

TANGAZA COLLEGE

*THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA*

# From System To Story

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Signed..........

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## INTRODUCTION

"Once upon a time .....", that is common phrase; easy to oppose a truth but impossible to resist a story. Many spiritual teachers of humanity, like Buddha and Jesus brought to light their teachings in stories. Through stories they warmed the way into hearts of their listeners, and broke down barriers hindering human hearts from "touching" the divine.

In the light of the revival of story telling and increased interest of many for narrative theology I would like to give my thoughts to this subject. This research will be combined with my reflections upon the theological system used for the preparation of future ministers at Tangaza.

I feel we are still dominated by creeds, catechisms which form our thought patterns. Our theological preparation for the near future ministry in Africa takes an analytical path which fits very well to our computer age. Our "knowledge energy" stressing rational and logical patterns in theology, stands in a dilemma with hungry people for experience of God and holistic vision of their lives. I think the revival of story-telling here in Africa calls louder than anywhere else. African culture fades away from its imaginative elements of life, from story-telling. People have stopped telling stories. Perhaps this fact too, has contributed to the lack of personal contact among the people.

We are on the threshold of a new face of Evangelization of Africa. The recent post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa" No.11 says that: "... the local Churches of Africa hold a rightful place in the communion of the Church, that they are entitled to preserve and develop their own traditions without in any way lessening the primacy of the chair of Peter."

In connection with this quotation I think that storytelling is very much part of the African culture, as the preservation of values and its developments.

The same concern for the revival of story-telling should find its place in theology. We should involve in our theological studies the elements of imagination and feelings. Maybe in such an approach to theology we would find it easier to express it to the people without lessening its gist.

In the world at large there is already a well-established section of theology called "Narrative Theology" with leading theologians such as John Shea, John Navone, William Bausch. This narrative approach to theology raises many important issues. One of them is that story could be a very good means to transmit the intellectually elaborated theology to simple people who search rather for something to nourish their feelings and imagination. However, this requires preparation.

A Minister engaged in storytelling must be able to interpret stories, and must understand how the Christian story finds resonance in the hearts and minds of story-hungry people.

The whole theme of storytelling covers a large field. In my paper I will be selective. I want to depart from the theological context, look at the narrative reality of a man, then look closely at story itself and its teller and finally I will bring story to a pastoral context. In the first chapter I will try to make a move from a theology embodied in system to story. The following chapter, "Towards theology of Story" will insert us in the broad context of a story.

The third chapter is devoted to the pastoral application of storytelling in the area of Catechetics, Liturgy and moral teaching of the Church. At the end of this paper, in the appendix I would like to give some practical suggestions for the storyteller.

# CHAPTER ONE

## FROM SYSTEM TO STORY

Twenty years ago the notion of story or the notion of experience on the ground of Fundamental Theology in Catholic Seminaries would have been seen as a strange foreign body. Today many theologians are interested in Narrative Theology seeing there a possible key for the expression of dogmatic truths. David Tracy sees theology as an inquiry into "the meanings present in common human experience and the meanings present in Christian tradition"<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, not only on the ground of theology, human and religious experience started to play a very important role. However many are still not persuaded to enter into discussion on this ground which seems to take one away from reality. Some see narrative theology as a trap which might snatch away the clarity and systematic face of long theological labour. However, not long ago we had the great event of the Second Vatican Council which set us free from the bondage of a sub-systematic theological "packet". Faith searching understanding slides on the surface of science to the extreme other side where understanding searches for faith. Systematic theology developed only one of the faculties of the human mind. In the process of preparation of priests in the seminaries, the ability of intellectually grasping the elements of systematic theology was always well prized. Often it was judged whether one had a vocation to the priesthood or not on the basis of the intellectual abilities of a candidate. Experience in theology was suppressed to the level of individual relationship with Christ. Young priests leaving seminaries preached theology to ears that could not hear. In such a way I think it was a form of return to Judaism.

Priests were the ones who "KNEW" God, who "UNDERSTOOD" how God operates in the world. That created two types of people: clergy empowered in systematic theology and the common folk. People had their own theology containing feelings, imagination and narrative elements. Through different sodalities, associations and so forth, they were manifesting their

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<sup>1</sup>"Blessed Rage for Order", New York, 1975., p.34 in Chicago Studies, 1982, Vol. 21, No 1, p.8

dynamic relationship with Christ. It would be difficult to say what their actual experience of God was. Looking at the expressions of their faith we find a kind of experience woven into story, and now unfolding in narrative form. From collections of literature we know that people of the past told stories and lived by them. Those stories produced heroes and saints. In stories people found elements of truth which they needed to live, to hope for something, to desire honourable things. Unfortunately the scientific explosion in the beginning of our century pushed story-telling into a dark corner; stories became good only for children. Since then only scientific proofs claimed truth. All theological investigation wanted to be reliable to the modern mind, therefore they had to comfort themselves by the usage of scientific approaches as the object of investigation. Now we are slowly realizing, especially in theology, that we have forgotten about a great part of man which can not be approached scientifically. We began looking at man as one, whole reality. Today, when we speak about truth which refers to the person we mean, truth which affects the whole person. In this context I would say that the person rather resembles the story than something systematic. This I see especially as significant when God and man come into dialogue. In that mysterious human-divine dialogue it seems to me that any human system finds it difficult to stand up against story which provides the field for surprise and never ending participation of the whole man. I like the old story of the Jewish Rabbi who pleaded with God through story. "When the great Rabbi Israel Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciples, the celebrated Magid of Mesritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I say: do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer", and again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more would go into the forest and say. "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient". It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rishyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this

must be sufficient. And it was sufficient. God made man because he loves stories".<sup>2</sup>

How did it come to be that people defined God's story in systematic terms? It seems that God's story and our stories are somehow original experiences. In the course of time something happened to our mutual stories. People gifted with intelligence began to reflect on our mutual stories. In due time they began to draw conclusions and finally (and rightly so) they codified such conclusions into propositions, systems and creeds. The result has been what we call systematic theology. But it quickly was noted, that such theology is not the raw experience of our stories itself. It is intellectual sorting out of experiences in order to talk about them philosophically. All this gave rise to Christian idealism.

Theologians while doing theology tried to formulate clear definitions in written form. In one way or another this closed up Christianity into creeds and dogmas. People were to learn it, apply it to their lives, and not ask questions. The whole religion was seen as something ideal, up there, far away, waiting to be described by the theologians and then dished out to the people. In this context Marxists saw religion as an escapism from reality and as "opium".

Christianity in its nature is opposed to idealism in this sense. Apparently our religion resembles idealism, and today many people still see Christianity like that. It is caused by false Christian consciousness which projects images and meanings of Christ. Often believers are not aware or not able to draw the line between the realism of Christianity and its idealistic face. All of us often fall into the trap of projecting the meaning of Christ instead of finding those meanings of Christ in the practicing of our religion. We forget that: "the practice of Christian belief and Christian theology, are appropriately characterized as "ideological".<sup>3</sup> Christian meanings fall on the ground of our daily Life: Love, charity, compassion.

Our theology can be accused of being "Ivory-tower theology". If theologians still appeal to higher truths apart from human experience, then it is true that such theology has an idealistic nature. But if our approach to theology is like the one of Archimedes' who leapt out of his bathtub saying "Eureka" (I've found) then the idealistic outcome of theological conclusions would

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<sup>2</sup> Elie Wiesel, The Gates of the Forest, (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Huerwas & L. Gregory Jones, ■Why Narrative?■ Readings in Narrative Theology, U.S.A.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989, p. 114

be fully justified. In this sense we speak about the "ideological" character of religious experience which is expressed in theological language. Practice of faith and theological reflection, which by its nature bears ideological ground, must both be engaged in producing meanings and ideas. Theological idealism must be ordered to be brought down to reality, and I think, should be confronted with critiques. One of the many ways to do so, would be to discover something in our lives which is at the same time very real and on the other hand idealistic.

We are familiar with myth, parable and story, and they do not require special discovery, but maybe a re-discovery of their depth and power which are fashioned by our desires, fantasies, longings for something ideal. We long for discoveries of our reality in an idealistic light.

I personally agree with those who assert that in our theological expressions we lose at least one dimension: A NARRATIVE. We tend to forget that systematic theology is sooner or later only commentary on the original event. If we work enough behind the theology, we are going to get down to the story. Thomas Driver says the same thing in his book: Patterns of Grace. "A number of theologians recently have become interested in the importance of stories. They sense that all our logical scientific and theological discourse is secondary... I have long thought that theology is to religious narrative as literary criticism is to literature - commentary upon a more basic form of expression. ... I am one of the number of theologians today who believe that theology has in the course of time removed itself too far from its roots in narrative"<sup>4</sup>

If we look at the story-teller we notice that he explores in different directions. Conscious of his responsibilities he helps his audience to "shape" their experiences, to make sense of their world, he encourages them to live the reality in better, new ways. On the contrary, ideological stories often discourage audiences from ever being allowed to touch an illusion, ever being allowed to experience it in the way the reality is experienced.

