

Story and Vision: Exploring the Use of Stories for Growth in the Life of Faith

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Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

The use of story in communicating religious understanding and tradition is as old as religion itself. Human beings have always resorted to the language of story (image, symbol, metaphor, narrative) to speak of their encounters with Mystery. Telling stories is so much a part of what we do as human beings that we often take it for granted. Thus, the turn to story in religious education is nothing new, rather, it stems from a growing recognition and appreciation of the centrality of narratives to growth in personal and communal faith. How can different forms of stories be used to facilitate the growth in the life of faith among Catholic elementary and high school students in the Philippines? This is the question this extended essay seeks to address.

Scope and Limitations

"Story" is one of those deceptively simple words that everyone seems to use and hardly anyone can adequately define. A helpful definition offered by the Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas describes story as "a narrative account that binds events and agents together in an intelligible pattern."³ While strictly speaking, one can differentiate between story and narrative, for the purposes of this extended essay, I will treat these two terms as meaning essentially the same thing.

This work will build on a typology of stories presented by John Dominic Crossan in his book *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*⁴ and elaborated on by Terrence Tilley in *Story Theology*.⁵ In *The Dark Interval*, Crossan identifies five fundamental modes of story: *myths*, which function to establish a vision of the world; *apologues*, which illustrate and defend this vision; *actions*, which investigate the vision and its implications; *satires*, which attack and ridicule aspects of the world; and *parables*, which subvert the existing vision of the world and make alternative visions possible. While other types of story may exist, these five seem to adequately capture the range of possible relationships between stories and one's vision of the world and view of life. It is my belief that certain modes of story become more important than others at different moments of the faith journey, depending on the particular mode of faith persons are in. Each mode of story can invite the reader or listener to engage in a particular dynamic that leads to the deepening of faith. For example, I would contend that myths have a crucial role in establishing the basic "grammar" of faith and thus are much needed at that period when one is being initiated into the life of a faith community. Parables

on the other hand, are necessary to keep faith dynamic; they can challenge us to conversion when we grow too complacent or comfortable with our own certitudes.

In discussing the different modes of faith, I rely on a schema first articulated by John Westerhoff in his book *Will Our Children Have Faith?*⁶ In this early work, Westerhoff speaks of “styles” of faith rather than strictly sequential stages identified with particular age levels.⁷ In the chapter “Life Together,” he identifies four basic faith styles: *experienced faith*, *affiliative faith*, *searching faith*, and *owned faith*. This way of describing the modes of faith is more congenial to the purposes of this extended essay than the more well-known developmental schema of James Fowler (although Westerhoff’s schema builds on the work of Fowler) because Westerhoff tends to focus more on the human activity of the believer in a particular life situation rather than on the developmental capacities that characterize particular stages. It is thus much easier in Westerhoff’s descriptions to see how a particular mode of story addresses the particular needs of the believer as he or she works through a particular faith style.

This extended essay is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the uses of story in religious education. Nor is it primarily an attempt to articulate a theology of storytelling, although I hope that it may pave the way for such a project in the future. The immediate aims of this extended essay are quite modest and specific: to look at some ways in which the use of different types of stories can facilitate growth in a living faith.

Significance of the Topic

Religious educators worldwide have long acknowledged the power of stories. The immense popularity of such inspirational storybooks as William Bennett’s *The Book of Virtues*, Rachel Naomi Remen’s *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, Anthony De Mello’s *The Song of the Bird*, the works of Christian storytellers like Megan McKenna, Walter Wagener, and Madeleine L’Engle, the *Joshua* novels of Joseph Girzone and the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series attests to a widespread hunger for narratives that mediate a spiritual vision. In the Philippines though, my own observation is that lacking an adequate theory of how stories operate in the life of faith, religious educators who use stories tend to use them in a fashion that lacks a full appreciation of the power of the story and its potential for fostering personal transformation. Stories are used in a “hit or miss” fashion, narrated for their mere entertainment value, or told in ways that do not invite reflection, analysis or conversion. Some religious educators do nothing else but tell stories, leaving students unchallenged and ultimately, undernourished.

Ultimately however, the religious educator tells stories to change lives. We want stories to make a difference in the way people perceive, feel about, judge and act in the world. Thus we cannot afford to be haphazard in our tale spinning. We need to bring understanding, deliberation and method to our use of stories in religious education. Here we can look to Jesus as a model for storytelling. Jesus was not an indiscriminate teller of tales. He told stories each time with a very clear purpose in mind – to overturn psychological structures of discrimination and exclusion, to invite persons to re-imagine God, to sustain hope in times of despair, to invite a questioning of their notions of virtue, holiness, sin and salvation. In short, he told the

tales he knew his listeners needed to hear (but didn't usually want to hear); and he knew which tales to tell and how to tell them because he knew the hearts of his listeners well. Similarly, religious educators have to be able to tell stories addressed to the structures of the mind and heart of their students. A story is not just a story for an educator – it can be a challenge to prejudice, an offer of healing, a call to repentance, a gift of hope, a moment of revelation. We have to know why we tell the stories we tell – even if we cannot always control how these stories will be received and acted on. Thus we need to know how stories work and how they might be made to operate in facilitating growth in faith.

In an early book entitled *The Living Reminder*, the late Henri Nouwen, himself a teller of stories, wrote:

We have inherited a story which needs to be told in such a way that the many painful wounds about which we hear day after day can be liberated from their isolation and be revealed as part of God's saving relationship with us . . . By connecting the human story with the story of the suffering servant, we rescue our history from its fatalistic chain and allow time to be converted from *chronos* into *kairos*, from a series of randomly organized incidents and accidents into a constant opportunity to explore God's work in our lives . . . The challenge of ministry is to help people in very concrete situations – people with illnesses or in grief, people with physical or mental handicaps, people suffering from poverty or oppression, people caught in the complex networks of secular and religious institutions – to see and experience their story as part of God's own redemptive work in the world.⁸

Here, I believe Nouwen hits upon the fundamental reason why we need to explore the use of story in religious education. Each human being is the creator of a story – the story of his or her own life. While human beings experience life as a succession of events, perceiving and experiencing life as a story implies seeing the events that make up our lives as organized in some purposive way. To say life is a story means that all that we do and all that befalls us as human beings is ultimately meaningful. Every life perceived as story then contains a vision (whether implicit or explicit) of what life is all about and where it is headed.

As believing Christians, we acknowledge that our personal and communal stories are radically incomplete and ultimately false if they do not take God into account. Actually, Nouwen's metaphor of ministry as "making connections" between two different stories can be deceiving because it suggests that there is a human story in which God is not involved. We might say instead that the religious educator's task as a storyteller is to help persons to see how their personal and communal stories are actually one with the story of God unfolding in time and space. A story might help clarify things.

Once upon a time, there was a king who had an infant son whom he loved more than life itself. So much did he love his young son in fact that as the child grew to boyhood, the king, a widower for many years, married a wealthy lady of incredible beauty with the hope that she would be a second mother to the young prince. Unknown to everyone however, the lady was a powerful sorceress who hated children and who had married the king only to gain control of the kingdom. And so it came to

pass that when the king left for some months to fight in a distant land, she seized the opportunity to place a spell on the boy, causing him to lose all memory so that he could not even recall his own name. Then, she had him drugged, clothed in a beggar's rags, and cast out of the palace that had been the only home the boy had ever known. When the young prince awoke, he found himself lying by a roadside in a ditch, a beggar's bowl in his hand, with no memory of how he had come to be there. In the meantime, the queen sent a message to the king with the terrible news that his young son had been out hunting alone and had been devoured by wolves. The king was heartbroken and soon returned home. As for the boy, he spent the next ten years of his life wandering through the streets of the kingdom begging for food (and stealing on occasion), unaware of his true identity or of his great legacy – unaware in fact that the Great King he heard so much of and whose minions he saw marching through the streets each day was in fact his father. Not remembering who he was, he did not know how to return home.

Without the stories of our faith tradition to set the parameters and direction of our lives, we become like the young prince in the story, unaware of who we are, of where we belong, of our relationship to the Great King, or of our vocation as his children. We live as beggars rather than as heirs.

One evening, the enchanted prince came upon an old man, half-dead from beatings and starvation, lying in a ditch. The young man's heart was moved with compassion and though it meant not going with anything for the night, he fed the old man what bread he had scrounged up and used the money he had begged that day to buy the old man some wine and cheese. He did this for three days, using all he earned for the day to feed and nurse the old man. On the third day, the man revived. Now it turns out that the old man was a wizard himself who had run afoul of the evil queen. Looking upon his young benefactor, he immediately saw that this was no ordinary beggar. In gratitude for the boy's kindness, the wizard gave him a hand mirror that seemed to bend and twist the images reflected into it into strange and wonderful shapes and colors. Ordinary mirrors deceive, the old man said, because they show us only the appearances of things on the surface. But this mirror, the wizard affirmed, was magic and showed not the surface image of things, but things as they truly are. As the boy gazed into the mirror, he saw forming amidst the twisting play of lights and colors, a vision of himself with a crown upon his head and held tight in the old king's fatherly embrace. It was then that he remembered who he truly was.

