve in less than half a minute. Behind this assertion lies the presupposition that the heart of religion is to be found in a particular experience, and that this experience can be induced by hypnosis or other means:

Although this approach is rather simplistic, hypnosis may provide a productive avenue for the understanding of religious experience if Matheson's (1979) cautious position is considered. He is of the opinion that some religious events show a similar format on repeated occasions, permitting closer observation, revealing processes and phenomena equivalent in nature to those known as hypnotic. Matheson's conclusion is that particularly hypnosis' contribution to the use and role of imagery and perceptual, non-dominant events offers an interesting perspective on religious events.

2.4.3 The experience of God: A unique behavioural event

The experience of God, when considered behaviourally, can be conceived within a stimulus-response paradigm. The experience then is viewed as a behavioural response to a perceived stimulus. In this sense it is similar to other higher order experiences in that it includes organismic processing which mediates between a stimulus and a response. Bradford (1984:14) mentions an early proponent, Sargent, who appealed to Pavlovian learning theory and the physiology of the autonomic nervous system for explanation of mass conversion experiences - akin to the process of brainwashing. Malony (1981), however, argues convincingly that the experience of God has a qualitative uniqueness in its intensity that should not be ignored in a behavioural analysis. The experience is seemingly grounded in the perception that one is responding to a transcending reality and it evokes emotions that overwhelm with their intensity. A purely behavioural perspective on the experience of God will thus, according to this view, be lacking some of the core elements of the experience.

Malony addressed this perceived privation by combining behavioural and phenomenological models, and applying it by focussing on the biblical account of Samuel's first encounter with God in I Samuel 3:1-11.

Based on the *S-R* model of stimulus-response psychology, Malony (1981:329) suggests a *S-O-R* formula, where the *O* has been inserted to assure that religious experience is understood more as "response", rather than "reaction". Thus, the *S-O-R* formula asserts that the primacy of the experiencing individual in the model for religious experiencing is not instinctual react-

ing, it is reflective responding. The process might be relabelled *God-Person-Response* and, more precisely, *Revelation-Faith-Work*.

Revelation (stimulus), according to Malony, is what God does to make himself known to persons, and it is clearly illustrated in Samuel's experience. God called Samuel's name and thus became the stimulus which Samuel had to acknowledge and to which he had to respond. It should also be noted that Samuel was seeking God at the same time God was seeking Samuel. It seems as if the synchronicity of the events is somehow of great importance in all experiences of God. In regard to the second feature of the model, faith (person) can be understood psychologically as composed of both *attitude* and *perception*.

Malony defines attitude as a mental and emotional (and unconscious) set or predisposition. It includes both cognitive (what one believes e.g. does God exist?), and affective (how one feels about what one believes) components. By focussing one's attention and making one more attuned to certain parts of the environment, attitudes prepare one for the experience and make one set to respond, more or less like hopes and anticipations. In the experience of God an expectant attitude is often based on human needs. In addition to faith being an attitude, it is also a perception. Perceptions seem to be the sense persons make of what happen to them. Perception in religious experience involves an intuition of the meaning in, and an identification with the *revelation-faith* event at a deeply personal level.

Work is the term Malony applies to the human response in religious experience. It is the life lived after faith occurs - compare William James (1902:28): "By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots". The impact of the event could be seen in new, persistent, and sustaining interest, motives, feelings, thoughts, and deeds. Certainly this could have been observed in Samuel's experience. On the basis of his experience with God he became the first divinely appointed judge of Israel. He went to work for God.

Malony concludes with the conviction that the experience of God is indeed unique, even though it, like all other experience, occurs in space and time. This point of view accords well with the reports down through the ages as well as with the more dispassionate analysis of social-behavioural scientists. Moreover, Malony asserts that the experience of God, phenomenologically spoken, also has a qualitative uniqueness because it is unlike all other human experiences. This qualitative uniqueness evidently lies in the "trans-empirical, supernatural, otherworldly (quality) ... of the object to which persons report they are responding" (Malony 1981:327). This last phrase "to which persons report they are responding" provokes Malony to

make a parenthetical note about the limits of a phenomenological analysis. He maintains that the social-behavioural sciences can only accept the report, they cannot verify it. They should confine their analyses to the behaviour of persons who say they have met God. They seemingly cannot assess these reports against operational definitions of God as they can, for example, in experiments of depth perception in which the parameters are well defined and under control of the experimenter. Malony's position, however, justifies the significance of a phenomenological explication of the experience of God. The task of this study is to describe a human experience rather than prove the existence of God. Social-behavioural science cannot settle the validity question of the God object or the God experience because it has limited itself to a natural-scientific methodology. We cannot bar phenomena from our attention simply because we cannot scientifically verify their existence. We should rather consider the real meaning of experience and that can hardly be done experimentally.

2.4.4 A humanistic approach to the experience of God

John Dewey in 1934 called for a humanistic understanding of spirituality. He was strongly committed to the view that spiritual experience is a human phenomenon and that it is more basic than, prior to, and different from traditional expressions of religiosity (Elkins *et al* 1988).

Abraham Maslow, in *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (1964), echoed Dewey's call as the former was not impressed by most traditional, organised religion. He was, however, not anti-religion nor did he believe a non-theistic stance was the only viable philosophical posture. In fact, he believed that the "essential core-religious experience may be embedded either in a theistic, supernatural context or in a non-theistic context" (Maslow 1964:28). He once defined humanistic psychology in the same way as Paul Tillich defined religion: as "concern with ultimate concerns" (Maslow 1964:45).

Maslow is also indebted (by own admission) to William James, especially for taking the word "religious" out of its "narrow context of the supernatural, churches, rituals, dogmas, professional clergymen, etc., and distributing it in principle throughout the whole of life" (Maslow 1964:xii). He coined the term *peak-experiences* for these secularised religious or mystical or transcendent experiences. Not only are these experiences not dependent on churches or specific religions, as indeed James and Dewey saw, they do not necessarily imply any supernatural concepts. The peak experience is a transcendent experience of oneness and wholeness and

unity with the cosmos, and Maslow explicitly stated that this experience is a purely natural, albeit a transcendent, phenomenon.

Maslow insisted that the more sophisticated scientist is in a process of learning that though he or she must disagree with most of the answers to the religious questions which have been given by organised religion, it is increasingly clear that the religious questions themselves - and religious quests, the religious yearnings, the religious needs themselves - are perfectly respectable scientifically, that they are deeply rooted in human nature, that they can be studied, described, examined in a scientific way, and that the churches were trying to answer perfectly sound human questions. Maslow also presumed that even ancient reports of personal experiences or illuminations of God, or revelations of the divine which lies at the intrinsic core of every known high religion, can be subsumed under the head of the "peak-experiences" or "ecstasies" or "transcendent" experiences and be investigated by psychologists. It seems thus that these older reports, phrased in terms of supernatural revelation, were, in fact, perfectly natural, human peak-experiences of the kind that can easily be examined today, which, however, were phrased in terms of whatever conceptual, cultural, and linguistic framework the particular seer had available in his time. This led Maslow to another hypothesis: to the extent that all mystical or peak-experiences are the same, all religions are the same in their essence and always have been the same. When we peel away all the localisms, all the accidents of particular philosophies, all the ethnocentric phrasings, all those elements which are *not* common, that which is left over we may call the "core-religious experience" or the "transcendent experience".

In effect what Maslow was saying is that the evidence from peak experiences permits us to talk about the essential, the intrinsic, the basic, the most fundamental religious or transcendent experience as a totally private and personal one which can hardly be shared (except with other "peakers"). As a consequence, all the paraphernalia of organised religion - buildings and specialised personnel, rituals, dogmas, ceremonials, and the like - seemingly are to the "peaker" secondary, peripheral, and of doubtful value in relation to the intrinsic and essential religious or transcendent experience. Apparently, according to this view, the legalistic and organisational versions of religion may even tend to suppress naturalistic peak-, transcendent, mystical, or other core-religious experiences and to make them less likely to occur. Maslow, however, also criticised liberal religionists who seemed to stress rational knowledge and tried to rest all their efforts on knowledge of the impersonal world. They seem to be uneasy with the irrational, the anti-rational, the non-rational, "as if Freud and Jung and Adler had never lived ... They make no basic place in their systems for the mysterious, the unknown, the unknowable, the dangerous-to-know, or the ineffable" (Maslow 1964:41).

Maslow appealed for the experiential, the phenomenological aspects of religion, as well as mystery, ambiguity, illogic, contradiction, mystic, and transcendent experiences to be considered to lie well within the realm of nature. This is a lesson he wanted not only the non-theists and liberal religionists to learn, but also the supernaturalists, the scientists, and the humanists.

The dialogical relation of God to people and the relation of people among themselves lie in the heart of Martin Buber's personalistic stance. His greatest influence has been especially through his *I and Thou* (1970). That God's *being-a-person* does not threaten or exclude our personhood, but instead presupposes it and makes it possible, is the postulate for Buber's inclusion as a contribution to the humanistic approach to the experience of God. People enter into a direct relationship with God. The relationship apparently is at once being chosen and choosing, passive and active.

The basic word pair I-You (Kaufmann prefers to translate the German *Du* with You rather than Thou) signifies man's twofold world which is in accordance with his twofold attitude. The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination. There is no distinction between the person who experiences and the world he/she experiences: "Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is 'in them' and not between them and the world. The world does not participate in experience. It allows itself to be experienced, but it is not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it" (Buber 1970:56).

Buber's You apparently is the heir of mind, reality, spirit, and will. The You seems to be a fusion of the secular and the sacred, or, more accurately, a diffusion of the borders - a condemnation of the dichotomy of man's secular and sacred life. In this notion Buber seems to agree with Maslow in that he doesn't find the sacred in a Church, seminary or synagogue, but rather everywhere. The sacred, God as the eternal You, is everywhere: "Looking away from the world is no help towards God; staring at the world is no help either; but whoever beholds the world in him stands in his presence" (Buber 1970:127). The only God worth keeping is a God that cannot be kept. The only God worth talking about is a God that cannot be talked about. For Buber, God is no object of discourse or knowledge. He cannot be spoken of, but he can be spoken to; he cannot be seen, but he can be listened to. The only possible relationship with God is to address him and to be addressed by him, here and now.

Victor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, also made a significant contribution to humanistic psychology and religious experience when he opened psychotherapy to the spiritual dimensions of human experience. In his *Man's search for meaning* (1989) he insists that man's primary concern is his will to meaning. Self-detachment and self-transcendence were survival factors for Frankl on his way through the hell of Auschwitz and other camps. For Frankl (1989:112), "human existence is essentially self-transcendence".

This aspect of self-transcendence becomes very important when we consider Frankl's warning against what he called "pan-determinism" (Frankl 1989:132). By that he meant the view of man which disregards his capacity to take a stand towards any conditions whatsoever. According to his view man is not fully conditioned and determined but ultimately self-determining. Every human being thus has the freedom to change at any instant. One of the main features of human existence is the capacity to rise above, and transcend circumstances. In the same manner man ultimately transcends himself. Frankl called pan-determinism an infectious disease with which educators have been inoculated and he extended this to many adherents of religion who are seemingly not aware that thereby they are undermining the very basis of their own convictions. For either man's freedom of decision for or against God, as well as for or against man, must be recognised, or else "religion is a delusion, and education an illusion" (Frankl 1989:134).

Frankl opposed the pan-deterministic evaluation of religion for it contends that one's religious life is conditioned inasmuch as it depends on one's early childhood experiences, and that one's God-concept depends on one's father image. Frankl was convinced that even the worst father image need not prevent one from establishing a good relationship with God. He proposed that a deep religious life would rather provide one with the resources needed to overcome the hatred of one's father. Conversely, a poor religious life need not in each case be due to developmental factors. In his view all aspects of the client's humanness must be explored by way of a phenomenological approach and hence his (later) criticism of traditional psychoanalysis: "As soon as we have interpreted religion as being merely a product of psychodynamics, in the sense of unconscious motivating forces, we have missed the point and lost sight of the authentic phenomenon. By such a misconception, the psychology of religion often becomes psychology as religion, in that psychology is sometimes worshipped and made an explanation for everything" (Frankl 1989:134-135). In all fairness it should be noted that a number of psychologists have argued that *humanistic* psychology is fundamentally narcissistic and therefore a type of disguised self-worship (Vitz & Modesti 1993).

Elkins *et al* (1988) also believed there was a need for a humanistic understanding of spirituality. Their objective was to delineate a humanistic definition, description, and assessment approach to spirituality that would promote clearer understanding of spirituality and that would be sensitive to the spirituality of those not affiliated with traditional religion. Because of the many ways in which spirituality may be expressed outwardly, they believed the common core of spirituality would be found at the inner, phenomenological level. The major assumptions that formed the foundation of their work include: 1) There is a dimension of human experience which can best be described as a "spiritual dimension" or "spirituality"; 2) Spirituality is a human phenomenon and exists, at least potentially, in all persons; 3) By means of theoretical and phenomenological approaches, it is possible to define and describe spirituality and to develop an approach to its assessment.

Their first task in their research was to review the literature of major writers who had approached spirituality from a humanistic or phenomenological perspective. They proceeded to list nine major components that seemed to constitute core dimensions of what is meant by "spirituality". These factors are: 1) Transcendental dimension - The spiritual person has an experientially based belief that there is a transcendent dimension to life; 2) Meaning and purpose in life - he/she has emerged from the quest for meaning and purpose with confidence that life is deeply meaningful; 3) Mission in life - he/she has a sense of "vocation", a sense of responsibility to life; 4) Sacredness of life - he/she often experiences a sense of awe, reverence, and wonder even in "nonreligious" settings; 5) Material values - he/she can appreciate material goods but knows that ultimate satisfaction is found not in material, but in spiritual things; 6) Altruism - he/she is touched by the pain and suffering of others; 7) Idealism - he/she is a visionary committed to the betterment of the world and to the actualisation of positive potential in all aspects of life; 8) Awareness of the tragic - he/she is solemnly conscious of the tragic realities of human existence like human pain, suffering, and death; 9) Fruits of spirituality - true spirituality has a discernible effect upon one's relationship to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.

After an informal validation by interviewing five persons considered highly spiritual, the study group formulated the following definition of spirituality:

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning "breath of life", is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterised by certain identi-

fiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.

(Elkins *et al* 1988:10)

The second phase of the research focused on the construction of the Spiritual Orientation Inventory, a measure of humanistic spirituality. They were convinced that subtle “phenomenological realities” can be assessed and even “quantified” when sensitively pursued. The study group concluded with the conviction that they have laid some important theoretical foundations that will help clarify, define, describe, and perhaps even measure spirituality from a humanistic perspective.

The main factor that emerges from a study of humanistic psychology’s approach to the experience of God is the view that organised religion no longer has the sole ownership of the experience, or any religious experience for that matter. If psychology uses definitions, models, and assessment approaches to the experience of God that confuse it with traditional religious beliefs and practises, it will discount and misunderstand the experience of many people. An inclusive, enlarged, humanistic, pre-reflective, phenomenological approach seems inevitable if we want to make valid statements about this basic human phenomenon.

2.4.5 Phenomenological explications

The purpose of Husserl’s phenomenology was to experientially investigate the essence of phenomena and to disclose the mysteries of consciousness and being. As a result of this method, both Husserl and Heidegger were spontaneously delivered into realms that are transcendental in nature. Hanna (1993:184) is even convinced that Husserl considered the transcendental aspect of phenomenology to be its most important facet. Husserl distinguished between the transcendental ego and the psychological ego: “He observed simply that ‘there is no psychological ego’ and that ‘psychological self-experience’ boils down to the transcendental ego” (Hanna 1993:183). The transcendental ego, Husserl observed, gives form and meaning to the world itself, affecting not only our conception but our perception of the primordial world. The constitution of the world was not a sole or individual project of the transcendental ego but it involves the community of consciousness of transcendental egos that Husserl referred to as “transcendental intersubjectivity” (Hanna 1993:184). In fact, Hanna is convinced that Husserl’s conception of God can be found in this intersubjective context. He quotes an occasionally expressed “private opinion” of Husserl that God can be taken “to mean the community of *transcendental egos* which ‘creates’ a world” (Hanna 1993:185). Hanna also shows

how Heidegger's preoccupation with *Being* is the key to the latter's understanding of the transcendental. Heidegger seemingly traced all phenomena to pure Being and then to pure Nothing through a sustained meditation on the experience of dread or *angst*. "This projection into Nothing on the basis of hidden dread is the overcoming of what-is-in-totality: Transcendence" (Heidegger quoted by Hanna 1993:187).

Both Husserl's and Heidegger's methods provide a pathway to an investigation of the experience of God. The transcendent absolute that each of them accessed is so beyond thought and explanatory grasp that only the dimension of rigor and descriptive accuracy intrinsic to phenomenology might serve to enhance research of the experience.

William James was arguably the first researcher to use first person descriptions to clarify the meaning of experience. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) he argued that knowledge takes on many forms, science being only one and he insisted that personal experience was the indisputable original source of all scientific, philosophical, and theological systems. Much of his classic book consists of a catalogue of personal accounts of private religious experiences. He points to the reality of people's contact with a power beyond the conscious self, which affects his actions. In his final postscript to the book he says that "I am so impressed by the importance of these phenomena that I adopt the hypothesis which they so naturally suggest. At these places at least, I say, it would seem as though transmundane energies, God, if you will, produced immediate effects within the natural world to which the rest of our experience belongs" (James 1902:468).

It was mentioned in 2.2.8 that James is claimed to be the father of phenomenology. He asserted that consciousness did not exist as an independent entity, but as a function of particular experiences. Consciousness and object had to be considered in the same functional complex. This could be viewed as the germ of phenomenology. Experience also comes in many forms and James extended his full respect to them all. In the light of the European theological mainstream of his time, his remark that "nothing can be more stupid than to bar out phenomena from our notice, merely because we are incapable of taking part in anything like them ourselves" (1902:105) is very significant. James strongly endorsed religious experience as an essential, perhaps the most essential, part of life. His perspective on the experience of God is very practical, always approximate, fluid, tolerant, individualistic, and undogmatic. He values the experience as a magnificent contribution to human life; its truth manifests itself in the wonderful ways in which it enriches human conduct and feeling.

The major theme of his discussion (and indeed his entire philosophy) is that the value of something is to be judged by its effects, not by its origin, as quoted in 2.4.3: "By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots". He thereby attacked what later in the century came to be known as the Genetic Fallacy. By explaining the origins of something we have not nearly satisfactorily explicated its value. Religion is then defined as "*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*" (James 1902:37).

James argues that religion of the personal kind must be separated from that which is institutional in nature. Knowing cognitive content about God does not insure that we will know God in a primary experiential sense. The experience of God as a path of knowing and understanding is not to be set up against theological truth or knowing in a philosophical sense. Rather, it is to be seen as the real backbone of the world's religious life. James believes that the living and feelings of religion give real meaning to people. In conclusion James suggests that the characteristics of the religious life include the following:

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof - be that spirit "God" or "law" - is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.

Religion also includes the following psychological characteristics:

4. A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism.
5. An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.

(James 1902:435-436)

In his final conclusions he writes of the elements of religious experience: "treating these as purely subjective phenomena, without regard to the question of their 'truth', we are obliged, on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance, to class them amongst the most important biological functions of mankind" (James 1902:453). James formulates the essence of religious experience in the following terms:

The individual, so far as he suffers from his wrongness and criticises it, is to that extent consciously beyond it, and in at least possible touch with something higher, if anything higher exist. Along with the wrong part there is thus a better part of him, even though it may be but a most helpless germ. With which part he should identify his real being is by no means obvious at this stage; but when stage 2 (the stage of solution or salvation) arrives, the man identifies his real being with the germinal higher part of himself; and does so in the following way. *He becomes conscious that this higher part is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck.*

(James 1902:455)

For James, it seems as if all the phenomena are accurately describable in these general terms. He is adamant that there is probably no autobiographical document, among all those that he has quoted, to which the description will not well apply. One needs only add such specific details as will adapt it to various theologies and various personal temperaments, and one will then, according to James, have the various experiences reconstructed in their individual forms.

David Bradford (1984), as recounted in his momentous work, *The Experience of God: Portraits in the Phenomenological Psychopathology of Schizophrenia*, approached his research on the God experience of psychotic patients in the same spirit and from a similar perspective as James. In the footsteps of Binswanger, Straus, Jaspers, and Merleau-Ponty he sought to describe the primordial layer of immediate experience. "To the patient's lived body, and the world which provides this body a home, is added a third point of orientation - the experience of God" (1984:2).

Bradford collected narratives of the experience of God from eight chronic undifferentiated schizophrenics, and one person with a diagnosis of cyclic bipolar affective disorder. If a patient who had been reported by staff to have had a religious experience was agreeable, the researcher met with the patient and had a "conversation" about the patient's experience of God. To create the "portraits" of four of the subjects' experience of God, Bradford focuses on its immediate perceptual, emotional, and conceptual details, and insists that the experience of God "is a phenomenon *sui generis*, which has the distinction of occurring without a significant

mutilation of its basic features in normal and abnormal populations alike” (Bradford 1984:53).

He also remarks that:

A psychologist of religion interested in the relationship between religious experience in schizophrenia and in the normal population might find it remarkable that the percentage of hospitalized schizophrenic patients reporting experience of God in this study is about equal to the percentage of persons from the normal population of America and Great Britain reporting either an experience of God or a religious experience of a powerful spiritual force.

(Bradford 1984:51)

Bradford calls the method he used for his research a two-edged sword, for, in his view, a phenomenological approach adequate for investigating psychotic experience requires a transformation of the researcher’s consciousness just as it focuses the researcher’s and reader’s attention on the transformed consciousness of the severely disturbed patient. He consequently tries to dispose himself to encounter not just a schizophrenic, but simply another human being.

At the outset, the research was undertaken with the conviction that the subject’s experience of God coheres temporally in the form of a sequential unity - a story always moving from a beginning to an ending. Bradford also speaks of the “intrapsychic” complexity of the experience to indicate that it is constituted by ideational, emotional, and sensory forms, each possessing its own specific content.

After an initial conversation the researcher’s transformed consciousness moved him to a point where an *epoché* was performed, a suspension of disbelief in the factual existence of the phenomenon experienced during the conversation with the patient - analogous to Husserl’s “psychological reduction”. This allowed their experience of God to remain a vivid possibility. The researcher’s own experience of that which the other person refers to when speaking of God was also not excluded. From this point the researcher proceeded to a six step descriptive process which he likens to ascending a spiral staircase: “Step by step one mounts to the fourth. A rearward glance reveals the preceding three; they remain in view. A leap is required to arrive at the fifth, and by this time one will have turned the final spiral and thus left behind the possibility of viewing the first and the second. One comes to the platform of the sixth step without effort, the chief difficulty having been to step initially onto the fifth” (Bradford 1984:81).

Bradford's research results contain a case history, a narrative of the God experience, and a portrait for each of the four persons. With varying degrees of success, the portraits enable the reader to step into the experiential world of the patient and to sense how the patient's experience of God resonates with that world. From this research we can say that, during schizophrenic psychosis:

God is not experienced pantheistically. He is transcendent, much more so than immanent. Generally, God is experienced as a person in the theological sense of the term. He is a divine subject, in other words, and is able to enter into relationship with humans in a way not totally unlike that in which humans enter into relationships with one another. The same may be said for the possibility and capability of persons diagnosed as schizophrenic to enter into relationship with Him. He is not only a benevolent God of love, but also a wrathful, horrendous, punitive force ... Finally, God is experienced as autonomous; there is not a simple correlation between the credulity of the patient, on the one hand, and either His presence or its form on the other.

(Bradford 1984:221-222)

This experience would seem to be consistent with basic notions of God embodied in the Christian tradition. God's horrendous, convulsive power seems to be more pronounced in the schizophrenic's experience than in ordinary religious experience, and Bradford suggests that this feature may be viewed in at least two ways. It could be considered a manifestation of underlying psychopathology specific to schizophrenia, or a reflection of the schizophrenic experience having retained a more complete array of the primordial features of the experience of God than that preserved and offered by most contemporary currents within the Christian tradition. Bradford considers the latter alternative to be more convincing.

Bradford concludes that the phenomenological psychopathology of the experience of God can be raised to the level of a cultural critique which focuses attention on the poverty of the current deprived state of religious experience: "... the religiously hallucinated person called schizophrenic may be viewed as a psychologically impoverished culture's pained organ of religious experience" (1984:223).

Through the medium of personal stories, Roe, Warner, and Erickson (1986) applied phenomenological psychological methods to explore the experience of some women encountering feminism and Christian orthodoxy. The researchers view stories as "simply articulations of

experience”, and experience as being “simply the fabric of life as it is lived” (Roe *et al* 1986:30). The context in which this study was carried out is the need women have expressed to validate and value female experience and perceptions in general, and female religious experience and perceptions in particular. Of particular relevance to their research were the participants’ conceptions of God, Jesus Christ, theology, and the church.

Participants were selected who (a) had experience with Christian orthodoxy and feminism, and (b) could communicate their experience clearly. Their commitment to feminism led them to experiences of tension with their parents but also to positive changes in self esteem and trust in personal experience and feelings, and a growing confidence in their own intuition. Almost all expressed overwhelming need for, love for, and benefit from their woman friends. In their connectedness with other women, they realise intimacy, trust, and power. The experiences of these women are full of pain: pain of loss, estrangement, rejection, loneliness, self-doubt, fear. Most of this pain is experienced in relationships with parents, peer groups, romantic partners, and the church. Despite the pain, all express a sense of release and relief. Feminism helps these women discern positively who they are.

Roe *et al* proceeded to show from their original stories that most of these women learned to believe in, and fear a distant, transcendent, authoritarian, male God, with many expressing their fears of inability to meet God’s standards and avoid punishment. They have, however, replaced these physical images of God with more fluid expressions of experiencing God as “light”, “creative force”, “inner fountain”, and they have developed a sense of intimacy with God and of God delighting in their making and doing:

God is BIG, beyond me, uncaptured by evangelical jargon and systematic theology, but God is also in me ... I now have an increasing sense of God in me, of the Spirit’s presence with me offering comfort, peace, and wisdom; which sometimes comes as utter certainty about perceptions and/or what needs to be done.

(Roe *et al* 1986:34)

Many of these women had an expanded image of God that leads to greater understanding and appreciation for their femaleness, insisting that God must be representative of female attributes also - mother and father. Evident throughout many of these women’s stories is a special communion with God the Creator, through nature. This image of God the Creator appears to be an important alternative to the authoritarian God the Judge: “Some of my most special ‘re-

ligious experiences' have occurred as I've spent time in the wilderness and mountains thinking about God and experiencing her/him through her/his creation. These have been some of the most inspiring and emotional experiences of my life" (Roe *et al* 1986:35).

The participants' stories also revealed their struggle in identifying with Jesus Christ and his salvific act on the cross and their tension with the institutional church of today: "Somewhere in my head, heart or soul I know God is good and my perceptions and the world are both screwed up. So, although things may be rotten in the church today, I'll keep trying to encourage it towards better things and believe someday things will really change" (Roe *et al* 1986:37).

As far as Christian doctrine is concerned, most of these women continue to see truth in Christian doctrine; however, they express the need for "redefining" or "recreating" doctrine so it is more consonant with the experience of being female. The general emphasis was away from the importance of external, fixed doctrine or truth, and towards the authority of inner experience in all its flux and ambiguity since God is perceived to be flexible and loving: "I have finally come to hold the theory that if my personal experiences are valid, then the truth I find in them will be reflected in the Bible ... The role of doctrine is to help people describe, inform, and articulate their experience with God, not to define it" (Roe *et al* 1986:36). The major movements and feelings in these stories are ones of tension, affirmation of self, and the value of relating to God, but seemingly a different God than the conceptions with which most of these women were raised. These themes, however, are not uncommon and are recurring rather frequently in many people's experiences of God, as in the present study.

Margaret G. Alter (1986) conducted a study to describe a phenomenological theory of adult development in Christian religious experience. Alter chose a phenomenological method because of the apparent need of a study of the experience of God to take seriously the rich complexity of personal meaning inherent in faith. The phenomenological aspects that interested her had to do with "the 'inner' experience, the ongoing daily experience of a relationship with God as a person" (Alter 1986:152). Alter assumed that this phenomenological theory would reflect the richness of a relationship with God as well as the language that a believer might use to describe the ongoing commitment.

Alter derived a three stage theory from interviews with seven religious professionals who worked with believers committed to growth in their faith. During the interview she asked them what characteristics they observed in individuals under their direction at beginning, intermedi-

ate, and advanced stages of religious development. From the typescripts of these interviews she drew up charts which constitute the foundation of her theory.

The *beginning stage* of Alter's theory appears to have three movements: (i) The first movement suggests how a person approaches religious experience in the first place. This includes a few possibilities: an uncritical acceptance of his/her family's religious heritage, interest or vague curiosity, or existential discomfort and stress; (ii) The second movement begins when the seeking individual makes some decision about the significance of God in his/her life, a decisive, gradual (rather than through a sudden flash of insight) commitment to God. Apparently this period is usually accompanied by considerate emotion: awe, humility, thrill, elation; (iii) The third movement, following this decision, is characterised by great enthusiasm, vitality, and impatience, with little compassion. It is suggested that individuals at this point need time to focus in on establishing a better sense of self.

The *intermediate stage* falls into 5 discernible movements: (i) The first begins with a greater sense of independence from peers, spiritual directors, and family religious heritage. The need to develop a strong sense of self is now accomplished; (ii) This sense of self then becomes firmly established. God seems distant and quiet and they experience some discomfort and a feeling that they are "back sliding"; (iii) This period of pain then gives way to a much more realistic acceptance of personal limitations and imperfections. This realism about self is seen in the light of God's love and mercy; (iv) The significance of God's grace now becomes increasingly apparent and a deeper surrender to God ensues. Recognition of one's sinfulness is balanced by acceptance from God; (v) The combination of the more realistic self-image and deeper sense of God's grace yields a genuine compassion, i.e. greater concern for other's issues.

The *advanced stage* also covers five discernible movements: (i) The first is characterised by lightness, humour, peacefulness, and spontaneity; (ii) People move into a deeper sense of unity with and a greater dependence upon God. They describe a way of knowing as coming intuitively through their loving relationship with God; (iii) Compassion is now much enriched. Global awareness and concern are common; (iv) This concern for others links itself to personal well-being. Personal fulfilment is no longer seen as individualistic and isolated from others; it becomes self donating; (v) In the final movement of the advanced stage, lives are characterised by a deep abiding sense of peace even in the midst of confusion or turmoil. Very few people supposedly reach these heights where they will choose to suffer in order to bring about something God has communicated to them.

Alter emphasised that these stages represent an independent formulation of development in religious experience. It hence becomes part of life because of individual choice and decision, and is not a natural chronological event as in other theoretical assumptions about adult development. It comes as a result of individual commitment and interaction with God. In this way, this developmental phenomenology of religious experience is unique.