In the course of my theological studies I had a few difficulties. As future pastor and teacher of faith I ask myself in which way could I transfer the theology I studied to the people? First of all I ask myself: "What place the story has in my life, how does it affect me personally?"

In brief, I would like to pour out my fascination for stories in relation to the human person.

Once I attended a seminar in Heikima College, and now I do not remember anything of its

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Driver, Patterns of Grace: Human experience as Word of God, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), XXIII.

content, except a story which was told there to illustrate something, but now I do not remember what. So:

### **A. People remember Stories**

People remember stories long after they have forgotten the abstract word. Research confirms that we have the capability to remember stories for a significantly longer time than content that is couched in abstract language. Little wonder that Jesus used stories or parables to communicate his teaching. Who can forget the wayward son, the good Samaritan, the lost sheep, invited guests to the wedding, or the treasure in the field? His appeal to our imagination is an invitation to go beyond our stereotype and rational thinking, our idols and prejudices. His vision of the reign of God helps us to imagine a very different world, one in which people love, accept, and care for one another. Through his parables, Jesus turned things upside down so that we might begin to penetrate the mystery of the kingdom of God. And yet he used ordinary people and things in his stories - house-wives, sheep and coins - so that we might know that God's Kingdom is present in our ordinary lives.

### **B. Stories are Communal**

Stories derive from the communal experience and they aim at community to be experienced. Wisdom of the past codified in the story awaits to be deciphered by the listener. However, each of us listening to the story discovers common elements, and particular ones which touch us personally. One of my favourite stories is the tale of a man, boy, and donkey going to the market. The man and the boy tried to please everybody and only succeeded in offending everybody. I think the general message of this tale is "you will never please everyone". This story is very meaningful to me. It carries a particular message which is a guiding principle for my life. The message for me is: "Listen to what others say but do not conform your actions to that as an ultimate truth". On several occasions in my life I have had to make difficult decisions that I knew would upset people. I remembered the story of the man, boy, and the donkey.

The best example of communal story is our salvation story. The community of God the Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit communicates the great story of human beings. We listen to that story in community, in large part we understand the same message and, as community, we feel the

need of sharing it with others. Our liturgy, prayers, moral life derive from listening to God; stories have communal references. The Vatican Council struggled to re-connect the past with the emergence of new theologies and pastoral directions. The upsurge of interest in the lives of the saints and a return to the life of the first Christians are just two expressions of the yearning of the Christian community to be faithful to its original story.

### **C. Story is an effective tool for teaching**

Religious education engages both teachers and students in the story of God in our world. As a teacher I can be a good storyteller if I draw from many resources now available to me: the stories of Scripture, my own life experience, stories from literature, traditional stories overheard here in Africa, stories from the media. Then in the context of teaching I can use them in a variety of ways; for example, as oral narrative, drama, song, audiovisuals, reading or poetry.

I gather resources for stories from magazines, T.V., books, from other people. Above all I remember stories from my own life: stories of surprise, discovery, pain, celebration, success and failure and these I share with those I teach.

When telling a story, first I try to know the story verbally. Then I try to feel the story intimately before I share it - its moods, sequence and climax. It is important to look directly at my audience as I tell it and thus I invite the audience to involvement. While telling a story an important thing is the use of voice intonation, gestures, pauses and direct speech so that the story has the maximum impact.

In the process of integration of theology into my personality, I ask myself how to understand and absorb moral theology so that it might help me to live a better life and help me to teach others to live better lives. At the present time I think we have a problem with the basis of rational expressions of morality. Theologians produce more and more theories and solutions in this field, and still they are unsatisfactory.

Stanley Hauerwas says: "Contemporary ethical theory has ignored or rejected the significance of narrative for ethical reflection ..... this has been a profound mistake resulting in a distorted

account of moral experience"<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary ethical theories have tried to secure for moral judgments an objectivity that would free such judgements from subjective beliefs, wants, and stories of the agent who makes them. Such an outlook on the part of ethics is the result of an impersonal rationality.

Many have tried to free the objectivity of moral reason from narrative by arguing that there are Basic Moral principles, procedures or points of view to which a person is logically committed when engaged in moral action or when engaged in moral action or judgment. The standard of moral judging simply ignores the fact that most of the convictions that charge us morally are like the air we breathe - we never notice them. Moral judging attempts to separate our moral notions from their narrative context by trying to ground or derive their meaning from rationality itself. I think that is why it has been difficult to explain why moral controversies have no satisfactory solutions.

I would propose, "Let's return to story".

How can story affect ethical judgment and the whole ethical story?

Ethics deals explicitly with reasons for acting. The trick lies in turning reason into a form proper to acting. The moral actions are accomplished by practical wisdom: a type of wisdom which can not claim to be science. Here man simply regards something as good for him or bad. The story has the capacity to shape man's nature which is not rationality in itself but something more. Narrative forms have the power to appeal to that "something more" and thus influence our moral actions.

The field of a story is action that is why any active response to the story allows that story to touch our depth where our "character" lies. That character is not something theoretical but a real motor that shapes our personality. When story enters deep enough into us, first it tries to discover the inner structure of our actions, then it displays the system according to which our actions are connected with one another, finally the story may affect the development of our character. This is the real success of the story, if it is able to come to the level where the measureless capacity of the human spirit lies. That character may be regarded as a form of language which embodies a type of life which is already in us and, for exploring it, needs a story.

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<sup>5</sup> Ed. Stanley Hauerwas & L. Gregory Jones, Why Narrative: Reading in Narrative Theology. W.M.B., Eerdmans Publishing Co., U.S.A., 1989, P. 158.

Another question which I ask myself is: How am I preparing myself for my future ministry and how am I going to translate the theological knowledge given to me in a way that the people would understand?

Our education for ministry should in theory embrace the full spectrum of needs and services that form the agenda of the life of the Christian church. However, as in science, pastoral education is more and more fragmented by specializations. I think even if we are specialized in the particular field of pastoral theology we never lose two aspects of our ministry. We should know how to listen to people's stories and then we should know how to tell the Christian story that would resonate in the hearts and minds of a story-hungry people.

The renewed interest in storytelling is still in its infant stage. "Some find it hard to take it seriously, being more engaged by the entertainment that stories supply than by their revelatory and creative capacity"<sup>6</sup> So far there is no system worked out able to match theology and story. The expert in this field is John Shea who through his teachings and publications has shown himself to be a superb story-teller and theoretician in describing the use and the potential of stories. I like his description of the goal of a story in pastoral theology: "The goal is not to translate into another language what is already written or spoken to distill a meaning as if clarifying what the other was trying to express. Rather it is to form a communion with the world of the other, appreciating the horizons within which the other lives, feeling empathy for the feelings that form part of the other's experience, sensing the network of social relationships that support or bind the other"<sup>7</sup>

The world hungers for God's values more insistently than ever. People starve for peace in their lives, neighbourhood and in the whole world. We, as the ministers to these people, after long preparation are expected to be able to help everyone to grow spiritually.

To avoid the danger of pouring out onto the people the kind of theology we learn for years, I have proposed in this chapter a return to story as a possible means of transferring systematic theology into "people's theology". People are not buying set formulas any more, or pious platitudes redolent of an era gone by that did not succeed in bringing people to a spiritual awakening.

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene W. King, "Storytelling and Christian Faith", Chicago Studies, 1982, No.1. vol. 21 p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.16

There is an anguished search, sometimes confused in its direction, for a more liberal outlook. Modern man, mired in profound cultural change, first wants to know who he is, what imprisons his soul, what stands in the way of spiritual progress. He wants to rediscover the God beyond Laws, norms, doctrines not made flesh, words estranged from life. If we want to make Christianity credible we have to find the ways of plunging into the depth of the human spirit. As I have already mentioned, that could be done by means of a story. However, before we take this tool into our hands we'd better look at it more closely, and examine it more carefully.

# CHAPTER TWO

## TOWARDS THEOLOGY OF STORY

Interpretation and search for meaning with the aid of story is already quite well known. Long ago Plato employed myths to illustrate his philosophy and thus he could communicate visions of truth that ordinary language could not describe. Jesus through parables tried to indicate what he meant by the phrase "Kingdom of God". Preachers and theologians of the modern Church return to story as an effective and unique way of expressing some truth.

In this chapter I intend to look more closely at different characteristics of a story. However, it will not be an easy task because story is a very complex reality. Before I enter into any analysis of a story I want to show what kind of attitude I have towards stories and what type of tools I am going to use. Each of us looks at the world-story through different glasses; one, through a microscope, another through a telescope, still another looks at the world with the eyes of faith. Travelling through our lives we create our own stories which trace our patterns of acting. Each of us, in order to have his own identity, tells his own story, which consists of elements of the world story and of elements which are unique to each of us.