Stories can be magic mirrors that help us to see with the eyes of the imagination, beyond the surface of things to the realities often hidden from immediate consciousness. The vocation of the religious educator is that of helping persons to discover, to remember, and to consciously participate in the Great Story of which their individual and communal stories are a part. In recognizing the story of which one is a part, one is enabled to better recognize and respond to the action of God in history. By telling stories, the religious educator allows the audience to recognize the patterns of grace and mystery running through their lives; he or she invites students to participate freely and knowingly in the unfolding of a story that is both human and divine. Because the fundamental stories of the Christian tradition tell of a God of fidelity, graciousness and compassion, our students can come to regard their lives as a journey toward

healing, wholeness, and redemption . . . In recognizing the story of which one is a part, one is enabled to better recognize and respond to the action of God in history.

Methodology

Before tackling how stories might help facilitate growth in faith, we need to explore the importance of story for the task of religious education. Therefore, the chapter that follows will be devoted to answering the question of why we need to retrieve the category of stories in the first place. Stories are more than just illustrations or entertainments. They are a powerful contributor to the formation of a “life-vision” – an all-embracing stance toward an understanding of human beings, the world, and God. I will make the case that story is a necessary “language” that complements the propositional language of doctrine. Story appeals to the imagination that is to all the faculties of a person, and thus has a vitality, richness and capacity for persuasion more suited to the tasks of evangelization and catechesis than doctrinal language. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss how stories can facilitate the activities of believing, trusting and doing which are the components of the faith process. The third chapter will be devoted to a discussion of Crossan’s typology in relation to Westerhoff’s four styles of faith. This will be the core of the extended essay. In it, I will try to show how different types of stories contribute positively to the dynamic of each faith style. The fourth chapter will present a simple process that shows how persons learn from stories. It will also tackle a few practical recommendations regarding how stories can be used in religious education classes.

Chapter Two

The Recovery of the Imagination

In the past three decades, there has been a growing recognition and appreciation of the role that imagination plays in the life of faith. The late William Lynch’s substantial pioneering work on the imagination in his books *Christ and Apollo* and *Images of Faith* have helped us to understand imagination as the power that mediates reality to knowing subjects. James Fowler devoted a chapter to this subject in *Stages of Faith*, where he discusses how faith forms a way of seeing life in relation to an “ultimate environment.”⁹ Andrew Greeley has written a number of articles on the religious imagination. David Tracy, Gordon Kaufman, John Coulson, Julian Hartt, and Garrett Green have also written important books on the subject. The turn to imagination in our age, I am convinced, has much to do with the growing realization that the empiricist, rationalist and objectivist epistemologies that ground modernity have left faith high and dry. Diagnosing the malaise of modern unbelief, the great religious philosopher Abraham Heschel wrote:

Modern man fell into the trap of believing that everything can be explained, that reality is a simple affair which has only to be organized in order to be mastered. All enigmas can be solved and all wonder is nothing but “the effect of novelty upon ignorance.” The world, he was convinced, is its own explanation, and there is no necessity to go beyond the world in order to account for the existence of the world.¹⁰

The exaltation of rational knowing to the exclusion of emotion, intuition, value and feeling have impoverished the quality of human knowing so that mystery has been exiled from the world and the eternal hymn of creation has been reduced to mere “rumors of angels.” Faith thrives on the contact with Mystery. The turn to the imagination is an act of resistance against the narrowness and impoverishment of an existence that has no room for Mystery. The turn to imagination then is not a mere theological “fad” – it signals a growing recognition that on the retrieval of the imagination lays the hope of restoring vitality to religious faith.

Kathleen Fischer tells us that “the imagination is indispensable to our life of faith” and points out at least three reasons why this is so.¹¹ Fischer holds that in the light of the incarnation, all of creation is potentially sacramental, that is to say, the created world is capable of mediating God’s self-communication to us.¹² “The imagination opens us to the experience of the Ultimate coming through finite reality, to the Depth at the heart of matter.”¹³ What this means is that revelation has a necessarily symbolic character since we do not perceive God directly but always through the concrete mediation of some created reality that simultaneously reveals and conceals the divine presence and activity. Since revelation is symbolic, its primary appeal is therefore to the imagination. Likewise, the initial response to revelation is also formulated on the level of the imagination in the form of symbols, images, stories, and rituals. Consequently, perceiving and responding to God’s active presence in the world requires the cultivation of an imagination capable of recognizing the divine at work in the experiences of every day. The cultivation of such an imagination requires immersion in the images, stories, rituals, and symbols of the Christian tradition.

Faith and imagination both invite a response to truth that goes beyond a mere notional assent to rational propositions to an engagement of the total person in belief, trust, commitment, and love.¹⁴ The imagination is capable of capturing truths too subtle and deep to be grasped by the intellect alone.¹⁵ The intellect can reduce the rainbow of reality to a single shade and thus betray the truthfulness of an experience by failing to take into account the dimensions of sense perception, memory, feeling, emotion, intuition, and will, which are as significant to faith as the facts themselves. Both faith and imagination invite us to move beyond a narrowly objectivist approach to truth (a legacy of Enlightenment empiricism and rationalism) to a more self-involving and participatory engagement which involves sense, emotion, intuition, will, memory, intellect, and action in the apprehension, appreciation, and living of truth. Such participation often has a much greater potential for transforming perceptions, desires, attitudes, and values than appeals addressed to the intellect alone.

Finally, the life of faith needs the imagination to shape visions, stories and images that nourish hope and trust in the promises of God and help us to transform our present in the light of our visions. Hope in God’s promise of salvation is nourished by a belief in God’s fidelity, which is portrayed in story after story in the Bible. For those who hope in God’s promises, the imagination can “bridge the gap between the past and the future, enabling us to envision what we have not yet experienced.”¹⁶ The imagination helps us to construct from the images and stories of our personal and communal past, anticipatory visions of the Kingdom that serve to motivate and direct our efforts at recognizing and realizing God’s redemptive will in the present.

This belated appreciation of the role of imagination in the life of faith leads us to reconsider the ways in which we educate for faith. Have we perhaps been too narrowly rationalistic in our catechetical approaches? Have we supposed that we could lead persons to conversion principally on the strength of our explanations and syllogisms? Religious education that fails to address the imagination runs the risk of presenting a faith unable to transcend the parameters of rationalism or ideology, a faith evacuated of the power to inspire, challenge or motivate because it has become too abstract, too disconnected from the conditions of actual life. The recovery of the imagination invites us to discover ways and means of educating, adequate to the task of transforming the learners' hearts, indeed their total person.

The Importance of Life-Vision

In going over Fischer's apologetic for the imagination, one notes that key to her understanding of the role imagination plays in the life of faith, is the idea of imaginative vision. Faith always implies some kind of vision of how things are. John Navone describes vision as "a particular way of seeing, imagining, and feeling about the world and ourselves."¹⁷ He goes on to say –

Everyone has some vision or other of God (ultimate reality), world, man, and salvation, which he attains in the concreteness of his experience and, in turn, irradiates at every level of his being. Vision permeates our thoughts, desires, interests, ideals, imagination, feelings, and body language; it is our worldview, our sense of life, and our basic orientation toward reality. Our vision gives rise to our character, to our style of life, to our tone of being in the world. Vision is the way in which we grasp the complexity of life; it is the way we relate to the things of life; it involves the meaning and value that we attach to the complexity of life as a whole and to the things of life in particular.¹⁸

In a similar vein, Pamela Mitchell speaks of a "life-view" – an individual's all-embracing stance toward and understanding of the cosmos,¹⁹ while Martin Lang speaks of "life-meaning systems" and James Fowler speaks of "images of our ultimate environment" which shape our responses and initiatives in accordance with what we see going on.²⁰ Essentially, what these three authors are referring to is the same thing: an imaginative construct which functions paradigmatically to mediate our interaction with reality and to provide a basis for orienting our lives. We never know completely what reality is in itself. We know it only through the lens of our images and stories. Whether we are directly conscious of it or not, we are always working out of some imaginary "map" that provides the contours of the landscape of human existence in the world. Vision is important because we can only act within the world, as we perceive it; our values, attitudes and actions have meaning only in relation to the world as we imagine it to be. It follows, that how we see and interpret reality (creation, ourselves, others, and God), is a determinative factor in how we make decisions and how we live our lives.

In the first chapter, the claim was made that religious educators tell stories in order to change lives. This extended essay sets out to show that the way in which this change occurs

is through the transformation of people's imaginative paradigms or life-visions²¹ and that one of the most effective ways to achieve this transformation of life-vision is through the use of stories.

Why Tell Stories?

It is doubtful that Christian religious education can bypass the stories of our tradition and remain faithful to the Christian message.