In Heideggerian terms, William J Morgan (1993) shows how sport as a transcendent form has a fundamental spiritual intent and aspires to absolute spirit, the reality of being. In an existential phenomenological analysis of sport as a religious experience he described how this encounter of the absolute “takes the form of a reflective illumination and conceptualization of the life of the spirit, consciousness as embedded in human existence through reason and the intuitive comprehension and understanding of metaphenomenal reality” (Morgan 1993:121). This apparently arises out of our *being-in-the-world* involving a tuning-in manner of correspondence with relational being. The athletic pursuit aspires to a basic embodiment of the religious consciousness realised through the contingencies of bodily existence, in a cultural and artistic way. Morgan is of the opinion that this ultimate religious quest transcends the representative artistic sport performance in an affirmation of total strife in which the forces of spiritual existence unwind in the serious pursuit of meaning. Being itself, absolute spirit, or God, through the conscious awareness of the ontological presence of being, is realised as a meta-phenomenal dimension. The presence of being is invoked in the sport and athletic context. Sport is thus an activity of the spirit in its highest sense for its primordial, transcendent aspiration.

Posing the question: “Is running a religious experience” Hal Higdon (1992:78) quotes runners using phrases like “I saw God when running up the side of Pike’s Peak”. As for whether one can meet God while running, Higdon answers both yes and no, as “He can be met almost anywhere, but there is no guarantee” (Higdon 1992:81).

2.4.6 Hardy’s research

Alister Hardy (1979) conducted intensive studies regarding religious experience at the *Religious Experience Research Unit*, Manchester College, Oxford in the early 1900’s. Although the research done by the unit can hardly be called phenomenological, being of an explanatory and scientific-biological nature, he came to much the same conclusions as William James (1902). Hardy accuses James that he deliberately tended to “select the more exceptional, and at times

the truly abnormal, examples in order to illustrate his psychological arguments concerning different aspects of the subject" (Hardy 1979:32). His respect for James' views put forward three-quarters of a century earlier is, however, evident. The influence of James on his own findings cannot be denied.

Over many years, Hardy and his colleagues have collected together over 4000 first-hand accounts of experiences of benevolent non-physical power - some call it God, some do not. To some the presence of this power is strongest when contemplating natural beauty or listening to music; others feel it when they paint or create. Awareness of its presence affects the way people look at the world, it alters behaviour and changes attitudes.

What is intriguing about Hardy's study is the notion that there are some realities which seem to work as triggers to the experience of God. Certain realities enhance the possibilities and awareness of the senses. For Hardy, religious experience is primarily perceptual, a matter of sensory awareness, though expressed in the metaphors and doctrines of the religious cultures within which it occurs. He proposed that religious awareness is biologically natural to the human species and it remains a naturalistic phenomenon that is part of the natural world and has evolved through natural selection because of its survival value to the individual. He was thus more of a committed evolutionist and critical scientist than James.

Hardy's findings suggest some ninety-two categories which reveal religion to be a universal experience of humankind. These experiences of some 'extra-real-godness' occur equally among primitive and sophisticated peoples. There are 12 main elements within the 92 categories: (1) Sensory or quasi-sensory experience: visual; (2) sensory or quasi-sensory experience: auditory; (3) sensory or quasi-sensory experience: touch; (4) sensory or quasi-sensory experience: smell; (5) supposed extra-sensory perception; (6) behavioural changes: enhanced or 'superhuman' power displayed by man; (7) cognitive and affective elements; (8) development of experience (9) dynamic patterns in experience; (10) dream experiences; (11) antecedents or 'triggers' of experience; (12) consequences of experiences.

As a result of his research, Hardy came to the conclusion that the first four main divisions, although interesting as they appear to illustrate some very unusual states of consciousness, are in his view nothing like so profound as the states of spiritual awareness which are described in the later accounts. He found that the development of personal religious experience has a varied structure. The experience of God developed *within* the person, so to speak, in the following ways: (i) a steady disposition towards God; (ii) a gradual growth of sense of awareness: expe-

rience more or less continuous; (iii) a sudden change to new sense of awareness: conversion, the moment of truth; (iv) particular experiences, no growth recorded; (v) particular experiences, each contributing to growth of a sense of awareness of the presence of God. Hardy also deals with development of the experience in relation to other people and with the development of the experience in different periods of life which he felt to be significant in the development of religious experience.

Many of Hardy's respondents told him something of what it was that originally gave rise to their religious feelings. These include: natural beauty; sacred places; participation in religious worship; prayer and meditation; music, visual art; literature, drama and films; creative work; physical activity; relaxation; sexual relations; happiness; depression, despair; illness; childbirth; the prospect of death; the death of others; crisis in personal relations; silence, solitude. He also mentions a few accounts of experiences resulting from the taking of drugs (Hardy 1979:81-103).

In conclusion Hardy states that:

It seems to me that the main characteristics of man's religious and spiritual experiences are shown in his feelings for a transcendental reality which frequently manifest themselves in early childhood; a feeling that 'Something Other' than the self can actually be sensed; a desire to personalize this presence into a deity and to have a private I-Thou relationship with it, communicating through prayer.

(Hardy 1979:131)

David Hay (1994) reviewed Hardy's hypothesis and his own research strengthens Hardy's plausibility while not supporting the rival explanations, supposedly Marx, Durkheim, and Freud. Hay attempted to classify Hardy's accounts and identified eight major types of experience reported in order of frequency, as:

1. A pattern of events in a person's life that convinces him or her that in some strange way they were meant to happen.
2. An awareness of the presence of God.
3. An awareness of receiving help in answer to prayer.
4. An awareness of being looked after or guided by a presence not called God.
5. An awareness of being in the presence of someone who has died.
6. An awareness of a sacred presence in nature.

7. An awareness of an evil presence.
8. Experiencing in an extraordinary way that all things are "One".

(Hay 1994:5)

Hay contended that the rival explanations have taken place in a social context where post-Enlightenment, secular models of reality have come to dominate contemporary understanding. This historical process supposedly led to a failure on the part of many scientists to attend seriously to the phenomenology of the experience of God. One major difficulty that Hay (1994:15) does point out with the application of a perceptual thesis to religious experience, is that there is no identifiable organ of religious perception. Viewing the experience as a general raising of bodily awareness, a "felt sense" of the body, Hay proposes that an expansion of the meaning of the word *sensory* may be required to take account of religious phenomena.

Hay's positive reading of Hardy is somewhat questioned by Ellwood (1994). He proposes that the Hardy/Hay view of religious experience is benign and too naturalistic. Ellwood (1994:26) urges us to keep in mind that there is "really no such thing as a purely 'natural' human experience of this sort if that term excludes the 'added on' social construction of the experience and its significance through language. Words may sometimes do much to create the phenomenon, as when one intentionally uses them inwardly to lead oneself into a prayerful or meditative state of consciousness." He continues to claim that even if the state presents itself as spontaneous, it is the selection of language used to interpret it (e.g. 'presence of God') that obviously makes it religious and not some other kind of reverie, ecstasy, or 'high'. Ellwood compares the Hardy/Hay experiences with Abraham Maslow's "peak experiences". For Ellwood, the approach seems to be based on individualistic assumptions about human nature in the Cartesian sense, holding an atomistic view of the human being as a separate, individual, rather self-contained entity within which highly private experiences happen. It does not take into account that we are children of the universe in intimate moment by moment interaction with it, beginning with breathing: "Even the most solitary, subjective religious or mystical experience is inseparable from social and universal context" (Ellwood 1994:27).

Nieto (1994) fiercely criticises Hay's reading of Hardy for overlooking the "metabiological" root of Hardy's psychology of religion. He poses a question that Hay allegedly overlooked: "What is the driving force behind man's biological transcendent experience? Is Hardy's concept simply immanent experience self-explained by material evolution alone, or is there an element of the mysterious that defies ultimate explanation? How was matter able to evolve to such a point and experience such a transcendence?" (Nieto 1994:32). Rotenberg (1994) also

criticises Hay, especially for his failure to include Foucault's theory in his discussion. Hardy also comes under fire from Rotenberg for his presupposition that the very belief in God might entail "survival value". In spite of the criticism, Hardy's research and Hay's response provide us with a very important alternative to the phenomenological viewpoint. Whether it is indeed a better or more valid option is highly questionable. The reported similarities in the results and conclusions are of notable significance and importance.

2.4.7 Mysticism and the mystical experience

"If these are not the times of mystics, they are undoubtedly the times of analysts of mystical experience" (Kristo 1982:21). With this statement Jure Kristo sums up the variety of claims about the ultimate significance of mystical experience. William James (1902:342) is even convinced that "personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness". Several writers (cf. James 1902; Deikman 1981) emphasise that the mystical experience is beyond the scope of language to convey. It is also not easy to sum it up in any one, definite, experience. Walker (1988) asserts that the Christian mystics did not consider their religion to be constituted by any one experience, but rather to be a life-long transformation of the human person in relationship with God. He considers mysticism to be a way of living, rather than a particular experience.

Although *mysticism* is a more modern term, the word *mystical* (*mystikos*) is far more archaic. Both St. Paul and Christ used this term which was unknown in the Old Testament tradition. The term *mysticism* has in recent times been used as an equivalent for two characteristically different German words, derived from the Greek root meaning "to close": *Mystizismus*, which stands for the cult of the supernatural, for theosophical pursuits, for a spiritualistic exploitation of psychical research; and *Mystik*, which stands for immediate experience of a divine-human intercourse and relationship. The word *mysticism* has, furthermore, been commonly used to cover both (1) the first-hand experience of direct intercourse with God; and (2) the theologico-metaphysical doctrine of the soul's possible union with Absolute Reality, i.e. with God. It would be conducive to the purpose and scope of this study to restrict the use of the word *mysticism* to be an equivalent for *Mystik* and to use the term *mystical experience* for direct intercourse with God within the paradigm of *mysticism*. It is fair to say that mystical experience is a primarily psychological issue whereas the doctrine of mysticism is essentially a metaphysical problem.

Kristo (1982) insists that, whatever else mystical experience may be, it is a human experience and it is therefore reasonable to assume that it has a physiological and psychological grounding. He is also convinced that mystical experience is, like all experience, conditioned by cultural, historical, philosophical, and religious presuppositions and assumptions.

In the attempt to characterise mystical experience one falls upon such words as “unitary”, “total”, and “immediate”. Smith (1981:20) describes the experience as “an attitude of mind; an innate tendency of the human soul, which seek to transcend reason and to attain to a direct experience of God, and which believes that it is possible for the human soul to be united with the Ultimate Reality, when God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience”. Mysticism thus goes beyond religion and aspires to intimate union with the divine. Several scholars emphasise the union with the divine in their writings on mysticism e.g. C.G. Jung. Daschke (1993) shows within the Jungian paradigm that, in order to unite with God, one needs first to unite the self through individuation, the process that brings opposites together. The mystic’s mind must resolve into single, balanced, meaningful ideas in which the opposites are essential, complementary aspects of the same concepts, just as they exist as archetypes in the collective unconscious. Only when one has united these opposites within can one unite with God. The mystic, according to Daschke, hopes to transform into a purely spiritual being, and therefore unite psyche and soul, mind and spirit.

According to Teasdale (1988), Dionysius became the authority in the early Middle Ages and beyond for the *via negativa*, the apophatic method of “dark contemplation”, by which one may approach the Divine through a process of “unknowing” (*agnosia*), an unknowing in the rational sense, but a true knowing in an intuitive way. In Dionysius’ conception mystical wisdom is a form of knowledge which can only be gained by not trying to understand God. It apparently comes to the one who strips the intellect of its desire to have conceptual understanding, for such understanding is reportedly impossible to us. Thus, in Dionysius’ view, mysticism is a secret gnosis that is given by God to the person who meets the conditions of a relationship with Him, namely everything. It seemingly is an experience and a knowledge of the Divine, the inner mystery of his being, and a wisdom whose content is beyond the range of ordinary perception. Teasdale notes that this approach had a far-reaching influence on a large number of mystics in the Middle Ages, especially from the twelfth century onwards. He mentions that the Cisterines, Victorines, Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, and figures like Eckhart and John of the Cross were all nurtured in this method and were deeply formed in this tradition of the *via negativa*.

In our century, William James (1902) analysed mystical experience and associated it with the inward and transformative, or unifying, character of a type of experience that is exemplified by representative persons in most major religious traditions. Some writers assert that James' analysis of mystical experience has been the most widely used (cf. Martin jr. 1987:324; Hocking 1981:227). The eminent elements of James' analysis are the *ineffable* character of the mystic experience (it defies description and can only be directly experienced), the *noetic* quality (they are not only states of feeling but also states of knowledge), the *transiency* (it can only be sustained for very short periods of time), and the *passivity* (James 1902:343). Elsewhere James (1981) treats the phenomenon as if it consisted of the uncovering of tracts of *consciousness*. Reality is being uncovered through the mystical experience and James calls *uncovering* of some sort the essence of the phenomenon.

In their study of the characteristics of intense religious experience, Spilka, Brown, and Cassidy (1992) state Starbuck's reported seven response patterns: (1) self surrender; (2) determination to change; (3) forgiveness from God; (4) presence of an outside power; (5) desire for public confession; (6) spontaneous awakening, illumination, and new knowledge; (7) feelings of unity with God. According to Spilka *et al*, Clark listed in order of decreasing frequency: joy, peace, unity and oneness, happiness, lightness of body, and weeping and shouting. They also list Stace's suggested "universal core of mysticism" from his studies in comparative religion: (1) feelings of unity within oneself and with the world; (2) timelessness and a loss of a sense of location; (3) a sense of joy and peace; (4) a sacred and holy quality; (5) a contact with the divine; (6) a presence of contradictions or paradox; (7) ineffability.

From their theorising Spilka *et al* (1992:244) hypothesised that the components of mystical experience are likely to be:

1. a sense of the presence of the divine
2. feelings of unity and completeness
3. impressions of reverence, sacredness, and holiness
4. awareness of new knowledge and spiritual enlightenment
5. positive emotions of happiness, joy, and peace
6. a variety of strong emotional and physical reactions
7. some evidence of extreme sensory stimulation and possibly hallucinatory behaviour.

Their own research prompted them to observe that support for their hypothesis is mixed with unexpected and possibly inconsistent elements. Spilka *et al* admit that this is an intricate and important area of study that requires new and sophisticated theoretical and methodological approaches.

Smith (1981) postulates certain articles as the basis of mysticism. The first article maintains that the soul can see and perceive with a "spiritual sense" or intuition, by means of which a person can receive direct revelation and knowledge of God, by which he/she perceives things hidden from reason, through which he/she is brought into a conscious fellowship and unity with God. The highest knowledge can thus be attained by the spiritual sense and not by the intellect. Secondly, Mysticism assumes that humans should partake in the divine nature, if they are to know the divine - "only if the self is real can it hope to know Reality" (Smith 1991:21). It assumes that within every living soul there is a divine spark, that which seeks re-union with the Eternal Flame. In the third place, Mysticism assumes that none can attain to the knowledge of God except by purification from self. Fourthly, the guide on the upward path of the mystics is, and must be, Love. Love, to the mystic, supposedly is the active expression of his or her will and desire for the Absolute, and also his or her innate tendency to that Absolute.

An eminent scholar of mysticism, W.E. Hocking (1981), regards mysticism neither as metaphysics, nor as an experience, but as an art: "the fine art, almost the lost art of worship" (Hocking 1981:224). He asserts that, historically, the mystics are those who have carried the common art of worship to the degree of virtuosoship, they are those who have won eminent experimental knowledge of the way to God. Hocking regards their technique, which is the refinement (and often the exaggeration) of worship, to be the essence of all worship. According to this view the mystic "in his own first intention is he who approaches and acknowledges God in an immediate action called worship; and mysticism must be understood by way of this intention" (Hocking 1981:224). Elsewhere, Hocking (1963) states that mysticism may have its absolute, but the mystic finds the absolute in immediate experience.

In *The meaning of God in Human Experience*, Hocking (1963) states that a philosophy of mysticism would be a philosophy of worship. He does, however, admit that this can only be said if we do not fall into the trap of the strange courtings of frenzy, ecstasy, and intoxication. He is adamant that some of the greater mystics and schools of mysticism have actually reduced worship back again to thinking, contemplation, reflection, and have represented the end of worship as a personal knowledge of God, or even as a doctrine of God.

For Hocking, nothing is more notorious about the mystic's knowledge than its inarticulateness. The mystic himself reportedly knows that his/her insight is unfinished and unsatisfactory, even while he declares his experience to be one of perfect satisfaction. And as the mystic has been hard put to it to tell what it is that he knows, he has in our later and Western world had increasing recourse to reporting the *psychology* of his experience, in lieu of its cognitive contents.

Hocking suggests that we should allow the mystic the first word in reporting, and also in interpreting, his/her experience. But while he/she dwells upon its unique, superlative, indescribable aspects, psychology reportedly helps our understanding of that experience by finding what is *not* unique about it, what analogies it has in more commonplace experiences, undertaking thereby both to describe and to explain it. It should be noted, however, that this study acts on the assumption that the unique features of an individual's experience of God can be revealed through a phenomenological explication of essentially descriptive procedures. Hocking is principally indebted to William James and therefore the ineffable and noetic quality (usually also transient and passive) of the mystical experience always shines through. In the character of ineffability, the indescribable quality of the experience for Hocking and James becomes a point of psychological description. Hocking thus tries to explain this ineffability and the transiency on psychological grounds.

Deikman (1981) categorises mystic experiences as (a) *untrained-sensory* - this refers to phenomena occurring in persons not regularly engaged in meditation, prayer, or other exercises aimed at achieving a religious experience; (b) *trained-sensate* - this category refers to essentially the same phenomena occurring in religious persons in the West and in the East who have deliberately sought "grace", "enlightenment", or "union" by means of long practice in concentration and renunciation. These first two states are phenomenologically indistinguishable; (c) *trained transcendent* - this state is associated with long training and is a high ultimate experience that goes beyond affect or ideation. In conclusion Deikman defines mystic experience as the production of an unusual state of consciousness, brought about by a "deautomatization of hierarchically ordered structures that ordinarily conserve attentional energy for maximum efficiency in achieving the basic goals of the individual: biological survival as an organism and psychological survival as a personality" (Deikman 1981:259).

Teasdale (1988) draws a comparison between the primary question of coming into an awareness of our unity with God and all reality, and the Christian vision of our contemplative wisdom. He also identifies intuition as an important aspect of the mystical. In the light of these

elements, Teasdale (1988:213) defines mysticism as a “process of intuitive apprehension that gives one a profound consciousness of Ultimate Reality. Mysticism is also a process of transformation in the divine Reality in such a way that one is gradually made aware of one’s unity with God. Mystical contemplation awakens a knowledge of God’s presence in nature, the self and in others which also includes the world”. Listing seven essential characteristics of mystical consciousness, Teasdale calls mysticism a total process of entering the realm of the Ultimate Mystery that is (1) practical; (2) experiential; (3) non-conceptual and ineffable; (4) unitive; (5) noetic; (6) integrative; (7) sapiential.

This rather cursory overview of the mystical experience belies the importance it has for this study. Perhaps Teasdale (1988:222) summarises its significance when he describes mysticism as possibly the greatest necessity for the future of the human race and he is adamant that a civilisation cannot long endure that denies a place to the mystical quest for “mysticism is the inner coherence of life, and without it a civilization has no direction or ultimate purpose, but with it, such a society is in harmony with all creation”.

2.4.8 The Transpersonal view

Transpersonal psychology, branded as the fourth force in psychology (Sutich 1969; Valle 1989), seems to possess a natural openness towards the transcendent and spiritual dimensions of human existence. This tendency ensures the transpersonal view’s significance to this study.

Anthony Sutich and Abraham Maslow are arguably the prime movers in the articulation of the transpersonal view within the early development of humanistic psychology. Maslow (1969), in the first article of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, raised the perspective on optimal states and optimal values, extending far beyond ordinary limits of ego boundaries, time, and space. Maslow’s focal point into this transpersonal realm emerges when we answer the following kind of questions: “What are the moments which give you the greatest kick, the greatest satisfaction? What are the great moments? What are the moments of reward which make your life worthwhile?” (Maslow 1969:3-4). His view of the transpersonal experience is closely linked to his views of the “peak experience”. Vich (1988:109) brings to our attention that the first English-language construction and use of the term “*Trans-personal*” was by William James during 1905-1906. James is even considered by some to have been the first transpersonal psychologist (Armstrong 1984:207). Like much of James’ work, today’s transpersonal perspective is an experience- and knowledge-based search for an understanding of the whole of human psychological life (Vich 1988:110). The transpersonal movement is a movement

without a leader that has drawn people to it who share a common concern and a purpose, and “who share a vision of what is possible for human beings as equal participants and co-creators of our reality” (Vaughan 1982:38).

In his definition of transpersonal psychology, Sutich (1969:16) states that it is a scientific study of, among other, peak experiences, ultimate experience, ultimate meaning, transcendental phenomena etc. Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) surveyed a variety of definitions of transpersonal psychology and in their integrated effort the spiritual, transcendental, mystical nature of the experience that extends beyond the usual limits of ego and personality is evident. In their analysis of 37 definitions of transpersonal psychology, the most frequently found themes, occurring fifteen or more times in the different definitions were:

1. States of consciousness
2. Highest or ultimate potential
3. Beyond ego or personal self
4. Transcendence
5. Spiritual

(Lajoie and Shapiro 1992:90)

Based upon their analysis Lajoie and Shapiro (1992:91) offers the following definition which is a contemporary and clear effort: “Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness.”

But what does the transpersonal experience of the divine entail? The transpersonal experience frequently extends over to the accounts of humanistic psychology (notably A. Maslow) and the Christian mystics. To avoid duplication only some of the unique attributes of the transpersonal experience and contributions of transpersonal research will be dealt with. One such unique framework is the *multistate paradigm*, as applied by Steele (1993). In this application Steele followed a model founded by Thomas B. Roberts to address the inability of the framework of Thomas Aquinas and Scholasticism to explicate the richness of modern day spirituality and union with God. The multistate paradigm consists of three central concepts: *mindbody states* (MBSs) - high level executive systems which integrate and control lower level information processing systems, *mindbody psychotechnologies* (PTs) - means of producing MBSs e.g. contemporary approaches to meditation, biofeedback, yoga, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines, hypnosis and others, and *resident abilities* (RAs) which refer to certain assumptions

made for purposes of guiding theory and observation e.g. human abilities and inabilities “re-side” in MBSs and the strength of abilities, inabilities, and disabilities differs from one MBS to another.

Steele’s primary focus is the Roman Catholic spiritual tradition and what follows is a short exposition of his use of the multistate paradigm in an analysis of one discrete sub-tradition, generally considered significant in Roman Catholic spirituality, the path of spiritual development presented in the writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite, John of the Cross.

In the works of John of the Cross, the ultimate spiritual goal is typically conceptualised as union with a personal God, wherein both God and the soul become one in participant transformation. The human experience most often chosen by Catholic mystics as a metaphor for spiritual development towards this union is that of intimate human relationship, especially that of romantic love. This is witnessed to by the fact that most of the corpus of John of the Cross is organised as commentaries on three poems which are literally romantic allegories.

Before analysing the path of spiritual development, Steele states certain assumptions: as a Roman Catholic, John of the Cross assumes the existence of a personal God, the beginning and end of all things, who cannot be comprehended conceptually, and became incarnate most perfectly in Jesus of Nazareth. Steeped in the tradition of scholasticism, John assumes that the human person is comprised of *body* and *soul*. The soul has two components, the *sensory* (lower or inferior aspect), and *spiritual* (superior component). It should be noted that when John refers to the two parts of the soul, he is talking about two realms of experience rather than two parts of the soul. As a Roman Catholic, John also assumes humans are created and sustained by God.

The writings of John of the Cross are addressed to Roman Catholics who have consciously entered the path of spiritual development, people who would speak of themselves as “seeking God” or wanting to “grow closer to God” and “experience God profoundly”, and who desire clear instructions how to proceed. At this point in their interior life the spiritual path presented in the writings of John of the Cross is appropriate and effective. In brief, this path of spiritual development has three levels, with subsequent stages:

Level I: Beginning

Stage 1: Active Night of Sense: Progress is the result of the intellectual, affective, moral, and spiritual training involved in the practice of three closely-related PTs: Active purification, dis-

cerment of spirits, and mental prayer (meditation).

Stage 2: Passive Night of the sense: Whereas the experience at stage 1 is ultimately pleasant and stimulated, at this stage, presentation of the MBSs, preceding that of the PTs, typically begins as an initial, subjectively painful experience of dryness, abandonment, and darkness. There may be the experience of personal nothingness and sinfulness. The PTs at this stage are recommended responses to the spontaneous MBSs, responses which facilitate continued progress. During the latter portion of this stage, a wide variety of MBSs begin to occur as attention is withdrawn from the sensory realm of experience and turned towards the spiritual realm of experience. If one maintains fidelity to the recommended PT, certain RAs are typical consequences e.g. self-knowledge and the concomitant knowledge (experience) of God.

Level II: The Proficient Level

Stage 1: Active night of spirit: Regarding the general PT for this stage John is adamant that passing beyond all that is naturally and spiritually intelligible or comprehensible, souls ought to desire with all their might to attain what in this life could never be known or enter the human heart. John's rationale for this PT is based on his knowledge that the individual typically experiences a wealth of unusual MBSs at this stage, the visions, prophecies, locutions etc. John's analysis treats this stage by breaking it down into three components: intellect, memory, and will, each with its own PTs and RAs.

Stage 2: Passive Night of the Spirit: The MBSs at this stage is characterised by a deep sense of personal unworthiness, impurity, and sinfulness. All one can do during this period is suffer the purgation patiently (PTs). Residency at the conclusion of this stage is freedom from all attachments other than God, and the concomitant ability to receive permanent divine union.

Level III: Perfect

Stage 1: Spiritual betrothal/Espousal: According to John, at this stage God communicates to the soul great things about himself, beautifies her with grandeur and majesty, adorns her with gifts and virtues, and clothes her with the knowledge and honour of God ... she experiences in God an awesome power and understands secrets of God (MBSs). The individual offers his or her virtues to God in the spirit of love (PTs). The RA is the ability to understand and experience God to a degree that approximates the "blessed in heaven", although one comes to know that God cannot be completely understood or experienced.

Stage 2: Spiritual Marriage: Most concisely, spiritual marriage is the ultimate goal of spiritual development according to John of the Cross: the soul becomes divine. For those attaining this most exalted state, the intellect of this soul is God's intellect; its will is God's will; its memory is God's memory; its delight is God's delight (MBSs). At this stage there is no PT for, ac-

cording to John, in the union of the soul with God there is no means or intermediary. At this level the individual receives the ability or gift of seeing what God is in Himself and what He is in his creatures in only one view. What a person knows and experiences of God in this awakening is entirely beyond words (RA).

Another unique framework for the understanding of the transpersonal experience is presented by Matthew Fox as described by Robert Frager (1989). Drawing primarily on the earliest text of the Bible and the work of Meister Eckhart, Fox has outlined four stages of the spiritual journey towards divine experience. These are the *via positiva*, the *via negativa*, the *via creativa*, and the *via transformata*. Frager points out that this model conceives the spiritual journey as a cyclical spiral rather than a linear progression. One meets each of these four paths over and over again on the way.

The *via positiva* is the beginning of all genuine mysticism. This path involves love for creation and awe at its splendour and immensity, and God can be experienced in and through creation. Love is part of the essence of the Divine and therefore we must experience love deeply to come close to God. Not unlike the Passive Night of Sense of the multistate paradigm discussed earlier, the *via negativa* is a balance and a complement to the previous stage. It includes such seemingly disparate experiences as darkness, nothingness, silence, pain and suffering, letting go, receptivity, and letting be. Everyone on the mystical journey must deal with darkness and unknowing. We must accept our nothingness and emptiness. The more we become empty, the more can we be filled with God. The *via creativa* results from a combination of the first two that leads to a breakthrough to our own creativity. Frager explains that, in one sense, this creativity is the image of God within us, God as infinite potential manifesting differently through each person. The *via transformata* includes the other three parts. It requires a combination of compassion and justice to create a better world for everyone and shows certain common elements with Level III of the multistate paradigm. Actions that stem from this sense of compassion include: (a) realisation of the interconnectedness of all creation and a reverence for all existence; (b) a sense of celebration, joy, and play - which gives depth and sacredness to all life, and life to all ritual; and (c) a love of healing and opposition to injustice (Frager 1989:303).

Thomas and Cooper (1980) used quantitative means to explore the domain of intense spiritual phenomena. Questionnaires were distributed to a number of individuals and a total of 305 were returned. As a result they found that a large percentage of adult Americans have had some type of intense spiritual experience, most of which occurred spontaneously and were of

widely varying type. They conclude (analogous with Bradford's research as discussed in 2.4.5) with the assertion that their data gave no support to a supposedly widely held assumption that persons who have intense spiritual experiences are more or less pathological personality types. Thomas and Cooper (1980:83) admit that qualitative methods will be needed to measure the whole range of experiences.

The phenomenological method of research is indeed not uncommon to transpersonal research. Patrik (1994), for example, combines phenomenology with meditation for their apparent common ground in their training of attentiveness to the processes and contents of consciousness. He applies the phenomenological method to meditation experiences to describe what happens when one meditates, and to identify basic patterns or structures of consciousness occurring in meditation experiences. He offers a phenomenological description of two meditation experiences. The first can be described as a "quiet focus" experience, and is characterised by silence, ease and steadiness of focus, and by a sense of naturalness. The second description is one of a "heightened awareness" experience accompanied by an "overall sense of merging".

Gifford-May and Thompson (1994) took it one step further and studied phenomenological reports of experiences of "deep states" of meditation. The study elicited three major constituents of the experience: Transcendence beyond the normal physical and mental boundaries of the self, a different sense of reality, and positive emotion. Although these experiences are somewhat similar to the quality of mystic experience described by James (1902), and are often attributed to "part of consciousness, or God" (Gifford-May and Thompson 1994:133), their merit for inclusion in this study is limited. The application of the phenomenological method to these experiences, however, is meaningful.

As a current force in psychology, transpersonal psychology is still a developing endeavour and therefore the transpersonal view is not yet established as far as the primordial experience of God from a Christian perspective is concerned. Often the transcendental experiences referred to by transpersonal researchers might not refer to a "divine" experience, or might not even have a specific religious meaning. We should remain aware of the fact that, because absolute truths are not readily accessible to us, relative truths have to function as mutual correctives. Approaching the one truth from various sides, sometimes even in opposite directions, we cannot attain it, but we may at least encircle it. The focus in this study, however, is the experience of a phenomenon called God and the preceding reading of the transpersonal experience is therefore biased towards the phenomenon under investigation. Bearing this in mind, reflecting on the transpersonal view can be a deserving enterprise.

2.5 The Phenomenology of Religion and the experience of God

2.5.1 Introduction

Although the phenomenology of religion has emerged as a major field of study during the twentieth century, the term has been utilised by numerous scholars who seem to share little if anything in common. P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye is often considered the founder of the discipline (Krüger 1982; Eliade 1987). Within the study of religion, numerous efforts have been made towards the clarification of a “phenomenological approach” to the subject.