In this section I will concentrate on one's life-story told in connection to God's story, told to the whole human race. Here I will use as a help to me the book of John Navone entitled: "Towards a Theology of Story"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Navone, Towards a Theology of Story, St. Paul Publications., England: 1977

## **A. Faith as belief in a universal story**

A story of the human race has its beginnings and aim, and provides for us the context within which our personal story takes shape and finds its meaning. "To know God is compared to knowing universal story, that is, to participate in it"<sup>9</sup> Navone asserts that belief in a universal story is a confession that the reality is comprehensible, meaningful and good. One who wants to encounter the Lord of the Universe can do it only through the human story which relates to Him, which is the only means to speak of him at all. Story-telling which gives birth to faith in God is the discovery of the proper meaning of the universal story. Novelists, philosophers and theologians tell stories in order to find the STORY. Their stories are experiments in possibility which reach beyond the context of a story. All of us are plunged into the universal story which tries to become completed. Our unfinished selves seek fulfillment in the ultimate promise which God's story holds for us. Our desire to know ourselves implies our need to participate in the universal story. Participation is the framework within which faith achieves its conscious self-understanding and is called to recognition of its existence as a personal relationship to the universal story.

## **B. Story as pattern of participation in the World**

"Through storytelling we express our patterns of participation, and our transcendence in reality. Our reflection upon the world is conditioned by the images and symbols whose meanings emerge within the structure of stories"<sup>10</sup>. When we apply the same idea to the grounds of faith we could say that storytelling expresses patterns of our participation in the object of our faith. Expression of our faith involves also images and symbols which help us to portray our relationship and our experience. The stories which faith tells are the answers to basic questions about the purpose of our lives and of the world. They put us in the particular pattern of interpretation of the world and of God. Consequently from that set of interpretations we draw the meanings of our lives and of our deaths.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.31

### **C. The Key to Story is the experienced meaning**

In the present world we have problems with meanings. Different elements of our reality have different meanings to different people and to some they do not have meaning at all. In this context meaning may change its face or even lose its existence. Such an example could be the fact of slavery. Once upon a time this story had its own meaning, later in the time of the French Revolution some found slavery as meaningless while still others held it as a meaningful element in social structure. Today it is commonly accepted that slavery has no meaning from any view point. The meanings in this sense could have gone such a journey because they were products of the human mind.

As Navone rightly noticed, it is a different case in the search of meanings in a story that engages faith. "The stories which the faith tells us are not fully understood until their meaning is experienced. They bear on our existence and can not be grasped unless they are embodied"<sup>11</sup> The story that our faith tells presupposes the unity of thought with life, of language and belief with personal and public existence. We reflect on the meaning of faith stories and symbols only after we have lived the renewed life which they have communicated. Our reflection seeks to explain what the religious experience has embodied in the story and what meaning it really has in our lives.

Religious symbols and stories are addressed to the whole person; his heart, head, imagination and feelings. They appeal to the level of our being, where we know effectively.

Religious stories invite us to extend our sensibilities, to share some intuitions about what constitutes the ground of experience and its vital possibilities, to consider what is beyond the limits of the immediate perception.

### **Stories evolve actions**

Having made a few general observations about the universal phenomenon of a story, I would like to come down to the ground level of the Judeo-Christian religion. The life of a Christian in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

the broad sense has no beginning, no middle no end.

In our religion the experience of God is the essential element. Here I mean: an experience of the Christian story has a Christian beginning, there is always something that preceded it. The dynamic experience makes our religion unfold itself in action. Those actions are rather imitative than rule - bound. Michael Novak has wisely observed that "men seldom act according to principles and rules stated in words and logically arranged; they act, rather, according to models, metaphors, stories and myths".<sup>12</sup> Our actions are in a constant struggle to become a certain type of person. This I think emerges from the very nature of our religion, where the story of God determines the behaviour of the Christian communities.

### **A. The dramatic story of Salvation**

The Exodus and the Christ story are the fundamental Biblical stories which shape the Judeo-Christian community's sense of reality, both in expressing what the community is trying to be, and what it is actually doing. It is like in a drama where, through action, we recognize actors, audiences, and thus grasp the whole play. The most dramatic story told to us was the "story of salvation". Here we notice something more than just action on the world-scene. Judaism and Christianity live according to travel stories: the Exodus and the Christ story. However, Christianity comes into existence with its lived affirmation of the Christ story and its implicit re-interpretation of the Exodus story.

There is an outer and an inner component to the journey in the travel story. The outer journey moves through times and space: the inner journey moves deeper into the mystery of being. The outer journey is the plot; the inner journey is the meaning. The outer journey is the metaphor for the inner journey of the spirit. The inner journey accompanies the outer journey when the reader grasps the meaning of the travel stories. The Gospel of John, for example, tells the story of Christ's journey to the Father; an event which is resonant of Israel's path to life as a development in both the Mosaic and exilic Exodus accounts. The journeys between Galilee and Samaria in which Christ speaks the word of God as described in the "Book of Signs" are themselves signs of the

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Novak, The experience of nothingness, New York: Harper and Row, 1971., p.23

journey to the Father, which spans the entirety of Christ's life, culminating in his final return as the risen Son and Lord. These visible journeys are signs of Christ's inner movement towards the Father; they also describe the quality of our Christian Life, our religious experience as a personal vocation which is not yet actualized but by means of the journey looks forward to its fulfillment.

## **B. Jesus as Storyteller**

John Shea reminds us that the early Christian strategy in religious education was to gather the folks, break the bread, and tell the stories. The Christian Community faithfully followed the example of Jesus who gathered people together, celebrated companionship in the breaking of bread, and told stories and parables. Jesus the story teller used village anecdotes to teach lessons about the kingdom. His parables were little windows through which the values of his dream for humankind were seen. They are meant to disturb and energize us, and shake us from our lethargy. They challenge us to take a stand which is often in conflict with our culture. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), for example, symbolizes the unexpected visitations of God on the journey and challenges us to serve others as God serves. The mustard seed (Mt. 13:31-32) suggests possibilities even in the most obscure situations and challenges us to have an unswerving faith. By viewing our own lives in parables with opposite poles to be reconciled, we can relate to the different seasons of our life journey.

## Characteristics of a story

A gentile once came to Rabbi Shammai and said, convert me to Judaism on condition that you can teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one foot. With a rod in his hand Rabbi Shammai angrily threw him out. Then the man went to Rabbi Hillel and repeated his request. Convert me to Judaism on condition that you can teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one foot. Rabbi Hillel converted him and taught him as follows. What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor..... This is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary.<sup>13</sup>

The reason we read a story like this is because it is a story, and stories are innately compelling and as such they tend to repeat themselves. That is why, in a similar scene, another rabbi answered the question pretty much the same way. When his questioner accepted his answer but insisted on a further elaboration, what did he get? A story, of course ( Luke 10: 25-37). And he was not only compelled by the genius of the story to hear it all, but was trapped into providing its conclusion ( although the word “ Samaritan ”stuck in his throat and perhaps he used a circumlocution when asked who was the neighbor in this case and he answered “the one, I guess who showed mercy”).

According to me the story of the Good Samaritan contains all of the characteristics of a good story. In storytelling it is essential to be aware of those characteristics. In further reflections this will also help us to see the deeper dynamics of a story.

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<sup>13</sup> William J. Baush, Storytelling, Imagination and Faith, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic: 1991. p.25.

## A. Stories provoke curiosity and compel repetition

The example I could bring here could be some of the long, boring Sunday sermons, I heard. The moment a priest begins to tell a story the attention of everyone is at the highest point.

"Such curiosity that stories provoke is not an idle one; it is compelling. We really want to know what it is about, and how it will end"<sup>14</sup>

Good stories provoke curiosity and compel us to repeat them. A good story is like "good news," too good to be kept. For better or worse the story must come out. We have all caught a story at one time or another, and we have been caught by them, that is why we repeat them.

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<sup>14</sup>

Ibid. p.30

## **B. Stories are a Bridge to one's culture and roots.**

One of the most impressive stories I ever read was written by Alex Haley entitled Roots. Alex Haley found his roots in the stories that formed a bridge to his culture in Africa. As a boy, he used to sit on the front porch of his grandmother's house in Tennessee and listen to her tell stories about his ancestors. These stories went all the way back to a certain Kinte who had been kidnapped and sold into slavery while he was chopping wood near Kambay Bolongo. Fifty years after he heard such stories, Haley went to Africa to try to learn something of his roots and of his ancestry. He talked with many of the villagers in the backcountry. They told him of very old men called "giots" who are like gurus and who on special occasions told the centuries - old histories of clans and families. In fact, there were certain legendary griots who were known to narrate the facts of African history literally for as long as three days without ever repeating themselves. With this knowledge, Haley eventually found his own ancestral village. There he consulted the village griot who began the recitation of his village's story. When the griot came to the 1700s Haley was startled to hear him say that "Omorro Kinte begot Kunta...Kunta went away from his village to chop wood ... and he was never seen again" Haley couldn't believe his ears. Here in this backwoods African village a man who had lived all his life there was telling him the same story he had heard on his grandmother's porch.