Christianity has a narrative structure. Jesus is proclaimed and his Good News is passed on from generation to generation by means of stories. It is by means of stories that the Gospel is accepted and Jesus confessed as liberating Lord . . . Of course not all the Biblical texts are narrative in form . . . Nevertheless, narrative clearly occupies a prominent place. This is undoubtedly connected with the historical character of both the Jewish and the Christian revelation, the central events of each being respectively the Exodus of the chosen people and the suffering and death of Jesus.²²

The basic sources of our faith are stories and rituals (which are, after all, re-enacted stories) centered on the life of an historical person who lived 2,000 years ago and whose story, we believe, continues to unfold in the lives of millions today. The particularity of our religious convictions is due to the unique shape of the life story of the man we believe to be the Incarnate Word. To lose touch with the sacred stories of our faith tradition is to evacuate Christianity of its particular content thus reducing it to little more than an ideology. Take the term justice, for example, which is bandied about by practically everyone. What does it really mean? Does meeting out the death penalty to rapists and incestuous fathers correspond to the justice of the Kingdom? Concretely, I am suggesting that we do not know what real justice is until we see Jesus' dealing with sinners as the embodiment of God's justice. Neither do we know what the Kingdom of God is about until we see the story of Jesus as determining the shape of God's Kingdom. Stanley Hauerwas speaks directly to this issue when he writes, "There is no way to know the Kingdom except by learning the story of this man Jesus. For his story defines the nature of how God rules and how such a rule creates a corresponding 'world' and society. There is no way to talk about the social ethics of Christianity except as they are determined by the form of Jesus' life as we find it told by the general narratives."²³

Edward Schillebeeckx affirms, "Christianity is first and foremost a story and a praxis, not a theory or a gnosis."²⁴ That is to say Christianity did not initially begin with a theory about Jesus around which stories were built as interesting addenda or doctrinal illustrations.²⁵ Rather, in the beginning, there were primary experiences of Jesus, both as an historical human being and as the Crucified and Risen One. From these experiences, stories were told, retold, reflected upon and, as years went by, recast to reflect the growing insight into the significance and truth of Jesus' person. Discursive theological language followed from the "primary" language of experience, image, symbol, and story.²⁶ Doctrine is an attempt to capture in normative propositions the consensual results of various faith communities' theological reflections on the nature and significance of the Christ event for human living. These normative propositions, while necessary, need to maintain contact with the pristine sources of the

tradition if they are to maintain their full meaning and power. Theological and doctrinal formulations are necessarily bound by time and culture. In seeking to creatively and faithfully express the truths embedded in these formulations for a new age, we need to return to the stories of faith in order to recapture something of the originating experience that lies at the heart of the doctrinal formulations.²⁷

Why tell stories? Because stories can help us do greater justice to the richness and complexity of faith convictions by displaying the narrative-experiential contexts in which these convictions arise. The conviction, for example, that God is love cannot fully be grasped apart from the story of Jesus. The statement becomes a vacuous abstraction unless it is connected somehow to the bottomless, non-discriminatory self-giving that reaches a climax in the crucifixion and blossoms into resurrection. This is not an argument for *replacing* the systematic language of doctrine with the language of image, symbol and story; the one, after all, complements the other. We must affirm, however, the need for the kind of subjective “knowing” that is available only through our recourse to story. The “logic” of story differs from the logic of reason. That is why stories have the power to surprise us and continually open us up to new perspectives. The resurrection could never have been logically deduced from the way in which Jesus lived and died. For that matter, who would have guessed at God’s incomprehensible predilection for sinners, if Jesus had not partied with the prostitutes and tax collectors? Or that Lordship could be exercised from the cross? Because the logic of story differs from the logic of reason, the convictions of faith can never be reduced to a predictable system. Stories keep faith from degenerating into worn-out platitudes and exhausted ideologies.

We tell stories because, as Christian religious educators, we believe that some ways of envisioning the world are nearer to the truth than others. Some life-visions may, in fact, be complete distortions leading to sterile or dysfunctional patterns of perception, feeling, judgment, and behavior. The religious educator seeks to initiate persons into true life-visions that are ultimately life-giving for all. Stories are concrete embodiments of particular life-visions.²⁸ The stories of Sacred Scripture, which we designate as “inspired”, are stories which we take to embody true and trustworthy vision. The religious educator who tells a story is inviting listeners to enter into the world of the story and to temporarily take on its implicit life-vision in order to expand, deepen, or challenge their own perception and appreciation of reality. What George Connell writes of literary authors could just as well be said of religious educators engaged in storytelling:

The task of the author is not simply to entertain but more fundamentally to communicate a view of life that will, directly or indirectly, clarify reality for his readers. The artist is to use his art to bring to life a particular stance toward existence.²⁹

What the storyteller invites the listener to do is to see the life-view embodied in the story, to enter into the story, to understand how it looks and feels to construe the world in this way, and consequently to reflect on the way in which he or she construes the world in actuality.³⁰ What is involved on the part of the listener is an imaginative passing over into the experience of another in order to be enriched, disturbed and/or moved to action.

Stories are particularly suited to encouraging this type of imaginative engagement both because story is the form that comes closest to capturing the multivalent character of human experience and because stories are capable of occasioning new (and often transforming) experiences by their appeal to the faculties of the imagination (sense, memory, emotion, intuition, intellect, will). According to Herman Mertens, there is a richness and vitality that discursive reasoning and logical propositions cannot capture so that “what cannot be said notionally and rationally must be said in stories.”³¹

. . . stories are possessed of their own eloquence. Stories can move us profoundly while reasoning leaves us cold. Stories can evoke an atmosphere and carry us away while logically conclusive arguments patently fail to convince. Stories can transport us into that intensely personal world where the mystery of faith is at home, while the crystal clear language of concepts and the near-infallible art of reason serve only to diminish.³²

William Bausch in this anecdote demonstrates the evocative power of story:

Martin Buber tells the story of his paralyzed grandfather who was asked to tell a story about his great teacher, the famous and holy Baal Shem Tov. The grandfather replied by telling how the Holy Man used to jump up and down and dance while he was praying. And while he was reciting the story, the grandfather stood up and the story carried him away so much that he too had to jump and dance in order to show how the Master had done it. From that moment, he was healed.³³

Entering into the world of the story, the paralyzed man was so caught up in his memory of the Master’s joyous abandon that he began to spin and dance. Stories invite such total self-involvement and participation by recreating or evoking particular experiences in their multivalent richness and vitality. Stories communicate the passionate and the personal. Storytelling engages the heart as well as head and in so doing increases the possibility of exploring, appreciating and appropriating new life-visions. Stories transform our life-visions by way of imaginative participation more than by way of explanation.³⁴

Stories and Faith

Faith as a process involves three distinct but interrelated activities: believing, trusting, and doing. How can stories help us to enter more fully into these three aspects of faith?

Faith as Believing

Faith as an act of believing has two dimensions: believing in the God who reveals and believing the truth that God reveals. There is always a “truth” aspect of faith, a message that invites understanding, trust, commitment, and proclamation. The truth of doctrine is actually a life-vision. It is an insight into the reality of things that suggests a particular life-stance for believers. In faith, we believe these truths and the truthfulness of the life-visions they espouse on the basis of the trustworthiness of the God who reveals. The truth that God reveals

comes to us, albeit imperfectly, through the mediation of the human concepts and words we call beliefs. Beliefs that are normative for the faith community have for us the status of doctrine. Thus, to believe in faith involves believing in the doctrines of our faith community on the basis of our trust in the God who reveals. To believe means to enter into the life-vision embodied in our beliefs.

How can stories aid us in the act of believing? In the first place, stories are powerful means for us to come to the stance of trust necessary to believe in the truths of our faith and to enter into the life-vision they represent. However, more will be said of this in the following section when we talk about the fiducial or “trust” aspect of faith. What we will consider here is how stories can aid us in understanding religious beliefs and move our hearts to the assent of faith.

We first need to understand understanding. Understanding the truths of faith to us means more than being able to explain formulas or recite definitions. I understand something, not only when I can grasp it, but also when I am grasped by it. An objectivist approach to truth distances the knower from the known. The relationship is one-way. The knower remains in full control of the situation and does not allow himself to be affected by the object he seeks to understand. A subjectivist approach to knowing³⁵ invites us to enter into a relationship of mutuality with that which we seek to know so that we allow the idea, person, object or event to question us, probe us, shock us, move us, or possibly transform us. Parker Palmer is one of the chief advocates of this subjectivist epistemology in education. He writes:

When academics speak of “the pursuit of truth” they rightly imply a gap exists between truth and ourselves. But there is a conceit hidden in that image; the conceit that we can close the gap as we track truth down. In Christian understanding, the gap exists not so much because truth is hidden and evasive but because we are. We hide from the transforming power of truth; we evade truth’s quest for us. That is why Abba Felix and his fellow seekers went into the desert, into solitude and silence: they were trying to sit still long enough, in a space open enough, that truth could find them out, track them down. The truth that sought them was not an inert object or proposition. Rather, it had the quality of a person who wished to draw them into a community of mutual knowledge, accountability and care.