Eliade differentiates four major groups of scholars who use the term *Phenomenology of religion*. First he notes a proliferation of works in which the term is used in the vaguest, broadest, and most uncritical of ways, often meaning nothing more than an investigation of the phenomena of religion. Secondly, the term is used to denote that branch of science of religion which systematises and classifies religious phenomena. Both Eliade and Krüger are adamant that there has been little if any regard for specific phenomenological concepts, methods, or procedures of verification. Krüger advances strong arguments against the classification of phenomenology of religion in this sense as an independent sub-discipline within science of religion. Eliade’s third group reportedly has been making the most significant contributions of the phenomenology of religion to the study of religion. This group includes scholars such as Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade. The fourth group includes a number of scholars whose phenomenology of religion have been influenced by philosophical phenomenology, notably Max Scheler and Paul Ricoeur.

C.J. Bleeker distinguishes three types of phenomenology of religion: the descriptive phenomenology that restricts itself to the systematisation of religious phenomena, the typological phenomenology that formulates the different types of religion, and the specific sense of phenomenology that investigates the essential structures and meanings of religious phenomena (Eliade 1987). The attempt to identify the recurrent structures of religious phenomena, seeing the relations between these, and constructing classifications, should be accepted as invaluable with a view to adequate conceptualisation and the understanding of the meaning of a specific phenomenon e.g. the individual’s experience of God.

The insights of Husserl and his successors have a significant bearing on the works of phenomenologists of religion, particularly through the application of the *epoché* and the eidetic

vision of Husserl's pure phenomenology. Spiegelberg (1965a) reminds us that Husserl, while born into the Jewish religion, had become a Protestant in his twenties, largely as a result of his study of the New Testament. While outward religious practice never entered his life any more than it did that of most academic scholars of the time (see 2.2.8), his mind apparently remained open to the religious phenomenon as to any other genuine experience.

Recent publications of certain essays, combined with confidential notes and correspondence, allow Spiegelberg to give the following indications of Husserl's incipient theology and religious attitude: (a) Husserl expected that his phenomenology, and particularly its teleological interpretation of consciousness, would in time become helpful in aiding theological insight; (b) Husserl repudiated uncompromisingly and repeatedly any kind of theological dogma; (c) Husserl disclaimed theism in the usual sense. There are, however, in his writings references to the idea of an epistemological God as a perfect knower. But Husserl never claimed any theological significance for this deliberate fiction. Beyond that, the idea of God seems to have entered his later thinking only in the shape of a final goal of the constitutive functions of consciousness. Apparently he did not make up his mind about the question whether or not such a Deity was a personal being. And it almost looks as if, as the goal of human consciousness, Deity is still very much in the making, i.e., God is merely a becoming God.

Spiegelberg admits that these theological rudiments are no clear guide to Husserl's personal religious convictions, especially if we interpret religion in the sense of dependence and reliance upon a power not ourselves. Here, it seems, there were at least two trends side by side in Husserl's personal attitude: on the one hand a trend towards absolute philosophical autonomy and responsibility, which expressed itself, among other things, in his disapproval of catholicising tendencies among his own students; on the other hand, especially in extreme situations, Husserl expressed a touching faith in divine aid which would support him if only he himself tried his utmost. It was in such moods that he spoke about his vocation and even his mission under God's will to find new ways for philosophy and science.

According to G.A. James (1985), however, the term *phenomenology* within the field of religion is employed in a sense that not only does not square with its meaning for Husserl, but it seems also to have connotations that it could not possibly have had for him or any of his followers. James also observes that, if phenomenology is the discussion of what appears, and the essence of religion is necessarily concealed, it is hard to imagine how a phenomenology of religious experience is possible. It should be noted, however, that while a phenomenon called God is not readily accessible, the way this phenomenon is revealed to humans through their

experience is accessible through their descriptions. This study is not concerned with the meaning of *phenomenology* within the psychology of religion but with the experience of the phenomenon, God, and therefore the *phenomenology of religion* will be understood as widely and inclusively as possible in an attempt to grasp the meaning of the experience of God within the sciences of psychology and the psychology of religion. Let's now turn to a reflection on certain views within this field.

2.5.2 W.E. Hocking

As a counterpart to questions about the meaningfulness of the concept of God, William Ernest Hocking (1963), in *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, sought for its "original sources" in experience. In his foreword to the fourteenth edition, John E. Smith calls Hocking the true heir of William James - he apparently inherited the legacy and developed it further. Hocking, however, expresses dissent from the views of James, but he calls it a sign of the extent to which he owes to him. Smith calls Hocking's book one of the serious philosophical treatments of religion in the twentieth century. Hocking's mystical stance has been dealt with earlier and will not be repeated here.

Hocking's relevance to this study lies in his refusal to abandon experiential foundations. *Religious experience* is a common phrase, often used throughout literature as well as throughout this study. *God* - as a being beyond the world whom "no man hath seen at any time" - is not always presumed to be a direct factor in experience. Hocking attempts a plausible discussion which combines metaphysical depth with experiential bearings. He shows how God may be found in human experience at large, and how this knowledge develops in the specifically religious experience of mankind.

Hocking (1963:154) poses the question: "How ... is religious truth to be known? Are the realities of which religion speaks to be discovered in experience? Or are they matters of hypothesis, or of inference, that is to say, of reason?" In his answer he states that religious truth is founded *upon experience*. In that imaginary picture of ours of the psychological birth of the idea of God we may discern, beside the stroke of will, an experience of discovery. If there is any knowledge of God, it must be in some such way a matter of experience. This implies that our experience of reality is not confined to pure sensation. According to Hocking's view sensation itself also brings us into contact with a reality which is independent of our will; sensation is a metaphysical experience. From this follows that religious faith must be built upon an experience not wholly different from sensation; but a super-sensible experience, like our expe-

rience of our fellow humans; an experience which recognises the reality given in sensation for what, in its true nature, it is.

Hocking continues to suggest that whatever is matter of experience must also become, in time, matter of reason; for reason is but the process of finding, by some secure path of connection, a given experience from the standpoint of other experiences assumed as better known. It is then through reason that the original experience of God becomes established as veritable truth.

Experience, for Hocking, is the region of our continuous contact with metaphysical reality. He deems metaphysical knowledge to be the most universal kind of knowledge: "(T)he infant's first thoughts are metaphysical, that is to say, thoughts of Reality - though not by name or title. The chance for finding God of general human value is built on the prospect that God may be found *in experience*, 'experience' being the region of our continuous contact with metaphysical reality" (Hocking 1963:215). God can seemingly appear in experience only through some working of himself. Speculation will thus not find him; He makes himself known. In his explication, Hocking reserves no place for an enquiry whether God exists, or whether belief in him has any importance. His whole treatise leads to the assertion that God is to be known in experience, if at all.

Hocking broadly outlines two distinct phases of experience wherein God is apt to appear: in the experience of Nature and in social experience. At special points in nature the awareness of God seems to break through. It also rings true for social experience: apparently it is not everywhere, but at special junctures and crises, that the awareness of God comes to people; at the events of death and birth, of war and wedlock, of dream and disease and apparition.

Although Hocking proposes two different (and relatively independent) regions of religious suggestion, it is evident that he doesn't keep them apart nor does he assign to either a priority over the other. For Hocking, the religious experience of Nature means nothing if not finding Nature living, even personal, thereby personalising that experience. Social experience likewise becomes religious experience only when it is at the same time an experience of Nature power. Fundamentally people's contact with Nature uncovers all their limitations. Hocking is adamant that Nature concentrates within itself all that is menacing and hostile to people; and that it also reminds them of their pettiness and weakness. Primary religious experience in his view is so burdened with this consciousness of limitation that he remarks: "What man fears, that he worships" (Hocking 1963:234).

It would seem as if Hocking is somewhat Platonic in his search for the original source of the knowledge of God - an innate idea that comes to be known through certain experiences. At the source of all religion, Hocking finds an experience of God as an Other Knower of our world (in addition to ourselves), already in close relation to self, and also in some natural bond with our social and physical experience. It seems then that the original source of the knowledge of God is an experience which might be described as an experience of not *being alone in knowing the world*.

2.5.3 Attributes of religious experience

An important question draws the attention of the student of the psychology of religion: is there a discrete set of characteristics of the religious experience, or are there more than one type of religious experience with each type possessing unique characteristics? Some clarification on this issue could be provided by a content analysis of various accounts of religious experiences and a subsequent factor analysis of the categories.

The first attempt to specify the attributes of religious experiences was by William James (1902). After presenting numerous examples of religious experiences, James arrived at four characteristics common to the experience: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (see 2.4.7 for an explanation of these elements).

Based on interviews with 45 persons, Margolis and Elifson (1979) developed a typology of religious experience. The 45 persons reported 69 experiences with no person volunteering more than three experiences. The persons' accounts were content analysed to extract the major attributes of the experience. Categories were established by reading the experiences and listing their dominant themes. Following this, each experience was rated for the presence or absence of each theme and the number of times each theme occurred. After the tabulation was completed, it was decided that any theme which occurred five or more times would be included in the typology. The accounts included reports like: "There was such a warmth, a feeling of security and love", "I was like mentally in another world", "I saw things without subject/object duality", and "All of a sudden I became aware of God" (Margolis and Elifson 1979:65-66).

The content analysis was structured so that the themes could be divided into three broad categories: "Before", "During", and "After" the experience. The content analysis yielded a total of 36 themes. Once the content analysis was completed, the themes of the religious experience

were factor analysed using component analysis. A separate factor analysis was performed on each of the three broad categories: "Before", "During", and "After" the experience.

The content analysis of 69 religious experiences yielded the following 20 themes which are presented by Margolis and Elifson along with the number of times they occurred: Change in perception of reality (29), Security (28), Non-specific change in internal state - cognitively oriented (24), Ecstasy (23), Initial negative reaction (22), Visions or voices (22), Experience of divine presence (18), Non-specific change in internal state - feeling oriented (17), Peace (14), Church service or religious retreat (13), Talking to a friend (12), Out-of-body experience (9), Loss of control (9), Experience of unity or oneness (6), Experience of love (6), Drugs (6), Dream (5), Physical distress (5), and Music (5).

A factor analysis of these themes yielded four factors namely: (1) *Transcendental experience* - it involves coming into contact with a higher or metaphysical plane of reality, and this contact dramatically changes the way the person perceives him/herself, and the world; (2) *Vertigo experience* - it involves at least a temporary disorientation for the person, often triggered by drugs or music; (3) *Life change experience* - in many ways this experience seems to mark the beginning of a life change for the individual in that his/her thinking or his/her feelings about him/herself or his/her relationship to God is profoundly affected; (4) *Visionary experience* - this experience, although it is often associated with a dream, is perceived as being a genuine contact with a divine presence. Although these factors appear to be quite different, they all seem to be intense emotional experiences, and, with the exception of factor 2 (Vertigo experience), they seem to have a positive emotional tone.

According to Margolis and Elifson these factors tend to share the characteristics of (a) unity, (b) ineffability, (c) noetic quality, (d) positive affect, and (e) time/space distortions. They also mention that the similarities to previous typologies provide a source of external validation for this typology as an accurate representation of the characteristics of a religious experience.

Cumpsty (1983) suggests a general framework for identifying and locating religious experience. While having regard to the fact that what counts in one tradition as religious experience may not count so in another tradition, Cumpsty attempts to respond to the need for criteria to distinguish between what for the student of religion might count as religious experience, and what is claimed to be such by members of a sample studied. He suggests that, if there is a common essence to all religious traditions - a primary religious experience - it is (a) a felt

sense of the ultimate real in or behind the transitory parade of experiences, and (b) a mode of belonging to it, with the latter changing to accord with the former.

According to Cumpsty a typology of religion in terms of the human modelling of the nature of the ultimate real, the sense of which is distilled from total experience of the “world out there”, presents only three possible religious types and the non-religious response. The three paradigmatic religious types are called: *Nature Religion* in which the “world out there” is conceived as both real and monistic i.e. a closed system of cause and effect; *Withdrawal Religion* in which the “world out there” is conceived to be a transitory manifestation of the ultimately real, from which one may learn of the possibilities in the reality itself but by which one must not be snared into a sense of its permanence; *Religion of Secular World Affirmation* in which the “world out there” is conceived to be real and essentially good but secular, and the ultimately real to be transcendent.

Cumpsty proposes that religious experiences be understood to be, and located as: (a) any experience which focuses the individual’s attention on or modifies his felt sense of the ultimately real, and (b) all those elements which contribute to the individual’s sense of belonging to the ultimate real or modify such sense.

A typology of religious experience as a catalogue to group together those experiences which display like features, and any attempt to classify attributes of religious experiences seem to be dependent upon the results of existing research and therefore are of limited significance to this study.

2.5.4 Images of God and experience

Analogous language and thought - and accompanying metaphoricity - are part of the search for meaning in the experience of God. Many, perhaps all, of the terms that are applied in religious discourse to God are being used in special ways, differing from their use in ordinary mundane contexts. For example, when it is said that “great is the Lord”, it is not meant that God occupies a large volume of space. Experiencing God in images reflects a phenomenon deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. The Old Testament writers use images and symbols to portray the Israelite’s relationship to God. For instance, “I have carved you in the palm of my hand” (Is. 49:16); “We are the clay and you the potter, we are all the work of your hands” (Is. 64:7); “As the hind longs for the running waters, so my soul longs for you, o God” (Ps. 42:2). The

Israelites searched for concrete ways to enter into and express the unfathomable mystery of their God.

Jesus communicates his profound experience of his Father, his own identity, people's relationship to Him, and the reign of God through images and stories. For example, He describes his Father as the "vinegrower" and Himself as the "true vine" (Jn 15:1). He presents Himself as the "Good Shepherd" (Jn. 10:14). He describes the nature of the reign of God in parables. In many rich imaged ways Jesus experiences and expresses his Father's and his own identity, our relationship to God, and the meaning and the reign of God.

Images-of-God research essentially seeks correlates of conceptualisations of God, but the research elicits ambiguous reactions. Ralph W. Hood jr. (1989) is of the opinion that images-of-God research remains morassed in what seems an endless series of simple studies of God/parent correlations from which little of theoretical merit has emerged. Hood jr. illustrates how, in his view, this research has been dominated by the assumptions that images of God are primarily, if not totally, rooted in family experiences. Although he acknowledges the value of the documentation of such correlations, he insists that the mere collection of such correlations is at best tedious without some consideration of the ontological issue and its articulation in relevant theologies. Although Hood jr. concedes that it is true that one's image of God is conditioned by one's own life experiences, and indeed, at least partly, by one's experiences with parents, he asserts that it cannot be totally conditioned. He suggests that it may be more reasonable to say that one's life experiences eventually culminate in views that are "awakened" and lead to images of reality and truth no longer conditioned totally by one's particular experiences.

Entertaining a considerably more expansive view, Maureen Conroy (1985) is convinced that an imaged experience can evolve into a rich encounter with God and result in a deepening of our relationship and personal growth. She demonstrates experientially how God's self-communication engages our imagination, which can develop into an intimate experience of God. She defines *image* as "a vivid and visual internal representation of a person or object", and *imagination* as "the creative or receptive process of representing interiorly a particular image ... for deepening affectivity and ... it also facilitates the developing of a meaningful experience of and lively relationship with God" (Conroy 1985:12). The *experience of God* is described as a personal and heartfelt encounter between God and us wherein we interiorly participate in the life of God. Conroy explains that this can be grounded in *kataphatic spirituality* (involving symbols, images, sensation, concepts) or the *apophatic tradition* (emptying oneself

of sensory and conceptual representations). According to Conroy's view an experience of God involves movement: God draws us closer in relationship and we respond positively to this attraction. Furthermore she asserts that an experience of God can take place over a long period of time, for instance, God inviting a person to be his "resting place" in various ways over several years; or it can happen briefly, such as a person having a heartfelt glimpse of God's smiling and rejoicing.

One dynamic uniting image and experience during an in depth encounter that Conroy mentions is the movement from an image or story to a personal experience of God, which deepens the relationship and results in personal growth. She explains how "Ignatian contemplation" of a Gospel story provides a context for this movement. We creatively reconstruct particular details of the event and imaginatively relive the action of the story. Through a series of active encounters and inner movements we apparently soon integrally participate in the story as if it is developing in our own lived experience. We reportedly move from imaginative representation to an affective encounter. As we deeply remain with a particular Gospel narrative over a period of time, we may eventually experience a simple being with, a quiet oneness with God. Conroy continues to show how people change as a result of this profound encounter. She tells the story of Amy's contemplation of the story of Lazarus in John 11 to exemplify this dynamic. Conroy is of the opinion that Amy's experience of this dynamic portrays how God's story can be incarnated in our personal experience.

Conroy's second dynamic of image and experience of God is a movement from a general sense of God to a concrete image or story. This begins with a vague awareness of God. By sharing our inner feelings and life experiences with God and striving to be attentive to his response, we reportedly notice an image forming within us. This image may be a glimpse, a flash, a clear picture, or a gentle inner stirring. We may experience God's presence more concretely as we linger with this image and possibly share with God our feelings about its engaging quality. Through experiencing God specifically in the arena of this vibrant image, our ongoing relationship develops. In the depths of our being, we grow intimately closer to God. Again using stories she shows how the imaged experience develops from a lively relationship with God. The imaged experience, then, turns into an arena for further dialogue, a "dwelling place" where God and humans meet concretely.

Another dynamic of image and experience of God can evolve through spiritual direction, which Conroy describes as a rich experience of prayer and grace for the director and the directee. We evidently come to the session with a general sense or specific experience of God.

In the process of sharing this with the director, an image seemingly arises within us. As we describe it to our director, who helps us to stay with it, we begin to notice more about it. We experience God in a full and more meaningful way. Our sense of God becomes incarnated; our experience is enfleshed.

Image, rooted in our imagination, engages our affectivity and understanding. A concrete image residing in us can lead to a deeper experience of God. Conroy's explication is a commendable effort in an area of experience that still calls for more attention.

2.6 Résumé

The literature review illustrated the vast array of research available within the scope of this study. The disciplines of psychology, phenomenology of religion, and psychology of religion provide a frame of reference for this investigation. From this basis this study continues into a consideration of methodology. The method used in this research will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The exploration of the individual's experience of God requires a methodology. The method outlined in this chapter is a two-edged sword, for a phenomenological approach adequate for investigating the experience of God requires a constant dialogue between the researcher/reader and the phenomenon to be explicated. The research methodology, thus, has no prevalence over the phenomenon to be explored. The constant dialectic between approach, method, context, and content is maintained throughout the research. In this chapter a motivation for the application of the phenomenological method is first of all given. The research approach is subsequently put into perspective and the research procedure outlined.

3.2 Choice of method

Dietrich Bonhoeffer opens his book *Christology* (1978:27) with the statement that discourse about God begins in silence. He subsequently quotes Kierkegaard: "Be still, for that is the absolute", and Cyril of Alexandria: "In silence I worship the unutterable". This reminds one of Psatha's description (in Stones 1988:142) of phenomenological inquiry as "beginning in silence".

The phenomenological method of investigation is chosen for this study for its effort to remain true to the facts as they are happening. Allowing the facts to speak for themselves is the closest way in research to "begin in silence".

Stones (1988:144) explains that the fundamental point of departure of phenomenological praxis from traditional natural scientific research is that priority is given to the phenomenon under investigation rather than this being secondary to an already established methodological framework. The operative word in phenomenological research is "describe".

Van Huyssteen is of opinion that theology is fundamentally descriptive. He contrasts narrative theology as descriptive theology with all forms of explanation which always implies a foundationalist epistemology. Theology basically reflects on religious experience and the ensuing

religious language as ways to the phenomenon some may call God. It should be noted that, for van Huyssteen, these experiences, and their accompanying metaphorical language, can only be reliably interpreted, from a theological perspective, on the basis of the classic texts of the Christian faith. A phenomenological attitude attempts to describe phenomena and experiences as originally revealed without recourse to theory or text. The narrative is a valuable and useful way to verbally present religious experience and to communicate its fullness - "The closer faith and theology are to experience, the more they turn to narration in their form and expression" (Leonard Boff, quoted by Gillespie 1988:36).

Experience is the particular way that we interpret all of the reality around us, including God. The only way we can manage to say anything about God at all is through a description of our primal experience, even if it is through extended concepts like analogies and metaphors. Description is thus a valid and helpful way to come to knowledge and understanding of the God experience. We cannot quantify our emotions and experiences. We can only attempt to describe them and come to knowledge by understanding the experience. As far as religion is concerned we can observe the religious actions of a certain person but that in itself tells us nothing about his or her original and primordial experience of God. A person's consciousness of his or her own existence in reality comes to an expression in the phenomenological method of investigation.

3.3 Perspective on research approach

Methodological reflection involves a critical attitude directed towards one's approach, and towards the adequacy of one's method in carrying out the research program suggested by one's approach (Churchill 1990). Critical reflection in this study will be carried out *a priori* (prior to engaging in the research effort) as well as *a posteriori* (after the enactment of method).

The following questions should now be posed: what happens in the process where our primary experience is transformed into concepts bound by language and thoughts?, and: are these concepts valid reflections on human experience?

A neutral, bias-free reflection on the reality we call God seems impossible. One cannot escape having a perspective. Religious experience cannot be totally independent of concepts, beliefs, and linguistic practices. This is presumably the reason why Stones (1988:142) views the extent to which it is possible for any investigation to fulfil the requirements of "beginning in silence"

(see 3.2) as problematic. The researcher, by virtue of *being-in-the-world* which he/she is investigating, is inevitably involved in the way it manifests itself to him/her.

Van Huyssteen (1987:154) is of the opinion that no religious experience can be seen as pre-linguistic or pre-theoretical. Language, in his view, not only represents or reflects reality, it also constitutes and transforms reality. Religious experience, and indeed all experience, has a socio-cultural component and is thus governed by the language and traditions of specific groups.

We remain socially, culturally, and historically embedded and we are influenced by the prevalent scientific and philosophical paradigms. As stated earlier, we cannot escape having a perspective. That is the reason why religious language will always be relational. This relational feature of religious language makes it possible for a person to talk about a reality outside him- or herself. In religion this relational language refers to the use of metaphors, models, and analogies as ways of talking about God and our experience of God, even if only tentative, and no absolute statements about God can be made.

This investigation required persons to describe their experience of God and articulate that experience in words which were then interpreted in a psychological context. Teaching about God, however, is a language problem requiring exact articulation of primary experience, and as such it is a hermeneutical problem, therefore metaphors are the ground and heart of our reflection on God. Sometimes a metaphor becomes so dominant and is used so commonly that it results in a model, for example God as Father. The task of theology is thus to transform the metaphorical language of our experience to clear concepts to form theories and models.

The urge of phenomenology, on the other hand, is to "re-establish contact with the raw material of life itself. It is the effort to rediscover and re-experience life itself directly underneath the layer of secondary scientific constructions. It wants to learn again how to see clearly and how to describe accurately what we see ... It wants to return '*to the things themselves*' as the phenomenological battle-cry runs" (Krüger 1982:17).

Modern phenomenology, says Spinelli (1989), admits, however, that it cannot tell us what the true nature of reality is, nor will it ever be able to do so. True reality will forever remain both unknown and unknowable to us.

The point is to (re)discover meaning in the world and in life itself. In all phenomenological investigations we are concerned with the unfolding of a phenomenon, allowing it to reveal itself more clearly. The experience of God is a phenomenon that is experienced both collectively and uniquely by persons. According to Kruger (1988:38) phenomenological research in psychology does not look for measuring instruments and techniques to find out things about people of which we cannot possibly know, but rather tries to get people to describe and explicate their experiences in order to systematically and rigorously disclose the meaning structures of our lives and behaviours, in other words to articulate what is thus disclosed. Stones (1988:142), however, insists that these meaning structures that are disclosed, are already known in a pre-scientific, pre-articulative manner. Any scientific investigation entails a formalised study of this pre-scientific knowledge.

How can this notion be reconciled with the viewpoint of Van Huyssteen that religious experience can never be pre-linguistic (pre-articulative)? Perhaps we should consider Churchill's suggestion (even though in a different context) that it is possible to possess knowledge about something while having little in the way of a lived acquaintance with the subject matter. It is thus possible to say more than one knows by acquaintance. Conversely, it is possible to know more than one can tell (1990:46).

The problem is also somewhat reduced if we consider metaphor (and indeed all language?) not only as a way of communicating but also as a way of knowing (experiencing?). Pre-reflective knowing and communicating this knowledge meet each other in the phenomenological praxis.

Staying true to the phenomenological reduction it is not really the intent to find the basis or origin of an experience (reality is in any case forever elusive), but what is really meaningful is the realisation or revelation of the phenomenon as it is revealed through experience. It must be emphasised that this study is psychologically biased rather than theologically. For the latter, the inverse might be true. The psychologist concerned with the phenomenology of a particular experience wishes to return to its original form, unbiased by reflection, theory etc. in order to rediscover it in its original, pure essence.

In this light we should consider Valle, King, and Halling's (1989) angle when they explain that the realm of naïve experience is not the external environment of the natural sciences, but rather the *Lebenswelt*. The *Lebenswelt* is the starting point or ground for the existential-phenomenological inquest. This *Lebenswelt* is of a pre-reflective (pre-linguistic?) nature and precedes our reflective awareness. Through faithful description we strive to bring the pre-

reflective *Lebenswelt* to the level of reflective awareness where it manifests itself as psychological meaning. The pre-reflective nature of the *Lebenswelt* does not exclude it as a source of knowledge, but is actually the indispensable ground or starting point of all knowledge.

In essence, according to Stones (1988:149), phenomenological praxis in psychology is concerned with the rigorous description of phenomena contextualised in the *Lebenswelt*.

As meaning is conveyed by words and sentences, the analysing of first hand first person descriptions is an effective way to reveal the psychological meaning of experiences, provided that no absolute statements or generalisations are made. Van Vuuren (1989) shows that description is not a phase in science but a distinct type of science. Gathering and analysing descriptions are feasible because descriptions can reveal psychological acts for the experiencer as well as how the person is in the world.

It is thus fair to say that experience has psychological meaning. In the interrelatedness of a person and his world, and in the “dialogical ... inter-human intentionality” (Edwards 1987:10) every person constitutes a certain (personal) reality. In the manifestation of this reality, our common humanity and the shared quality of language make it possible to describe the experience and subsequently transform concepts in order to elicit valid reflections on the meaning of an experience.

3.4 Research procedure

3.4.1 Introduction

The locus of phenomenological research is human experience. The first step in the research is the identification of the phenomenon to be studied. This study focuses on the experience people have of God. The different manifestations of the phenomenon are explored so that one can come to an understanding of the essential structure(s) of the phenomenon. In order to stay true to the “epoch reductions” or “subjective reductions” of phenomenological inquiry, the phenomenon is not preliminarily described or narrowed in any way.

The research procedure that was followed is derived from the procedures described by Du Toit (1992), Polkinghorne (1989), and Stones (1988), and those used by Du Toit (1991) and Hoek (1988).

3.4.2 Collection of data

3.4.2.1 Research question

It is crucial that an appropriate focus question be asked. Stones suggests a pilot study and this was followed by Hoek. The research question in this study did not, however, necessitate a pilot study. The following question served as the research question: *Describe your experience of God as completely as possible.*

The research question was translated into the language of the interviewed person's choice. Follow up questions were asked to clarify certain issues.

3.4.2.2 Selection of persons

Throughout the study reference is made to "persons" or "persons interviewed", for in phenomenological research the term "subject" is generally not very acceptable as it calls up images of people being viewed from a distance. In this study the persons interviewed were co-researchers and contributors in search of a meaningful understanding of a shared human experience.

Persons were chosen on the basis of their basic ability to provide rich descriptions of the experience being investigated. The first requirement for selection was that a person should have experienced (or still experience) the phenomenon. The topic (the God experience) is limited to a specific group of people. The second requirement was that the persons interviewed were verbally fluent and articulate, and able to communicate their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions in relation to the researched phenomenon. They must have had the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of their experience of God.

The third requirement constituted a willingness to be open to the researcher and having had a real interest in the experience so that, where necessary, more than one interview could be agreed upon.

Stones (1988:150) also states having the same home-language as a criterion for selection. This criterion was not strictly adhered to although it is feasible.

The number of persons selected for phenomenological based studies varies considerably. Polkinghorne (1989) names studies that ranged from 325 to 3 protocols. Churchill (1990:58-59) suggests that even one in depth case study can be a valuable and fruitful endeavour. For the purpose of this study, 10 persons were initially invited to share their experience of God with the researcher. They were selected to generate a fair range of variation in the set descriptions to be used for revealing the phenomenon. The idea was not to meet statistical requirements for making statements about distribution with a group of people or to achieve statistical generalisation, but to obtain richly varied descriptions. Therefore an array of individuals were carefully chosen to provide a variety of specific experiences of the topic being explored.

Six protocols were eventually chosen to be analysed. The remaining four protocols were omitted for their somewhat cryptic and inarticulate nature that were not conducive for an accurate and valid analysis and description of the phenomenon.

3.4.2.3 The Interview

In the interview the persons were asked to describe in detail their experience of God. The research question (see 3.4.2.1) was posed and the interview sessions were tape recorded and later transcribed and translated into English if they were in a different language. In certain instances the persons preferred to write an essay instead of being tape recorded. The same research question was asked in these instances. The researcher created a situation in which the person could feel relaxed, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. The relevant biographical data were collected from each person interviewed.

The interviews were open-ended and were conducted in an informal, non-directive manner, the interviewer attempting to influence the persons as little as possible. The interviewer attempted to acquire descriptions of the experience of the phenomenon itself without the person's interpretation or theoretical explanations. Rather than seeking general opinions, the interview focused on specific situations and action sequences that are instances of the theme under investigation so that the essence or structure of the theme could emerge and show itself.

Giorgi (in Stones 1986:121) considers "the search for adequate descriptions and their interpretations to be an important part of science itself". It is therefore important not to accept the descriptions as a taken-for-granted-right. "As researchers we cannot demand good first-person descriptions from our subjects. We must receive these descriptions as gifts. As members of the

scientific community we can demand that our own descriptions do justice to psychology as a human science" (Van Vuuren 1989:73).

3.4.3 The analysis of the data

3.4.3.1 An intuitive and holistic grasp of the data

Each complete description was read as many times as was necessary in order to understand it as a whole experience, and, in these terms, to achieve a sense of what the person experienced. In this initial reading of the protocol, the researcher had to bracket personal preconceptions and judgements, and, to the fullest extent possible, remained faithful to the data. Through the repeated reading of the data the researcher not only achieved a holistic sense of the experience, but also prepared for the further phases in which a more exacting analysis was required.

3.4.3.2 Breaking down the data into natural meaning units (NMUs)

After the initial reading of the protocol, the data were broken down into naturally occurring units (Natural Meaning Units or NMUs) which reveal a single recognisable aspect of the person's experience. This was accomplished by recording each time a transition in meaning was perceived. Although the person's own words took preference, the researcher allowed himself to articulate the essence of each NMU in words other than those used by the person in order to convey the intended meaning clearly. This, however, was done very sparingly. Certain units that were considered non-revelatory of the phenomenon (*n.r.o.p.*) under investigation were also identified.