It is not an isolated case but "every people, nation, and community have stories and myths that preserve and prolong the traditions that give them their identity. It is popular, especially in Africa that when a nation is in trouble, it often returns to its traditional stories to look for direction and healing, to regain a sense of what made it great in the past"<sup>15</sup>

If the people forget their stories, they do not know who are they, they have lost the point of reference of their identity. In such a context the culture is marked with amnesia.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.33

### C. Stories bind us to the universal human family

It is amazing to scholars that stories from diverse times and places on the earth are very alike. The themes are the same and often the very same wording and phrasing are used. It is suggested that behind those stories are the same fundamental motifs and patterns. Joseph Campbell explains the phenomena of a story saying:

".....It is now fairly agreed that the general continuity, and an occasional correspondence to the detail, can be referred to the psychological unity of the human species"<sup>16</sup>

No one can deny that we find such universal human themes in the gospels. Today, whoever listens to Jesus' stories with an open heart and true desire to renew his life, finds the way to rebirth

and spiritual renewal in the love offered by Jesus. Stories indeed reflect our common humanity and bind us to one another in a common destiny, apparently even beyond time and space. And to this extent Herold Goddard's comment in his book The Meaning of Shakespeare is quite on the mark: "The destiny of the world is determined less by the battles that are lost and won than by the stories it loves and believes in."<sup>17</sup>

### D. Stories help us to remember

What do the stories help us to remember? By telling stories we have afresh in us our past, our history, our glories and our shame. People today still tell stories of the Jewish holocaust, of Vietnam, of Nagasaki, precisely so that we do not forget what we have done, or can do to each other. I like the phrases of William R. White which states: "We are forgetful people. We need

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell, 848., in William J. Baush, Storytelling, Imagination and Faith, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic: 1991. p.35.

<sup>17</sup> Herold Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, Vol. 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 208.

storytellers. We need someone to lay the drama of God's love before us. We need to be reminded of the uncommon grace of God. We need to hear the stories of the almost -too-good-to-be-true promises of God, the story of good news in the midst of the world's bad news".<sup>18</sup>

## E. Stories use a special language

William Bausch, dealing with the special language used in stories, points out storyteller Robert Bela Wilhelm who distinguishes three kinds of language:

One is our daily talk of declarative sentences and explanation. This is our daytime talk. But, then, there is the other side. There is our nighttime talk. This is our dreams we have alluded to already and will see more of later. This nighttime talk of our dreams is the language of the subconscious with its marvelous images and fantasies. These images express our deepest selves.

Then, there is storytelling. This language is a combination of the daytime and nighttime talk; it bridges and unites both. Storytelling is daytime talk because it makes sense. It is night time talk because it is rich in images that, like a dream, can happen in a story but not in everyday life. So the story combines the two, giving us a more holistic version of reality. Consequently, stories lead us more deeply into ourselves.<sup>19</sup>

Have you ever watched a movie that really moved you? I did. "Brother Son and Sister Moon". The story affected me very much, really got "inside of me". I noticed that the story began its life in me on its own. I could not quite put into words what the effect was, but I felt its resonance, perhaps even a free-floating disturbance. I found it hard to discuss the picture even with my best friend, who also saw it. I have realized that, because I was caught up in the story I gained a special language known only to me.

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<sup>18</sup> William R. White, Speaking in Stories, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1982), 113.

<sup>19</sup> William J. Bausch, Storytelling, Imagination and Faith, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic: 1991, p.38.

## F. Stories restore the Original power of the Word

These days words have been devaluated extensively. When spoken, they're often used to deceive or solicit, as in commercials. When written, they tend to come out like computer printouts. But words have power, especially spoken words. The ancients knew this. To know something's name was to have power over it. That is why Adam could name the animals, but Jacob could not name the angel who wrestled with him. In the Old Testament, the word was called DABAR, meaning something of great power and potency. Here is a good example in Isaiah 55:11 "The word of God goes forth and will not return until it accomplishes its end"

Sometimes we forget that the word was spoken long before it was written. Perhaps many of us do not realize that the stories we read today in the Bible originally were in spoken form. In the course of time the ancient stories were torn apart from their storytellers and put down on the paper. Seeing such a picture of our Biblical stories I would conclude with William J. Bausch that "this means that the biblical stories were not meant to be privately read but to be publicly told and publicly heard. The Bible is a written oral voice and when orally proclaimed easily regains something of its story power"<sup>20</sup>

Stories:

In the Middle Ages most of the monks, like the general population, could not read. Every morning, however, they would meet in chapel in front of a large Bible. In silence they would listen while a literate monk read a single passage out loud. He would step back after this short reading, bow, and retire in silence. He would get up and read again - the same passage. And this he did over and over again until the chapel was empty. The idea was that as each monk got something out of the reading to take with him during the day he would leave. As the word invaded his life, he was ready for life. The word had power.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.42

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p43.

## G. Stories promote healing

Modern psychology uses storytelling to bring healing to people, especially the healing of deep hurts and memories from the past. The tool here is precisely imagination. It is not difficult to go back to the past through the imagination. Anyone of us can recall easily the sights, sounds, and the smell of the past. This powerful means does not simply serve to go back and retell a story of the past. Imagination is a wonderful tool that enables to release pains and hurts buried deep in the person. I think the famous preacher and story teller Anthony de Mello knew well about the healing power of stories. In his book The Prayer of the Frog he wrote: "Carry a story around in your mind so you can dwell on it in leisure moments. That will give it a chance to work on your subconscious and reveal its hidden meaning. You will then be surprised to see how it comes to you quite unexpectedly ... and brings you insight and inner healing"<sup>22</sup>

## H. Stories provide a basis for hope and morality

When people are in a hopeless situation the only way out, so to speak, is to imagine other possibilities and alternatives. It is the imagination, therefore that gives birth to hope. The Bible for example, is full of stories of a people, betrayed and betraying, who are caught up in moral and political death patterns. Jesus in his stories challenged his listeners to envision a different future. His parables were designed to provoke them into hope and into seeing a better way of living and acting.

Once a man picked up the morning paper and, to his horror read his own obituary! The newspaper had reported the death of the wrong man. Like most of us, he relished the idea of finding out what people would say about him after he died. He read past the bold caption which read, "Dynamite king dies", to the text itself. He read along until he was taken aback by the description of him as a "merchant of death". He was the inventor of dynamite and he had amassed a great fortune from the manufacture of weapons of destruction. But he was so moved

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony De Mello, The Prayer of the Frog, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand: 1990., p.XII.

by this description, that he did not want to be known as a "merchant of death" anymore. It was at that moment that a healing power greater than the destructive force of dynamite came over him. It was his hour of conversion. From that point on, he devoted his energy and money to works of peace and human betterment. Today of course, he is best remembered, not as a "merchant of death" but as the founder of the Nobel Peace Prize - - ALFRED NOBLE.

# CHAPTER THREE

## STORY IN THE PASTORAL CONTEXT

Ministry to others and for others really begins at the intersection between God and his people revealed in their stories and conversations. But if, on the contrary, ministry is seen as serving others, then disdain is not far behind. You serve and they do not respond. "No one turns out for anything", you complain. The people must be - are - indifferent and apathetic. How can one love such an uncooperative and unappreciative people? And all that you do for them! But if you leave this "serving" concept of people behind, and instead seek to enter into their conversations and stories, then you will be one with them. It will not be you and them, but we. We see this most dramatically in that well known story of Damien. We remember that frightening moment when he put his foot into the hot water after a futile day's evangelizing and felt nothing, the unmistakable sign of leprosy. That Sunday he got in the pulpit and did not begin with his customary "you leppers" but with "we leppers..." From that point on, his unsuccessful ministry is electric, fruitful beyond his wildest dreams. He has now entered their conversation. He is their story and once more a word has been made flesh, and dwelt among people.

Stories are not only a basis for ministry; they are also a fruitful guide to discerning when in ministry love must come before law.

"Tanzan and Ekido were once travelling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling. Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection. "Come on, girl" said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Ekido did not speak until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he could no longer restrain himself. "We monks do not go near females", he told Tanzan, "especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that? "I left the girl there", said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Reps, *Zen flesh, Zen bones*, (Rutland, V.T., C.E. Tuttle, 1975), quoted in *Let's Pray* 12 by Charles Reulemann, F.S.C., (Winona, Minn. St. Mary's Press, 1982), 74.

In this final chapter I would like to share some suggestions linking story to pastoral context.

## Stories and Catechetics

To pass on a tradition without telling of stories is unthinkable. "Augustine understood this vital link when he counseled Deogratias in "De Catechezandis Rudibus" to instruct his baptismal candidates by means of NARRATIO. Among other effects, Augustine intended that narrative should establish an atmosphere of happiness (Hilaritas), an outcome not unrelated to the desire of contemporary educators to have people "tell their stories" as a way of helping to establish the environment of mutuality prerequisite for theological reflection in common"<sup>24</sup>

In recent years there was noticed a shift in the field of religious education. With this revival we have less stress on orthodoxy and more on the affections. People do not so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched. They want to feel Christ who will lead them to a change of heart.