By this understanding, I not only pursue truth but truth pursues me. I not only grasp truth but truth grasps me. I not only know truth but truth knows me. Ultimately, I do not master truth, but truth masters me. Here, the one-way movement of objectivism, in which the active knower tracks down the inert object of knowledge, becomes a two-way movement of persons in search of each other. Here, we know even as we are known.³⁶

To understand doctrine then is to enter into a relationship with the truth such that we do not hold it away from us at arm’s length but allow it to speak to us, act and impact on us, on our way of seeing and feeling things, on our life-vision. On the part of the learner, this requires the willingness to risk vulnerability, to give up the safety of ignorance, self-deception or prejudice and surrender to the illuminative power of doctrine. On the part of educators, it means

presenting doctrine in such a way as to invite subjective involvement so that doctrine no longer becomes an artifact to be scrutinized, but a loving and authoritative voice addressing the learner personally from the heart of Mystery, and inviting the learner to live in a new way.

The propositional language of doctrine rarely, if ever, invites us into a mutual relationship with truth. We can understand in an intellectual way why Jesus is true God and true man, or what it means to claim that there are three persons in one God. But such a knowing would amount to little more than the explication of a formula if it did not, in some way, alter the way we imagine the world to be. By telling the stories that ground our doctrines, or by employing character, action and plot to give body and action to the truths of our beliefs, we invite learners to enter into a transforming relationship with truth that has the potential to reconfigure the geometry of their life-visions. The story draws them in so that they can vicariously experience the meaning of the doctrine or truth as it plays out in the lives of the story's characters. The story incarnates the truth in character, plot and action rather than leaving it on the level of intellectual abstraction. Story is a medium or mode of communication that calls for such subjectivist self-involvement.

A modest illustration: many of my students have a hard time understanding how the possibility of eternal damnation could coexist with belief in a God who wills salvation for all human beings. All my talk of free will and the possibility of saying "no" to God being inherent in the gift of free will sounds logical, but unconvincing to them. They cannot understand how someone faced with the offer of grace and redemption could possibly turn it down. It is not logical. So I generally tell them this story.

Once there was a wicked old woman who died without anyone remembering a single good deed she had ever done in her long life. Because of her wickedness, the devils immediately took her and plunged her into a lake of fire there to await the last day. But it so happened that her guardian angel, after racking his brains to recall any good that might redeem her eventually remembered one incident the old lady had done. The good deed was this. She had once pulled up an onion in her garden and given it to a starving beggar. The angel rushed to present the old woman's case before God; and God, hearing the angel's testimony, ordered the angel to take the old lady's onion and hold it out to her over the lake of fire. She could then grab hold of the onion, and the angel could pull her out. "If you manage to pull her out without breaking the onion," God said, "she can enter into Paradise." The angel did as he was bidden. The old lady grabbed the onion, and the angel began pulling her out. Her feet were about to clear the surface of the lake. However, when the rest of the damned saw her being rescued, one of them grabbed hold of her ankles just as she rose above the fiery lake and soon he too was being pulled into Paradise. Seeing this, more of the damned followed suit, one after another, each grabbing hold of one another's ankles until pretty soon, all of the accursed were rising to Paradise. But the old lady, seeing what was happening grew indignant and began to yell, "This is my onion not yours. I am to be saved, not you! Go away!" The moment those words left her mouth the onion broke and the whole crew, including the old lady, tumbled back into the fiery lake. And there they remain to this day.

This story is an adaptation of a tale told in Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Whenever I tell this story in the context of our discussions on free will, sin and redemption, high school students have no trouble understanding the old lady's response. They know enough of human nature to understand the pathology of the human heart that refuses to share the experience of blessing with others. I believe that, for a number, there is even a spark of recognition, of identification with the old lady's resentment and indignation. Her behavior in the context of the story is all too human. Her story is theirs. When I use this story in class, students are generally able to see concretely what it means to refuse the offer of salvation; they are able to understand why people do it. They are even able to understand why *they* do it. By presenting a story that incarnates the truth and meaning that religious beliefs point to, they are led to understand the truth "from inside" rather than in a speculative way.

Story is a mode of communication capable of presenting truth in a way that direct "scientific" discourse is unable to because there are always dimensions of truth, particularly personal or religious truth, that rational discourse cannot capture or convey. "Passions, existence, and matters of personal actuality are not empirical objects and cannot be communicated by objective statement; they require a different mood, orientation and usage in order to be conveyed and understood. When we treat these areas as objects . . . we do not really communicate *them* but communicate *about* them."³⁷ Stories aim at the heart and not just at the intellect and, therefore, are a mode of communication eminently suited to bridging the gap between the knower and the known. Stories are the language of embodiment, of the passionate and the personal; they are the primary language of experience and are able to generate new experiences for learners because of their self-involving character.

Believing is not simply a matter of objectivist understanding. Believing requires an existential surrender to the truth of faith. Rational discourse, indispensable as it is, seldom invites more than an intellectual surrender. Stories, by connecting truth with life and human experience, restore a wholeness and believability to truth that is often lost in more objectivist formulations. Stories invite us not merely to comprehend truth in a notional sense, but to live in the light of truth. They are the vehicles best suited to communicating (not just communicating about) life-visions.

Faith as Doing

Faith has a performative and obediencial aspect. "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it."³⁸ The performative aspect of faith requires us to live the truth we believe. I submit that stories can help us to do this in two basic ways: firstly, by giving us exemplars or models of how faith can be lived in concrete historical circumstances; and secondly, by motivating us to live the truth by revealing the beauty of truthful lives.

The question in the minds of believers is very often, "How am I to live my faith? What does it mean to live as a Christian today?" I suggest that stories allow believers to address these questions by allowing them to explore, in a vicarious manner, the way Christian convictions are incarnated and play out in the lives of actual or fictitious characters. Stories show us characters moving and changing through time. They show us how persons struggle

to actualize their convictions in the face of opposition and the consequences of their efforts. They illustrate what a virtuous life means in the concrete. Stories yank us out of the realm of intellectual abstraction and force us to wrestle with the complexity of how Christian life-visions can be embodied in our own personal history. James McClendon is a theologian who has done pioneering work in the area of life-stories and theology. He writes,

“In or near the community there appear from time to time singular or striking lives, the lives of persons who embody the convictions of the community but in a new way . . . Such lives, by their attractiveness or beauty, may serve as data for the Christian thinker, enabling him more truly to reflect upon the tension between what is and what ought to be believed and lived by all.”³⁹

McClendon focuses specifically on the genre of biography, but his insight that human lives incarnate theological themes and eschatological virtues has applications even in the genres of fiction. Christianity is primarily a life to be lived more than it is a theory to be explained. It needs the witness of persons to show us what such a life means in terms of actions, decisions, attitudes, values, virtues, desires, and dreams.

My point is, that anyone who wants to understand what the Sermon on the Mount means in the concrete, would do well to consult the lives of such persons as Saint Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day, and Peter Maurin. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Jean Vanier are icons of Christian charity. Living the paschal mystery is nowhere more evident than in the story of Oscar Romero. The heroic love, which is willing to lay down one’s life for another, is aptly given form in the story of Saint Maximilian Kolbe. Lives teach by embodying the convictions of faith and morality. Not limiting oneself to the realm of actual history, one might learn much regarding the kenotic dimension of Christian life from Bernanos’ priest in *The Diary of a Country Priest*. I have learned much about religious tolerance, the need to see beyond the walls of prejudice, and fidelity to truth from the novels of Chaim Potok. The beauty of the mystical life first became clear to me when I met Father Zossima in the pages of Dostoevsky’s mighty novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. The beauty and burden of the witness to peace has been movingly rendered in Jan De Hartog’s Quaker-novels *The Peaceable Kingdom* and *The Lamb’s War*. And of course, King Arthur moves me by his fidelity to the dream of a world where might does not make right but where might serves right. Stories of conversion can be of help to those struggling in the stage of searching faith. C. S. Lewis’ autobiographical account of his own conversion *Surprised by Joy*, Thomas Merton’s journey to faith in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and of course the classic *Confessions* of Saint Augustine are both moving and encouraging for those struggling to come to a faith they can own. Even stories that deal with the day-to-day struggles of persons seeking to live in fidelity to their life-visions provide a way to explore vicariously the contours of the good life. By “enfleshing” the virtues and struggles of persons seeking to live truthfully, stories give us models of how our own lives can be lived and how we can negotiate the transition from vision to reality.

The truthful life is attractive because it embodies what we find best in ourselves and in other human beings. The truthful life possesses its own beauty. Thus, stories of truthful living can serve to motivate learners to undertake the work of living up to what is best in themselves and incarnating the vision of the Kingdom in their own actuality.