3.4.3.3 Transformed Meaning Summaries

Through a reflection on the NMUs, the researcher identified the themes that were central to the descriptions and the NMUs relating to each theme were grouped together. The researcher proceeded to reflect on the central themes and the NMUs, which were still expressed essentially in the concrete every-day language of the subject, and transformed their language into formal psychological language in a summary which reflected the essential intended meaning of the description. The researcher attempted to transform the initial language without making assumptions or diverting from the initial intention of the description. These transformations are necessary because the original descriptions given by the persons are usually naïve regarding

psychological structures and often include multiple and blended references (cf. Polkinghorne 1989:55; Stones 1988:153).

The transformation was accomplished by two thought processes: reflection and imaginative variation. The process of reflection intends to answer the questions: what is truly being described in the meaning unit?, and: what is absolutely essential to understand the psychological dynamic operating here? Imaginative variation is a type of mental experimentation in which the researcher intentionally alters, through imagination, various aspects of the experience, either subtracting from or adding to the proposed transformation (Polkinghorne 1989:55).

Only the information that was clearly and truly related to the person's unique experience had to be transformed. The ultimate goal is to accurately express the essential (intended) meaning of the individual's experience in articulate psychological statements.

3.4.3.4 Synthesis

The NMUs, themes, and transformed summaries were once more reviewed and reflected on. The context, meanings, and intentions became clearer and in the process more transformations of meaning occurred. Each description was synthesised into a descriptive statement of essential psychological meaning. This resulted in a specific situated structure for each person. The structure is described as being "specific and situated", in that it remains true to the specific contextual experience of the subject.

The researcher proceeded to reflect on the importance of the identified themes for each person by recording the frequency of occurrence of each theme (Appendix B). Subsequently the transformed summaries and specific situated structures had been reflected on once more. The researcher tried as much as possible to depart from the specifics of the situation to communicate the most general meaning of the phenomenon in a truly psychological-phenomenological way. A universal structure emerged as a description of the Christian experience of God.

3.4.3.5 Validation

At this point the researcher returned to the persons interviewed and asked them whether the synthesis truly reflect their experiences. This was done on the assumption that the participants themselves would be the best able to indicate the extent to which their experiences had been correctly disclosed. First of all they were requested to comment on the universal structure and

to rate it on a scale from 1 to 10 to the extent to which it reflected their own experience of God. Subsequently they had to rank the themes according to the significance it had for them.

Another form of validation is to submit one's analysis and description to external scrutiny by other judges. Although another researcher will probably describe the phenomenon differently, "validity is indicated by the extent to which such differences in wording and expression are intersubjectively understood to reflect an identical meaning or to indicate similar themes to those which emerged from the data as explicated by the original researcher" (Stones 1988:155). This study was submitted to the scrutiny of a supervisor and an external examiner as a further means of validating.

A final indication of validity is if the general situated structure corresponds very clearly with the available theory on the phenomenon.

3.4.4 Conclusions

The researcher's analytic process was critically reflected upon and the results were reviewed in the light of previous research and theory pertaining to the experience of God in chapter two. The implication of the phenomenological findings for psychological theory and application conclude the study. It must be remembered that, in phenomenological research, no final or definite conclusions can be made. The research "can never exhaust the investigated phenomenon ... (and) can never be complete" (Colaizzi quoted by Stones 1988:155). The search for the truth and reality remains a noble quest with its own rewards. All conclusions arrived at are tentative and subjective reflections and not the aim of the investigation. It is merely part of the journey.

3.5 Résumé

A methodology for investigating religious experience seems inevitable if one is to conduct a valid and authoritative study. The phenomenological method of investigation was chosen for this exploration. In this chapter a motivation for the application of the phenomenological method was first of all given. The research approach was subsequently put into perspective and the research procedure outlined. In the following chapter the actual research and results will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Following the methodological justification and an outline of the research procedure in the preceding chapter, this chapter proceeds with a description of the actual research as it was executed. The protocols, natural meaning units, identified themes, transformed meaning summaries, specific situated structures, and universal structure of the experience form part of this chapter. The results are then interpreted and validated.

4.2 Data analysis: Person A

4.2.1 Protocol: Person A (Female, 34 years)

Any personal experience of God/a godliness is built on the traditions - handed over from one generation to a next - within a particular nation and culture, and of course the church one belongs to. The existing dogmas and teachings concerning the God of Christianity, dictate borders to the individual regarding statements about God, and even about experiences of God. Those things that are not permitted to be said within the walls of the church - the undesirable questions and theories regarding God/a godliness - have all been said and asked by philosophers and atheists a long time ago. My experience of God alternates constantly between these two poles: the triune, merciful, and loving God who cares for us, and who is involved in us; and then the cruel, uninvolved, merciless God who has no involvement in people and their world and who does not ever want to be involved.

Some days when I read the Bible I literally feel how God's spirit of peace and love and security fills me up; on some other days I question aloud whether religion is after all not only the "opium of the people", a self-hypnosis of: "I'm making myself believe"; "I believe that I believe". This is an introduction - the presupposition of my thoughts.

My experience of God entails that I should talk about **who** and **what** God is (if there is a God), and what He does, and how He is involved in my life. The vastness and majesty of the universe, the delicate composition of insects, leaves, and flowers, the wonder of a baby being

born, call for only one conclusion: Someone is bigger than all of this. Considering that limestone-formations of caves formed around 2500 million years ago, deep beneath the earth, I realise anew how insignificant one person is. Something or Someone had been responsible for the creation and order in nature, the plants and animals and people. The powers and miracles in nature leave me dumbfounded, and I humbly bow down before Him who was responsible for it all.

The data that scientists afford regarding the age of the earth and the size of the universe, is far too immense for my limited reason to grasp. And the diminutive little word "eternity" is totally beyond my comprehension. Whereto everything is moving, and when or if it will end, that I also don't know. I realise, however, that everything that surrounds me is just too awesome and grand, and therefore there must be a purpose behind the bigger picture. The power/powers in command of this remarkable universe-project, certainly has/have an objective and intent. And I presume that He is in command of this encompassing plan.

The confession regarding God within Christianity is that He is immutable. Every day the world is the same and yet different. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening, seasons succeed one another, but nevertheless everything changes. I don't think God is totally immutable while He allows and executes all these alterations in creation.

I desperately want to believe the confession that God is personal. I want Him to be like a Father to me: He should take care of me, know everything about me, and direct my whole life. The faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross and the consequent redemption of humanity from its inevitable death is an anchor to which thousands cling. And those people have peace in their hearts, really do good and live good lives. But I see how the very same people also fail - I see how they are vindictive and loveless. I am also part of these masses. I also wish that Something/Someone can tell me what are the things that hurt others and deeply disappoint others; acts that do harm - to myself and to those I love.

You see, the redemption in Jesus Christ is such an incredible incident! So illogical and extraordinary! Sometimes I succeed in believing in it with my whole heart, and sometimes my mind just won't accept it. It's especially difficult to believe in it if one witnesses and experiences all the misery in the world. The narratives of people's absolute mercilessness and cruelty in wars, the pain and suffering of people, the worthiness of human beings that is being destroyed - all these things make me wonder and ask, like so many people before me and with

me now, where is or was the God of Love? Everything would have been acceptable if He had made people just a little better - this so-called "crown of his creation".

The Bible tells us that we, as insignificant creatures, may not question God's ways, because He knows everything and He is fully in control. Sometimes it is safe to follow this way and people offer this security as their defence to excuse themselves. At other times it is an immense frustration because we want to reason and understand everything with our common sense.

Who and what is God to me? He is the Power that is utterly different and entirely greater than humans. He expects tolerance and love from me in my life on earth. Sometimes He leaves me alone for a period of time only to involve Himself with me at a later stage in a very definite manner. I think that He punishes me sometimes, and rewards me when I'm good. I'm trying very hard to avoid Christianity's arguments regarding guilt and feelings of guilt, and rather seize the grace. I can summarise my faith in God by quoting Martin Luther: "I believe in God with my heart and I believe in God with my reason, but most of the time I believe in God against my heart and against my reason."

4.2.2 Natural Meaning Units: Person A

1. Any personal experience of God/a godliness is built on traditions.
2. The existing dogmas and teachings concerning the God of Christianity, dictate borders to the individual regarding statements about God, and even about experiences of God.
3. Those things that are not permitted to be said within the walls of the church have all been said and asked by philosophers and atheists a long time ago.
4. My experience of God alternates constantly between two poles...
5. ... the triune, merciful, and loving God who cares and who is involved in us
6. ... the cruel, uninvolved, merciless God who has no involvement in people.
7. Some days when I read the Bible I literally feel how God's spirit of peace and love and security fills me up.
8. On some other days I question aloud whether religion is after all not only the "opium of the people", a self-hypnosis of: "I'm making myself believe".
9. My experience of God entails that I should talk about **who** and **what** God is.
10. ... if there is a God ...
11. The vastness and majesty of the universe, the delicate composition of insects,

leaves and flowers, the wonder of a baby being born, call for only one conclusion:
Someone is bigger than all of this.

12. Considering that limestone-formations of caves formed around 2500 million years ago, deep beneath the earth, I realise anew how insignificant one person is.
13. Something or Someone had been responsible for the creation and order in nature, the plants and animals and people.
14. The powers and miracles in nature leave me dumbfounded.
15. I humbly bow down before Him who was responsible for it all.
16. The data that scientists afford regarding the age of the earth and the size of the universe, is far too immense for my limited reason to grasp.
17. The diminutive little word "eternity" is totally beyond my comprehension.
18. Whereto everything is moving, and when or if it will end, that I also don't know.
19. I realise that everything that surrounds me is just too awesome and grand ...
20. There must be a purpose behind the bigger picture.
21. The power/powers in command of this remarkable universe-project, certainly has/have an objective and intent.
22. I presume that He is in command of this encompassing plan.
23. The confession regarding God within Christianity is that He is immutable.
24. Every day the world is the same and yet different.
25. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening, seasons succeed one another.
26. ... but nevertheless everything changes.
27. I don't think God is totally immutable while He allows and executes all these alterations in creation.
28. I desperately want to believe the Confession that God is personal.
29. I want Him to be like a Father to me.
30. He should take care of me, know everything about me, and direct my whole life.
31. The faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross and the consequent redemption of humanity from its inevitable death is an anchor to which thousands cling.
32. Those people have peace in their hearts, really do good and live good lives.
33. But I see how the very same people also fail - I see how they are vindictive and loveless.
34. I wish that Something/Someone can tell me what are the things that hurt others and deeply disappoint others; acts that do harm - to myself and to those I love.
35. The redemption in Jesus Christ is such an incredible incident! So illogical and extraordinary!
36. Sometimes I succeed in believing in it with my whole heart

37. ... sometimes my mind just won't accept it.
38. It's especially difficult to believe in it if one witnesses and experiences all the misery in the world.
39. The narratives of people's absolute mercilessness and cruelty in wars, the pain and suffering of people, the worthiness of human beings that is being destroyed - all these things make me wonder and ask, like so many people before me and with me now, where is or was the God of Love.
40. Everything would have been acceptable if He had made people just a little better - this so-called "crown of his creation".
41. The Bible tells us that we, as insignificant creatures, may not question God's ways.
42. He knows everything ...
43. He is fully in control.
44. Sometimes it is safe to follow this way and people offer this security as their defence to excuse themselves.
45. At other times it is an immense frustration because we want to reason and understand everything with our common sense.
46. Who and what is God to me? He is the Power that is utterly different and entirely greater than humans.
47. He expects tolerance and love from me in my life on earth.
48. Sometimes He leaves me alone for a period of time ...
49. ... only to involve Himself with me at a later stage in a very definite manner.
50. I think that He punishes me sometimes ...
51. ... and rewards me when I'm good.
52. I'm trying very hard to avoid Christianity's arguments regarding guilt and feelings of guilt ...
53. ... and rather seize the grace.
54. I can summarise my faith in God by quoting Martin Luther: "I believe in God with my heart and I believe in God with my reason, but most of the time I believe in God against my heart and against my reason."

4.2.3 Natural Occurring Themes and Transformed Summaries: Person A

A1. Development and growth

1. Any personal experience of God/a godliness is built on traditions.
4. My experience of God alternates constantly between two poles ...

5. ... the triune, merciful, and loving God who cares and who is involved in us
6. ... the cruel, uninvolved, merciless God who has no involvement in people.
24. Every day the world is the same and yet different.
25. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening, seasons succeed one another.
26. ... but nevertheless everything changes.

A's experience of God is, like her experience of the world, not immutable but indeed very flexible. She is constantly attempting to reconcile two perceived sides of God - a negative and a positive.

A2. Theological insight

2. The existing dogmas and teachings concerning the God of Christianity, dictate borders to the individual regarding statements about God, and even about experiences of God.
7. Some days when I read the Bible I literally feel how God's spirit of peace and love and security fills me up.
22. I presume that He is in command of this encompassing plan.
23. The confession regarding God within Christianity is that He is immutable.
28. I desperately want to believe the Confession that God is personal.
31. The faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross and the consequent redemption of humanity from its inevitable death is an anchor to which thousands cling.
32. Those people have peace in their hearts, really do good and live good lives.
33. But I see how the very same people also fail - I see how they are vindictive and loveless.
41. The Bible tells us that we, as insignificant creatures, may not question God's ways.
42. He knows everything ...
44. Sometimes it is safe to follow this way and people offer this security as their defence to excuse themselves.
50. I think that He punishes me sometimes ...
51. ... and rewards me when I'm good.
52. I'm trying very hard to avoid Christianity's arguments regarding guilt and feelings of guilt ...
53. ... and rather seize the grace.

A's experience is being dictated by dogmas and teachings. She does experience a feeling of being filled up by peace and love and security. She experiences God as being in command and omniscient. She thinks that He punishes her bad deeds and rewards her when she is good. For A, God's grace overrules her feelings of guilt.

A3. Paradox/Dialectical tension

3. Those things that are not permitted to be said within the walls of the church have all been said and asked by philosophers and atheists a long time ago.
8. On some other days I question aloud whether religion is after all not only the "opium of the people", a self-hypnosis of: "I'm making myself believe".
10. ... if there is a God ...
18. Where to everything is moving, and when or if it will end, that I also don't know.
34. I wish that Something/Someone can tell me what are the things that hurt others and deeply disappoint others; acts that do harm - to myself and to those I love.
36. Sometimes I succeed in believing in it with my whole heart
37. ... sometimes my mind just won't accept it.
38. It's especially difficult to believe in it if one witnesses and experiences all the misery in the world.
39. The narratives of people's absolute mercilessness and cruelty in wars, the pain and suffering of people, the worthiness of human beings that is being destroyed - all these things make me wonder and ask, like so many people before me and with me now, where is or was the God of Love.

A experiences a dialectic between believing with her whole heart and questioning God's existence. She wishes that she had more answers because there are many things that contradict the notion of God's love, especially human suffering and misery.

A4. Direction

9. My experience of God entails that I should talk about **who** and **what** God is.
47. He expects tolerance and love from me in my life on earth.

A's experience urges her to talk about God; Who He is and his attributes. She realises that He expects a certain attitude from her.

A5. Creation

11. The vastness and majesty of the universe, the delicate composition of insects,

leaves and flowers, the wonder of a baby being born, call for only one conclusion:
Someone is bigger than all of this.

12. Considering that limestone-formations of caves formed around 2500 million years ago, deep beneath the earth, I realise anew how insignificant one person is.
13. Something or Someone had been responsible for the creation and order in nature, the plants and animals and people.
14. The powers and miracles in nature leave me dumbfounded.
27. I don't think God is totally immutable while He allows and executes all these alterations in creation.
40. Everything would have been acceptable if He had made people just a little better - this so-called "crown of his creation".

The wonder of creation encourages A to see someone behind it all. She is intensely aware of the imperfections of human beings in contrast with God's significance.

A6. Submission to a higher power

15. I humbly bow down before Him who was responsible for it all.
21. The power/powers in command of this remarkable universe-project, certainly has/have an objective and intent.
43. He is fully in control.
46. Who and what is God to me? He is the Power that is utterly different and entirely greater than humans.

A experiences God as utterly different and entirely greater than human beings. She senses that he is fully in control. Therefore she willingly submits herself to his power and reign.

A7. Beyond the rational

16. The data that scientists afford regarding the age of the earth and the size of the universe, is far too immense for my limited reason to grasp.
17. The diminutive little word "eternity" is totally beyond my comprehension.
19. I realise that everything that surrounds me is just too awesome and grand ...
20. There must be a purpose behind the bigger picture.
35. The redemption in Jesus Christ is such an incredible incident! So illogical and extraordinary!
45. At other times it is an immense frustration because we want to reason and understand everything with our common sense.

54. I can summarise my faith in God by quoting Martin Luther: "I believe in God with my heart and I believe in God with my reason, but most of the time I believe in God against my heart and against my reason."

A considers eternity, the universe and redemption as extraordinary and totally beyond her comprehension. While she tries to believe with her feelings and her reason, she often finds that she believes in spite of her feelings and her reason.

A8. A sense of a presence

29. I want Him to be like a Father to me.
30. He should take care of me, know everything about me, and direct my whole life.
48. Sometimes He leaves me alone for a period of time ...
49. ... only to involve Himself with me at a later stage in a very definite manner.

A needs God to be like a father to her, to take care of her and direct her life. This presence in her life is very important to her, even if its not always equally profound.

4.2.4 Specific situated structure for person A

A's experience of God is closely related to her world-view. Her experience of God is thus not immutable, but indeed very flexible. She constantly attempts to reconcile two perceived sides of God - a negative and a positive. Her experience is heavily influenced by dogmas, teachings and traditions. She feels that she is being filled up by peace and love and security, by a God who seems to be in command and omniscient. She perceives that He punishes her bad deeds and rewards the good ones. She feels that God's grace overrules her feelings of guilt. She wishes that she had more answers because she observes many things that contradict the notion of God's love, especially human suffering and misery. Therefore she experiences a dialectic between believing with her whole heart and questioning God's existence. God's presence in her life is very important to her, even though it is not always equally profound. She feels obliged to talk about God and she realises that He expects a certain attitude and lifestyle from her. The wonder of creation encourages her to see someone behind it all. She is intensely aware of the contrast between the imperfections of human beings and God's significance. A experiences God as utterly different and entirely greater than human beings. She willingly submits herself to his power and reign because she senses that He is fully in control. She needs Him to take care of her and direct her like a father would do. She considers eternity, the universe and redemption as extraordinary and totally beyond her comprehension. She tries to be-

lieve with her feelings and her reason but often finds that she believes in spite of her feelings and her reason

4.3 Data analysis: Person B

4.3.1 Protocol: Person B (Female, 45 years)

When I think about God, I experience Him as a person - a person of love but also one of justice. And that is why we should love God with our whole heart, and because of his righteousness, our obedience to Him should always play a decisive role in our lives.

I experience God in the way that He demonstrates his love to each person who loves Him and honours Him - honours Him at all times. For me, his love is eternal and always the same and so great and protective - and I know that He loves me just the way I am. Even when I sin, I experience that He does not desert me; He still walks with me, and He brings me back. That is God - He is not a human being. He is God and He has no favourites; in his eyes we are all equal. And above all: I love because He loved me first - that is the only reason why I am able to love. And He loves me so that, in Jesus Christ, He died for me and made me one with Him. And He gave us the Holy Spirit - I experience Him, I hear Him through my spirit and through my soul as a result of the Holy Spirit - his Spirit - Christ's Spirit that dwells in me. That is why I am able to love Him that much and that is why I am able to praise Him - because of his Spirit in me. He is alive, He is the creator, He is not in creation. I don't see Him in the plants and the trees because He is not in the creation, but He is the creator and you can see Him in the chain of animals and all else that is so delicately put together. In science and in everything one sees a living hand of a God, a living God. But He also reveals Himself to me through his creation, in my spirit, for sometimes one gets tired and worn out and when one goes for a walk - I am a person who is extremely fond of nature - and when I go for a walk in nature, then He uses the creation and then I experience Him in his creation. This experience cleanses my soul; I become restful; it gives me peace; I become a new person.

I have also experienced God in other ways, like one day in sardine season - we were in Durban and there was an atmosphere of excitement among the many people gathered there where the sardines were. It did, however, not become part of me because suddenly parts of the Scriptures became alive for me; that part of the Scriptures where Jesus told Peter and Andrew: "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men." He has spoken similarly to me through the creation - through events in creation He has made parts of the Scriptures come to life for me.

Although sometimes I experience God through feelings and emotions, the Word still remains the primary means whereby I know God. I see Him in and through his Word. He puts this knowledge in me through his Spirit, and when I pray all these things are part of me.

I also experience God through other people, particularly when it is someone close to me - then I see God through that person. I just sense that something greater than ourselves is working here. If that person is, for example, sad or downhearted, then one picks up that person's sadness in your own spirit. It is a spiritual experience with another person that I can't describe. All of this brings to me a certain peace, particularly when I am a little down myself and I stumble upon someone who is living close to the Lord - it is as if God's peace fills me up again. Through that person the peace in me is being restored. I know that it is not that person who is making it happen, but God alone.

4.3.2 Natural Meaning Units: Person B

1. When I think about God, I experience Him as a person.
2. I experience Him as a person of love.
3. I also experience Him as a person of justice.
4. That is why we should love God with our whole heart.
5. Because of his righteousness, our obedience to Him should always play a decisive role in our lives.
6. I experience God in the way that He demonstrates his love to each person who loves Him and honours Him.
7. For me, his love is eternal.
8. His love is always the same.
9. His love is so great and protective.
10. I know that He loves me just the way I am.
11. Even when I sin, I experience that He does not desert me.
12. Even when I sin He still walks with me.
13. He brings me back.
14. God is not a human being. He is God and He has no favourites;
15. In God's eyes we are all equal.
16. Above all: I love because He loved me first.
17. He loves me so that, in Jesus Christ, He died for me.
18. He made me one with Him.

19. He gave us the Holy Spirit.
20. I experience Him, I hear Him through my spirit and through my soul as a result of the Holy Spirit that dwells in me.
21. Because of his Spirit in me I am able to love Him that much and that is why I am able to praise Him.
22. He is alive.
23. He is the creator, He is not in creation.
24. I don't see Him in the plants and the trees because He is not in the creation.
25. He is the creator and you can see Him in the chain of animals and all else that is so delicately put together.
26. In science and in everything one sees a living hand of a God, a living God.
27. He also reveals Himself to me through his creation.
28. When I go for a walk in nature, He uses the creation and then I experience Him in his creation.
29. This experience cleanses my soul.
30. I become restful; it gives me peace; I become a new person.
31. I have also experienced God in other ways.
32. Like one day in sardine season ... suddenly parts of the Scriptures became alive for me.
33. He has spoken similarly to me through the creation.
34. Through events in creation He has made parts of the Scriptures come to life for me.
35. Sometimes I experience God through feelings and emotions.
36. The Word still remains the primary means whereby I know God.
37. I see Him in and through his Word.
38. He puts this knowledge in me through his Spirit.
39. I also experience God through other people, particularly when it is someone close to me - then I see God through that person.
40. I just sense that something greater than ourselves is working here. If that person is, for example, sad or downhearted, then one picks up that person's sadness in your own spirit. It is a spiritual experience with another person that I can't describe.
41. All of this brings to me a certain peace.
42. Particularly when I am a little down myself and I stumble upon someone who lives close to the Lord - it is as if God's peace fills me up again.
43. Through that person the peace in me is being restored.
44. I know that it is not that person who is making it happen, but God alone.

4.3.3 Natural Occurring Themes and Transformed Summaries: Person B

B1. Relationship

1. When I think about God, I experience Him as a person.
11. Even when I sin, I experience that He does not desert me.
12. Even when I sin He still walks with me.
13. He brings me back.
15. In God's eyes we are all equal.
39. I also experience God through other people, particularly when it is someone close to me - then I see God through that person.
40. I just sense that something greater than ourselves is working here. If that person is, for example, sad or downhearted, then one picks up that person's sadness in your own spirit. It is a spiritual experience with another person that I can't describe.

B has a relationship with God that is not unlike the relationship she has with other people. She experiences God in and through relationships. This brings her in touch with other people's feelings and emotions. The shared experience of emotions also brings her to an experience of God. She senses God's presence in the dialogue with others.

B2. Love

2. I experience Him as a person of love.
4. That is why we should love God with our whole heart.
6. I experience God in the way that He demonstrates his love to each person who loves Him and honours Him.
7. For me his love is eternal.
8. His love is always the same.
9. His love is so great and protective.
10. I know that He loves me just the way I am.
16. Above all: I love because He loved me first.
17. He loves me so that, in Jesus Christ, He died for me.
21. Because of his Spirit in me I am able to love Him that much and that is why I am able to praise Him.

B perceives love as the primary attribute of God. She experiences God's love which she believes is eternal and immutable. She experiences this love to be totally unconditional and it calls her to an equal love for other people and calls her to service and praise.

B3. Theological insight

3. I also experience Him as a person of justice.
5. Because of his righteousness, our obedience to Him should always play a decisive role in our lives.
14. God is not a human being. He is God and He has no favourites;
18. He made me one with Him.
19. He gave us the Holy Spirit.
22. He is alive.
36. The Word still remains the primary means whereby I know God.
37. I see Him in and through his Word.
38. He puts this knowledge in me through his Spirit.

For B, God personifies ultimate righteousness and justice. She considers the Scriptures to be the primary means of knowledge of God. God's spirit moves her to an insight into scriptures to come to a certain knowledge of God.

B4. Contemplation/Inner feeling

20. I experience Him, I hear Him through my spirit and through my soul as a result of the Holy Spirit that dwells in me.
29. This experience cleanses my soul.
30. I become restful; it gives me peace; I become a new person.
35. Sometimes I experience God through feelings and emotions.
41. All of this brings to me a certain peace.
42. Particularly when I am a little down myself and I stumble upon someone who lives close to the Lord - it is as if God's peace fills me up again.
43. Through that person the peace in me is being restored.
44. I know that it is not that person who is making it happen, but God alone.

B experiences God in her inner feeling and emotion, a feeling that makes her restful and brings her to an inner peace. She regards it to be a cleansing feeling and she is convinced that only God can restore her inner peace and well being.

B5. Creation

23. He is the creator, He is not in creation.
24. I don't see Him in the plants and the trees because He is not in the creation.
25. He is the creator and you can see Him in the chain of animals and all else that is so delicately put together.
26. In science and in everything one sees a living hand of a God, a living God.
27. He also reveals Himself to me through his creation.
28. When I go for a walk in nature, He uses the creation and then I experience Him in his creation.
31. I have also experienced God in other ways.
32. Like one day in sardine season ... suddenly parts of the Scriptures became alive for me.
33. He has spoken similarly to me through the creation.
34. Through events in creation He has made parts of the Scriptures come to life for me.

B experiences that God uses nature, and indeed his whole creation to reveal Himself to her. Through his creation God gives her insight into the Scriptures.

4.3.4 Specific situated structure for person B

B enters into a relationship with God that is not unlike the relationship she has with other people. In and through inter-human relations she experiences God. This brings her in touch with other people's feelings and emotions. She senses God's presence in the dialogue with others. The shared experience of emotions in this interaction also brings her to an experience of God. She perceives love as the primary attribute of God and she believes that this love is eternal and immutable. She experiences God's love to be totally unconditional and it calls her to an equal love for other people and calls her to service and praise. For B, God personifies ultimate righteousness and justice. She considers the Scriptures to be the primary means of knowledge of God. God's spirit moves her to an insight into scriptures to come to a certain knowledge of God. She experiences God in her inner feeling and emotion that makes her restful and brings her to an inner peace. She regards it to be a cleansing feeling and she is convinced that only God can restore her inner peace and well being. B experiences that God uses nature, and indeed his whole creation to reveal himself to her. Through his creation God gives her insight into the Scriptures.

4.4 Data analysis: Person C

4.4.1 Protocol: Person C (Male, 32 years)

My experience of God is still developing and probably always will be. In fact the very first thing that comes to mind when I think about God is that I know very little about Him. He is the Wholly Other, and sometimes silence is the only way to express what I really feel. He remains a mystery to me. I know just enough, and experience just enough to keep on hoping. Therefore I cling to Him with all my life. I am totally dependent upon Him. It is, however, a dynamic experience and often changes from day to day. There is a constant dialectic between being and becoming; knowing and believing; confirmation and contradiction. This paradoxical relation lies at the heart of my experience of God.

My growing years contributed considerably to the way I experience God today. The experience is thus not totally primary, but heavily influenced by what I had learned and experienced in my environment. It is a culturally affected experience, phrased by my own wants and needs, my fears and preferences, my objectives and preconceptions.

The experience of God is an experience *sui generis*. It is unlike any other human experience. It goes beyond the senses, the mind, and even intuition. It is a dynamic force that is outside myself but it manifests itself as an inherent power that reaches beyond human possibilities. Still the realm of religious experience remains a mystery to me. Sometimes extraordinary events, that cannot be ascribed to coincidence, occur. What I refer to are those events that happen when I find myself at the right place at the right time although at the most unlikely place and time. My interpersonal relationships also influence the experience. I perceive God through other people and likewise the way I experience my relations with people around me affects the way I perceive God.

God's presence is not always very profound, although I am never completely without it. As human beings, however, we have a responsibility towards ourselves and others. God's presence does not deny that fact. He merely directs us to fulfil our full potential and to do our bit to make his creation a better place. I believe that every human being has a free will to choose his or her own destiny. On the way to that destiny, however, we remain in the presence of a higher power. I realise that the spiritual dimension in people's lives takes on many different forms. Spiritual and transcendent reality is something very personal and our ability to really understand the meaning of that dimension to another person is very limited.

The road with God is not always a smooth ride. It's a road with numerous obstacles, twists, and turns. It is a constant interplay between revolting and submission; rebellion and resignation. There is a constant tension between hope and reality; a tension between the pain of human beings and the confession regarding a merciful, loving Heavenly Father. Even in the most tragic human suffering, though, it becomes possible to see God and to sense his presence. Sometimes the experience is even more profound during a crisis.

I am often overwhelmed by the wonder of God's creation. Consider for example new life; human life and life in nature. In birth and death I find an all-encompassing creator and I am struck with awe and wonder. That experience keeps me humble. Life and growth are so dynamic and well executed by the creator. Death on the other hand reminds us of the temporality of everything. Life is a fleeting blink of the eye and through death God reminds us that we are transient. That very thought also urges me to "seize the day", to make the best of what I have, and of what I am.

God is also a directing principle in my life. The *Vox Dei* leads me on a road and through the example of Christ, my conscience or what the psychologists may call the *Superego*, I strive to lead a sensible life. I strive to find meaning in the world and to live a meaningful life. I am convinced that the meaning of life cannot be restrained. There is no categorical truth behind the meaning of life, and God, and reality. God is everything that I experience and much, much more. Therefore I don't claim to have the answers. It is only possible to say what God means to me; how I experience Him; it might not be true for anyone else, but it sure is real and true to me.