The kerygmatic renewal in Catechetics was associated with Joseph Jungmann and the achievements of the modern psychology. In the older vision of catechesis there was emphasis on history of salvation: God's progressive self-revelation in history, prefigured in the Old Testament, fulfilled in Christ and continued in the Church. In the late 1960s, the new decade of "experiential" Catechetics prevailed. This shift might be summarized as the movement from preacher to councillor; kerygma was subordinated to relationship. Teachers, who only a few short years previously had enthusiastically proclaimed the good news, now earnestly sought ways to provide experiences. Because revelation "happened in the now", educators subordinated salvation history to salvation unfolding in the present. Experiential Catechetics became so enamoured with the present that neither history nor story was luminous. Today narrative methods in catechetics are quite well known, but may be not yet be fully explored. As a future educator of catechists I would like to highlight a few characteristics of narration in catechetics.

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<sup>24</sup> Mary G. Boys, "Storytelling and Christian faith", Chicago Studies", vol. 21.1 (Spring 1982, 85.

Not every teacher is good in evoking life situations or other stories in the process of catechizing. Many have to help themselves by constant practice and preparation. The efforts made to convey the message in symbolical language will be fully rewarded, because facts and stories reflect the convictions and the insights of the teacher in a way that very few people can miss. I hope these few guidelines at least will help me to attain proficiency in this art.

When you prepare your catechesis, choose the illustrations that will not distract the attention of the group from the central points of your lesson. And when the moment comes for you to evoke these life situations or tell stories, you will find it easier always to keep the aim of your catechesis in mind. Facts and stories are not meant to entertain people or make it easier for them swallow the "pill" of a lesson. They should always be used to relate a particular message to life. Sometimes there are secondary elements in an illustration which capture too much attention from the listeners. They raise issues which are irrelevant to the topic.

Do not yield to every attractive illustration that comes. Otherwise you will lose sight of God's word and use illustrations just because they are compelling anecdotes. It is very tempting to go on telling stories just because people like to hear such anecdotes. Facts and stories are not an end in themselves. They have to be transparent and lead people to the mysteries of faith. Some illustrations are so long that they literally swallow the whole catechesis.

Relevant illustrations need to be explained. If you interpret them all the time, you may give the impression that you have to turn on another light to see the light that you have already switched on. If the life situations you evoke or the stories you tell are well chosen, your listeners will respond to them. They will naturally get hold of them and interpret them on their own. You have only to be attentive to their reactions and help them progress in the discovery of the truth, while respecting their freedom to accept or reject certain interpretations. Make sure that you do not impose your views on your students when the facts or the stories you narrate lead to various interpretations. And do not make these illustrations say what they do not say.

A good teacher knows how to narrate incidents of life as if he had witnessed what happened. He can't remain neutral. He has to put his heart into what he says and speak with feeling. That is possible only if he took time to get hold of these incidents and made them part of his own experience. Then he could really feel involved in his narration. As soon as he begins evoking an incident, he gives concrete details about the people and the surroundings where the action takes place. He describes the physical appearance of his characters and makes them think

aloud. He evokes the central scenes of the incident in detail so that those who listen to him may interpret the facts properly.

Make sure that the life situations you evoke or the stories you tell are of interest to the majority of your people. It may happen that certain events and stories will leave the audience indifferent either because they are not adapted to their age or mentality, or because they are too remote from their own experience. For example, the experience of sheep-tending will be of interest to people who live in a region where this kind of activity is known. For others, maybe fishermen, this kind of experience could be practically unknown and, consequently, without interest.

Remember also that people from urban centers are usually more reserved than people from rural areas. As they are often sophisticated, they do not easily respond to the same illustrations. Young people are evidently more sensitive to certain situations than to others. They can be deeply disturbed or even traumatized for the rest of their life when they hear about cruel incidents. Such horrifying events or stories upset their emotions and monopolize their attention in such a way that they can no longer reflect in an objective way on the meaning of these situations.

Sometimes I ask myself: Can I use untrue illustrations? I think there is nothing wrong with fabricating stories, but we should never give our audience the impression that these stories really happened. We have only to begin our narration by saying: "Let's suppose that one day ...." or similar introduction. Even if the stories you narrate have never taken place, they should remain credible. Otherwise they will cheapen the message you want to put across.

Keep in mind that nothing can turn people off faster than an anecdote which shows other persons in a bad light and can be interpreted as an insult thrown at them. In some instances, you will need the permission of the persons concerned to use illustrations in which they are involved. This happens especially when personal matters are at stake which require the strictest confidentiality. When these people allow you to use illustrations involving them, it is enough for you to indicate that permission was granted to narrate these incidents. You will do well to give credit to those whose illustrations you use by saying, for example: "a friend of mine told me..."

In conclusion, if it is true to say that God reveals Himself through events of life and human situations, then the same incidents can serve as mediation between God and people. And when the evocation of such incidents does not make it possible for people to get deeper insights into the mysteries of faith, these facts and stories are not of much use in faith formation. Yet the passage

from human experiences to the Word of God is not always easy to make. Too often it is made in an artificial way, in the sense that the scriptural text is not really in continuity with the experience evoked.

When a catechist finds joy in narrating events of life or telling stories, his enthusiasm is automatically communicated to his listeners. His joy reveals how convinced he is about the message he wants to transmit. Even if he is an excellent storyteller but has no joy in his heart, he will have very little impact on the people that he guides.

## Story and Christian Liturgy

It would be natural to suppose that "the telling of the stories" refers to the liturgy of the word, but on further reflection one begins to wonder whether that is always the case, and secondly, whether the liturgy of the word is the only place where stories are told. For the purpose of this paper, I want to leave aside the scriptural narratives read in the liturgy so that I can concentrate better on the other parts of liturgy. I would like to see whether, in the other parts of our liturgy, there is a place for stories.

The liturgy of the Eucharist in itself has a narrative character: "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1Cor.11:26). Here the meaning of the Eucharist as a present liturgical event is defined in reference to the past (the death of the Lord) and to the future (until he comes). According to me the story is made explicit, because if the story was not known the liturgical act would be unintelligible. The liturgy makes sense insofar as it relates past events and future events to the present moment in such a way that they constitute a continuous story.

I think it would be helpful for further investigations on the narrative qualities of liturgy to realize that on the ground of liturgy we deal with two types of stories. Stephen Crites, in his article, "The Narrative Qualities of Experience"<sup>25</sup>, distinguishes between sacred stories and mundane stories. By "sacred stories" he means the stories which, "lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told: They form consciousness rather than being among the objects of which it is directly aware." By "mundane stories", on the other hand, he refers to "the stories that are told, all stories directly seen or heard." The relationship between these two sets of stories would be that the mundane stories of a people are all told within the context of their sacred story and are attempts to hint at and provisionally to articulate the story that can not be told.

This distinction is helpful for the light it sheds on the narrative quality of liturgical texts. Thus, a hymn or a psalm or a Eucharistic prayer refers quite explicitly to the larger story of the divine plan unfolding in history. The phrase such as: "from age to age you gather a people to

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Crites., "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of the American Academy of Religion. 39 (1971), 3, 291 ff.

yourself", or even "grant that we who eat this bread and drink this cup may become one body, one spirit in Christ", clearly refers to a story that the community of the faithful believes to be taking place even now. That liturgy presupposes the "story-that-cannot-be-told" is obvious enough.

The Eucharistic Prayers and the theology of Eucharist in use today did not change much; they still have the same basic structure. They begin with thanks offered to the Father for the history of redemption which reached its culmination in Christ "who was and is and is to come". They move, from thankful remembrance, to the present moment, to the anticipation of the future, the culmination of history in the eschatological unification of all things in the Christ. Perhaps that hope for the ending of the redemptive story is best expressed in the Eucharistic prayer II (Mass for the Dead): "On that day we shall see you, our God, as you are. We shall become like you and praise you for ever through Christ our Lord, through whom all good things come". It is important to see that the Eucharistic Prayer in all its many forms has always been marked by this inherently narrative structure.

However that narrative function of the Eucharistic Prayer has been overlooked for a long time. The historical causes of this are many and complex. The transition to the non-Jewish world, from the domestic liturgy to the large scale liturgy, entered the grounds where the sacred story did not lie in the consciousness of the people. All these factors contributed to a development in which the rite was deemed to require a commentary. Later, that commentary affecting the way the liturgy was celebrated came to be divorced from the traditional texts and rites of the Mass. With the passage of time, the foundational story contained in the texts themselves began to be lost on account of other interpretative stories imposed upon it. The sacred story ceased to be heard.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Searle, ■Storytelling and Christian Faith, The narrative quality of Christian Liturgy■, Chicago Studies, Vol. 21, 1. (Spring 1982), 77.