Faith as Trusting

We believe not only *that* God exists, but also we believe *in* God in a way that is analogous to our belief in the people who love us and whom we love. To believe in someone is to take the risk of giving ourselves into this person's keeping. It is to believe that in this person's eyes, we are known and loved. By revealing the character of God as compassionate and trustworthy, stories invite a response of trust on the part of listeners. God is known in the Bible principally through his actions rather than through a discussion of his divine attributes. Even when the writers of Sacred Scripture ascribe particular qualities to God such as compassion, righteousness, fidelity and loving-kindness, these adjectives are generally tied to historical experiences in which they have seen God demonstrating these qualities in his dealings with humankind. Thus, we find in the Bible that the attitude of abandonment to God is often nurtured by recitations of his mighty deeds in history.⁴⁰ On the other hand, believers run the risk of losing heart and betraying the Covenant when they forget God's kindness to them in the past:

Like our ancestors, we have sinned, we have acted wickedly, guiltily; *our ancestors in Egypt never grasped the meaning of your wonders. They did not bear in mind your countless acts of love . . . They forgot the God who was saving them, who had done great deeds in Egypt . . .*"⁴¹

The genre of personal testimony that one encounters particularly in the charismatic movement and evangelical gatherings is a mode of narration that achieves much the same effect. In this storytelling form, people proclaim the salvific power of God in their own lives. They testify to healings, release from addictions, upturns in fortune, liberation from meaninglessness and despair. By portraying the character of God as revealed through his actions, these personal stories suggest that the acts of God are not events of the past, but part of his ongoing work in the world. Such stories invite us to trust the God who works wonders even today.

Another way in which stories invite trust is by portraying the drama of human beings who in their struggles to live truthfully in difficult circumstances, are vindicated in their faith in God and/or Ultimate Reality. What such stories say (sometimes indirectly through tone) is that despite the difficulties we experience, God or Ultimate Reality is fundamentally trustworthy. The eleventh chapter of *Hebrews* sees this approach when it extols the exemplars of faith in the Biblical tradition: "These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what was upright and earned the promises."⁴² The *Book of Judith* likewise offers its heroine as a model of fidelity to God vindicated. "Secular" stories such as that of Helen Keller or the fictional character George Bailey in the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life* also invite us to trust in goodness at the heart of the universe, and are therefore supportive of religious faith. I would also cite the *Narnia Chronicles* of C. S. Lewis, the Curdie books of George MacDonald, and the fantasies of Madeleine L'Engle as examples of stories that invite trust in the goodness of creation and ultimately of the Creator. In one way or another, what these stories proclaim is that those who hope in God, those who live in truth, will never be put to shame. It is not enough, then, for educators to affirm that God is trustworthy. God's

trustworthiness needs to be demonstrated. Stories allow us to do this. They are indispensable means of inspiring a trusting faith.

This chapter has tried to do a number of things. It has tried to situate the turn to story in the context of the new appreciation for imagination in the life of faith. We saw that the dependence of the moral and religious life on imaginative vision is what makes the category of story so important for educating in faith. We tell stories to transform life-visions. We then tried to demonstrate the importance of story, especially as regards life-vision and finally as regards the three fundamental aspects of faith: believing, doing and trusting. In the chapter that follows, we will deepen our exploration of the ways in which stories can foster growth in faith by seeing how specific genres of story can relate to different modes or styles of faith.

Chapter Three

Four Faith Styles

In his influential book *Will Our Children Have Faith?*⁴³ religious educator John Westerhoff presented an alternative to James Fowler's now famous faith stages. While influenced by Fowler's research, Westerhoff chose to speak of *faith styles* rather than *faith stages*, which indicates some dissatisfaction with the concept of stages for his purposes. It seems that what Westerhoff wanted to avoid was the danger of using stages in a judgmental way to pigeonhole people or to suggest that some stages were qualitatively better than others.⁴⁴ The recourse to stages employed by Fowler suggests that life in faith is like a ladder with persons beginning at the bottom rungs and ascending to higher levels. The image that Westerhoff chose to use instead was that of a tree that grows by adding on rings. The "rings" would represent four styles of faith: *experienced faith*, *affiliative faith*, *searching faith* and *owned faith*. One notes that these are terms which are descriptive of the subject's activity rather than of the subject's developmental capacity. By employing this image, Westerhoff seems to suggest that we ought not to speak of levels of faith that are "higher" or "lower," "better" or "worse." Neither are the styles of faith strictly identified with particular age levels or with a stage-like process of development wherein one abandons one stage in order to proceed to another. Each "style" of faith is complete and whole in itself; and while for the most part we come to the different modes in a sequence that parallels human growth, moving from one style to another does not mean an abandonment of previous styles. As the image of the tree suggests, we add on new "rings" without shedding the old ones. Indeed, one can exhibit any of the styles at different stages of life.⁴⁵

While as far as I know, there has been no empirical validation of Westerhoff's schema, a number of religious educators seem to find it useful. Thomas Zanzig employs this scheme, as do a number of authors of the religious education and youth ministry series' from Saint Mary's Press. Marcellin Flynn likewise employs Westerhoff's categories with some modifications in his books *Catholic Schools and the Communication of Faith* and *The Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*. For the purposes of this extended essay, Westerhoff's scheme seems promising because rather than focusing on developmental capacities, it describes the particular activity, which characterizes each faith mode. Given this, it is easier to see how

stories can be used to facilitate the particular process dominant in each faith style. We can now proceed to a description of each style.

Experienced Faith

Experienced faith is a style of faith, although not confined to them, characteristically associated with young children. While it is the earliest faith style, its characteristics are foundational and continue to influence persons throughout their lives.⁴⁶ Marcellin Flynn identifies this style with what Fowler refers to as a “fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primarily related adults.”⁴⁷ It is characterized by receptivity and imitativeness. It involves experiencing and imitating the trust in and commitment to God exhibited by persons with whom one is emotionally bonded (for children, this usually means parents). “Initially, children absorb the faith and values of their parents quite uncritically through a process of identification and modeling. Experienced faith ... is the imitative, unquestioned ‘introjection’ of faith in the young child through the observance of significant others.”⁴⁸

Crucial to this style of faith is the presence of a caring community of persons who enact their faith visibly and tangibly in explicitly religious practices as well as in the way they live, work, relate to others and in their existential stance toward the world. The faith content that is the object of imitation can consist of explicitly religious practices such as the sign of the cross, the recitation of prayers, going to Church, and so on. It can also consist of attitudes and values that stem from a religious faith stance. On an affective level, the consistent communication of love, care and tenderness can lead persons, particularly children, to an existential posture of trust and openness to reality that can blossom one day into a personal relationship of faith in God. Caring adults can also communicate to children the elements of their interpretation of the world, albeit not principally by way of discursive reason but through the language of stories that help to structure the child’s perception of reality.⁴⁹

Affiliative Faith

The adoption of this faith style usually parallels a significant growth in one’s capacity and need to relate to others on a deeper level than when one was younger. Characteristic of the affiliative style of faith is the need to belong and to participate in an intentional community of faith.⁵⁰ “All of us need to feel that we belong to a self-conscious community and that through our active participation can make a contribution to its life.”⁵¹ In contrast to the style of experienced faith where imitation is often unconscious, persons exhibiting this style of faith bring a greater degree of volition, understanding, and consciousness to the process of imitation and participation. As the capacity for abstract thinking develops, trust and commitment to the faith of the group can become more conscious and rational. Religion as it is practiced at this stage can often look like the religion of one who has a mature and total commitment to active membership in the faith community. One becomes an altar boy, sings in the choir, participates in the Mass every Sunday, goes to confession, participates in Church-related projects. This style of faith remains “affiliative,” however, in the sense that

it continues to be dependent to a large degree on the faith of the significant group and on the individual's need to be part of it.

Aside from the need to belong, Westerhoff points out that this faith style is characterized by the need for authority and for the nurture of religious affections. By authority, Westerhoff means "a community's affirmation of a story and a way of life that judges and inspires its action."⁵² The identity of the group comes from a story and a way of life, which are normative for its members. "The Church must continually be aware of its story and its way. We need to hear and tell that story . . . we need to act to internalize, rehearse, and personally own the story which undergirds the community's faith."⁵³ The nurture of religious affections and of the intuitional mode of consciousness are necessary to insure that religious faith becomes a matter of the heart as well as of the head. In particular, children whose capacities for abstract thinking are just beginning to develop need to experience the affective dimensions of faith often more than they need to hear propositions they cannot as yet grasp. Therefore, learners who exhibit this style need opportunities to act in ways that enhance the religious affections that cultivate intuition and open the way to awe, wonder and radical amazement in the face of mystery. Participation in drama, dance, painting, music, sculpture and storytelling have an important role to play in this regard.⁵⁴

Searching Faith

The previous faith-styles are characterized by a dependence on the faith of significant others. Searching faith is characterized by a gradual distancing away from those tenets and practices of faith that were once accepted uncritically on the basis of the need to belong or on the "blind" acceptance of authority. Doubts about God's existence or the truth of particular doctrines will emerge. There is often disillusionment with religious institutions, religious authorities and organized religion. This can be alarming for parents who might think their children are "losing their faith." Yet, in most cases, what the learner is in search of is a faith worthy of one's commitment. Oftentimes, this cannot be achieved without rejecting (sometimes provisionally, sometimes permanently) many elements of the religion of one's childhood.