Analogy is the only way that I can speak about God. Only through anthropomorphic attributes do I attempt to grasp the meaning of God in my life. The symbolism of the church, the sacraments, the confession, the teaching of the Trinity, the *Imago Dei*, the Scriptures, play a very important role in my experience of God and my attempt to understand his presence in my life. Therefore institutional religion with its symbols and rituals and sense of communion will always be an integral part of my experience of God. Isn't that a burden? Is it a burden to carry diamonds?

4.4.2 Natural Meaning Units: Person C

1. My experience of God is still developing and probably always will be.

2. In fact the very first thing that comes to mind when I think about God is that I know very little about Him.
3. He is the Wholly Other ...
4. ... and sometimes silence is the only way to express what I really feel.
5. He remains a mystery to me.
6. I know just enough, and experience just enough to keep on hoping.
7. Therefore I cling to Him with all my life.
8. I am totally dependent upon Him.
9. It is, however, a dynamic experience ...
10. ... and often (the experience) changes from day to day.
11. There is a constant dialectic between being and becoming; knowing and believing; confirmation and contradiction.
12. This paradoxical relation lies at the heart of my experience of God.
13. My growing years contributed considerably to the way I experience God today.
14. The experience is thus not totally primary, but heavily influenced by what I had learned and experienced in my environment.
15. It is a culturally affected experience ...
16. ... phrased by my own wants and needs, my fears and preferences, my objectives and preconceptions.
17. The experience of God is an experience *sui generis*. It is unlike any other human experience.
18. It goes beyond the senses, the mind, and even intuition.
19. It is a dynamic force that is outside myself ...
20. ... but it manifests itself as an inherent power
21. (It is a dynamic force) that reaches beyond human possibilities.
22. Still the realm of religious experience remains a mystery to me.
23. Sometimes extraordinary events, that cannot be ascribed to coincidence, occur.
24. What I refer to are those events that happen when I find myself at the right place at the right time although at the most unlikely place and time.
25. My interpersonal relationships also influence the experience.
26. I perceive God through other people ...
27. ... and likewise the way I experience my relations with people around me affects the way I perceive God.
28. God's presence is not always very profound, although I am never completely without it.
29. As human beings, however, we have a responsibility towards ourselves and others.

- God's presence does not deny that fact.
30. He merely directs us to fulfil our full potential and to do our bit to make his creation a better place.
 31. I believe that every human being has a free will to choose his or her own destination.
 32. On the way to our destination, however, we remain in the presence of a higher power.
 33. I realise that the spiritual dimension in people's lives takes on many different forms.
 34. Spiritual and transcendent reality is something very personal ...
 35. ... and our ability to really understand the meaning that dimension has to someone else, is very limited.
 36. The road with God is not always a smooth ride.
 37. It's a road with numerous obstacles, twists, and turns.
 38. It is a constant interplay between revolting and submission; rebellion and resignation.
 39. There is a constant tension between hope and reality;
 40. ... a tension between the pain of human beings and the confession regarding a merciful, loving Heavenly Father.
 41. Even in the most tragic human suffering, though, it becomes possible to see God and to sense his presence.
 42. Sometimes the experience is even more profound during a crisis.
 43. I am often overwhelmed by the wonder of God's creation.
 44. Consider for example new life; human life and life in nature.
 45. In birth and death I find an all-encompassing creator ...
 46. ... and I am struck with awe and wonder.
 47. That experience also keeps me humble.
 48. Life and growth are so dynamic and well executed by the creator.
 49. Death on the other hand reminds us of the temporality of everything.
 50. Life is but a fleeting blink of the eye ...
 51. ... and through death God reminds us that we are transient.
 52. That very thought also urges me to "seize the day", to make the best of what I have, and of what I am.
 53. God is also a directing principle in my life.
 54. The *Vox Dei* leads me on a road ...
 55. ... and through the example of Christ, my conscience or what the psychologists

may call the *Superego*, I strive to lead a sensible life.

56. I strive to find meaning in the world ...
57. ... and (I strive) to live a meaningful life.
58. I am convinced that the meaning of life cannot be restrained.
59. There is no categorical truth behind the meaning of life, and God, and reality.
60. God is everything that I experience and much, much more.
61. Therefore I don't claim to have the answers.
62. It is only possible to say what God means to me;
63. ... how I experience Him; it might not be true for anyone else, but it sure is real and true to me.
64. Analogy is the only way that I can speak about God.
65. Only through anthropomorphic attributes do I attempt to grasp the meaning of God in my life.
66. The symbolism of the church, the sacraments, the confession, the teaching of the Trinity, the *Imago Dei*, the Scriptures, play a very important role in my experience of God and my attempt to understand his presence in my life.
67. Therefore institutional religion with its symbols and rituals and sense of communion will always be an integral part of my experience of God.
68. Isn't that a burden? Is it a burden to carry diamonds? (*n.r.o.p.* - *Non revelatory of the phenomenon*)

4.4.3 Natural Occurring Themes and Transformed Summaries: Person C

C1. Development and growth

1. My experience of God is still developing and probably always will be.
9. It is, however, a dynamic experience ...
10. ... and often (the experience) changes from day to day.
13. My growing years contributed considerably to the way I experience God today.
14. The experience is thus not totally primary, but heavily influenced by what I had learned and experienced in my environment.

The experience of God for C is dynamic and constantly growing and changing. It is influenced by factors like environment, culture etc.

C2. Beyond the rational

2. In fact the very first thing that comes to mind when I think about God is that I

know very little about Him.

4. ... and sometimes silence is the only way to express what I really feel.
5. He remains a mystery to me.
17. The experience of God is an experience *sui generis*. It is unlike any other human experience.
18. It goes beyond the senses, the mind, and even intuition.
21. (It is a dynamic force) that reaches beyond human possibilities.
22. Still the realm of religious experience remains a mystery to me.
23. Sometimes extraordinary events, that cannot be ascribed to coincidence, occur.
24. What I refer to are those events that happen when I find myself at the right place at the right time although at the most unlikely place and time.
35. ... and our ability to really understand the meaning that dimension has to someone else, is very limited.
60. God is everything that I experience and much, much more.
61. Therefore I don't claim to have the answers.
62. It is only possible to say what God means to me;
63. ... how I experience Him; it might not be true for anyone else, but it sure is real and true to me.
64. Analogy is the only way that I can speak about God.
65. Only through anthropomorphic attributes do I attempt to grasp the meaning of God in my life.

C experiences God as a mystery that reaches beyond the senses and the mind and therefore he finds it difficult to express the experience in words. He considers the experience to be unique and very personalised. Extraordinary events that cannot be ascribed to coincidence seem to enhance the experience. Analogy is the only way that C can relate the meaning of God in his life.

C3. Theological insight

3. He is the Wholly Other ...
19. It is a dynamic force that is outside myself ...
20. ... but it manifests itself as an inherent power
33. I realise that the spiritual dimension in people's lives takes on many different forms.
66. The symbolism of the church, the sacraments, the confession, the teaching of the Trinity, the *Imago Dei*, the Scriptures, play a very important role in my experience

of God and my attempt to understand his presence in my life.

67. Therefore institutional religion with its symbols and rituals and sense of communion will always be an integral part of my experience of God.

C experiences God as a Wholly Other being, outside the range of human ability, manifesting itself as an inherent power. Symbolism and rituals play an integral part in his experience.

C4. Paradox/Dialectical tension

6. I know just enough, and experience just enough to keep on hoping.
11. There is a constant dialectic between being and becoming; knowing and believing; confirmation and contradiction.
12. This paradoxical relation lies at the heart of my experience of God.
38. It is a constant interplay between revolting and submission; rebellion and resignation.
39. There is a constant tension between hope and reality;
40. ... a tension between the pain of human beings and the confession regarding a merciful, loving Heavenly Father.
58. I am convinced that the meaning of life cannot be restrained.
59. There is no categorical truth behind the meaning life, and God, and reality.

C's experience of God is characterised by dialectic and paradox: a constant interplay between two opposing poles in his experience. There is a tension between positive and negative human attitudes and divine attributes.

C5. A sense of presence

7. Therefore I cling to Him with all my life.
8. I am totally dependent upon Him.
28. God's presence is not always very profound, although I am never completely without it.

C considers himself to be totally dependent upon God, and God being ever present, although his presence is not always equally profound.

C6. Relationship

15. It is a culturally affected experience ...
16. ... phrased by my own wants and needs, my fears and preferences, my objectives

and preconceptions.

25. My interpersonal relationships also influence the experience.
26. I perceive God through other people ...
27. ... and likewise the way I experience my relations with people around me affects the way I perceive God.
29. As human beings, however, we have a responsibility towards ourselves and others. God's presence does not deny that fact.
34. Spiritual and transcendent reality is something very personal ...

C's experience of God and his experience of fellow human beings is mutually dependent on each other. His perception and experience of God is continuously being affected by his needs, objectives and relationships. In the same way his experience of God has an influence on his perception of people and human relations.

C7. Suffering/Death/Dying

36. The road with God is not always a smooth ride.
37. It's a road with numerous obstacles, twists, and turns.
41. Even in the most tragic human suffering, though, it becomes possible to see God and to sense his presence.
42. Sometimes the experience is even more profound during a crisis.
49. Death on the other hand reminds us of the temporality of everything.
50. Life is but a fleeting blink of the eye ...
51. ... and through death God reminds us that we are transient.
52. That very thought also urges me to "seize the day", to make the best of what I have, and of what I am.

C recognises God's presence in the tragedy of human suffering and even insists that the experience can be more profound at such times. In the face of death, C becomes intensely aware of human transience and this awareness urges him to use all the opportunities that comes his way.

C8. Direction

30. He merely directs us to fulfil our full potential and to do our bit to make his creation a better place.
31. I believe that every human being has a free will to choose his or her own destination.

32. On the way to our destination, however, we remain in the presence of a higher power.
53. God is also a directing principle in my life.
54. The *Vox Dei* leads me on a road ...
55. ... and through the example of Christ, my conscience or what the psychologists may call the *Superego*, I strive to lead a sensible life.
56. I strive to find meaning in the world ...
57. ... and (I strive) to live a meaningful life.

C senses that he remains in the presence of a higher power called God, who directs him even though he has the free will to choose his own destination. He listens to the voice of God inside him which he recognises as his conscience. He follows God's direction to find meaning in the world and to live a meaningful life.

C9. Creation

43. I am often overwhelmed by the wonder of God's creation.
44. Consider for example new life; human life and life in nature.
45. In birth and death I find an all-encompassing creator ...
46. ... and I am struck with awe and wonder.
47. That experience also keeps me humble.
48. Life and growth are so dynamic and well executed by the creator.

C often experiences an overwhelming feeling of awe and wonder when faced with the creation. This feeling is particularly profound in the face of new life and when he witnesses the end of life. He considers it to be a humbling experience.

4.4.4 Specific situated structure for person C

The experience of God for C is dynamic and constantly growing and changing. It is influenced by factors like environment, culture, and tradition. He experiences God as a mysterious force that reaches beyond the senses and the mind, and therefore he finds it difficult to express this unique and personalised experience in words. He experiences God as a Wholly Other being, residing outside the range of human ability, manifesting itself as an inherent power. C considers analogy to be the only way that he can relate the meaning of God in his life. Symbolism and rituals therefore play an integral part in his experience. Extraordinary events that cannot be ascribed to coincidence seem to enhance the experience. C's experience of God is character-

ised by dialectic and paradox: a constant interplay between two opposing poles in his experience. There is a tension between positive and negative human attitudes and divine attributes. C considers himself to be totally dependent upon God, and God being ever present, although his presence is not always equally profound. C's experience of God and his experience of fellow human beings is mutually dependent on each other. His perception and experience of God is continuously being affected by his needs, objectives, and interpersonal relations. In the same way his experience of God seems to influence his perception of people and human relations. C senses that he remains in the presence of a higher power called God, who directs him even though he has the free will to choose his own destination. He follows God's direction to find meaning in the world and to live a meaningful life. C often experiences an overwhelming feeling of awe and wonder when faced with the creation. This feeling is particularly profound in the face of new life and when he witnesses the end of life. In the face of death, C becomes intensely aware of human transience and this awareness urges him to use all the opportunities that comes his way. C recognises God's presence in the tragic of human suffering and even insists that the experience can be more profound at such times.

4.5 Data analysis: Person D

4.5.1 Protocol: Person D (Male, 34 years)

I definitely believe that there is a God outside ourselves, a God who is in control and who determines the course of all things. This I believe because I know my own knowledge and my own skills and my own power are very limited and I know that my abilities are restricted. I believe that this God takes an interest in the well-being of humans. This becomes evident through his intervention in the history of people and nations - not necessarily only Israel. I believe that He, through someone named Christ, tries to show humans how they should exist and live, and how their relationship with Him should be like.

I believe that God is so great that his supremacy and command reach much further than my restrictive mind could ever grasp. I also believe that He is in command of other people and other nations and indeed other religions. My personal experience of God is that He leads me in a certain direction while I often experience the frustration of wanting to go in my own direction or doing something my way and then it just doesn't happen the way I planned. I am steered in a direction that often feels against my will but I am vested in the plan God has for my life and I humbly follow the route that He leads me on.

Sometimes I experience God as absent, especially in times of crises, but even then I cling to the belief that He is not gone, He is still close and present. In my personal life it is my experience that at specific times it so happens that God leads me and guides me and works with me. That, to me, is a real experience and I cannot deny it. It doesn't happen all of the time; it doesn't happen every day; it often happens at times when I actually do need that confirmation - He then works in me as a reality. He is not a God who takes me out of the desert, or makes my problems disappear, or straightens out all my roads that I may prosper. No, He is rather a God whom I experience and come to know through my trials and sufferings.

I experience God when I observe nature and witness how wonderfully He created everything. I also experience God through the behaviour of other people and through their relations. I also experience God through my own personal relationships.

During T's suicide, the death of a person who did not want to live anymore, God was totally absent. In the prelude to her death, her depression, her suicide and what followed, I experienced God as absent. Also during the funeral, the sermon and the words of consolation were empty and meaningless to me and I still can't find any solace from what happened.

I consider my experience of God as a unique personal experience which is different from other's experience of God in the sense that He walks a personal road with me and at certain stages in my life He really steps in and determines what will happen to me.

I also experience God where the community of believers gathers around God's Word and where the believers pray and praise together.

Although there are times when I experience God as absent and times when I can't understand his actions, I shall never stop searching for Him; never cease to ask for his will and his revelation. There have been times in my life when everything that happened contradicted what I knew about God, but fortunately I have always succeeded, in spite of it all, in clinging to Him, still believing that everything will be all right, always hoping that the best is yet to come - and God has never let me down. That is why I am convinced that my surrender to God does not only have meaning in this life, but also when this life passes.

While the future rests with the Lord I should trust Him with my future because no human being knows what will happen even in the next second. I have no alternative but to walk with

God and to believe that He knows the best for my life. It is not always easy to lay my life in his, but I try.

My experience of God is somehow far greater and more dominant than my knowledge of Him. I do believe though that one can have a basic knowledge of God because of his self revelation through the Bible, through nature, and through other people. This knowledge is then presupposed in my own experience.

The content of the Bible and my comprehension of this content have always been a consolation to me and to thousands, millions of other believers. It has meaning to me and others, it brings us to a better insight concerning our relationship with God.

My profound feeling is that God is everything that I have said, and still so much more, because there is so much about this powerful, almighty, Wholly Other being that I just cannot express in words.

4.5.2 Natural Meaning Units: Person D

1. I definitely believe that there is a God outside ourselves.
2. He is a God who is in control and who determines the course of all things.
3. This I believe because I know my own knowledge and my own skills and my own power are very limited and I know that my abilities are restricted.
4. I believe that God takes an interest in the well-being of humans.
5. This becomes evident through his intervention in the history of people and nations.
6. I believe that He, through someone named Christ, tries to show humans how they should exist and live ...
7. He tries to show how their relationship with Him should be like.
8. I believe that God is so great that his supremacy and command reach much further than my restrictive mind could ever grasp.
9. I also believe that He is in command of other people and other nations and indeed other religions.
10. My personal experience of God is that He leads me in a certain direction while I often experience the frustration of wanting to go in my own direction or doing something my way and then it just doesn't happen the way I planned.
11. I am steered in a direction that often feels against my will but I am vested in the

- plan God has for my life and I humbly follow the route that He leads me on.
12. Sometimes I experience God as absent, especially in times of crises.
 13. But even then I cling to the belief that He is not gone, He is still close and present.
 14. In my personal life it is my experience that at specific times it so happens that God leads me and guides me and works with me. That, to me, is a real experience and I cannot deny it.
 15. It doesn't happen all of the time; it doesn't happen every day.
 16. It often happens at times when I actually do need that confirmation.
 17. He then works in me as a reality.
 18. He is not a God who takes me out of the desert, or makes my problems disappear, or straightens out all my roads that I may prosper.
 19. He is a God whom I experience and come to know through my trials and sufferings.
 20. I experience God when I observe nature and witness how wonderful He created everything.
 21. I also experience God through the behaviour of other people and through their relationships.
 22. I also experience God through my own personal relationships.
 23. During T's suicide, the death of a person who did not want to live anymore, God was totally absent. In the prelude to her death, her depression, her suicide and what followed, I experienced God as absent.
 24. Also during the funeral, the sermon and the words of consolation were empty and meaningless to me.
 25. I still can't find any solace from what happened.
 26. I consider my experience of God as a unique personal experience.
 27. It is different from other's experience of God in the sense that He walks a personal road with me.
 28. ... at certain stages in my life He really steps in and determines what will happen to me.
 29. I also experience God where the community of believers gathers around God's Word and where the believers pray and praise together.
 30. ... there are times when I experience God as absent and times when I can't understand his actions.
 31. I shall never stop searching for Him; never cease to ask for his will and his revelation.
 32. There have been times in my life when everything that happened contradicted

what I knew about God ...

33. ... fortunately I have always succeeded, in spite of it all, in clinging to Him, still believing that everything will be all right ...
34. I have always succeeded in hoping that the best is yet to come ...
35. ... and God has never let me down.
36. That is why I am convinced that my surrender to God does not only have meaning in this life, but also when this life passes.
37. While the future rests with the Lord ...
38. ... I should trust him with my future ...
39. ... because no human being knows what will happen even in the next second.
40. I have no alternative but to walk with God and to believe that He knows the best for my life.
41. It is not always easy to lay my life in his, but I try.
42. My experience of God is somehow far greater and more dominant than my knowledge of Him.
43. I do believe though that one can have a basic knowledge of God ...
44. ... (one can have a basic knowledge of God) because of his self revelation through the Bible ...
45. ... (one can have a basic knowledge of God) because of his self revelation through nature ...
46. ... (one can have a basic knowledge of God) because of his self revelation through other people.
47. This knowledge is then presupposed in my own experience.
48. The content of the Bible and my comprehension of this content have always been a consolation to me and to thousands, millions of other believers.
49. (The content of the Bible) has meaning to me and others, it brings us to a better insight concerning our relationship with God.
50. My profound feeling is that God is everything that I have said, and still so much more ...
51. ... there is so much about this powerful, almighty, Wholly Other being that I just cannot express in words.

4.5.3 Natural Occurring Themes and Transformed Summaries: Person D

D1. Theological insight

1. I definitely believe that there is a God outside ourselves.

6. I believe that He, through someone named Christ, tries to show humans how they should exist and live ...
36. That is why I am convinced that my surrender to God does not only have meaning in this life, but also when this life passes.
42. My experience of God is somehow far greater and more dominant than my knowledge of Him.
43. I do believe though that one can have a basic knowledge of God ...
44. ... (one can have a basic knowledge of God) because of his self revelation through the Bible ...
47. This knowledge is then presupposed in my own experience.
48. The content of the Bible and my comprehension of this content have always been a consolation to me and to thousands, millions of other believers.
49. (The content of the Bible) has meaning to me and others, it brings us to a better insight concerning our relationship with God.

D's experience of God results from the knowledge he has of God as revealed through his reading of the Bible. This brings him in contact with issues like the afterlife, tri-unity of God etc.

D2. Submission to a higher power

2. He is a God who is in control and who determines the course of all things.
3. This I believe because I know my own knowledge and my own skills and my own power are very limited and I know that my abilities are restricted.
9. I also believe that He is in command of other people and other nations and indeed other religions.
33. ... fortunately I have always succeeded, in spite of it all, in clinging to Him, still believing that everything will be all right ...
37. While the future rests with the Lord ...
38. ... I should trust Him with my future ...
39. ... because no human being knows what will happen even in the next second.
40. I have no alternative but to walk with God and to believe that He knows the best for my life.
41. It is not always easy to lay my life in his, but I try.

D perceives his own abilities to be limited and he feels compelled to entrust God with his future. He does not experience this to be particularly easy, but he tries to lay his life in God's hands with the conviction that He is totally in control of his destiny.

D3. A sense of a presence

- 4. I believe that God takes an interest in the well-being of humans.
- 5. This becomes evident through his intervention in the history of people and nations.
- 28. ... at certain stages in my life He really steps in and determines what will happen to me.
- 34. I have always succeeded in hoping that the best is yet to come ...
- 35. ... and God has never let me down.

Through a consciousness of God's intervention in his life, D still succeeds in hoping, and he is convinced that God has never let him down.

D4. Relationship

- 7. He tries to show how their relationship with Him should be like.
- 21. I also experience God through the behaviour of other people and through their relationships.
- 22. I also experience God through my own personal relationships.
- 26. I consider my experience of God as a unique personal experience.
- 27. It is different from other's experience of God in the sense that He walks a personal road with me.
- 29. I also experience God where the community of believers gathers around God's Word and where the believers pray and praise together.
- 46. ... (one can have a basic knowledge of God) because of his self revelation through other people.

D considers his experience of God to be unique and personal. He gains knowledge of God in the way God reveals himself through other people.

D5. Beyond the rational

- 8. I believe that God is so great that his supremacy and command reach much further than my restrictive mind could ever grasp.
- 50. My profound feeling is that God is everything that I have said, and still so much more ...

51. ... there is so much about this powerful, almighty, Wholly Other being that I just cannot express in words.

D realises that God reaches beyond his rational grasp and that he cannot express everything that he experiences.

D6. Direction

10. My personal experience of God is that He leads me in a certain direction while I often experience the frustration of wanting to go in my own direction or doing something my way and then it just doesn't happen the way I planned.
11. I am steered in a direction that often feels against my will but I am vested in the plan God has for my life and I humbly follow the route that He leads me on.
14. In my personal life it is my experience that at specific times it so happens that God leads me and guides me and works with me. That, to me, is a real experience and I cannot deny it.
15. It doesn't happen all of the time; it doesn't happen every day.
16. It often happens at times when I actually do need that confirmation.
17. He then works in me as a reality.

D experiences how God leads him in a certain direction even if its against his own will. He willingly follows God's lead in the firm belief that God's guidance works in him as a reality and eventually confirms his experience.

D7. Suffering/Death/Dying

12. Sometimes I experience God as absent, especially in times of crises.
13. But even then I cling to the belief that He is not gone, He is still close and present.
18. He is not a God who takes me out of the desert, or makes my problems disappear, or straightens out all my roads that I may prosper.
19. He is a God whom I experience and come to know through my trials and sufferings.

D is deeply under the impression of a paradox in his experience of God when faced with human suffering. Although God seems absent, he experiences Him and comes to know Him through his trials and sufferings.

D8. Creation

- 20. I experience God when I observe nature and witness how wonderfully He created everything.
- 45. ... (one can have a basic knowledge of God) because of his self revelation through nature ...

When observing nature, D senses that God reveals Himself through nature and creation.

D9. Paradox/Dialectical tension

- 23. During T's suicide, the death of a person who did not want to live anymore, God was totally absent. In the prelude to her death, her depression, her suicide and what followed, I experienced God as absent.
- 24. Also during the funeral, the sermon and the words of consolation were empty and meaningless to me.
- 25. I still can't find any solace from what happened.
- 30. ... there are times when I experience God as absent and times when I can't understand his actions.
- 31. I shall never stop searching for Him; never cease to ask for his will and his revelation.
- 32. There have been times in my life when everything that happened contradicted what I knew about God ...

A feeling of God's absence at certain times is part of D's experience of God. He constantly searches for God behind a tragedy, which seems to contradict what he knows about God.

4.5.4 Specific situated structure for person D

D's experience of God results from the knowledge he has of God as revealed through his reading of the Bible. This brings him in contact with issues of faith. D feels compelled to entrust God with his future because he perceives his own abilities to be limited. He tries to lay his life in God's hands with the conviction that He is totally in control of his destiny even though he does not experience this to be particularly easy. Through a consciousness of God's intervention in his life, he still succeeds in hoping, and he realises that God has never let him down. D considers his experience of God to be unique and personal and unlike any other human experience. He perceives that God reveals himself through other people and through this revelation he gains knowledge. He admits that God reaches beyond his rational grasp and that

he cannot express everything that he experiences. D experiences how God leads him in a certain direction, and even if its against his own will, he willingly follows God's lead in the firm belief that God's guidance works in him as a reality and eventually confirms his experience. A feeling of God's absence at certain times is part of D's experience of God. He constantly searches for God behind a tragedy, which seems to contradict what he knows about God. He is deeply under the impression of a paradoxical tension in his experience of God when faced with human suffering. Although God seems absent, he experiences Him through his trials and sufferings and thereby he gains knowledge of God. The creation also plays a big role in his experience of God. When observing nature, D senses that God reveals Himself through nature and creation.

4.6 Data analysis: Person E

4.6.1 Protocol: Person E (Male, 38 years)

(Aspects of the response that were considered to be non-revelatory of the experience were omitted. Refer to Appendix A for the complete essay.)

Experience is a historical process. My present experience of God grows out of the earliest realisations of God's presence in my life. Those experiences are fundamental to understanding and describing this point in my life.

I am utterly convinced that God in his eternal love conceived me from eternity. He saw my historical existence before the universe was grounded and loved me into being as this person, at this computer, in this place in space and time, with my temporal history and existence and eternal future. I hold in a (hopefully) creative tension the paradox of God's foreknowledge and my own free and human decisions in my life.

That being said, my first remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God came in my childhood. This numinous moment occurred in the most unlikely of places with the most likely of men.

I was about eight years old and listening to a sermon in the church of my baptism, the Umbilo Road Gereformeerde Kerk in Durban. The preacher was the much loved Ds. Petra de Klerk a man of deep holiness and wholeness. The sermon was on the tension between Sarah and Hagar and Hagar's flight in the desert with Ishmael and her being comforted by an angel (Genesis

21:8-21). Somehow, with the sermon, the entire scene, the people who involved their personalities, conflicts, despairs, and surprise at God's intervention, became vividly real and alive. This is, for me, the moment which launched me into my present career of Scriptural Theologian within the Catholic Church.

More and more the meeting with God in profound interior stillness and peace grew. I started praying the Divine Office (the prescribed prayer for those who have made religious profession) and even with a very active work life, home life, and social involvements, managed to juggle everything around this still and quiet centre of my being that I could return to more and more at will.

Previously, though cured of traditional piety (miraculous statues, miracles, apparitions of Our Lady and locutions through saints and all the Hollywood elements of the Catholic life of faith), I had never been angry with God. Puzzled, in giddy love, remote, but not angry. In the noviciate year of '84 I learned that gift.

The first aspect was a deeper entry into scripture and the Psalms which express all human emotions to God. The second was the growing awareness of the reality of *apartheid* and my own people's contribution to the suffering of many. The third was the often explosive relationship between one English speaking South African, a Coloured man from the Cape, a Boer, and four militantly newly independent Zimbabweans who had lost family in the war. Though I had disagreements with the Zimbabwean brothers, I grew closer to them in friendship than with my fellow South Africans and they often referred to me as the bridge in the community which allowed them to know and understand the other brothers, including our three priests (one British, one American and one English colonial, born in India raised in Rhodesia and schooled in England - our Novice master).

I was angry at *apartheid*, I was angry at Afrikanerdom, I was angry at the black brethren, I was angry at the white foreigners and I was angry at my fellow South Africans who appeared more liberal and gung-ho revolutionary than myself but who could not maintain a decent personal relationship with anyone other than gung-ho revolutionaries. And, I was extremely angry at God for *apartheid*, race, and my own confusion.

It was an emotional see-saw of a changing spirituality within me as well as changing interpersonal relationships confronted by this microcosm of the world and Southern Africa.

The realisation of how God participated in that incarceration resolved some of the anger. Later when I read Eli Weisel's 'Night', the execution scene stands out as something I had truly experienced, though in a different way. Weisel tells the story of several camp members in Hitler's Germany being hanged in retribution for an escape, including a young lad in his teens. A voice cries from the crowd forced to watch, 'where is God in this?', and another voice answers, 'there He is, the young man dying'. It was something no theology of Incarnation could ever teach, that utter closeness of God in all human situations.

One thing I found was a profound insight into scripture. Since I did not touch the Bible as an academic object (still don't!) but as the lived experience of generations of people with the God Who is Close - Emmanuel. That early memory of the sermon on Hagar and Ishmael put me in touch with those great and frustrating characters of the Old and New Testaments as real people. I could read through the religious language and pious accretions of the ages and touch the raw, the bawdy, the scandalous, and the deeply loving commitment to God. This grew as I grew, and as I am growing more proficient in Greek and Hebrew I made deep and real friends among the angry old men, the lascivious women and the plainly confused heroes of the Old and New Testaments.

Fairly early on my future as a teacher of Scripture was decided upon by my superiors, in consultation with me. I look back on those days with deep affection. God began to fill all the moments I had previously kept from Him. Friends for life were made, some who chose to leave the ministry. In 1988 I made my final vows as a Dominican and tied myself to the Order for life.

Being a Jungian in terms of my personal preference and my training for the priesthood, dreams are important. I had a dream that year, soon after my illness and the loss of my Namibian friend (the fact that he is a Nama, plays a role as well). I was in a shop and this wizened old bushman was the proprietor. There were all sorts of statues of Buddha and various Hindu deities for sale. I was asked to choose one. One of the statues was my own little chalk 'Christ at Prayer'. As I came closer to it and reached out for it, all the images fell down and shattered and I could not grasp hold of it. The old man simply said, "You cannot cling to any image of God." This exploration of the unimaginable God has remained with me since then.

As it turned out I spent 5 years in Welkom. I was appointed parish priest in Bronville and Odendaalsrus at Easter of '91, and parish priest of Welkom town in 1992.

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There is very little time for personal or community prayer in the pastorate. I just had to trust that God was there most of the time, and slowly became aware that, in fact, God was tangibly close all the time. The car to and from meetings, or parish events, or mining accidents, or crises in the hospitals, or crises with teenagers from the school and parish, or political turmoil in Bronville, or the latest murder on a shopkeeper in the parish, or the death of a seriously ill parishioner, or comforting a strange family when one of their members died on the roads near Welkom, or a million other things, became my chapel and place of prayer that would not be interrupted by the telephone. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, parish, and school events followed a never-ending cycle together with political mediation and the administration of the Order in South- and all of Africa.