The Constitution on the Liturgy opens with a sweeping panorama of salvation history, from its O.T. beginnings to its climax in the parousia. It is within this context that the Council chose to consider the liturgy of the Church as an element of our religion that speaks and furthers the history of salvation. It happens precisely in the liturgy in a structuralized form of prayer. This structuralized form of liturgical prayers, like the Eucharistic prayers, bears similarities to narrative expressions. In prayer as in stories, there is a beginning, a middle, and an end. Put it more precisely, there is an initial situation, the onset of the crisis, and the final resolution of crisis. To return to the distinction of Stephen Crites, we might say that each text of the liturgy represents a more or less fragmentary attempt to relate the "story-that-cannot-be-told". Such prayer being structural, and on the other hand being seen as narrative, reflects the fact that those relationships are not frozen, but suffer all the uncertainties of our ongoing history until the definitive establishment of God's kingdom at the end of time.

In the light of this rather sketchy survey of the narrative quality of the liturgy some brief suggestions might be made about possible pastoral implications.

1. The narrativity of the liturgy supposes that the members of the praying community have a corresponding grasp of the narrative quality of Christian experience itself. This implies a familiarity with the Christian story, not only in its historical past, but heading on to the eschatological fulfillment in the future. Here I see the need of a more narrative approach to catechesis and preaching. Without the sacred story the liturgy would be unintelligible.
2. There is no longer place for the faithful in the liturgy as spectators; the texts themselves point to our involvement in the story they proclaim. It is a story which has come about, not only because of God's gracious initiative, but because it is a story which is incomplete and will remain so unless we play our part. The "Amen" which we assent to the prayer becomes an act of commitment and engagement to our vocation as portrayed in the prayer.
3. In order that both the story and our part in it might emerge more clearly from the text, much more work will have to be done on the prayers of the liturgy. Especially here in the African context there is a great need for research in order to see how the same narrative meaning can be more powerfully communicated to the contemporary congregations.
4. The shift from understanding the text to interpreting every detail of the rites may serve to remind us of the multiple sources of meaning in the liturgy. Although I have concentrated mainly on the narrativity of prayer forms, the Christian story is also carried on more or less

explicitly, more or less adequately, in hymns, chants of the rites. They, too, as well as the scriptural readings, should be scrutinized to be sure that they offer a coherent account. This means, e.g to avoid singing Marian hymns on Pentecost Sunday. It means celebrating the liturgy in such a way that the primary meanings do not get overshadowed by secondary symbols. Kissing a crucifix, representing the dead Christ, is not the same as venerating a relic of the true cross, or even a simple cross on Good Friday.

5. The tendency of a ritual is to harden into rock-hard custom which can never mean the same to successive generations. The recognition of the narrative qualities of the liturgy should offer some help to remain true to the tradition we have received while at the same time discovering it anew in the fresh versions of each new generation.

## Story and moral teaching of the Church

For a long time there has been tension between ethics and pastoral concerns. Those dealing with the concrete lives and problems of men and women often encounter the law-like judgements of abstract productions of moral theologians. On the other hand the ethicists feel that those engaged in the pastoral task of the Church often "water down" the church's ethical principles in the light of a particular person's problem.

That tension has been particularly acute in our time as the Church has stated its convictions about divorce, sexual ethics and abortion. Those in the front-line of the pastoral reality of the modern Church find it difficult to cope with complex problems. In many ways the more "open" mode of moral theology represented by such people as Curran, Milhaven, McCormick, O'Connell and many others has been an attempt to make ethics more responsive to the pastoral situation. But in this line pessimists assert that ethic's important contribution for guiding the life of the Church has been lost. In this context, whether we say that certain moralists are too strict or too conservative, one thing is sure, little progress has been made. Since Vatican II there was no major break through the sterile uniformity of the moral face of Christianity. The call for renewal of moral theology issued of Vatican II has not, in fact taken place. Many assume that such a renewal has occurred as we talk about the "new" moral theology as compared with the "old". And it is certainly true that the "new" moral theology can be characterized in contrast with the "old" as stressing less the significance of "absolutes". The "new" moral theology has made at least an attempt to be more pastorally relevant than was possible for the "old".

The stirring element in this part of my paper was the passage of O'Connell in his book, Principles for a Catholic Morality. It seems to me he expressed a very valid point, why moral theology can not break through.

What was not noticed in the enthusiasm for this "change" in Catholic moral theology is that structural and methodological assumptions that were called for in Vatican II remained unchanged. The new "liberal" moral theologians still continued the basic natural law methodology of neo-scholasticism... or attempts were made to develop a "dynamic" theology of the natural law... The attempt to make moral theology more nourished by scriptural teaching, as Vatican II had requested has been lost amid the concern to make ethics more pastorally responsive... Though the books in Catholic moral theology will often have chapters on "biblical concepts" those concepts seldom do any work for forming the basic structure of how moral theology is conceived<sup>27</sup>

The failure to renew moral theology lies on the confused ground of the pastoral context. Moral theologians too often end up in their investigations with nothing or little that is informative. They do not say how the moral, pastoral ministry of the Church should be shaped. The pastors, on the other hand, often spent too much time trying to soften the edges of the church's stand on birth control, divorce, contraceptives etc. In the name of pastoral sensitivity, we fail to notice that we lack any means to understand more positively how ethics could respond to the pastoral task of the Church.

I think it is time to ask, what does all this have to do with a story?

Story-telling and the attention to narrative is currently enjoying a boom in a number of different areas. Many people seek to return to their "roots" in an attempt to discover their "real story". The current interest in "storytelling" and narrative, cannot and should not be the reason for trying to change the concept of Christian ethics in terms of narrative. However, narrative is a very important tool for Christian theology, for we Christians cannot avoid the fact that we are constituted as a community through a story, and we live by learning to be hearers and tellers of that story.

In this respect it is crucial to see that our knowledge of God and ourselves is an accidental form of story. We cannot talk about God in a more fundamental manner than we do in affirming him as our creator who begins our story, as our comforter who gives us the way to go on, and as our redeemer who gives us our ultimate destiny. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, our stories are interwoven into God's story.

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<sup>27</sup> O'Connell, Principles for a Catholic Morality, New York: Seabury Press, 1978, p.20-30.

We have to realize as God's creatures that we are not the authors of the "sacred story". We are characters who are invited to take part in God's ongoing life. We shape our stories according to the knowledge of God's story. Here there is the starting point of a narrative approach to Christian ethics.

This is the basis for the extraordinary claim of Christians that we are participants in God's very life. For our God is the kind of God that wills to be God only as he includes us within his very life. Our God is God of grace. From our side it requires the knowledge of God, that is to say, learning God's story through the particular dealing with Christ. The knowledge of "God's story" requires from us that we tell many "stories". It is crucial for our attempt to live faithful to God's calling. That is why the Christian life can never be thought of as a set of rules or presuppositions. It is an invitation across time to witness to God's story. It is, therefore, never something we have "done" but rather always remains a task. Therefore I see the central point in Christian ethics in faithfulness to Jesus as guide for our appropriation of God's story as our own. He is the means through which we learn what it means to make God's story ours.

Christian ethics, understood in terms of learning God's story is not concerned with doing something, but rather it helps us rightly see the world. For we can only act within the world according to what we see, and we can rightly see the world by being trained to see. It is therefore a central point of Christian ethics that only as we learn to be faithful disciples can we begin to see the world as constantly tempted to act as if it were not God's world.

The stories we find in the Gospels ask us to submit ourselves to a discipline of life and training if we want to negotiate a sinful world. To be Christian, therefore, is not first of all to obey certain commandments, or rules, but to learn to grow into that story. The simple language we have for such growth is that we must learn to be disciples. Only as we learn to be such, will we have the means to understand why it is that the world of God's creation necessarily includes a cross at its center.

But how does this way of understanding Christian ethics make a difference for the earlier mentioned tension between ethics and pastoral care? Perhaps all that talk about Christian moral life being one of learning, to make God's story mine is still not clear, especially when we confront it with agonizing pastoral situations. For example, the Church continues to maintain that divorce is wrong and prohibited, and yet pastorally we continue to confront situations that suggest the church should be more flexible on this issue. How does all the emphasis on "narrative" make any

difference for dealing with this kind of concerns?

The pastoral questions often seem to begin with "problems". But moral life and ethics are distorted when we attempt to begin with the question "What should I do in this case"? Therefore, the first question that should form the pastoral task of the church is not "what should we do"? but rather "what should we be"? I believe that human life, or precisely Christian life, is understood as a progress through life situations, through harms and dangers, moral and physical. Each human life will then embody a story whose shape and form will depend upon what is counted as a harm and danger and upon success and failure, progress or decline - how all these are understood and evaluated. Therefore, the first pastoral task of the Church, and the prime responsibility of those the church calls out to be ministers, is to look to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ through encouraging one another to grow in virtue. Those virtues will help us better hear and witness to the story of Jesus' cross and resurrection.