Westerhoff notes three characteristics of this faith style.⁵⁵ One is the presence of *doubt and/or critical judgment*. In adolescence, the capacity for critical reason begins to emerge. Adolescents begin to see inconsistencies everywhere. They feel the need to question old certitudes that no longer seem true or meaningful to them. A helpful metaphor is to see the period of searching faith as a kind of a quest with personal faith and truthful living as the "holy grail." One goes on the quest armed with the sword of critical reason and the shield of personal experience. On the journey, one meets knights and damsels, dragons and wizards – never knowing which is friend and which is foe. Everything must, therefore, be tested in battle. What usually survives is whatever one finds personally relevant and meaningful. Judgment based on one's reason and personal experience rather than on external authority generally decides which elements of faith are to be kept and which ones are to be set aside (at least temporarily). At this point, the religion of the head becomes as important as the religion of the heart.⁵⁶ The learner needs to understand the whys and wherefores of his/her faith. Historical, theological, and moral reflections on life need to be cultivated.⁵⁷

Oftentimes, he needs to establish meaningful connections between traditional teaching and his/her own personal experience.

This brings us to the second characteristic of searching faith, which is *experimentation*. “Searching faith requires that we explore alternatives to our earlier understandings and ways, for people need to test their own tradition by learning about others.”⁵⁸ Here we see flirtations with the occult, the New Age, Marxism and oriental religions. Here we also see the exploration of different tributaries of the Christian tradition – for example, the works of Christian mystics like Julian of Norwich and Meister Eckhart, or of movements like the charismatics, creation spirituality and ecofeminism. There is often an intensified interest in spirituality. The experimentation may also take the form of exploring meditation and contemplation, designing worship experiences suited to one’s needs, participating in special retreats.

The third characteristic of searching faith is the need to *commit one’s life to causes and persons*. According to Westerhoff, one learns commitment by committing oneself to a variety of ideals, projects, and ideologies.⁵⁹ This is part of the “testing” process. People go through commitments to discover whether these commitments are actually worth their while. Many of these commitments will, therefore, be superficial or short-lived. Other causes may engage persons to a greater degree and over a long period of time. Some may expand to an owned faith.

Owned Faith

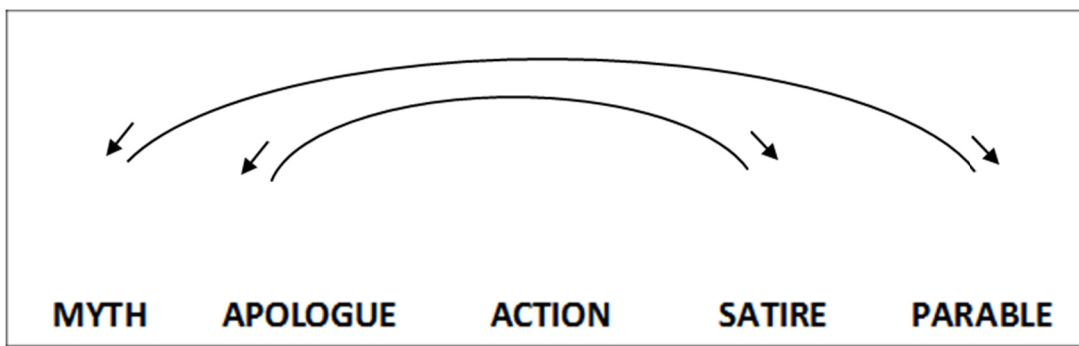
Owned faith involves a personal love relationship with God that expresses itself in the love of neighbor. It is characterized by the willingness to live out the implications of what one has come to believe as true even when to do so involves “swimming against the current” of the values and attitudes of the dominant culture, indeed even of one’s own nurturing community. Owned faith involves a free, informed and personal appropriation of the beliefs and practices of one’s faith community. This does not mean that one readily accepts things as they are given; the act of appropriation often requires creative fidelity in trying to reconcile the beliefs of one’s tradition with one’s own personal experience. Owning one’s faith does not mean that one has all the answers to life’s questions and problems. Rather, it means that one can address these questions and problems creatively and courageously because one trusts in a benevolent power at work beyond the horizons of one’s understanding. Owned faith involves willingness among believers to work at eliminating the dissonance between the vision contained in the community’s beliefs and their personal lifestyle and action in the world. Persons who own their faith possess a strong sense of witness and mission and are willing to collaborate with others to realize the dream of the Kingdom.

To own one’s faith does not mean that one stops growing. Rather, it means that one has found a place – a story and a tradition – in which to sink one’s roots. Doubts will continue to assail the believer, but now he has a patch of solid ground on which to confront the questions that face him. Owned faith does not banish the storms of disappointment or disillusionment, but it is able to live in the tension between vision and reality without falling into frustration and despair. Persons who have owned their faith realize that the

challenge of truthful, faithful living does not lie in continually transplanting oneself from one plot to another in order to sample all knowledge and truth. The challenge lies rather in deepening one's roots in the soil of one's tradition and spreading one's branches to embrace the tensions, paradoxes, and mysteries of life in its fullness.

Modes of Story and the Life of Faith

The question we began this extended essay with was, "How can different forms of stories be used to facilitate the growth in the life of faith of Filipino Catholic students?" In his 1975 book *The Dark Interval*, John Dominic Crossan identifies five fundamental modes of story that may be distinguished from one another in terms of their relation to the story world or what we have in this study referred to as life-vision. Paraphrasing Crossan then, the typology includes *myths*, which function to establish a vision of life; *apologues*, which illustrate and defend this vision; *actions*, which investigate the vision and its implications; *satires*, which attack and ridicule aspects of the vision; and *parables*, which subvert the existing vision and make alternative life-visions possible. Crossan further suggests that one can lay out these five stories in a continuum (see below).



The arrows in the above continuum suggest that the modes of story they point to exist in relationships of binary opposition. Myth and parable are polar opposites, as are apologue and satire. Myth sets up the worldview that parable overturns. Apologue demonstrates the worldview working out in actuality, and satire points out the flaws and failures in attempts to live out the vision. Actions are the way worldviews/life-visions are explored. They are "open" stories in the sense that they do not strive to make a pre-conceived point, but in the unfolding, show the implications of particular life-visions.

Given the centrality of vision to the life of faith, Crossan's typology is both useful and necessary for understanding just how stories function to facilitate a person's growth in faith. In the following section, we will address the central question of this study by first describing each mode of story and then suggesting how this form may be used to facilitate the dominant movement of each faith style.

Myth: Establishing a Vision of Life

“A story is a myth if it sets up a world for people to dwell in or a tradition for people to live in.”⁶⁰ Myth is the primal form of story. Every other mode of story, including parable, presupposes a myth that sets up a vision of how things are, how the world works, why we do the things that we do, and how life should be led. Human beings cannot live without some kind of myth, some kind of story that explains themselves to themselves. Our acting in the world always unfolds against the backdrop of some kind of myth. Myths are not necessarily religious in the sense of being connected to a religious tradition. Darwin’s theory of evolution is as much a myth as the creation stories in the first two chapters of *Genesis*. Marxism sets up its own myth with the proletariat as the vanguard of a utopic social order. Nations have myths that shape their understanding of themselves as a people. In our day, there have been significant attempts to harmonize science and religion through the forging of new “creation stories.” Teilhard de Chardin and Brian Swimme have both tried their hands at creating new cosmological myths able to take in the discoveries of modern science.

All people live out of personal or communally shared myths, though these are not always openly articulated or acknowledged. In his book *Story Theology*, Terrence Tilley cites Joseph Campbell as giving four basic functions of myths.⁶¹ The first function is *religious*; myths awaken in us a sense of awe, wonder, humility and respect in the face of Ultimate Mystery. They awaken us to the sacramental nature of the world in which we dwell. The second function is *cosmological*; myths tell us where everything comes from and where it is headed. They are stories of origins and destinies which provide us with a framework for dealing with ultimate questions. Myths can also have a *moral-social* function. They legitimate particular forms of social order and promote the development of virtues and behaviors consistent with this order. They also discourage particular behaviors or attitudes that are disruptive or detrimental to the order espoused. Finally, myths have a *psychological-pedagogical* function; they give individuals a place to hold and a role to play within the order established through myth. In this way, myths offer individuals an orientation that allows them to harmonize the different aspects of their lives. In sum then, a myth is a story, which sets up a vision of life. It awakens and directs a people’s sense of awe, gives a sense of origin and destiny, establishes a social order and teaches us how to live in it.⁶² Myths can perform any or all of these functions.

For Christians, the story of Jesus has a normative function; it is our central myth. When we tell the Jesus Story as a myth, we are suggesting that the reality of Jesus ultimately explains us to ourselves and demands that we live in a particular way. The religious function of the Jesus Story is to awaken wonder at the prodigality of God’s love for sinners (us). The cosmological dimension emerges explicitly when we consider the Johannine theme of the Incarnate Word, the Pauline theme of creation in Christ, and the universal significance of the resurrection. The moral-social dimension emerges in the vision of the Kingdom whose charter is the Sermon on the Mount. Finally, as myth, the Jesus Story calls us to follow on the road of discipleship.