At Easter 1996, I bid farewell to the parish and came to Rome to continue my studies. Here in Rome one is surrounded by the externals of the faith. Every corner has its church, there are chapels aplenty and the people live in familiarity with the faith. My academic life is fairly intense and being a Dominican in later formation I can make use of the exemption to absent myself from the community prayer. I mostly celebrate the Eucharist in private; and my experience of God is deepening. My sense of God's presence is more acute now that I have the time and the distance from the mad rush of too many responsibilities back in South Africa. I also have the distance from the issues of South Africa and the more trendy streams of theology and spirituality which come and go. My room looks out on the forum and the Colosseum, perched as I am atop the Angelicum on the Quirinal hill. Here the experience of God tends to the timeless and the eternal. This is difficult to describe in any language but analogy, which as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the only way 'eff' the ineffable, but analogy has its limitations. I am deeply content in God's presence and relate the mystery of God in my life in a diverse number of ways.

I am always in a deep and loving friendship, which can have its spectacular moments of anger but does not doubt the love. As a Christian I believe in the Trinitarian God who is One. My human limitations have brought me to grow in a different way in each of the persons of the Godhead. The Father I sense as constantly close and embracing. The Son I sense in my exercise of ministry when Christ gives Himself to others through me, and I am touched by Him in them. Christ becomes the companion and friend on whose shoulder I can cry, with whom I can discuss my dreams and frustrations, my temptations and my fallings, my points of high insight when working on a text. The dialogue is almost constant and I am never in fact lonely even though I am more alone now than I ever have been. The rhythm of a Dominican house of higher study is almost that of a contemplative monastery given over to total dedication in

prayer. This is an international community of some 60 men. Some one forms friendships with, others remain faces to a great extent. There are very little external demands and your life is geared to your study, which for a Dominican is a very clear form of prayer. I get together with my friends socially once in a while for a beer or a movie outside of the community, but for much of the time outside of classes, meals, those conventual prayers I attend and the Sunday liturgy, I am entirely alone and hardly ever lonely, my loving Companion and Friend is entirely close.

My relationship with the Spirit is more in the field of active ministry. I use the summer breaks to build up my experience of the church in the world by working in parishes around the globe. Sometimes the Spirit will upset a "brilliantly" planned and practised sermon (I never preach from notes) and I will find something much better emerging from my own mouth. The Spirit has the most wry sense of humour of the Godhead and is constantly surprising me with myself and things I thought I would never be capable of in ministry. He breaks down the barriers of my natural introversion and contemplative lifestyle. Sometimes I find myself stumbling through a sermon feeling totally inarticulate and then find that it has touched someone deeply in their relationship with God. I find that I am deeply happy in ministry to the dying (something which is not natural to me) and last year in Canada grew in the grace of that ministry. Ministry to the dying in Welkom was usually in terms of unnatural death, accident, murder, sudden cancer - had very few peaceful passings. In Canada I dealt more with people who were dying naturally and that was a deep grace. I had previously experienced that aspect of graceful dying only twice in the five years in Welkom.

My daily Eucharist (which is the custom for Catholic priests) is sometimes profound and often simply a habit. I do not change that rhythm of liturgical prayer because even the most mechanical meeting with God has profound spiritual importance.

Even though I am physically alone I am in the midst of a vast community of the living and the dead, the communion of saints, whose friendship and love I feel. I will sometimes talk to my mother, my grandmother and grandfather (who played a significant role in my life but whom I have not here included), those I assisted at their deathbeds and those whose funerals I have celebrated. In a very real sense there is a vast community of people I have absolutely no secrets from as they are present in the eternity of God's love and can judge my temporal actions, my human failings and moments of despair from the point of view of total knowledge and total love. In a sense I feel that some of that I experience with the community gathered in God,

is what I try to bring to persons I come face to face with. My loving cynicism has, I pray, more loving than cynic in it.

The darker moments come from being harsh with myself - some of the shock of the little boy reading Revelation in Afrikaans is still there - and with the silliness of the bureaucratic centre of the Church. Whenever I received a person into the Catholic church during my time in Welkom, I would sit them down beforehand and give my 'whore' speech. The Church is the bride of Christ, the face of God in the world, the historical continuation of the life, mission, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and the foretaste in history of the future, eternal, glory of Christ. She is also the whore ready to sell herself at the cheapest price. She has her share of clerics and laity who do real evil. Her true nature is as the sacrament of Christ, her behaviour from time to time is no more or no less than the confusion we experience in our own lives when we find we do not do the good we want to do. If you realise how much the church is like yourself you can have more sympathy and patience with the failure of her members by drawing closer to the truth of her nature. So too with ourselves. We are known by God (in the full Hebraic meaning of the word, not an intellectual exercise but a communion comparable to sexual union) from all eternity and we will be known for all eternity. Part of the Christian faith is to revel in that knowledge, in playful love and to live it in all playful, delightful and earnest, loving seriousness.

The clerical bureaucrats can be as back-stabbing and vicious as anyone climbing the corporate ladder, the people of God can cause untold grief and suffering to others and each other. At the same time there is that warm embracing love often correcting, more often just pouring love, that I experience in my relationship to God. The moments of doubt at the church and the faith - and what professional does not experience that at their chosen vocation? - are always in the context of this profound relationship of pure love and gentle (or not so gentle) humour which makes me confront myself nakedly day after day and start finding what it is that God dreams I become in this life in co-operation with His (thank God) inexhaustible love and presence leading us to eternity.

What can I do at this moment which will upset what He knows is going to happen? Nothing really, since He has foreseen, in Love, every possible act I can undertake, woven them all in His plan for our eternal salvation. The story of my experience with God from that nine year old boy to this 38 year old priest shows that more than adequately.

4.6.2 Natural Meaning Units: Person E

1. Experience is a historical process.
2. My present experience of God grows out of the earliest realisations of God's presence in my life. Those experiences are fundamental to understanding and describing this point in my life.
3. I am utterly convinced that God in his eternal love conceived me from eternity.
4. He saw my historical existence before the universe was grounded ...
5. He loved me into being as this person, at this computer, in this place in space and time, with my temporal history and existence and eternal future.
6. I hold in a (hopefully) creative tension the paradox of God's foreknowledge and my own free and human decisions in my life.
7. My first remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God came in my childhood.
8. This numinous moment occurred in the most unlikely of places with the most likely of men. (*n.r.o.p.*)
9. I was about eight years old. (*n.r.o.p.*)
10. I was listening to a sermon in the church of my baptism, the Umbilo Road Gereformeerde Kerk in Durban. (*n.r.o.p.*)
11. The preacher was the much loved Ds. Petra de Klerk, a man of deep holiness and wholeness. (*n.r.o.p.*)
12. The sermon was on the tension between Sarah and Hagar and Hagar's flight in the desert with Ishmael and her being comforted by an angel. (*n.r.o.p.*)
13. With the sermon the scene became vividly real and alive.
14. This is, for me, the moment which launched me into my present career of Scriptural Theologian within the Catholic Church.
15. More and more the meeting with God in profound interior stillness and peace grew.
16. I started praying the Divine Office (the prescribed prayer for those who have made religious profession) and even with a very active work life, home life, and social involvements, managed to juggle everything around this still and quiet centre of my being that I could return to more and more at will.
17. Previously, though cured of traditional piety (miraculous statues, miracles, apparitions of Our Lady and locutions through saints and all the Hollywood elements of the Catholic life of faith), I had never been angry with God.
18. Puzzled, in giddy love, remote, but not angry.

19. In the noviciate year of '84 I learned that gift - to be angry with God.
20. The first aspect was a deeper entry into scripture ...
21. ... and the Psalms which express all human emotions to God.
22. The second (remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God) was the growing awareness of the reality of *apartheid* and my own people's contribution to the suffering of many.
23. The third (remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God) was the often explosive relationship between one English speaking South African, a Coloured man from the Cape, a Boer, and four militantly newly independent Zimbabweans who had lost family in the war.
24. Though I had disagreements with the Zimbabwean brothers I grew closer to them in friendship than with my fellow South Africans ...
25. I was extremely angry at God for *apartheid*, race, and my own confusion.
26. It was an emotional see-saw of a changing spirituality within me as well as changing interpersonal relationships confronted by this microcosm of the world and Southern Africa.
27. The realisation of how God participated in that incarceration resolved some of the anger.
28. Later when I read Eli Weisel's 'Night' the execution scene stands out as something I had truly experienced, though in a different way. Weisel tells the story of several camp members in Hitler's Germany being hanged in retribution for an escape, including a young lad in his teens. A voice cries from the crowd forced to watch, 'where is God in this?', and another voice answers, 'there He is, the young man dying'.
29. It was something no theology of Incarnation could ever teach, that utter closeness of God in all human situations.
30. One thing I found was a profound insight into scripture, since I did not touch the Bible as an academic object (still don't!) but as the lived experience of generations of people with the God Who is Close.
31. That early memory of the sermon on Hagar and Ishmael put me in touch with those great and frustrating characters of the Old and New Testaments as real people.
32. I could read through the religious language and pious accretions of the ages and touch the raw, the bawdy, the scandalous, and the deeply loving commitment to God.
33. This grew as I grew, and as I am growing, more proficient in Greek and Hebrew.

34. I made deep and real friends among the angry old men, the lascivious women and the plainly confused heroes of the Old and New Testaments.
35. Fairly early on my future as a teacher of Scripture was decided upon by my superiors, in consultation with me.
36. I look back on those days with deep affection.
37. God began to fill all the moments I had previously kept from Him.
38. Friends for life were made, some who chose to leave the ministry. (*n.r.o.p.*)
39. In 1988 I made my final vows as a Dominican and tied myself to the Order for life. (*n.r.o.p.*)
40. Being a Jungian in terms of my personal preference and my training for the priesthood, dreams are important.
41. I had a dream that year, soon after my illness and the loss of my Namibian friend (the fact that he is a Nama, plays a role as well). I was in a shop and this wizened old bushman was the proprietor. There were all sorts of statues of Buddha and various Hindu deities for sale. I was asked to choose one. One of the statues was my own little chalk 'Christ at Prayer'. As I came closer to it and reached out for it, all the images fell down and shattered and I could not grasp hold of it.
42. The old man simply said, "You cannot cling to any image of God".
43. This exploration of the unimaginable God has remained with me since then.
44. As it turned out I spent 5 years in Welkom. I was appointed parish priest in Bronville and Odendaalsrus at Easter of '91, and parish priest of Welkom town in 1992. (*n.r.o.p.*)
45. There is very little time for personal or community prayer in the pastorate. (*n.r.o.p.*)
46. I just had to trust that God was there most of the time ...
47. ... and slowly became aware that, in fact, God was tangibly close all the time.
48. The car to and from meetings, or parish events, or mining accidents, or crises in the hospitals, or crises with teenagers from the school and parish, or political turmoil in Bronville, or the latest murder of a shopkeeper in the parish, or the death of a seriously ill parishioner, or comforting a strange family when one of their members died on the roads near Welkom, or a million other things, became my chapel and place of prayer that would not be interrupted by the telephone. (*n.r.o.p.*)
49. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, parish, and school events followed a never-ending cycle together with political mediation and the administration of the Order in South- and all of Africa. (*n.r.o.p.*)

50. At Easter 1996 I bid farewell to the parish and came to Rome to continue my studies. (*n.r.o.p.*)
51. Here in Rome one is surrounded by the externals of the faith.
52. Every corner has its church, there are chapels aplenty and the people live in familiarity with the faith. (*n.r.o.p.*)
53. My academic life is fairly intense ...
54. ... and being a Dominican in later formation I can make use of the exemption to absent myself from the community prayer. I mostly celebrate the Eucharist in private.
55. And my experience of God is deepening.
56. My sense of God's presence is more acute now that I have the time and the distance from the mad rush of too many responsibilities back in South Africa.
57. I also have the distance from the issues of South Africa and the more trendy streams of theology and spirituality which come and go.
58. My room looks out on the forum and the Colosseum, perched as I am atop the Angelicum on the Quirinal hill. (*n.r.o.p.*)
59. Here the experience of God tends to the timeless and the eternal.
60. This is difficult to describe in any language but analogy ...
61. ... which as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the only way 'eff' the ineffable ...
62. ... but analogy has its limitations.
63. I am deeply content in God's presence ...
64. ... and relate the mystery of God in my life in a diverse number of ways.
65. I am always in a deep and loving friendship ...
66. ... which can have its spectacular moments of anger but does not doubt the love.
67. As a Christian I believe in the Trinitarian God who is One.
68. My human limitations have brought me to grow in a different way in each of the persons of the Godhead.
69. The Father I sense as constantly close and embracing.
70. The Son I sense in my exercise of ministry when Christ gives Himself to others through me ...
71. ... and I am touched by Him in them.
72. Christ becomes the companion and friend on whose shoulder I can cry, with whom I can discuss my dreams and frustrations, my temptations and my fallings, my points of high insight when working on a text.
73. The dialogue is almost constant and I am never, in fact lonely even though I am more alone now than I ever have been.

74. The rhythm of a Dominican house of higher study is almost that of a contemplative monastery given over to total dedication in prayer.
75. This is an international community of some 60 men. *(n.r.o.p.)*
76. Some one forms friendships with, others remain faces to a great extent. *(n.r.o.p.)*
77. There are very little external demands and your life is geared to your study, which for a Dominican is a very clear form of prayer.
78. I get together with my friends socially once in a while for a beer or a movie outside of the community ... *(n.r.o.p.)*
79. ... but for much of the time outside of classes, meals, those conventual prayers I attend and the Sunday liturgy, I am entirely alone and hardly ever lonely, my loving Companion and Friend is entirely close.
80. My relationship with the Spirit is more in the field of active ministry.
81. I use the summer breaks to build up my experience of the church in the world by working in parishes around the globe.
82. Sometimes the Spirit will upset a "brilliantly" planned and practised sermon (I never preach from notes) and I will find something much better emerging from my own mouth.
83. The Spirit has the most wry sense of humour of the Godhead ...
84. The Spirit is constantly surprising me with myself and things I thought I would never be capable of in ministry.
85. He breaks down the barriers of my natural introversion and contemplative lifestyle.
86. Sometimes I find myself stumbling through a sermon feeling totally inarticulate and then find that it has touched someone deeply in their relationship with God.
87. I find that I am deeply happy in ministry to the dying (something which is not natural to me) ...
88. ... and last year in Canada grew in the grace of that ministry.
89. Ministry to the dying in Welkom was usually in terms of unnatural death, accident, murder, sudden cancer - had very few peaceful passings.
90. In Canada I dealt more with people who were dying naturally and that was a deep grace.
91. I had previously experienced that aspect of graceful dying only twice in the five years in Welkom.
92. My daily Eucharist (which is the custom for Catholic priests) is sometimes profound and often simply a habit.
93. I do not change that rhythm of liturgical prayer because even the most mechanical

meeting with God has profound spiritual importance.

94. Even though I am physically alone I am in the midst of a vast community of the living and the dead ...
95. ... the communion of saints, whose friendship and love I feel.
96. I will sometimes talk to my mother, my grandmother and grandfather (who played a significant role in my life but whom I have not here included), those I assisted at their deathbeds and those whose funerals I have celebrated.
97. In a very real sense there is a vast community of people I have absolutely no secrets from as they are present in the eternity of God's love ...
98. ... and can judge my temporal actions, my human failings and moments of despair from the point of view of total knowledge and total love.
99. In a sense I feel that some of that which I experience with the community gathered in God, is what I try to bring to persons I come face to face with.
100. My loving cynicism has, I pray, more loving than cynic in it.
101. The darker moments come from being harsh with myself ...
102. ... some of the shock of the little boy reading Revelation in Afrikaans is still there ...
103. ... and with the silliness of the bureaucratic centre of the Church. (*n.r.o.p.*)
104. Whenever I received a person into the Catholic church during my time in Welkom, I would sit them down beforehand and give my 'whore' speech. (*n.r.o.p.*)
105. The Church is the bride of Christ, the face of God in the world, the historical continuation of the life, mission, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and the foretaste in history of the future, eternal, glory of Christ.
106. She is also the whore ready to sell herself at the cheapest price.
107. She has her share of clerics and laity who do real evil.
108. Her true nature is as the sacrament of Christ ...
109. ... her (the church's) behaviour from time to time is no more or no less than the confusion we experience in our own lives when we find we do not do the good we want to do.
110. If you realise how much the church is like yourself ...
111. ... you can have more sympathy and patience with the failure of her members by drawing closer to the truth of her nature. So too with ourselves.
112. We are known by God (in the full Hebraic meaning of the word, not an intellectual exercise but a communion comparable to sexual union) from all eternity and we will be known for all eternity.

113. Part of the Christian faith is to revel in that knowledge, in playful love ...
114. ... and to live it in all playful, delightful and earnest, loving seriousness.
115. The clerical bureaucrats can be as back-stabbing and vicious as anyone climbing the corporate ladder ... *(n.r.o.p.)*
116. ... the people of God can cause untold grief and suffering to others and each other. *(n.r.o.p.)*
117. At the same time there is that warm embracing love often correcting, more often just pouring love, that I experience in my relationship to God.
118. The moments of doubt at the church and the faith - and what professional does not experience that at their chosen vocation? - are always in the context of this profound relationship of pure love and gentle (or not so gentle) humour ...
119. ... which makes me confront myself nakedly day after day and start finding what it is that God dreams I become in this life in co-operation with his (thank God) inexhaustible love and presence leading us to eternity.
120. What can I do at this moment which will upset what He knows is going to happen? Nothing really, since He has foreseen, in Love, every possible act I can undertake, woven them all in his plan for our eternal salvation.
121. The story of my experience with God from that nine year old boy to this 38 year old priest shows that more than adequately.

4.6.3 Natural Occurring Themes and Transformed Summaries: Person E

E1. Development and growth

1. Experience is a historical process.
2. My present experience of God grows out of the earliest realisations of God's presence in my life. Those experiences are fundamental to understanding and describing this point in my life.
3. I am utterly convinced that God in his eternal love conceived me from eternity.
4. He saw my historical existence before the universe was grounded ...
5. He loved me into being as this person, at this computer, in this place in space and time, with my temporal history and existence and eternal future.
7. My first remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God came in my childhood.
14. This is, for me, the moment which launched me into my present career of Scriptural Theologian within the Catholic Church.
32. I could read through the religious language and pious accretions of the ages and

touch the raw, the bawdy, the scandalous, and the deeply loving commitment to God.

- 33. This grew as I grew, and as I am growing more proficient in Greek and Hebrew.
- 35. Fairly early on my future as a teacher of Scripture was decided upon by my superiors, in consultation with me.
- 36. I look back on those days with deep affection.
- 55. And my experience of God is a deepening.
- 68. My human limitations have brought me to grow in a different way in each of the persons of the Godhead.

The development of his experience of God is fundamental to E's description of the phenomenon. His experience of God seems to be eternal, determined by events and history. His past brings back good memories and sustains the current deepening of the experience. This growth is dynamic, constantly deepening, from childhood until the present.

E2. Paradox/Dialectical tension

- 6. I hold in a (hopefully) creative tension the paradox of God's foreknowledge and my own free and human decisions in my life.
- 57. I also have the distance from the issues of South Africa and the more trendy streams of theology and spirituality which come and go.
- 92. My daily Eucharist (which is the custom for Catholic priests) is sometimes profound and often simply a habit.
- 100. My loving cynicism has, I pray, more loving than cynic in it.
- 101. The darker moments come from being harsh with myself ...
- 102. ... some of the shock of the little boy reading Revelation in Afrikaans is still there ...
- 109. ... her (the church's) behaviour from time to time is no more or no less than the confusion we experience in our own lives when we find we do not do the good we want to do.

D intensely experiences the paradox of God's foreknowledge and his own perceived free will. There is also a perceived tension between profound experience, and cynicism and habit.

E3. Theological insight

- 13. With the sermon the scene became vividly real and alive.
- 18. Puzzled, in giddy love, remote, but not angry.

20. The first aspect was a deeper entry into scripture ...
30. One thing I found was a profound insight into scripture, since I did not touch the Bible as an academic object (still don't!) but as the lived experience of generations of people with the God Who is Close.
34. I made deep and real friends among the angry old men, the lascivious women and the plainly confused heroes of the Old and New Testaments.
51. Here in Rome one is surrounded by the externals of the faith.
53. My academic life is fairly intense ...
54. ... and being a Dominican in later formation I can make use of the exemption to absent myself from the community prayer. I mostly celebrate the Eucharist in private.
67. As a Christian I believe in the Trinitarian God who is One.
77. There are very little external demands and your life is geared to your study, which for a Dominican is a very clear form of prayer.
98. ... and can judge my temporal actions, my human failings and moments of despair from the point of view of total knowledge and total love.
105. The Church is the bride of Christ, the face of God in the world, the historical continuation of the life, mission, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the foretaste in history of the future, eternal, glory of Christ.
106. She is also the whore ready to sell herself at the cheapest price.
107. She has her share of clerics and laity who do real evil.
108. Her true nature is as the sacrament of Christ ...

A deep entry into scripture and a corresponding profound insight lay the foundation of E's experience of God. From this insight E draws a belief in the Trinitarian God of Christianity who is one. His experience of God is being enhanced by the experiences of the men and women of the Bible.

E4. Contemplation/Inner feeling

15. More and more the meeting with God in profound interior stillness and peace grew.
16. I started praying the Divine Office (the prescribed prayer for those who have made religious profession) and even with a very active work life, home life, and social involvements, managed to juggle everything around this still and quiet centre of my being that I could return to more and more at will.
- 21 ... and the Psalms which express all human emotions to God.

- 26. It was an emotional see-saw of a changing spirituality within me as well as changing interpersonal relationships confronted by this microcosm of the world and Southern Africa .
- 37. God began to fill all the moments I had previously kept from Him.
- 74. The rhythm of a Dominican house of higher study is almost that of a contemplative monastery given over to total dedication in prayer.

E experiences a meeting with God in profound interior stillness and peace. He finds human emotions concerning God in the quiet centre of his being. In his contemplative dedication, God fills all the empty, reserved moments, thereby creating an optimal climate for an experience of God.

E5. Anger

- 17. Previously, though cured of traditional piety (miraculous statues, miracles, apparitions of Our Lady and locutions through saints and all the Hollywood elements of the Catholic life of faith), I had never been angry with God.
- 19. In the noviciate year of '84 I learned that gift - to be angry with God.
- 25. I was extremely angry at God for *apartheid*, race, and my own confusion.
- 27. The realisation of how God participated in that incarceration resolved some of the anger.
- 66. ... which can have its spectacular moments of anger but does not doubt the love.

E's experience of God is marked by anger towards Him, although the anger has been resolved to a great extent. E considers the anger as a gift and his anger never doubts the love.

E6. Relationship

- 22. The second (remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship) was the growing awareness of the reality of *apartheid* and my own people's contribution to the suffering of many.
- 23. The third (remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God) was the often explosive relationship between one English speaking South African, a Coloured man from the Cape, a Boer, and four militantly newly independent Zimbabweans who had lost family in the war.
- 24. Though I had disagreements with the Zimbabwean brothers I grew closer to them in friendship than with my fellow South Africans ...
- 31. That early memory of the sermon on Hagar and Ishmael put me in touch with

those great and frustrating characters of the Old and New Testaments as real people.

65. Always in a deep and loving friendship ...
70. The Son I sense in my exercise of ministry when Christ gives Himself to others through me ...
71. ... and I am touched by Him in them.
72. Christ becomes the companion and friend on whose shoulder I can cry, with whom I can discuss my dreams and frustrations my temptations and my fallings, my points of high insight when working on a text.
73. The dialogue is almost constant and I am never, in fact lonely even though I am more alone now than I ever have been.
79. ... but for much of the time outside of classes, meals, those conventual prayers I attend and the Sunday liturgy, I am entirely alone and hardly ever lonely, my loving Companion and Friend is entirely close.
80. My relationship with the Spirit is more in the field of active ministry.
81. I use the summer breaks to build up my experience of the church in the world by working in parishes around the globe.
82. Sometimes the Spirit will upset a "brilliantly" planned and practised sermon (I never preach from notes) and I will find something much better emerging from my own mouth.
83. The Spirit has the most wry sense of humour of the Godhead ...
84. The Spirit is constantly surprising me with myself and things I thought I would never be capable of in ministry.
85. He breaks down the barriers of my natural introversion and contemplative lifestyle.
86. Sometimes I find myself stumbling through a sermon feeling totally inarticulate and then find that it has touched someone deeply in their relationship with God.
93. I do not change that rhythm of liturgical prayer because even the most mechanical meeting with God has profound spiritual importance.
94. Even though I am physically alone I am in the midst of a vast community of the living and the dead ...
95. ... the communion of saints, whose friendship and love I feel.
97. In a very real sense there is a vast community of people I have absolutely no secrets from as they are present in the eternity of God's love ...
99. In a sense I feel that some of that which I experience with the community gathered in God, is what I try to bring to persons I come face to face with.

110. If you realise how much the church is like yourself ...
111. ... you can have more sympathy and patience with the failure of her members by drawing closer to the truth of her nature. So too with ourselves.
112. We are known by God (in the full Hebraic meaning of the word, not an intellectual exercise but a communion comparable to sexual union) from all eternity and we will be known for all eternity.
113. Part of the Christian faith is to revel in that knowledge, in playful love ...
114. ... and to live it in all playful, delightful and earnest, loving seriousness.
117. At the same time there is that warm embracing love often correcting, more often just pouring love, that I experience in my relationship to God.
118. The moments of doubt at the church and the faith - and what professional does not experience that at their chosen vocation? - are always in the context of this profound relationship of pure love and gentle (or not so gentle) humour ...

E experiences a moment of intense and deep relationship with God in the growing awareness of social injustice and suffering. He also has such an experience in interpersonal relationships. In Christ he finds a companion and friend on whose shoulder he can cry and with whom he can discuss everything that he considers important. In this constant dialogue he never experiences loneliness. His relationship with the Spirit is one of guidance and humour. He also experiences God in the sense of community. He senses that God knows him in all aspects of the word and he revels in that experience in a playful, delightful and earnest, loving seriousness. E also experiences a warm embracing love and gentle humour in his experience of God.

E7. Suffering/Death/Dying

28. Later when I read Eli Weisel's 'Night' the execution scene stands out as something I had truly experienced, though in a different way. Weisel tells the story of several camp members in Hitler's Germany being hanged in retribution for an escape, including a young lad in his teens. A voice cries from the crowd forced to watch, 'where God in this?', and another voice answers, 'there He is, the young man dying'.
29. It was something no theology of Incarnation could ever teach, that utter closeness of God in all human situations.
87. I find that I am deeply happy in ministry to the dying (something which is not natural to me) ...
88. ... and last year in Canada grew in the grace of that ministry.

89. Ministry to the dying in Welkom was usually in terms of unnatural death, accident, murder, sudden cancer - had very few peaceful passings.
90. In Canada I dealt more with people who were dying naturally and that was a deep grace.
91. I had previously experienced that aspect of graceful dying only twice in the five years in Welkom.
96. I will sometimes talk to my mother, my grandmother and grandfather (who played a significant role in my life but whom I have not here included), those I assisted at their deathbeds and those whose funerals I have celebrated.

E is deeply under the impression of the utter closeness of God in all situations, especially the nearing and onset of death.

E8. Beyond the rational

40. Being a Jungian in terms of my personal preference and my training for the priesthood, dreams are important.
41. I had a dream that year, soon after my illness and the loss of my Namibian friend (the fact that he is a Nama, plays a role as well). I was in a shop and this wizened old bushman was the proprietor. There were all sorts of statues of Buddha and various Hindu deities for sale. I was asked to choose one. One of the statues was my own little chalk 'Christ at Prayer'. As I came closer to it and reached out for it, all the images fell down and shattered and I could not grasp hold of it.
42. The old man simply said, "You cannot cling to any image of God".
43. This exploration of the unimaginable God has remained with me since then.
59. Here the experience of God tends to the timeless and the eternal.
60. This is difficult to describe in any language but analogy ...
61. ... which as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the only way 'eff' the ineffable ...
62. ... but analogy has its limitations.
64. and relate the mystery of God in my life in a diverse number of ways.

E considers God to be unimaginable, timeless and eternal - an image one cannot grasp or cling to. He can only describe it in analogous terms. Analogy seems to be the only way to relate the mystery of God in his life - the only way to express the ineffable.

E9. Sense of presence

46. I just had to trust that God was there most of the time ...

- 47. ... and slowly became aware that, in fact, God was tangibly close all the time.
- 56. My sense of God's presence is more acute now that I have the time and the distance from the mad rush of too many responsibilities back in South Africa.
- 63. I am deeply content in God's presence ...
- 69. The Father I sense as constantly close and embracing.

E is deeply under the impression of the utter closeness and presence of God at all times. This elicits a feeling of deep content. He senses God as father as being constantly close and embracing.

E10. Submission to a higher power

- 119. ... which makes me confront myself nakedly day after day and start finding what it is that God dreams I become in this life in co-operation with his (thank God) inexhaustible love and presence leading us to eternity.
- 120. What can I do at this moment which will upset what He knows is going to happen? Nothing really, since He has foreseen, in Love, every possible act I can undertake, woven them all in his plan for our eternal salvation.
- 121. The story of my experience with God from that nine year old boy to this 38 year old priest shows that more than adequately.

E senses that he, and all his actions, are embedded in God's inexhaustible and eternal love and presence. He willingly submits himself to God's plan for his life.

4.6.4 Specific situated structure for person E

The development and growth of his experience of God is fundamental to E's description of the phenomenon. His experience of God seems to be eternal, determined by events and history. His past brings back good memories and sustains the current deepening of the experience. This growth is dynamic, constantly deepening, from childhood until the present. D intensely experiences the paradox of God's foreknowledge and his own perceived free will. There is also a perceived tension between profound experience, and cynicism and habit. A deep entry into scripture and a corresponding profound insight lay the foundation of E's experience of God. From this insight he draws a belief in the Trinitarian God of Christianity. His experience of God is enhanced by the experiences of the men and women of the Bible. In his contemplative dedication, God fills all the empty, reserved moments, thereby creating an optimal climate for an experience of God. E experiences a meeting with God in profound inte-

rior stillness and peace. He finds human emotions concerning God in the quiet centre of his being. E's experience of God is also marked by a certain degree of anger towards Him, although the anger has been resolved to a great extent. He considers the anger as a gift and his anger never doubts the love. His relationship with God resembles the relationships he has with humans. He experiences a moment of intense and deep relationship with God in the growing awareness of social injustice and suffering. He also has such an experience in interpersonal relationships and in the sense of community. In Christ he finds a companion and friend whose shoulder he can cry on and with whom he can discuss everything that he considers important. In this constant dialogue he never experiences loneliness. His relationship with the Spirit is one of guidance and humour. He senses that God knows him in all aspects of the word and he revels in that experience in a playful, delightful and earnest, loving seriousness. E also experiences a warm embracing love and gentle humour in his experience of God. E is deeply under the impression of the utter closeness and presence of God at all times. This elicits a feeling of deep content. He senses God as Father as being constantly close and embracing. His experience of the presence of God is especially profound in the nearing and onset of death. He considers God to be unimaginable, timeless, and eternal - an image one cannot grasp or cling to. He can only describe it in analogous terms. Analogy seems to be the only way to relate the mystery of God in his life - the only way to express the ineffable. E senses that he, and all his actions, are embedded in God's inexhaustible and eternal love and presence. He willingly submits himself to God's plan for his life.