## CONCLUSION

John Henry Newman, referring to the early Christian writers and saints, said; "dogma and proof are in them at the same time hagiography",<sup>28</sup> I believe that doctrine and apologetics are best understood in the context of the lives of particular people in whom the traditions become especially luminous. If Catholicism wants to be at the heart of human traditions, then there should be a genuine attempt to integrate the whole of human life into the search for the Kingdom of God. Our religion should be opened to the extraordinary variety of human styles and individual and cultural expressions of values.

Story is an essential feature of Christian heritage. Christian religious education conveys the divine story about God's communion with humankind and the world. Religious stories invite us to find meaning in our own experiences in response to God's invitation to love more completely. The creation story of Genesis (Chapter 2-3) lays the foundation for all stories being told between God and man. Our human story is a movement between chaos and harmony. Stories enable us to participate in His imagination, that created the world and man.

In the span of this paper I have tried to develop only those elements of storytelling that I think are essential for the young minister of God's people. We are just in an initial stage to counterpoint our personal stories against that larger story. Soon, as young ministers, we will have to make a move from the theological system we were brought into, to the mentality of the people in the local church. Wherever people whisper their stories to God they will expect us to help them experience God's healing touch, his love and hope in God's presence among his people.

Present Christians of Eastern Africa show a great interest in the Bible. Here I think is a great opportunity for us ministers to make the word of God alive and meaningful to the people. The fact that the Bible and the liturgy come out of a storytelling culture and encounter an African-storytelling-culture, makes the task easier. This is a good time to abandon teaching the Bible as if it were a book on mathematics. We can share the Bible the way it was shared for many generations before us. With this realization we can approach our task as religious educators from

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<sup>28</sup> James Olney, *Melaphor of Self*, [Princeton: Princeton: Princeton: Princeton University, 1981], p.49.

a more enjoyable and relaxed perspective. We need not fear (as some do) that we will ruin anyone's faith by failing to teach exact information or by answering a question the wrong way. Rather, we can view our task as a process of sharing the faith story with our people and helping them reflect on that story as it touches their lives. We can trust the Holy Spirit to do the rest. Our task is to celebrate and dramatize the story, to respond to it with music, visual form or our word.

My final implication of storytelling could be its impact on feminism. Women's imagination must be now granted its proper place in the religious education field, so long dominated by the experience of men. Our society has to realize that, along with men, women are adding their own perspectives and proper balance to many fields. It is their voice, their writings, and their approach to life that is having its impact on theology as well. We need women storytellers who expose feminine values that are as yet unexpressed in our present society.

I hope that my paper contributes something to the development of interest in narrative theology at Tangaza College, and to the more effective Evangelization of Africa.

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# APPENDIX

## THE ART OF STORYTELLING

### The difficulties of the story

I propose to deal in these final pages with the difficulties or dangers which beset the path of the story-teller, because, until we have overcome these, we cannot hope for the finished and artistic presentation which is to bring out the full value of the story. Usually, in the long run we manage to find our own method. However, in the beginning, I think it is useful to have certain pitfalls pointed out to us with a view to helping us to work out our method of story-telling.

#### 1. There is the danger of side issues

An inexperienced story-teller is exposed to the temptation of breaking off from the main dramatic interest in a short, exciting story in order to introduce a side issue which is often interesting and helpful but which must be left for a longer and less dramatic story. If the interest turns on some dramatic moment, the action must be quick and uninterrupted, or it will lose half its effect. Shedlock, a professional storyteller, says:

I remember the despair of a little boy at a dramatic representation of "Little Red Riding-Hood" when that little person delayed the thrilling catastrophe with the wolf, by singing a pleasant song on her way through the wood. "Oh why", said the little boy "does she not get on?. And I quite shared his impatience.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Marie L. Shedlock., The Art of the Storyteller, Daver Publications. Inc., New York, 1951. p.5.

This warning is necessary only in connection with the short dramatic narrative. There are occasions when we can well afford to offer short descriptions for the sake of literary style. In such cases it is good to take our audience into our confidence, warning them that they are to expect nothing particularly exciting in the way of dramatic event. They will then settle down with a freer mind to the description we are about to offer them.

## 2. Altering the story to suit special occasions

Very often this is done out of ignorance, trying to protect our audience (especially children) from knowledge which they already possess. Siedlock shares her experiences:

I remember once when I was telling the story of the Siege of Troy to very young children, I suddenly felt anxious lest there should be anything in the story of the rape of Helen not altogether suitable for the average age of the class, namely, nine years. I threw, therefore, a domestic coloring over the whole subject and presented an imaginary conversation between Paris and Helen, in which Paris tried to convince (?) Helen that she was a strong minded woman thrown away on a limited society in Sparta, and that she should come away and visit some of the institutions of the world with him. .... then I invited the children to reproduce, in writing for the next day, the story I had just told them. The small child presented me, as you will see, with the ethical problem from which I had so laboriously protected her. The essay ran:

Once upon a time the King of Troy's son was called Paris. And he went over to Greece to see what it was like. And here he saw the beautiful Helener, and likewise her husband Menelayus. And one day, Menelayus went out hunting and left Paris and Helener alone, and Paris said: "Do you not feel dull in this palace? And Helener said: "Come away and see the world with me". So they slipped off together, and they came to the King of Egypt, and he said: "Who is the young lady?" So Paris told him. "But", said the King "it is not proper for you to go off with other people's wives. So Helener shall stop here". Paris stamped his foot. When Menelayas got home, he stamped his foot. And he called round him all his soldiers, and they stood round Troy for eleven years. At last they thought it was no use standing any longer, so they built a wooden horse in memory of Helener and the Trojans and it was taken into the town.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Ibid" p.7. The spelling mistakes in the child's essay are purposely left as in an original. This will be appreciated by those who know how gladly children offer an orthographical alternative, in hopes that one if not the other may satisfy the demands of the situation.

### 3. The danger of introducing unfamiliar words

Sometimes we take for granted that our listeners are acquainted with the meaning of certain words upon which turns some important point in the story. We must not introduce without at least a passing explanation, words, which, if not rightly understood, would entirely alter the picture we wish to present. Once Sheddock told a story to a group of Irish peasants:

Many of the older men and women, who could neither read nor write had never been beyond their native village. I was warned to be very simple in my language and to explain any difficult words which might occur in the particular Indian story I had chosen for that night, namely, "The Tiger, the Jackal and the Brahman". It happened that the older portion of the audience had scarcely ever seen even pictures of wild animals. I profited by the advice and offered a word of explanation with regard to the tiger and the jackal. I also explained the meaning of the word Brahman - at a proper distance, however, lest the audience should class him with wild animals. I then went on with my story, in the course of which I mentioned a buffalo. In spite of the warning I had received, I found it impossible not to believe that the name of this animal would be familiar to any audience. I, therefore, went on with the sentence containing this word, thus:

"And then the Brahman went a little further and met an old buffalo turning a wheel."

The next day, while walking down the village street, I entered into conversation with a thirteen-year-old girl who had been in my audience the night before and who began at once to repeat in her own words the Indian story. When she came to the particular sentence I have just quoted I was greatly startled to hear her version, which runs thus: "And the priest went on a little further, and he met another old gentlemen pushing a wheel barrow."

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 9

#### 4. The danger of claiming cooperation of the listeners by questions.

This usually occurs in telling stories to children, and making this mistake is more serious to the storyteller than the child, who rather enjoys the process and displays a fatal readiness to give any sort of answer if only he can play a part in the conversation. Children have a perpetual way of frustrating our hopes, and of landing us in unexpected bypaths from which it is not always easy to return to the main road without a violent reaction.

Once a certain storyteller told a story, counting on the cooperation of his listeners - children of a primary - school. He began:

"Yesterday, children, as I came out of my yard, what do you think I saw? The elaborately concealed surprise in store was so obvious that Martha rose to the occasion and suggested, "An elephant"

"Why, no. Why should I see an elephant in my yard, (thought the orator)? It was not nearly so big as that - it was a little thing"

"A fish" ventured George whose eye fell upon a picture hanging on the wall. The storyteller smiled patiently.

"Now, how could a live fish get into my yard?"

"A dead fish" answered someone from the back row.

"Noo! It was a little kitten" said the story-teller, decidedly. "A little kitten. She was standing right near a big puddle of water. Now, what else do you think I saw?"

"Another kitten," suggests Martha. "No; it was a big dog. He saw the little kitten near the water. Now cats do not like water, do they? What do they like?"

"Mice", said Joseph abruptly. Well, yes, they do, but there were no mice in my yard. If they don't like water, what do they like?"

"Milk" cried Sarah confidently. "They like a dry place" said the storyteller. "Now, what do you suppose the dog did? "Nobody knows what the dog did?", repeated the story-teller. What would you do if you saw a little kitten like that?" And Philip remarked gloomily: "I'd pull its tail" "Oh, come on, "And what do the rest of you think? I hope you are not as cruel as that little boy." A jealous desire to share Philip's success prompted the quick response:

"We'd pull it too"

Noo. The reason for the total failure of this story was the inability to draw any real

response from the children, partly because of the hopeless vagueness of the questions, partly because there was not time for reflection. Children say the first thing that comes into their heads without any reference to their real thoughts on the subject.