Myth is particularly important for persons in the mode of *experienced faith*. In sharing myths with children, the religious educator is communicating a particular vision of the world and of

life which becomes the seed of the child's personal life-vision. Jewish families in the celebration of the Seder Meal recount the story of the Exodus of the Chosen People. In the context of the Seder Meal, this story functions mythically to shape the self-understanding of those who celebrate. They are God's people, the least of all peoples, loved and liberated by God, partakers of a promise, called and destined to be blessing to the world. Interestingly enough, it is the youngest child who invites the sharing of the story with this question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" In a sense, all children are that youngest child begging for the story to be told, begging to know the whys and wherefores of their lives in community. The story of the Exodus told as myth fulfills the fundamental functions we have spoken of. It awakens awe and humility at God's graciousness on behalf of an unlikely people; it tells of a people's origin and destiny; it suggests a pattern of life lived in gratitude for the act of liberation; it tells them who they are as members of God's Chosen People and grounds them in fidelity to the Covenant. Likewise, the story of the Last Supper, though seldom treated as myth, can be told in such a way as to fulfill a number of myth's important functions. It can provide an account of origins, it can validate a particular pattern of living (self-giving love unto death), it is capable of awakening a sense of awe and humility at the extent of God's love, and so on. Young people in the mode of experienced faith likewise need to hear myths told and retold if they are to come to know who they are, and what they are destined for, and what role they have to play in the world. C. S. Lewis, I believe, is able to achieve this in his wonderful children's novels – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Magician's Nephew*, and *The Last Battle* – which are thinly veiled attempts to introduce children to the Christian myth of creation, redemption, and eschatological consummation. Myth invites participation in the world that it creates. When sharing mythical stories, therefore, we are inviting children to see the world/life in a particular way.

Experienced faith is the privileged time and mode for myth. It is true that we never outgrow the need for myth, but the earliest stage of faith is important because it is the period of creating foundations. It is the period of uncritical acceptance. In sharing myths, therefore, we need to be alert to the nature and quality of the vision we are communicating in our stories. Are we imparting a vision of life that leads to an appreciation of Loving Mystery at the heart of the universe? Are our accounts of origin and destiny consistent with belief in a loving God who cares for all people? What pattern of moral behavior do our myths endorse? What do our stories suggest life is all about? The creation stories in Genesis are classic myths. In retelling them for children, however, educators have to be alert to the four questions I have just posed. The Judeo-Christian stories of creation are more than stories about origins. They are visions of life. We need to be careful about the visions we are trying to impart. Children can outgrow certain myths as they grow older, but the meanings and values contained in the myths of childhood can perdure and be the guiding impulses for constructing the new myths that guide them in adolescence and even adulthood.

Two things must be said before we move on. First, as religious educators, we need to be alert to the doctrinal implications of the stories we share. I am not suggesting that there be absolute congruence between myth and doctrine so that myth becomes doctrine in narrative form; I am suggesting, rather, that we be aware of the values and visions communicated on the four "levels" on which myths function. The *trajectory* of the myth and the doctrine ought to be consistent and not contradict one another in these four areas. Secondly, because

emotional bonding is important in dealing with children on the level of experienced faith, we need to assure that our stories are validated by our own caring behavior, which manifests in experiential form the truth of the myths we are trying to share. A myth of Incarnate Love demands that we incarnate love.

Apologue: Defending the Vision

Sheldon Sacks tells us “an apologue is a work organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement or a series of such statements.”⁶³ Another way of putting it is that an apologue is a story with a lesson. We have all heard parents or teachers use such stories, ending them almost inevitably with the words, “The moral of the story is. . . .” Apologues are narrative illustrations of moral and religious truths and ideals, of the wisdom gained from experience or transmitted through culture. Aesop’s fables are a perfect illustration of apologues. Bible stories are often used as apologues (even though they were not intended to be such). Such is the case of the tale of David and Goliath, where the point of the story is “With God all things are possible.” Apologues can illustrate doctrines and beliefs, as when the creation story in the first chapter of *Genesis* is told to explain that God is creator or the story of the Fall is told to explain what sin means. Apologues can be constructed as defenses of particular value systems. The fictional character of Superman (at least in his early days) was the embodiment of Truth, Justice and the American Way. The boyhood of Jose Rizal is often mined for stories emphasizing things like respect for elders, obedience to parents, the importance of telling the truth, etc. Crossan sees the Dick Tracy series as an example of apologue since its title character is constantly spouting such lines as, “Yes, *inevitably* a criminal’s mind cracks first, then with reason perverted he fashions his own finish.”⁶⁴ Allegories such as Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Hannah Hurnard’s *Hind’s Feet on High Places*, C. S. Lewis’ *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and *The Great Divorce* are all apologues that are written in order to prescribe a particular religious stance. The *Chicken Soup for the Soul* genre of storytelling is also a form of apologue – the wisdom story that offers a lesson about the things that matter in life.

Religious educators can also treat the Jesus Story as a form of apologue. In doing so, however, they need to be wary of using the Jesus Story to validate their own agendas. For example, some storytellers might want to stress the importance of obedience to parental authority and use the story of Jesus to validate this message by stressing his obedience to the Father. This is a misuse of the story, and sharp students can readily counter this ploy with stories of incidents when Jesus was patently not obedient to his earthly parents. My point is that the Jesus Story as apologue ought not to be used to validate themes and convictions that are not themselves inherent in the actual narrative. In using the Jesus Story as apologue, we need to pay attention to story and distill the “lessons” from there. One helpful thing to remember is that Jesus’ proclamation was a proclamation in word and deed. In most instances, then, we will find in the Gospels deeds that are apt illustrations of his words.

The apologue is the most obviously pedagogical story mode although it is not always the most effective. Its meaning is intended to be quite plain. It functions to validate aspects of a particular life-vision. Apologues, I believe, are best suited to persons in an affiliative faith mode where young people are seeking to discover the “grammar” of the faith community,

seeking to understand what it means to truly believe and belong. Doctrines communicated through narrative illustrations are apologues that help socialize young people into a community's belief system. In learning the kind of life membership entails, young people often need obvious exemplars or role models that embody the virtues and values of the community to which they want to belong. They need heroes. The traditional genre of hagiography (which I will distinguish later from the biographies of saints) often performed this function. Hagiographers often narrated stories of saints in such a way as to underscore particular virtues like courage, faith, austerity, perseverance in trial, etc. Historical accuracy was not the point as it is in histories and biographies. The point was the vision of life embodied by this saint in concrete practice. Similarly, childhood heroes like the fictional characters of Batman, the Lone Ranger, Tarzan, Flash Gordon, the Phantom, and the like serve as embodiments of the positive ideals and values of a culture. Virtues and values need to be displayed narratively in order to come alive, and this is what apologue does. The learner coming across the lives of heroes and saints is captivated and inspired. As he gets older, chances are, he will find these figures rather wooden and two-dimensional; but in affiliative faith, the stories of characters such as these serve the purpose of illustrating, in an obvious way, the fundamental convictions of the life-vision and demonstrating how these can be lived.

Actions: Investigating Life-Visions

Actions like apologues, presume the world set up by myth. They differ from apologues, however in that they are not created to teach a lesson. This is not to say that we do not learn lessons from actions; we do. But the lessons we learn are learned by travelling along the way of the story and drawing our own insights and conclusions from what we vicariously experience. There is no point or lesson outside of the story itself. Action stories tend to be more complex than apologues because life is complex and actions are created to explore and investigate life. As Tilley says, "The point of an action story is to reveal how things go on in a world, whether the form of story is factual or fictional."⁶⁵ Action stories that are factual include histories, biographies, and autobiographies. Fictional action stories include novels, legends, or fairy tales.

The late novelist and literary critic John Gardner once wrote, "art rediscovers generation by generation what is necessary to humanness."⁶⁶ Such a task is not only the responsibility of artists; it is a fundamental human task. Action stories can become vehicles for the vicarious exploration of the world in order to discover what truly promotes human fulfillment. They can show us how virtues and values play out in life – not in the two-dimensional manner of apologues (which are mere illustrations), but in the thickness and complexity of existence in the world. The subject of an action is not a *lesson* which seeks to become incarnate in character and plot. The subject of an action is a *person* in search of a more human, more truthful existence. The subject does not begin by knowing what life means, or what is of value, or what truth is – he or she learns these on the way as he confronts multiple challenges and conflicts. The action does not offer the learner lessons – rather it offers the learner experiences and shows how character evolves, emerges, or crumbles in response to different situations and conflicts. Actions invite us to step into the world of the story's agents and to confront the realities they do. They invite us to ask ourselves, "How would I react in

this situation?” Actions have particular value for persons who are *searching for a faith worthy of their commitment*.

Telling the Jesus Story as an action story in the sense described above is an important way in which learners can come to know and understand Jesus as a living person, a way in which to enter into his mind and heart. Apologues distill lessons from the Story of Jesus. Actions give us (of course) Jesus-in-action and allow us to draw our own conclusions. Two popular attempts to tell the Jesus Story as action are Walter Wagener’s treatment of Jesus in *The Book of God* and Joseph Girzone’s modern-day treatment in *Joshua*. Wagener’s approach is the more conventional of the two. It is a “novelized” treatment of Jesus’ story that sticks to the basic lines of the Gospel narratives while using literary techniques to help us to come to understand in a subjective, participative way what Jesus might have thought and felt. Girzone, on the other hand, departs from the narrative framework of the Gospels by setting his story in modern-day America with Jesus returning to earth 2,000 years after his death as an itinerant handyman called Joshua. While departing from the “facts” of the story, Girzone has Joshua enacting patterns and displaying attitudes that are consistent with the actions and attitudes of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels. Both Wagener’s and Girzone’s attempts are legitimate approaches to re-telling the Jesus Story as action and helping us to understand the human Jesus and his vision of the Kingdom in a more empathetic way.