4.7 Data analysis: Person F

4.7.1 Protocol: Person F (Male, 33 years)

When I think of my own personal experience of God, I have more questions than answers. When I think about God the dominant question is: why doesn't God reveal Himself to us more clearly so that we may accept Him and experience Him more easily and better?

I can't deny the existence of God or God's influence in my life, even if I want to at times. There are, however, far too many things that we don't understand and that we just can't explain. Because there is so much that we don't understand, I have to leave room for God. Only God can fill the large vacuum of the inexplicable.

There are times in my life when I have a great appreciation for something "godly" - when I experience the wonder of nature; when I enjoy the love of loved ones; when I admire the

beauty of art and the arts; when I consider all the wonderful things that have happened to me in my life.

The need for a God who is present in my life is particularly pronounced and strong when I am confronted with the death of loved ones. It is too tough a thought that death is the end of it all. It's just too final to readily accept. When faced with death I feel very close to God and I experience the mystery of life and death and God behind it all.

There are, unfortunately, also many circumstances that leave me with serious doubts about God's existence and presence. I find it hard to believe when confronted with suffering, poverty, famine, sadness etc.

Although I have a deep respect for God and the mystery surrounding God, I know that I don't have to fear Him. The Christian religion has had an enormous influence on my life and I will never be able to escape that. Having said that, I must admit that I am not longing for a heaven where everything will be perfect. I'd much rather strive to contribute to making this world a better place, heaven on earth, to make God visible in the everyday living of ordinary people. Everyone has only one life in the end and what is the sense of it all if it only consists of pain and suffering?

The symbolism of Christ is the directing principle of my life. His example is the one to which I aspire. For me, He represents the ideal person. I try to live up to the norms and ideals that He stood for. I often ask myself how He would have acted within our modern time-sphere. His probable way of acting differs very little from that which I strive for. In spite of my idealising of Christ, sadly little of his character traits emerge in my daily conduct. It should, however, never discourage me to keep on following his example.

For me to experience God has everything to do with the here and now, with our interpersonal relationships, with an attempt to make God's creation a better place for all. I believe that that is God's aim with his creation.

4.7.2 Natural Meaning Units: Person F

1. When I think of my own personal experience of God, I have more questions than answers.
2. When I think about God the dominant question is: why doesn't God reveal

Himself to us more clearly so that we may accept Him and experience Him more easily and better?

3. I can't deny the existence of God or God's influence in my life, even if I want to at times.
4. There are, however, far too many things that we don't understand and that we just can't explain.
5. Because there are so much that we don't understand, I have to leave room for God.
6. Only God can fill the large vacuum of the inexplicable.
7. There are times in my life when I have a great appreciation for something "godly".
8. ... when I experience the wonder of nature ...
9. ... when I enjoy the love of loved ones ...
10. ... when I admire the beauty of art and the arts ...
11. ... when I consider all the wonderful things that have happened to me in my life.
12. The need for a God who is present in my life is particularly pronounced and strong when I am confronted with the death of loved ones.
13. It is too tough a thought that death is the end of it all. It's just too final to readily accept.
14. When faced with death I feel very close to God and I experience the mystery of life and death and God behind it all.
15. There are, unfortunately, also many circumstances that leave me with serious doubts about God's existence and presence.
16. I find it hard to believe when confronted with suffering, poverty, famine, sadness etc.
17. (Although) I have a deep respect for God and the mystery surrounding God.
18. I know that I don't have to fear God.
19. The Christian religion has had an enormous influence on my life and I will never be able to escape that.
20. Having said that, I must admit that I am not longing for a heaven where everything will be perfect.
21. I'd much rather strive to contribute to making this world a better place, heaven on earth ...
22. ... to make God visible in the everyday living of ordinary people.
23. Everyone has only one life in the end and what is the sense of it all if it only consists of pain and suffering?
24. The symbolism of Christ is the directing principle of my life.
25. Christ's example is the one to which I aspire.

26. For me, Christ represents the ideal person.
27. I try to live up to the norms and ideals that He stood for.
28. I often ask myself how He would have acted, within our modern time-sphere.
29. Christ's probable way of acting differs very little from that which I strive for.
30. In spite of my idealising of Christ, sadly little of his character traits emerge in my daily conduct.
31. It should, however, never discourage me to keep on following his example.
32. For me, to experience God has everything to do with the here and now ...
33. It has everything to do with our interpersonal relationships.
34. It has everything to do with an attempt to make God's creation a better place for all.
35. I believe that that is God's aim with his creation.

4.7.3 Natural Occurring Themes and Transformed Summaries: Person F

F1. Paradox/Dialectical tension

1. When I think of my own personal experience of God, I have more questions than answers.
2. When I think about God the dominant question is: why doesn't God reveal Himself to us more clearly so that we may accept Him and experience Him more easily and better?
3. I can't deny the existence of God or God's influence in my life, even if I want to at times.
15. There are, unfortunately, also many circumstances that leave me with serious doubts about God's existence and presence.
16. I find it hard to believe when confronted with suffering, poverty, famine, sadness etc.

F's personal experience of God is characterised by questions and doubts. He realises God's influence in his life, although particular experiences cause him to find it difficult to have a profound experience of God.

F2. Beyond the rational

4. There are, however, far too many things that we don't understand and that we just can't explain.
5. Because there are so much that we don't understand, I have to leave room for God.

- 6. Only God can fill the large vacuum of the inexplicable.
- 17. (Although) I have a deep respect for God and the mystery surrounding God.

F leaves room for God because of the huge void that the inexplicable leaves. The mystery surrounding God elicits a deep respect for God.

F3. Creation

- 7. There are times in my life when I have a great appreciation for something "godly".
- 8. ... when I experience the wonder of nature ...
- 21. I'd much rather strive to contribute to making this world a better place, heaven on earth ...
- 34. It has everything to do with an attempt to make God's creation a better place for all.
- 35. I believe that that is God's aim with his creation.

Sometimes F is under the impression of the wonder of God's creation and it urges him to attempt at making the world a better place.

F4. Relationship

- 9. ... when I enjoy the love of loved ones ...
- 10. ... when I admire the beauty of art and the arts ...
- 11. ... when I consider all the wonderful things that have happened to me in my life.
- 22. ... to make God visible in the everyday living of ordinary people.
- 26. For me Christ represents the ideal person.
- 32. For me to experience God has everything to do with the here and now ...
- 33. It has everything to do with our interpersonal relationships.

F experiences God when he considers the enjoyment significant others provide, when he admires the beauty of arts, and when reflecting on past experiences. His experience of God involves the here and now, and interpersonal relationships.

F5. Suffering/Death/Dying

- 12. The need for a God who is present in my life is particularly pronounced and strong when I am confronted with the death of loved ones.
- 13. It is too tough a thought that death is the end of it all. It's just too final to readily accept.

14. When faced with death I feel very close to God and I experience the mystery of life and death and God behind it all.
23. Everyone has only one life in the end and what is the sense of it all if it only consists of pain and suffering?

In the face of death F feels very close to God, and that feeling elicits a need for God's presence. He experiences the mystery of God when he reflects upon life and death.

F6. Theological insight

18. I know that I don't have to fear God.
19. The Christian religion has had an enormous influence on my life and I will never be able to escape that.
20. Having said that, I must admit that I am not longing for a heaven where everything will be perfect.

Christianity has had an enormous influence on his life. He focuses on the present, the here and now.

F7. Direction

24. The symbolism of Christ is the directing principle of my life.
25. Christ's example is the one to which I aspire.
27. I try to live up to the norms and ideals that He stood for.
28. I often ask myself how He would have acted, within our modern time-sphere.
29. Christ's probable way of acting differs very little from that which I strive for.
30. In spite of my idealising of Christ, sadly little of his character traits emerge in my daily conduct.
31. It should, however, never discourage me to keep on following his example.

F experiences that his life is being directed by Christ's and he aspires to everything for which the symbol stands.

4.7.4 Specific situated structure for person F

F's personal experience of God is characterised by questions and doubts. He realises God's influence in his life, although particular experiences bring about difficulty in having a profound experience of God. F, however, leaves ample room for God because of the huge void

that the inexplicable leaves. The mystery surrounding God elicits a deep respect for God. Sometimes he is under the impression of the wonder of God's creation and it urges him to attempt at making the world a better place. F experiences God when he considers the enjoyment significant others provide, when he admires the beauty of arts, and when reflecting on past experiences. His experience of God involves the here and now, and interpersonal relationships. In the face of death F feels very close to God, and that feeling elicits a need for God's presence. He experiences the mystery of God when he reflects upon life and death. Christianity has had an enormous influence on his life. He focuses on the present, the here and now. F experiences that his life is being directed by Christ's and he aspires to everything the symbol stands for.

4.8 Universal structure of the experience of God

The experience of God seems to be a unique, personal experience that manifests itself as an individual reality in a diverse number of ways. The phenomenon is essentially an experience *sui generis*, unlike any other human experience, and it remains fundamentally elusive and often defies description. Generally God is experienced as a transcendent, Wholly Other being, but with whom humans - based on faith and trust - are able to enter into a relationship in a way akin to the way we relate to one another. The experience reportedly is a dynamic experience, always growing, developing, and constantly changing.

The experience of this phenomenon is one of feeling and reflection. It is a significant experience and is conceptualised, self-transcending and intensified, embedded in, and co-determined by the historical, cultural, and social embodiment of the specific interpreting individual. God exists both as possibility and reality to these individuals, and the experience is creatively and wilfully executed through intentional consciousness.

The experience seemingly reaches beyond the rational, but analogy seems to be a way to relate this phenomenon, a way to express the ineffable. The experience can thus effectively be conceptualised and described in anthropomorphic and metaphorical terms, by means of that which is known and familiar eg. God as Father and God as Companion. The meaning of the experience can be found in the dialogue between humans and their world, the interplay between a consciousness of the here-and-now and an anticipation of that which is yet to come. From this profound and meaningful experience a commitment towards the ultimate reality is often made, and the believer experiences an appeal on his/her life to follow a certain direction.

Evidently the phenomenon is revealed to the receptive and intentional believer through the creation, insight into Scriptures, and interpersonal relationships. Contact with the environment and with significant others enhance the experience. The experience also manifests itself through human emotions. In this way God is met in interior stillness and through quiet contemplation - a profound experience of feeling in the quiet centre of human existence. This ultimately entails a feeling of utter dependence and a wilful submission to a higher power. A feeling of a warm, embracing love and closeness in all situations furthermore constitute the experience. On the other hand God can also be experienced as a punitive force, a distant, uninvolved entity, who sometimes provokes anger and cynicism.

The experience is characterised by the interaction of human presence and divine presence in the world. Fundamentally this seems to be a paradoxical relation, a constant dialectic between: God's foreknowledge and human free will; God's providence and human suffering; the celebration of life and the reality of death. This dialectical relation between binary opposing entities provides a context for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon.

4.9 Validation

In order to validate the content of the universal structure, the assumption was made that the participants themselves would be the best able to indicate the extent to which their experiences had been accurately disclosed. All the persons interviewed were requested to comment on the universal structure and to rate it on a scale from 1 to 10 to the extent to which it reflected their own experience of God. The ratings are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Ratings by the six persons to indicate the extent to which the universal structure discloses their own experience of God

Person	Rating
A	7.5
B	7
C	8.5
D	8.5
E	8
F	7

All the persons who participated in the study indicated that the universal structure was an accurate reflection of their own experience of God. The ratings ranged between 7 and 8.5, with an average of 7.75.

Subsequently they had to rank the themes according to the significance it had for them. The themes that were identified in the protocols amounted to the following thirteen: 1) Development and growth; 2) Theological insight; 3) Paradox/Dialectical tension; 4) Direction; 5) Creation; 6) Submission to a higher power; 7) Beyond the rational; 8) A sense of a presence; 9) Relationship; 10) Love; 11) Contemplation/Inner feeling; 12) Suffering/Death/Dying; 13) Anger. The rankings are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranking of the thirteen themes in order of significance for each of the six participants

	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E	Person F	Totals
Theme 1	5	7	4	3	6	7	<u>32</u>
Theme 2	13	12	13	11	10	10	<u>69</u>
Theme 3	1	11	3	1	4	2	<u>22</u>
Theme 4	9	6	10	4	7	8	<u>44</u>
Theme 5	6	2	5	6	12	3	<u>34</u>
Theme 6	12	5	12	7	13	12	<u>61</u>
Theme 7	2	9	1	9	11	4	<u>36</u>
Theme 8	8	8	6	12	5	11	<u>50</u>
Theme 9	3	3	2	10	2	1	<u>21</u>
Theme 10	4	1	8	8	1	9	<u>31</u>
Theme 11	10	4	9	2	8	13	<u>46</u>
Theme 12	11	10	7	5	9	6	<u>48</u>
Theme 13	7	13	11	13	3	5	<u>52</u>

To determine the nature of agreement among the persons on the order of significance of the thirteen identified themes in their own experience of God, Kendall's coefficient of concordance, *W*, is applied (compare Kendall & Gibbons 1990). We define the measure of relative agreement as

$$W = \frac{12S}{m^2(n^3 - n)}$$

W measures, in a sense, the communality of judgements for the m observers, pertaining to the n themes. The measure is based on the sum of squares of deviations of the column totals in Table 2 around their mean, which is $546/13 = 42$. We call this sum S and obtain

$$S = (32 - 42)^2 + (69 - 42)^2 + (22 - 42)^2 + (44 - 42)^2 + (34 - 42)^2 + (61 - 42)^2 + (36 - 42)^2 \\ + (50 - 42)^2 + (21 - 42)^2 + (31 - 42)^2 + (46 - 42)^2 + (48 - 42)^2 + (52 - 42)^2 = 2472$$

If the agreement among all the persons is perfect, $W = 1$. If they differ very much among themselves the sums of ranks will be more or less equal, and consequently the value of S becomes small compared with the maximum possible value, so that W is small. As W increases from 0 to 1 it indicates a greater measure of agreement in the rankings.

The measure of relative agreement for the six participants in this study is

$$W = \frac{12(2472)}{6^2(13^3 - 13)} = 0.377$$

The value of W is thus 0.377 where all six participants are considered. Although this is relatively low, the W value for persons A, C, E, and F is 0.645, and a very high W value of 0.828 is calculated for persons A, C, and F.

Whereas there seem to be much consensus that the universal structure is an accurate reflection of their own experiences of God, the six participants do not fully agree on the significance each theme has in their own experience. This is particularly true for persons B, D, and E, whose rankings seem to be in disagreement when compared to the high measure of concordance of the three other persons.

It should be noted that the ranking of themes proved to be somewhat problematic in certain instances. This is evident from the following remarks by person E: "It is very difficult to establish an 'order of significance'. Theme 9, relationship, contains in itself elements of anger (theme 13) - anger and conflict are inevitably part of any relationship. In the same way paradoxical elements and ambiguities will emerge in a relationship. The relationship is also growing and changing (theme 1), and calls for submission (theme 6). I really don't know where to rank theme 6 separately from themes 9 and 10, and therefore I add it on at the tail. I'm not completely satisfied with this order, so please accept it in this light." These remarks also explain, to an extent, why E's ranking is in disagreement with most of the other persons'.

There is clear evidence that the experience of God has a unique component for each individual who participated in this study. There is, nevertheless, consensus that the universal structure of the experience expresses the shared essence of the experience more than satisfactory.

4.10 Interpretation of results

The following question should now be attended to: what does the results of this study mean? It should be reiterated that in phenomenological research the most important aspect is not the findings but the process of discovery (compare the aims of the study in 1.2). In phenomenological research no final or definite conclusions can be made. The research can never exhaust the investigated phenomenon and can never be complete. The search for the truth and reality remains a noble quest with its own rewards.

This having been said, some remarks concerning the results should be considered. The general emphasis in the descriptions is away from the importance of external, fixed doctrine or truth, and towards the authority of inner experience in all its flux and ambiguity. The major movements and feelings in the protocols are ones of ambivalence, process, the value of relating to God, the commitment to faith and religion, and a sense of an experience that transcends the individual. The findings also show clear evidence of the authenticity of each individual's experience of God as well as the shared essence of the experience. A reading of the individual protocols brings one under the impression of the unique phenomenal world of each person.

It became clearly evident that some themes concern all the individuals, some themes concern only a few, and some themes reflected the unique experience of a certain individual (see Appendix B for a listing of the occurrence of themes in individual NMUs). This aspect was incorporated in the universal structure. Although there is no general consensus on the sequence of significance, the sum of the rankings of the identified themes by each of the participants resulted in the following order: 1) Relationship; 2) Paradox/Dialectical tension; 3) Love; 4) Development and growth; 5) Creation; 6) Beyond the rational; 7) Direction; 8) Contemplation/Inner feeling; 9) Suffering/Death/Dying; 10) A sense of a presence; 11) Anger; 12) Submission to a higher power; 13) Theological insight. A very notable observation is the extent to which the participants agreed with the universal structure, despite the heterogeneous nature of the original protocols. This is in line with the observation that the experience is essentially a shared phenomenon.

The concern of this investigation throughout remained with the phenomenon of God as it reveals itself to be in conscious experience, and not with its synthetic substitutes. Thus, through the pursuits of religious consciousness we find a fundamental spiritual intent in terms of finite and infinite existence which ultimately aspires to the reality of being. The explication of human experience of God takes the form of a reflective illumination and conceptualisation of consciousness as embedded in human existence, through reason and the intuitive comprehension and understanding of metaphorical reality. In Heideggerian terms this means that it arises out of our *being-in-the-world*.

It also seems fair to say that all the various forms of reflective, cultural, social, and intra-personal activity culminate in the heart of the religious consciousness. Thus, in one sense, the religious reality is found in the abyss of these manifestations as the ground of all activities of the spirit. Paul Tillich (in Morgan 1993:145) speaks to this point: "Religion is the aspect of depth in the totality of the human spirit ... The religious aspect points to that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man's spiritual life."

Hence, the religious reality is not only one separate entity among other entities, but the depth of all human aspirations. The multifaceted ideals underlying the pursuit of the various forms, beauty, truth, and reality achieve fruition through their import of the religious consciousness. The descriptions and universal structure in this study show that more than satisfactory.

4.11 Résumé

By utilising a phenomenological approach, the Christian experience of God was explored in this chapter. Six varied protocols were phenomenologically explicated and a universal structure of the experience emerged from the reflection on the narratives and subsequent methodological steps. The findings were then validated and discussed. In the last chapter the research will be evaluated and the study concludes with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter reflects on the investigation as it unfolded in the preceding chapters. This is done with an evaluation of the research regarding the use of a phenomenological methodology. Some recommendations are made as to how the results of this study can be put to use in future research. The open-ended conclusion serves as an incentive for further research in this field.

5.2 A critical reflection on research methodology

At this point it seems appropriate to make a few comments about the application of the phenomenological research methodology as a means to the disclosure of the phenomenon of God. Psychology should beware of using definitions, models, and assessment approaches that alienate and discount people's unique experiences. The methodology of this study is a psychologically coherent and philosophically attuned means for the investigation of the Christian experience of God. A phenomenological approach offers an opportunity to study the experience of God in a sensitive manner, allowing the facts to speak for themselves, whilst still staying within the borders of science. The findings show clearly that the universal structure is closely related to authoritative theory. The phenomenological method proved to be an effective way to explore the human experience of God.

When using a qualitative methodology the researcher should realise that he or she is not reading the description primarily from a literary point of view, but that he or she is turning intentionally from the description to the meaning of the situated experience. The test for a good description would be "to make sure that there are no preconceptions vitiating description" (Giorgi in Van Vuuren 1989:72). The question, however, remains whether a bias-free description is possible. It has been mentioned that a complete suspension of perspectivity seems impossible (see 1.4), the latter being an essential feature of any act of consciousness. Through a process of phenomenological reduction or *epoché* the researcher attempted to suspend belief in any real world that the phenomenon may have come from, removing from consideration both the (presumed) reality status of the phenomenon and any causal link between the phe-

nomenon and something else. Once engaged in the phenomenological reduction, the researcher neither attributed a reality status to the phenomenon under investigation, nor inferred the existence of something else as a cause or effect of the phenomenon. Instead, the researcher became aware of the phenomenon itself, as it appeared in conscious experience, with all its qualitative richness. What emerged were a number of raw, honest, and often surprising descriptions.

Experience has psychological meaning, also experience of God. Although reality manifests itself differently in each person, the shared quality of language makes it possible to engage in a study like this one. By focusing on the pre-reflective base of all reflections concerning conscious experience, the ongoing stream of conscious, structured experience is unveiled in its totality and not merely in its cognitive stance. Hence, the phenomenological perspective serves as a significant entry to the heart of the *lebenswelt*, the primacy of the experiential life-world. The shared essence of the experience of God clearly emerged in the course of the investigation.

The methodology used in this study breaks down the insularity of phenomenological-psychological research, a concern expressed by Bradford (1984:206). This was done by linking the concerns specific to phenomenological psychology with a broad range of material from several psychological subdisciplines, notably the psychology of religion. The theoretical developments of phenomenological psychology reflected in its methodologies must be marked by exceptional rigor, otherwise the entire endeavour floats away on a sort of insubstantial, conceptual haze. The methodology in this study models an effort to link the often elusive concerns of phenomenological psychology with a neighbouring discipline while preserving the integrity of the special phenomenological concerns.

It is better to ask: "What does it mean?", rather than "What is the truth?" The former question invariably enlarges the scope for the broadening of our (scientific) horizons. This should be kept in mind when formulating a research paradigm adequate for exploring religious phenomena. The emphasis on experience in this study opens the possibility to reclaim the nature of religious phenomena as falling essentially within the psychological realm.

In terms of the aim stated in 1.2(e), the researcher gladly reports that the "process of discovery" certainly contributed considerably to facilitate personal growth.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

The advances of the present study are many, and as with explorative work of any kind, these advances are marked with questions and probes for further investigation. The methodology demands critical attention and more instances of application in order to determine the validity of its claims, its utility for different varieties of religious experience, and the emendations which may be warranted given a different topic from the psychology of religion.

The different steps used for the explication of the phenomenon in this study could be utilised in other kinds of phenomenological research. Moreover, qualitative and quantitative methods should not be viewed in an either-or scenario but rather in unison to explore the depth of human experience.

The call for a similar study to be done on other religious entities e.g. Muslim or Hindu should be reiterated here. The ever-narrowing gulf between Eastern and Western psychologies could be spanned by the enterprise of phenomenological-psychological investigation. Research can be broadened to include basic spirituality or "peak experiences", or narrowed for example the experience of prayer or guilt.

The possibilities of further research on the phenomenon seem unlimited. The exploration of human religious experience is a deserving endeavour and will continue to enrich the lives of individuals, societies, and humankind alike.

5.4 Conclusion

This study ventured to unfold the phenomenon of God by listening to the way people talk about their experience of God. The success of such a task is finally up to the individual reader. The totality of human existence should ultimately be involved in reflection if the experience of the Wholly Other is to make sense and become meaningful in a world with myriad distractions.

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APPENDIX A

Describe your experience of God as completely as possible: Person E

First Memories

Experience is a historical process. My present experience of God grows out of the earliest realisations of God's presence in my life. Those experiences are fundamental to understanding and describing this point in my life.

I am utterly convinced that God in God's eternal Love conceived me from eternity. He saw my historical existence before the universe was grounded and Loved me into being as this person, at this computer, in this place in space and time, with my temporal history and existence and eternal future. I hold in a (hopefully) creative tension the paradox of God's foreknowledge and my own free and human decisions in my life.

That being said, my first remembered experience of a moment of intense and deep relationship with God came in my childhood. This numinous moment occurred in the most unlikely of places (wry smile) with the most likely of men.

I was about eight years old and listening to a sermon in the church of my baptism, the Umbilo Road Gereformeerde Kerk in Durban. The preacher was the much loved Ds. Petra de Klerk; a man of deep holiness and wholeness. The sermon was on the tension between Sarah and Hagar, and Hagar's flight in the desert with Ishmael and her being comforted by an angel (Genesis 21:8-21). Somehow, with the sermon, the entire scene, the people who involved their personalities, conflicts, despairs and surprise at God's intervention, became vividly real and alive. This is, for me, the moment which launched me into my present career of Scriptural Theologian within the Catholic Church.

Other than that moment my church life and relationship with God was not in any sense extraordinary or exciting. I boarded the bus for catechism on a Sunday morning, got teased by the other children in class and teased back in turn. I was one of the few children in that congregation attending an English school (run by the Holy Family Sisters of the Catholic Church!), which had certain effects in the often very narrow minded society of strict Afrikaner Calvinism in the 60's. Our church attendance as a family was patchy, though it was expected that I attend Sunday school regularly. As a family we would go to Sunday worship about once every two months or so. Always quite an outing in those days as my brother is four years younger than me.

School started with the Our Father every morning at assembly and we all were divided into groups for the Religious Education classes. In school I was proud to be a Protestant and Afrikaner in the overwhelming English atmosphere of the 'last outpost of the empire'. I was very fond of the principal, Sr. Agnes. But Catholicism was something 'they' got up to and I never attended any Catholic events in the school, though some of my friends did. The great reform of the Catholic Church in the 60's, Vatican II, filtered through in that the Sisters wore from term to term and year to year a surprising array of habits - but I had little insight into any of the real issues concerned with the ongoing journey of the Catholic Church through history.

There was another moment that stands out too, somewhere in my ninth year. We must have been dealing with issues of election and predestination in Sunday school. I sat down one day on my parents' bed and looked at the Bible which was on the bedside table on my mother's side of the bed. My train of thought was something like, "If God knows everything, He knows whether or not I am going to pick up the Bible and read it. What can I do at this moment which will upset what He knows is going to happen?" I did pick up the Bible and then went through another similar train of thought about which book to read. I ended up reading the book of Revelation, which launched me out of the Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika and into the Roman Catholic Church.

Change

The experience of reading through the book of Revelation as a child, without any sort of preparation for its contents, is quite frightening. This is the future God had planned for the world?!? Remember my thoughts were about God's foreknowledge at that point anyway. And I found myself repelled, at a deeply primitive level of my being (this is after all my enunciation of the experience almost 30 years later!), at the image of God presented in the book of Revelation. And I decided in the next few years not to have anything to do with such a God.

In my 10th year, and after a serious motor car accident in January 1970 we moved from the block of flats in St. Andrew's street, near the then St. Joseph's convent school, to a railway house in Mount Vernon. I also finished my English schooling and went to Port Natal Primary school since the sisters only took boys up to Std. 2.

Matters in the family were also beginning to show strains as the relationship between my mother and father deteriorated. This all became lumped together under the 'cruel God' image that episode with the Bible had evoked in me. I started reading and looking around in the years that followed and grew ever more distant from the Gereformeerde Kerk. Though now and then we would still attend the Durban South community with the redoubtable Ds. Bester who was a young man of the old school, his pronunciation of the word "God" in Afrikaans could send windows rattling for miles around. Worship was first in the scout hall and then in the new church, which always reminded my mother of the Zimbabwe ruins. My attendance at catechism became even more patchy.

I started reading anything I could lay my hands on. As my body and emotions changed during early adolescence the reading became more heavily flavoured towards occult literature. Somehow it didn't satisfy, though I would try out the rituals and whatnot in some of the things I read. Certainly the biography of Alistair Crowley stands out in my mind, simply because he seemed to be the nice sort of adult who would not insist on controlling the emotional, physical, and sexual storms which adolescence brings. "Do what thou wilt", sounded like just the sort of thing where I would feel at home.

However, during 1973 my parents finally separated, though they never divorced. The occasion was rather spectacular as my mother dragged my brother and I, in a taxi, to the 'other woman's' home. Fortunately she was not there, and there was no big scene. But when my father arrived home that night there was. It was the Thursday before Good Friday of 1973, I was 12. And somehow the date, my own pain and confusion of the night my father packed his bags and left and my mother's hysteria drove a further wedge into my already shaky image of God.

Life went on as usual though. But I did get more reclusive of my friends at school and the neighbourhood. And my own reading continued, interspersed, it must be said, with an ever growing fascination for Science Fiction, which I retain to this day!

During this time as well a major crisis happened among the three of us who remained at home. Sometime in July 1974 my mother had a complete emotional breakdown. My brother and I simply coped, since she never really recovered. It was an awful experience to see her emotional integrity crumble before my eyes and her being reduced to an empty shell of a person. There was no professional intervention and indifference from my father and my father's side of the family. My mother could pull herself together for a few hours at a time, but would then revert to near autistic insensibility. Also she and I started fighting, which had something to do with my resemblance to my father. This of course drove me, constantly questioning, further away from the 'God' of the book of Revelation.

Having read my way through various forms of occultism, gone down the road to the local Hindu temple (just across the Umhlatazana river in Chatsworth), and read my way through most forms of Buddhism, the third muminous moment arrived.

It was really by accident that, on the last day of school (now in Port Natal Hoër) 1975, I was standing outside Emmanuel Cathedral in Durban, wondering about the Catholics. I cannot remember the decisions which brought me to that church's door near the area where I grew up. While contemplating the gloomy interior and not knowing what to do when I walked inside, a lady came out. She exchanged the time of day with me and mistook my school uniform for that of the Maritz brothers' school (a common

mistake). In telling her that I was not a Maritz boy I came out with, "I'm not a Catholic, what goes on inside there?"

She took me inside and explained about statues, candles, holy water, and all the things I could see. Last of all she explained to me about the altar and about the Catholic teaching on the Eucharist and that the sacrament was reserved in the place I could see covered by curtains in the high altar. She simply said that Catholics take seriously Jesus' words at the last supper, 'this is my body, this is my blood' and the sacrament is that of the living and true presence of Jesus Christ. I thanked her, sat down and became completely engrossed in this piece of news. And there was palpably something there in that church. Hours must have passed, and I went home.

The next day (a Saturday) I returned and sat down for another few hours. I cannot remember taking a decision, but the power of that news and the vulnerability of Christ making Himself available as food and drink struck a very deep cord in me. There was a sense of utter and complete 'rightness' about it.

I found myself walking to the front door of the priest's house and asking to see a priest (unusual for me, who had become very introverted in consequence of the family crises). I introduced myself to Fr. Chris Lockyer OMI, ordained but six months at that time, and asked to become a Catholic. So my catechises started.

In the course of '75 family matters had taken an even worse turn and I moved in with my father in a flat he had near the beachfront. For the most part it was a lonely existence, since my father was never really home. So I cooked, cleaned, ironed, and got involved with a group of surfer dudes and their dudettes living in the area and felt very grown up to be a part of their group. After an enthusiastic start to Catechism, I faded out for a few months. But someone was whispering my name, profoundly.