## 5. The danger of overillustration

Experienced storytellers assert that the appeal to the eye and the ear at the same time is of doubtful value, and has, generally speaking, a distracting effect. The concentration on one channel of communication attracts, and holds the attention more completely. "There were some experiments done on blind people. It is confirmed that while addressing a story to a blind audience, their attentiveness is very one-pointed, and thus it is much easier for them to imagine the picture of the story because they are undistracted by the sights around them"<sup>32</sup>.

## 6. The danger of obscuring the point of the story with too many details

I think an example of this kind of error in story telling could be an attempt of Sancho Panza to tell a story to Don Quixote.

... he looked about him until he espied a fisherman with a boat near him, but so small that it could only hold one person and one goat. the fisherman got into the boat and carried over one goat; he returned and carried another; he came back again and carried another. Pray, Sir, keep an account of the goats which the fisherman is carrying over, for if you lose count of a single one, the story ends, and it will be impossible to tell a word more, ... I go on, then, ... he returned for another goat, and another, and another, and another. ... "Suppose then all carried over" said Don Quixote "or thou wilt not have finished carrying them this twelve months!".

"Tell me how many have passed already" said Sancho. "How should I know?" answered Don Quixote. "See there now! Did I not tell you to keep an exact account? There is an end of the story. I can go no further"<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> At the Congressional library in Washington, quoted by Marie L. Sheelock., The Art of the Storyteller, Daver Publications. Inc., New York, 1951. p.11.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.18

## **7. The danger of overexplanation**

Exaggerated explanation is fatal to the artistic success of any story, but is even more serious in connection with stories told from an educational point of view, because it hampers the imagination of the listener, and since the development of that faculty is one of our chief aims in telling these stories, we must leave room for free play. As Queyrat points out, this is especially important in telling stories to children: "A child has no need of seizing on the exact meaning of words; on the contrary, a certain lack of precision seems to stimulate his imagination only the more vigorously, since it gives him a broader liberty and firmer independence"<sup>34</sup>

## **8. The danger of lowering the standard of the story in order to appeal to the undeveloped taste of the listener.**

There is one dimension of story-telling which seems to have been very little considered, namely, the telling of stories to old people. Sometimes we think that stories to old people must undergo certain adjustments in order to be understood by a younger generation. Similarly we do not believe that an older generation can enjoy some stories of their childhood. When young people are able to enjoy outside amusements, the old people, necessarily chained to a house by age, many unable to read for themselves, might return to the joy of their childhood by hearing some of the old stories told them in dramatic form.

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<sup>34</sup> Les Jeux des enfants, p.16

## The tricks of story-telling

The art of telling stories is, in truth, much more difficult than acting a part on the stage: First, because the narrator is responsible for the whole drama and the whole atmosphere which surrounds it. He has to live the life of each character and understand the relation which each bears to the whole. Second, because the stage is a miniature one, gestures and movements must all be so adjusted as not to destroy the sense of proportion. Professional story-tellers tell us that the story itself bears a miniature character. It is difficult or impossible to get perfect artistic presentation in a very large hall or before a very large audience.

"I have made experiments along this line, having twice told a story to an audience in America. The audience was exceeding five thousand, but on both occasions, though the dramatic reaction upon oneself from the response of so large an audience was both gratifying and stimulating, I was forced to sacrifice the delicacy of the story and to take from its artistic value by the necessity of emphasis, in order to be heard by all present"<sup>35</sup>

Emphasis is the bane of all story telling, for it destroys the delicacy, and the whole performance suggests a struggle in conveying the message.

First and foremost, as a means of pulling up the attention of the audience, is the judicious art of pausing. Again Shedlock asserts that this simple thing has an extraordinary efficacy in telling a story. A little example from Hans Christian Anderson's "The Princess on the Pea": The king goes down to open the door himself. Now, one may make this point in two ways. One may either say: "And the King went to the door, and at the door there stood a real Princess" or a "And the King went to the door, and at the door there stood -- (PAUSE) -- a real Princess"

Among other means for holding the attention of the audience and helping to bring out the points of the story is the use of gestures.

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<sup>35</sup> Marie L. Shedlock., The Art of the Story-teller, Dover Publications, Inc., USA, 1951., P.32.

As to the hands, without the aid of which all delivery would be deficient and weak, it can scarcely be told of what a variety of motions they are susceptible, since they almost equal in expression the power of language itself. -- With our hands we ask, promise, call persons to us and send them away, threaten, supplicate, intimate, dislike or fear; with our hands we signify joy, grief, doubt, acknowledgement, penitence, and indicate measure, quantity, number and time --- So that amidst the great diversity of tongues pervading all nations, and people, the language of the hands appears to be a language common to all men <sup>36</sup>

One of the very effective means of telling stories is mimicry - the imitation of animals' voices and sounds in general is of never-ending joy to the listeners. However, there is grave danger in this field. This special artifice can only be used by such narrators as have special aptitude and gifts in this direction. There are many people with good imaginative power but who are wholly lacking in the power of mimicry, and their efforts in this direction remain grotesque and therefore ineffective.

It is helpful to start our story-telling with an introduction which would allow us to catch the audience and draw the attention of the listeners before we start our story. We can start off like this: "Do you know that last night I had a very strange dream. I dreamed that I was walking along the streets of this town with a large bundle on my shoulders, and that bundle was full of stories, and I was shouting at the top of my voice: Stories! stories! stories!. Who will listen to my stories? And I saw a group of students exclaiming: "We will listen to your stories." So I pulled out a story from my bundle and I began: (here you can start telling your real story.)

The great point is never to let the audience down, that is, in stories which depend on dramatic situations. If we tell stories in sections, and spread over two or three occasions, we should always stop at an exciting moment. It encourages speculation in listener's minds, which increases their interest when the story is taken up again. As I already mentioned in talking about the introduction to stories, I repeat about building up the beginning of a story. We have to take a quick hold of our audience by a striking beginning which will enlist their attention from the start. In the same way we must end our story. Our listeners must be impressed by the very dramatic climax to which the whole story leads.

## How and when to tell the story?

Sometimes we can read the story, but it is always better to tell a story. A story told has more power, will catch the imagination more quickly and will hold the attention of the audience longer than a story read. It is not necessary to memorize a story in order to tell it effectively. More important for a storyteller is paying attention to the setting, characters, objects and actions. It might be sometimes helpful to memorize key phrases such as opening lines and dialogue which are essential to the plot, and to key transitions. But in most cases it is best to let the story flow in a conversational way, as one does when telling the events of the day around the supper table. It is difficult to set some methods of story telling. I saw some storytellers closing their eyes and pouring a tale from the depths of their memory and imagination, transporting the hearer to the world they create breath by breath. There is almost a melding of consciousness as one follows their voice to the story's natural and inevitable end. At the end, I think, we must all find our own storytelling voices which will usually be similar to the way we tell stories in everyday conversations.

These days it is rather popular to tell a story in sermons. However, often the stories are told where there is no place for a story, and more often wrong stories are told which do not, make the point but touch some side issues. So, not every sermon should have a story.

Suppose I were to give a sermon to mothers who have problems with their children, I would probably end my sermon with this story:

"After the Great Revolution in France a village woman had been driven from her home to woods and fields for several days. She and her two children had lived on roots and leaves. On the third morning they had hidden in some bushes at the approach of two soldiers, a captain and a sergeant. The captain ordered the sergeant to find out what was stirring the bushes; He pushed the mother and her two children out. They were brought to the captain's side and he saw in an instant that they were starving. He gave them a long loaf of brown French bread. The mother took it eagerly, like a famished animal, broke it into two pieces, giving one piece to one child and the other to the second child. The sergeant looked up to the captain and said. "Is it because the mother is not hungry?" The captain replied "No sergeant, it is because she is a mother".

Preachers who use stories in their sermons assert that the conclusion of a sermon is the best

place for a story. Less frequently, a story is told somewhere in the middle of a sermon as a kind of an illustration of our thought. Once in a while a story can be used as an introduction to our sermon.

Stories are by far the best format to use during a children's moment in worship. Stories help to avoid the pitfalls of objects lessons and dialogue sermons. There is no temptation to manipulate the children for a cute response in order to get a laugh from the rest of the congregation. Children are not inclined to perform while listening to a story, parents are not as apt to be embarrassed by what their children do or say. Everyone is paying attention to the story, and the story is carrying a meaning for everyone.

Worship does not stop for adults when a story is being told, as it sometimes does with other kinds of children's sermons. Instead of becoming spectators or passive observers while children have their time, adults and youths will almost always become active participants as they overhear the story which is told to the children.

In like manner, the word proclaimed from the pulpit, which is usually addressed primarily to the concerns and needs of adults, can also be appealing and meaningful to children when given in the form of a story. It is not necessary for them to understand all of the words or ideas. They will listen in the same way they overhear other adult conversations, thinking about and reflecting on that which is of interest to them and ignoring the rest.