I restarted catechism with Fr. Chris, and we planned to have my reception into the Church in December of 1976. One of our penultimate catechism sessions was on death and the four last things: judgement, purgatory, heaven, and hell. At the end of the session I told Fr. Chris that my mother had died the day before and I would like to go to Mass that evening.

The class was on a Tuesday. The evening before I had arrived at the flat after school and found a case with my brother's things lying in the living room. I put fresh linen on my bed and settled down to sleep on the couch. Seeing my brother's things, I knew my mother had died. My father woke me up when he returned and told me the news. I said I had gathered that from my brother's things being there and went back to sleep.

At my mother's funeral at the end of that week I was dry eyed and muttered the usual appreciative nothings to the usual mumbled commiserations. Ds. de Klerk did the funeral in the AVBOB chapel and that was my last contact with the Gereformeerde Kerk as a member.

As I was still under 21 my parents' had to sign their agreement to me becoming a Catholic. My father did so under a great deal of emotional pressure from me. At the very last moment he placed the condition that I should also become a full member of the Gereformeerde Kerk after I had joined the Catholic church. I got his signature but had no intention of fulfilling the condition.

I was received into full communion with the Catholic Church on 24 December 1976. I became a daily Mass goer and server. My experience of God, through the intimate meeting with Christ in daily communion, deepened and strengthened and I started to read everything I could lay my hands on. Halfway through my matric year I was already reading Hans Küng, much to the surprise of the only Catholic member of staff at Port Natal.

In the back of Emmanuel Cathedral there is a statute of St. Martin de Porres, a Dominican Laybrother of mixed parentage who lived in South America in the 17th century. The name intrigued me as well as the title "Apostle of Friendship". Certainly the devotion to him grew nationally in that year as the country itself started going through the crisis which would fill the next 18 years of the country's history. Certainly I was meeting God as a friend and intimate. That experience of friendship and intimacy was most present during the liturgies, but not that much present outside of the church building itself. I developed a growing political consciousness, inspired by this Catholic saint who bore my name, and within a few

months I had moved into a militant anti-apartheid stance at school. This earned me no thanks and a number of violent encounters with those who thought differently. I was an indifferent student and a troublesome pupil.

War

Somehow I managed to scrape through my final year at school and then went to work with the South African Railways. With my financial independence I moved out from the new family and in with distant relatives. An elderly lady and her gay son in his 20's and her married 18 year old daughter, husband and baby daughter. Auntie Kaye managed to keep the menagerie together and we all lived happily and independently. There was, however, a distance with my own family which my step mother tried constantly to heal.

Then came the army. Within myself I was all for objecting and facing the jail sentence. But somehow, though I was capable of an action like that, it did not feel right. I felt I could not subject my father and mom and their new family to even more hurt from my side and went in July of '78. After basics in Kimberly and a spectacular run-in with the camp Commandant and Chaplain (an Afrikaans Baptist) about the use of racial slurs during bayonet practice I ended up in Ops Juliet on the Namibia border, which became 61 Mech Battalion while I was there. I was trained as a truck driver, had to function as ration storeman, canteen keeper and often as medic (as I had the keys to the medical supplies and was authorised to replenish the stores when the doctors came to visit or requested them from an operational situation). With that amount of power in an organisation I was untouchable with matters of discipline. I AWOLed on the border to attend Mass at Easter and Christmas.

The first Easter was the most fraught. I had made sure that the camp was supplied and stocked and got my co-driver to drop me at the Mariabronn mission station outside Grootfontein. The priest there, who was a German with Swapo sympathies thought I was a spy, objected to my rifle and uniform, but we finally sorted things out as I dismantled the thing and let him spread the pieces around as he wished (I never carried live ammo on the border even though it was mandatory). I had some items of clothing that could pass for civilian dress and slowly we became friends over my subsequent visits. I remember another precious moment at the Christmas Mass of '79 when I went to the township of Grootfontein and we were invited to sing Silent Night in our mother tongues. Fourteen languages were heard in unison that night.

Though most of my time on the border was spent at a physical distance from the church, I acquired a habit of daily prayer and weekly contemplation. I would go out once a week, into the bush and just sit at a distance from the camp in Oshivello. Sometimes the quiet was so profound that I found myself at total peace with all around me. There were profoundly numinous moments of wholeness and echoes of a great and incomprehensible love at that point. Because of my stillness animals would often appear and carry on their little animal tasks with no regard for me at all. That would enhance this experience of profound unity with the Author of all life.

I grew to love Namibia and its people while I was a soldier. Eventually I moved to Tsumeb to the transit camp there that was the storage point for all the 61 units scattered through the North. I remained in that powerful position as storeman and the only person qualified to drive any of the vehicles in the camp. Most of the guys there were my bush-juniors, so I led a fairly comfortable life for the last months of my national service. Yet the experience of the military left me a profound pacifist and somewhat cynical of human nature, though I describe that cynicism as a loving cynicism.

Another thing that happened during that time is that I was cured of piety. I went into the army as a bright-eyed and bushy tailed defender of the Catholic faith, replete with Rosaries, holy medals, and the paraphernalia of catholic piety. Though I managed to read through Augustine's city of God, I also became more interested in Catholic mysticism. The experiences of contemplative prayer in Oshivello diminished my need for traditional piety and I turned to John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Thomas Merton. I discovered the sacramentality of all of physical reality during that army experience. I grew used to the vagaries of the human spirit as well. To a degree that, not only did human nature cease to surprise me any more, also that I became less judgmental of people on the frontiers of society. The army has its share of dropouts, alcoholics, and drug addicts (as the broken locks on the morphine safe testified more than once, as well as the patches of dagga which were habitually to be found near almost every SA

camp in Namibia), and I grew to be friends with many of the more shady and confused characters around - though I am sure conaturality played its role there.

Yet the integration of these various facets were still a number of years into the future. I came out of the army with a great spiritual maturity and as a very contrary late teenager with a burden of military experience in a war zone. I had witnessed death, held dying soldiers both friends and strangers, driven their corpses to Grootfontein, and issued ammunition to people to do the same to others. All these streams were there but not in any way integrated.

Coming back from the army I returned to stay with Auntie Kaye. Charmaine and Japie had moved out in the meantime and Niel and Cuan had been born as Angela's rival siblings. Mervyn was still rather confused about everything, but we were a close family and I enjoyed family life with young children as the kids' babysitter.

From Clerk to Cleric

My relationship to the church had dwindled in the burning anger I felt near the end of my stay in Namibia, and with the restarting of my work in the Staff section of the S.A. Railways (as it still was then). Fr. Chris saw this and recommended I see a friend of his who was a psychologist. My work with Graham brought some integration and I started looking almost immediately to join a religious congregation. Some I visited but felt no 'connection' at all. At the same time I was moved to a more responsible and technical job in the Signals and Telecommunication section and was given a secretary and became very close to Debbie who was going through a traumatic break-up with her boyfriend of the time. At one point I even considered marrying her.

Then the Apostle of friendship struck and I became more and more intrigued with the Dominican Order, the Order of Preachers (the statue that started it all was given to Emmanuel Cathedral by Fr. Nick Humphreys who was 70 years older than me - to the day). I started corresponding with them and visited several of their houses throughout the country. I returned to the church as a daily server and communicant. I did small jobs for the Cathedral parish, which remained a spiritual home, though I belonged to another parish for Sunday worship and a weekly prayer group.

More and more the meeting with God in profound interior stillness and peace grew. I started praying the Divine Office (the prescribed prayer for those who have made religious profession) and even with a very active work life, home life, and social involvements, managed to juggle everything around this still and quiet centre of my being that I could return to more and more at will.

In the beginning of 1983 I left my work and the city of my birth, Durban. I started my formation as a Dominican in Maseru in Lesotho. The prayer rhythm of the house of formation and the growing discovery of all the aspects of Apartheid (there was a UN information centre in Maseru) grew. My political consciousness grew through the viewing of political material then banned in South Africa and contact with people like Joe and Jackie (killed in the 1985 raid), and the Hani family (Limphe was always a devout and faithful Catholic). I joined the crowds of militant young religious of that era who measured the success of their preaching in the number of whites who would walk out of a sermon in a huff.

During 1983 the postulants as we were then, came together for a winter course and our psychological evaluation. The latter was an utter and total disaster for me personally, and the psychologist turned me down. The religious sister psychologist was newly returned from Rome and her work under Fr. Rulla the Jesuit. The basic premise of the Rulla school is that a vocation is only possible to those from pure, untainted, happy, catholic family background. My irony betrays a great deal of anger at the school which has systematically destroyed religion in many parts of the world, since it appears to be a totally pelagian form of psycho mumbo-jumbo. The sister in question has confronted reality since then, I am happy to say. I, of course, was not worthy of Rulla. So I had Graham write me a reference (he being a fairly devout Jungian, which I remain to this day, and no fan of said sister's methods).

The committee who did the interview for entry into the noviciate decided to take their chances with me and I was accepted into the Noviciate. I was clothed in the habit of the Dominican Order. The Noviciate was also in Maseru and we were joined by several Zimbabweans. The Noviciate started with seven of us. It was the year I learned about anger.

Previously, though cured of traditional piety (miraculous statues, miracles, apparitions of Our Lady and locutions through saints and all the Hollywood elements of the Catholic life of faith), I had never been angry with God. Puzzled, in giddy love, remote, but not angry. In the noviciate year of '84 I learned that gift.

The first aspect was a deeper entry into scripture and the psalms which express all human emotions to God. The second was the growing awareness of the reality of Apartheid and my own people's contribution to the suffering of many. The third was the often explosive relationship between one English speaking South African, a Coloured man from the Cape, a Boer, and four militantly newly independent Zimbabweans who had lost family in the war. Though I had disagreements with the Zimbabwean brothers I grew closer to them in friendship than to my fellow South Africans and they often referred to me as the bridge in the community which allowed them to know and understand the other brothers, including our three priests (one British, one American, and one English colonial, born in India raised in Rhodesia and schooled in England - our Novice master).

I was angry at Apartheid, I was angry at Afrikanerdom, I was angry at the Black brethren, I was angry at the White foreigners and I was angry at my fellow South Africans who appeared more liberal and gung-ho revolutionary than myself but who could not maintain a decent personal relationship with anyone other than gung-ho revolutionaries. And, I was extremely angry at God for Apartheid, race, and my own confusion.

It was an emotional see-saw of a changing spirituality within me as well as changing interpersonal relationships confronted by this microcosm of the world and Southern Africa.

Whereas previously I would genuinely feel close to God in those moments of numinous encounter, moments which strengthened me until the next one, I was now riding a see-saw. There was both distance and growing closer to God in a real relationship that did not deny any emotion within me. I tended more and more to dump the whole lot before God in prayer, often accompanied, in private prayer, with expletives and a mentally slammed door. The honeymoon between God and me came to an end.

What also happened is that a sense of all-encompassing presence continued beyond moments of ritual prayer and worship into the everyday life. When you are very angry with someone, especially God, you tend to fulminate against Him all the time. I learned constant prayer and contemplation, but was not yet aware of it.

In 1985 I made my first profession for three years as a Dominican brother.

In the meantime the relationship with my family had deteriorated to almost nothing. My becoming a Catholic and entering religious life had been a grave shock to my grandmother, my only surviving natural grandparent. I am the eldest of my generation and the fact that she would have no great-grandchildren from me burdened her. She cut off communication and the rest of the family followed her physically tiny yet redoubtable lead.

Of the seven novices five made profession. Two Zimbabweans left during the course of the noviciate. We spent another, more serene, year in Maseru doing our basic philosophical preparation for academic studies. My relationship with the Zimbabweans was closer than with the other two South Africans, though we had all muddled through most of the issues of the noviciate. My sacramental life remained a source of great joy and personal contact with the vulnerable Jesus I had encountered on my first visit to Emmanuel Cathedral.

Though now and then the religious atmosphere would be a little oppressive and I would escape to visit friends I had made at the USSR embassy in Maseru. Of course travel to and from Lesotho became more and more difficult as the S.A. authorities became more and more suspicious.

Due to circumstances we were divided for our further studies. The Zimbabweans and the Engelsman went to England and the two who remained went to St. Joseph's in Cedara, Natal.

1986 was the year of the great state of emergency. I found the life and prayer at the seminary truly nourishing. Those years remain extremely precious to me. I blossomed spiritually and academically. After the junior students' concert in March of 1986 I was chosen to play the lead in the seminary musical, *Jeremia*, which was performed in early June. It was a thinly veiled satire on the South African situation and I did not have to act much to play the revolutionary young prophet making dire predictions of disaster unless people changed. We had a truly talented musician in the student body so there were a number of good show stoppers as well.

The state of emergency dawned when Fr. Theo Kneifel and Fr. Larry Kaufmann were picked up by the security police in the early hours of the morning. We joined the university students later that morning in a protest meeting and decided to take a strongly worded document to the commissioner of police in Pietermaritzburg. It was midday when we left the hall of the university so no one had heard the retroactive declaration of the state of emergency.

A little way down Durban Street we were surrounded by police dogs and riot squad men and given five minutes to disperse. It was impossible to do, being so completely surrounded, so about 40 seminarians ended up being detained, dressed in our full habits. Stuffed into two police cells in Howick we spent two weeks in those cells, getting used to public bodily functions and smells (showers were not working for the first week), and generally building up a very intense experience of community and prayer. It was an experience of religious community I will never forget. The songs from *Jeremia*, the musical, were often heard in that jail. We also prayed in the traditional chorus contra chorus manner between the two cells. Shouting out the psalms of the divine office twice a day in two choirs separated by a jail wall.

The realisation of how God participated in that incarceration resolved some of the anger. Later when I read Eli Weisel's *Night* the execution scene stands out as something I had truly experienced, though in a different way. Weisel tells the story of several camp members in Hitler's Germany being hanged in retribution for an escape, including a young lad in his teens. A voice cries from the crowd forced to watch, 'where is God in this?', and another voice answers, 'there He is, the young man dying'. It was something no theology of Incarnation could ever teach. That utter closeness of God in all human situations.

At that time the seminary also experienced the establishment of the Broederbond, of which I was the only white member. We were a group of Afrikaans speaking South Africans, a friendship circle really, that used to get together, relax, sometimes have one too many to drink and speak all the colours and variety of Afrikaans in the country. At that point as well I was asked to participate in the translation of the Catholic Order of Service, the Sacramentary into Afrikaans. So my journey from anger back to my people started.

Travels with a Boer

One thing I found was a profound insight into scripture. I did not touch the Bible as an academic object (still don't!) but as the lived experience of generations of people with the God Who is Close. Emmanuel. That early memory of the sermon on Hagar and Ishmael put me in touch with those great and frustrating characters of the Old and New Testaments as real people. I could read through the religious language and pious accretions of the ages and touch the raw, the bawdy, the scandalous, and the deeply loving commitment to God. This grew as I grew, and grew, more proficient in Greek and Hebrew. I made deep and real friends among the angry old men, the lascivious women and the plainly confused heroes of the Old and New Testaments. Fairly early on my future as a teacher of Scripture was decided upon by my superiors in consultation with me.

I look back on those days with deep affection. God began to fill all the moments I had previously kept from Him. Friends for life were made, some who chose to leave the ministry. Some of those have married, had children and made a success of their lives, others live in destitution and have real problems. I have contact still with many and the bond of love which grew in the year of *Jeremia* remains as strong as ever. We might not meet all that often, but we meet as soul-mates. Some experience for the moment real personal problems, yet the human heart is an unfathomable phenomenon, and though they suffer distance from the church now, we meet not as priest and alienated layperson, we meet as genuine friends who are temporarily separated by time and circumstance.

In 1988 I made my final vows as a Dominican and tied myself to the Order for life. In that year a very close friend at the Seminary, a Namibian, decided to leave his course of studies and return to secular life. As another student was being Ordained to the priesthood near the Angolan border, I decided to attend the Ordination, which was also the opportunity to go and visit in Windhoek. I left Pietermaritzburg with flu and arrived in the North of Namibia with pneumonia. I was sick as a dog. There was a profound spiritual experience tied in with all this. In my personal spiritual life I had been exploring more and more in the field of Catholic authors on Zen Buddhism (Zen was spiritual flavour of the month at that point as well - there are fashions in spirituality as there is in everything else).

I bought in Durban, a little chalk statue of the Buddha in the earth-witness posture, the moment of his enlightenment. I regarded it as the only available icon of Christ in meditation (which, other than a few kitsch Gethsemane scenes has not been an object of Christian iconography).

The serene face, the hands in touch with self and the earth, appealed to me and the spirituality I was exploring at that time. At much the same time I also discovered the Afrikaans poet Sheila Cussons, who writes poetry in the tradition of the great Spanish Mystics. She is Catholic.

Being a Jungian in terms of my personal preference and my training for the priesthood, dreams are important. I had a dream that year, soon after my illness and the loss of my Namibian friend (the fact that he is a Nama, plays a role as well). I was in a shop and this wizened old bushman was the proprietor. There were all sorts of statues of Buddha and various Hindu deities for sale. I was asked to choose one. One of the statues was my own little chalk 'Christ at Prayer'. As I came closer to it and reached out for it, all the images fell down and shattered and I could not grasp it. The old man simply said, "You cannot cling to any image of God". This exploration of the unimaginable God has remained with me since then.

Near the end of that year my granny had a mild heart attack. She decided that it was time to make peace and called to see me. I went home to talk it over with my father and mom and my step-granny gave me a dressing down. She warned me not to tell my granny that I was still involved with the priesthood, since it would cause her to die on the spot and her death would be on my conscience. At that point my granny lived with her eldest daughter and her husband on a smallholding near Richmond, Natal. I arrived, granny greeted me with a hug and peering under my elbow (she was a tiny woman) remarked with great interest, "Oh, is that one of the church's cars?"

1988 saw me ordained to the Diaconate, and for the first time I was licensed to preach without supervision. I was clothed in the vestments of a deacon by my Protestant father and step-mother. I found preaching an utterly fulfilling ministry and a real gift, trying always to make the words of Scripture come alive in the eyes of my listeners.

In 1990 I was ordained to the priesthood, with the entire family (except for Oom Tjaart, but then he is not the most liberal of people anyway) at the ordination, including my granny who had suffered a stroke weeks earlier but insisted on getting well enough to attend my ordination. I finished my studies at the end of that year and was appointed to assist in the parish of Bronville in the Free State, near Welkom. The plan was that I would spend nine months gaining pastoral experience and then leave for Rome to undertake further studies in Scripture.

Die Vrystaat en sy Dinge

As it turned out I spent 5 years in Welkom. I was appointed parish priest in Bronville and Odendaalsrus at Easter of '91 and parish priest of Welkom town in 1992. There is very little time for personal or community prayer in the pastorate.

I was also appointed to the Provincial Council of the Order in South Africa and the Inter-Africa Commission of the Order for all of Africa. Also school chaplain to the two schools in Welkom and carrying out a pastorate in four languages.

I just had to trust that God was there most of the time, and slowly became aware that, in fact, God was tangibly close all the time. The car to and from meetings, or parish events, or mining accidents, or crises in the hospitals, or crises with teenagers from the school and parish, or political turmoil in Bronville, or the latest murder of a shopkeeper in the parish, or the death of a seriously ill parishioner, or comforting

a strange family when one of their members died on the roads near Welkom, or a million other things, became my chapel and place of prayer that would not be interrupted by the telephone. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, parish, and school events followed a never-ending cycle together with political mediation and the administration of the Order in South and all of Africa.

There was a sense of loss of the time I had so freely available at seminary to grow in prayer. But there was a real spiritual growth in those too, too busy days in Welkom. I remember one Monday (my "day off" which happened in truth about once every four months!) which was fraught with practical problems of parish administration and upkeep, community life among the two priests in the religious house (myself and a retired man in his late 70's then - a genuine Dutchman with a genuine stubborn streak), some or other family blow up, problems within the Portuguese community, a stream of beggars at the door, and heaven knows what else. There was a point, just when evening fell and I made my way from my office to my bedroom on the other side of the priest's house, when I looked up, shook my finger and said, "That is IT! Stop this right now and give some peace and quiet or I'll kick Your butt!" The words were not even cold when the telephone rang with a teenager in a panic about a friend threatening suicide. I agreed to go along. Put the phone down, burst out laughing, "Right You've won, but You are simply going to have to handle this one on Your own, I am just going along for the ride!" It worked out all right and the energy and attention span was given me to sort through the crisis. But my spiritual experience took on more of the quality of a deep, deep friendship in which nothing much needed to be said, and anything could be said without any fear whatsoever of the bond of love suffering. I am fortunate to have that relationship with God and with a number of close friends in my life.

In the end I was teetering on the edge of burnout. My mother's breakdown so many years earlier made me keenly aware of the dangers of taking on too many emotional burdens. I had decided to remain in parish ministry until my responsibilities on the two governing bodies of the Order were completed. One task remained before I could leave the country. It was given to me in 1995.

Namibia

The Redemptorist Congregation specialise in parish missions. A sort of revival of parishes through two weeks of house visiting and a week of preaching. I felt that Welkom needed such an experience since they had been hearing only my voice for a number of years already. They are booked years in advance, but I was able to arrange Welkom in 1995 on condition that I join their preaching team in Grootfontein because they were an Afrikaans preacher short.

15 years after leaving as a soldier I returned as a priest. The preaching team lived at Mariabronn and went into Grootfontein every day, where we visited and preached our revival. Some remembered the soldier and I was reduced to tears by the gratitude of some of the sisters who welcomed the boy soldier become priest.

I visited the 'skietbaan' in Tsumeb where I spent the last part of my National service. Every building had been torn down and the pieces lay scattered around. Oshivello was now a Namibian forces base and I was not allowed in.

Returning I detoured via Hentiesbaai (where I spent my one legitimate pass) and through the desert road from Uis. A place of unutterable beauty and serenity. I have a deep, deep love for the Namib desert and went to say my temporary goodbyes.

The circle was completed visiting my Nama soul-mate his wife and young son in Windhoek. There had been a three year break in our being physically in each other's presence but none at all in our friendship. We will both be in our 40's when we meet again.

Travels to Rome

At Easter 1996 I bid farewell to the parish and came to Rome to continue my studies. I had a long talk with my granny before coming here, we both knew the end was near. My brother had married and his wife was pregnant with their first son. I knew that granny would go soon after the baby's birth. Alex was born in August and granny died in November.

Here in Rome one is surrounded by the externals of the faith. Every corner has its church, there are chapels aplenty and the people live in familiarity with the faith. My academic life is fairly intense and being a Dominican in later formation I can make use of the exemption to absent myself from the community prayer. I mostly celebrate the Eucharist in private. And my experience of God is deepening. My sense of God's presence is more acute now that I have the time and the distance from the mad rush of too many responsibilities back in South Africa. I also have the distance from the issues of South Africa and the more trendy streams of theology and spirituality which come and go. My room looks out on the forum and the Colosseum, perched as I am atop the Angelicum on the Quirinal hill. Here the experience of God tends to the timeless and the eternal. This is difficult to describe in any language but analogy, which as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the only way 'eff' the ineffable, but analogy has its limitations. I am deeply content in God's presence and relate the mystery of God in my life in a diverse number of ways.

I am always in a deep and loving friendship, which can have its spectacular moments of anger but does not doubt the love. As a Christian I believe in the Trinitarian God who is One. My human limitations have brought me to grow in a different way in each of the persons of the Godhead. The Father I sense as constantly close and embracing. The Son I sense in my exercise of ministry when Christ gives Himself to others through me, and I am touched by Him in them. Christ the companion and friend on whose shoulder I can cry, with whom I can discuss my dreams and frustrations, my temptations and my failings, my points of high insight when working on a text. The dialogue is almost constant and I am never, in fact lonely even though I am more alone now than I ever have been. The rhythm of a Dominican house of higher study is almost that of a contemplative monastery given over to total dedication in prayer. This is an international community of some 60 men. Some one forms friendships with, others remain faces to a great extent. There are very little external demands and your life is geared to your study, which for a Dominican is a very clear form of prayer. I get together with my friends socially once in a while for a beer or a movie outside of the community, but for much of the time outside of classes, meals, those conventual prayers I attend, and the Sunday liturgy, I am entirely alone and hardly ever lonely, my loving Companion and Friend is entirely close.

My relationship with the Spirit is more in the field of active ministry. I use the summer breaks to build up my experience of the church in the world by working in parishes around the globe. Sometimes the Spirit will upset a "brilliantly" planned and practised sermon (I never preach from notes) and I will find something much better emerging from my own mouth. The Spirit has the most wry sense of humour of the Godhead and is constantly surprising me with myself and things I thought I would never be capable of in ministry. He breaks down the barriers of my natural introversion and contemplative lifestyle. Sometimes I find myself stumbling through a sermon feeling totally inarticulate and then find that it has touched someone deeply in their relationship with God. I find that I am deeply happy in ministry to the dying (something which is not natural to me) and last year in Canada grew in the grace of that ministry. Ministry to the dying in Welkom was usually in terms of unnatural death, accident, murder, sudden cancer - had very few peaceful passings. In Canada I dealt more with people who were dying naturally and that was a deep grace. I had previously experienced that aspect of graceful dying only twice in the five years in Welkom.

My daily Eucharist (which is the custom for Catholic priests) is sometimes profound and often simply a habit. I do not change that rhythm of liturgical prayer because even the most mechanical meeting with God has profound spiritual importance.

Even though I am physically alone I am in the midst of a vast community of the living and the dead, the communion of saints, whose friendship and love I feel. I will sometimes talk to my mother, my grandmother and grandfather (who played a significant role in my life but whom I have not here included), those I assisted at their deathbeds, and those whose funerals I have celebrated. In a very real sense there is a vast community of people I have absolutely no secrets from as they are present in the eternity of God's love and can judge my temporal actions, my human failings and moments of despair from the point of view of total knowledge and total love. In a sense I feel that some of that which I experience with the community gathered in God, is what I try to bring to persons I come face to face with. My loving cynicism has, I pray, more loving than cynic in it.

The darker moments come from being harsh with myself - some of the shock of the little boy reading Revelation in Afrikaans is still there - and with the silliness of the bureaucratic centre of the Church. Whenever I received a person into the Catholic church during my time in Welkom, I would sit them

down beforehand and give my 'whore' speech. The Church is the bride of Christ, the face of God in the world, the historical continuation of the life, mission, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the foretaste in history of the future, eternal, glory of Christ. She is also the whore ready to sell herself at the cheapest price. She has her share of clerics and laity who do real evil. Her true nature is as the sacrament of Christ, her behaviour from time to time is no more or no less than the confusion we experience in our own lives when we find we do not do the good we want to do. If you realise how much the church is like yourself you can have more sympathy and patience with the failure of her members by drawing closer to the truth of her nature. So too with ourselves. We are known by God (in the full Hebraic meaning of the word, not an intellectual exercise but a communion comparable to sexual union) from all eternity and we will be known for all eternity. Part of the Christian faith is to revel in that knowledge, in playful love and to live it in all playful, delightful, and earnest, loving seriousness.

The clerical bureaucrats can be as back-stabbing and vicious as anyone climbing the corporate ladder, the people of God can cause untold grief and suffering to others and each other. At the same time there is that warm embracing love often correcting, more often just pouring love, that I experience in my relationship to God. The moments of doubt at the church and the faith - and what professional does not experience that at their chosen vocation? - are always in the context of this profound relationship of pure love and gentle (or not so gentle) humour which makes me confront myself nakedly day after day and start finding what it is that God dreams I become in this life in co-operation with His (thank God) inexhaustible love and presence leading us to eternity.

What can I do at this moment which will upset what He knows is going to happen? Nothing really, since He has foreseen, in Love, every possible act I can undertake, woven them all in His plan for our eternal salvation. The story of my experience with God from that nine year old boy to this 38 year old priest shows that more than adequately.

OCCURRENCE OF THEMES IN INDIVIDUAL NMUs

1. Development and growth.

Person A: 1, 4, 5, 6, 24-25;

Person B: -;

Person C: 1, 9, 10, 13-14;

Person D: -;

Person E: 1-5, 7, 14, 32, 35-36, 55, 68;

Person F: -.

2. Theological insight

Person A: 2, 7, 22-23, 28, 31-33, 41-42, 44, 50-53;

Person B: 3, 5, 14, 18-19, 22, 36-38;

Person C: 3, 19-20, 33, 66-67;

Person D: 1, 6, 36, 42-44, 47-49;

Person E: 13, 18, 20, 30, 34, 51, 53-54, 67, 77, 98, 105-108;

Person F: 18-20.

3. Paradox/Dialectical tension

Person A: 3, 8, 10, 18, 34, 36-39;

Person B: -;

Person C: 6, 11-12, 38-40, 58-59;

Person D: 23-25, 31-32;

Person E: 6, 57, 92, 100-102, 109;

Person F: 1-3, 15-16.

4. Direction

Person A: 9, 47;

Person B: -;

Person C: 30-32, 53-57;

Person D: 10-11, 14-17;

Person E: -;

Person F: 24-25, 27-31.

5. Creation

Person A: 11-14, 27, 40;

Person B: 23-28, 31-34;

Person C: 43-48;

Person D: 20, 45;

Person E: -;

Person F: 7-8, 21, 34-35.

6. Submission to a higher power

Person A: 15, 21, 43, 46;

Person B: -;

Person C: -;

Person D: 2-3, 9, 33, 37-41;

Person E: 119-121;

Person F: -.

7. Beyond the rational

Person A: 16-17, 19-20, 35, 45, 54;

Person B: -;

Person C: 2, 4-5, 17-18, 21-24, 35, 60-65;

Person D: 8, 50-51;

Person E: 40-43, 59, 60-62, 64;

Person F: 4-6, 17.

8. A sense of a presence

Person A: 29-30, 48-49;

Person B: -;

Person C: 7-8, 28;

Person D: 4-5, 28, 34-35;

Person E: 46-47, 56, 63, 69;

Person F: -.

9. Relationship

Person A: -;

Person B: 1, 11-13, 15, 39-40;

Person C: 15-16, 25-27, 29, 34;

Person D: 7, 21-22, 26-27, 29, 46;

Person E: 22-24, 31, 65, 70-73, 79-86, 93-95, 97, 99, 110-114, 117-118;

Person F: 9-11, 22, 26, 32-33.

10. Love

Person A: -;

Person B: 2, 4, 6-10, 16-17, 21;

Person C: -;

Person D: -;

Person E: -;

Person F: -.

11. Contemplation/Inner feeling

Person A: -;

Person B: 20, 29-30, 35, 41-44;

Person C: -;

Person D: -;

Person E: 15-16, 21, 26, 37, 74;

Person F: -.

12. Suffering/Death/Dying

Person A: -;

Person B: -;

Person C: 36-37, 41-42, 49-52;

Person D: 12-13, 18-19;

Person E: 28-29, 87-91, 96;

Person F: 12-14, 23.

13. Anger

Person A: -;

Person B: -;

Person C: -;

Person D: -;

Person E: 17, 19, 25, 27, 66;

Person F: -.