Biographies and autobiographies are particularly helpful for exploring the shape of truthful faith-filled lives. These differ from apologetic presentations of life stories in that the narratives in biography and autobiography are not refashioned to make a point. The lives are allowed to speak for themselves. Life stories told as actions are not meant to preach messages but to show character developing freely through time by way of the different choices and commitments the protagonists make. The life stories of such persons as Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Therèse of Lisieux, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Simone Weil, and others offer those in the searching mode of faith to see how these individuals embodied their faith convictions in their own particular contexts. *Of Gods and Men*, *Entertaining Angels*, and *Romero* are films that are often moving explorations of the struggle to live in fidelity to God and conscience. The biographies of saints are especially illuminating because they shed light on the dimension of one’s relationship to God.⁶⁷ For example, Julian Green’s life of Saint Francis (*The Fool of God*) succeeds in helping the reader “taste” Francis’ relationship with God. One gets a sense of a soul inebriated with the Divine, certainly a potentially significant experience for persons in the searching faith mode. Likewise, stories of conversions such as that of Saint Augustine, Bede Griffiths, Avery Dulles or C. S. Lewis can lead those in the searching mode to discover clues and helps for their own search.

Biographies provide learners with ways to explore lived convictions, to understand what a life lived out of a particular worldview looks like. These lives can challenge theological reflection and ethical action of learners’ lives. Furthermore, biography can lead learners to self-knowledge. In reading biographies, learners find themselves The story of a single life calls learners to reflect on their own stories; and, ultimately, these stories challenge learners to look at their own lives and assess their own embodiment of beliefs and convictions.⁶⁸

What is said of biography here can also apply to other types of action stories, even fictional ones. The films *Sister Stella L.*, *The Black Robe*, and *The Mission* allow us to explore the characters, convictions, and conflicts of their respective protagonists in a way that is illuminating and challenging.

Actions can explore the world of religion with sympathy and sensitivity, as Chaim Potok has done in *The Chosen* and *The Promise*. These are not only wonderful books about the redemptive power of friendship, they also deal with the destructive power of religious belief devoid of compassion, the conflict between reason and mysticism, the nature of prejudice, the struggle to remain rooted in religious tradition and yet open to the developments of the modern world. The traditional tale “The Juggler of Notre Dame,” as told by Ruth Sawyer, is a short but moving account of the “simple faith” that confounds the learned and the clever. Walter Wagener’s attempt in *The Book of God* to render stories from the Old and New Testaments as parts of a novel helps to recapture the sense of the faith of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. The Young-Adult novel *The Devil’s Arithmetic* deals with the Jewish admonition to remember. In it, a young Jewish girl who finds religious rituals pointless goes back in time to the Holocaust and experiences the horror of the prison camps. It is there amidst death and despair that the Sabbath Meal and the whole Jewish tradition take on a life-giving meaning. Sadly, the number of writers and storytellers who direct their efforts toward helping children and young people explore the world of faith and religion are few.

Actions as they are explained here have particular usefulness for those persons searching for a faith worthy of their commitment. They are useful to all searchers – even those who have owned their commitment to a particular faith tradition (because being committed is not the same as knowing all the answers). What they offer to the searcher is a way of vicariously exploring life in the world in order to discover what one can believe and how one can live.

Human beings need story . . . to disclose to their imaginations some genuinely new possibilities for existence; possibilities which conceptual analysis, committed as it is to understanding present actualities, cannot adequately provide.⁶⁹

Through action stories, searchers can investigate new possibilities for living by examining what truthful and faithful living can entail. They offer the possibility of looking into other lives and comparing them with one’s own. They help searchers to explore the world through the eyes of faith.

Satires: Critiquing the Vision

Satires are stories that ridicule aspects of the “real” world, external to the story, in order to create the possibility of change. They are the binary opposites of apologues. If apologues seek to affirm aspects of the life-vision, satires point out the ways in which people fail to live in fidelity to the vision. Its direct targets may be particular persons, institutions, traits presumed to be present in all persons, or combinations of the three. Being the polar opposite of apologue, satire relates to apologue as the opposite side of the coin. Like apologue, it seeks to “teach”;

but its lessons come not by way of demonstrating the truth and value of some vision but by ridiculing the inauthentic way it is lived. Its affirmations are presented by way of negation.

The *Book of Jonah* is an example of satire in the Bible.⁷⁰ What it satirizes, among other things, is the xenophobic attitude of post-exilic Israel that would set limits on the mercy of God. What it affirms is the incipient perspective of universalism as regards the possibility of salvation. Avery Cormen in his book (subsequently made into a movie) *Oh God!* satirizes fake piety, stereotypical thinking about God, the pretensions of theologians, and the commercialization of religion. What he affirms is the faith that is willing to take prophetic stances even when they are highly embarrassing. In her short story “Revelation,” Flannery O’Connor employs satire to skewer the judgmental and self-righteous Ruby Turpin, who sees herself as a good Christian woman but who turns out to be a “warthog from hell.” What O’Connor affirms is the topsy-turvy logic of the Kingdom, which has the prostitutes, tramps, and tax collectors at the head of the line to Heaven.

Those in an affiliative mode of faith can benefit from a blend of apologue and satire. Recourse to satire keeps those in this mode of faith humble by making them aware of the human propensity to betray the vision of God’s Kingdom. Those in the affiliative mode of faith can sometimes be uncritical in their loyalty toward persons and institutions. Often, ignorance, prejudice, pettiness, greed, laziness, or some manifestation of disordered desire and human sinfulness keeps them from thinking through the real implications of a commitment to living one’s faith. By pointing these out, satire keeps learners critical, hopefully even self-critical, of the ways in which faith is taught and lived.

Those in the searching style of faith are those most likely to appreciate and engage in satire. It is even quite probable that exposure to satires may have been a factor in prodding them out of an affiliative faith stance. The iconoclastic spirit that often accompanies searching faith revels in ridiculing the pretensions, hypocrisies, prejudices, and mediocrity of the self-satisfied. What those in the searching style of faith need to be aware of, however, is that faith cannot survive on a diet of satire alone. Satire can turn anarchic and nihilistic. It is useful insofar as it exercises a purgative effect on moral and spiritual vision; but it needs at the same time to affirm something, if only the possibility of something better.

I doubt that the Jesus Story itself can be told as a satire. While Jesus may have indulged in satire on occasion, the spirit of ridicule is not the spirit of the Gospel narratives. The story of Jesus is more constructive than it is destructive and, therefore, is more appropriately told in ways that invite the building of alternative possibilities for living.

Parable: Subverting the Vision

“The polar opposite of myth is parable. A parable is a story set within a world created by myth and which functions to subvert the world in which it is set.”⁷¹ The question arises why, if mythical visions are so necessary, we need to subvert them. The answer is certainly because reality, particularly Ultimate Reality, is always bigger than our visions. Conversion, on a cognitive level, involves “redrawing our maps” in response to new insights and

perceptions into reality, which cannot be accommodated within old paradigms. Parables call for paradigm shifts, that is to say, for conversion.

While parables resemble satires in that both function by way of negation, parables go much further than satires, which ultimately presume the truthfulness of the mythical vision. The “parabler,” however, recognizes that the myth is, after all, just another story. He, therefore, tells a story that jars the audience into realizing the relativity of its assumptions. A number of the stories presented by the late Anthony de Mello in his collections *The Song of the Bird* and *One Minute Wisdom* are excellent examples of parables in the truest sense of their being subversive of conventional mindsets. The “parabler” is not content to say, “You are playing the game badly,” which is pretty much what satire suggests; rather, he is likely to say, “You’ve got the rules of the game all wrong,” and even, “Perhaps you’re playing a different game.” In other words, those who feel obligated to judge sinners may discover that in rendering judgment against sinners and casting them out they are in for a big surprise. Jesus said, “Do not judge lest you be judged.” Is it possible that in our very act of judging others, we are actually bringing judgment on ourselves? Is it possible that without our knowing it, the definition of sinner has changed from one who is cast out to one who casts out? Is this why Jesus is so big on forgiveness and compassion?

Jesus spoke in parables, often to overturn deep-seated assumptions about God, sin, salvation, and the Kingdom. In telling these stories, he would deliberately upset his audience’s structures of expectation regarding the story’s outcome since these expectations were often rooted in the graceless and impoverished imaginations of his audience. In doing so, he was inviting people to imagine God and the world in a new way. But he went even further than this. Jesus also acted parabolically by associating with sinners, offering fellowship before repentance. He acted parabolically by healing on the Sabbath, forcing people to question what the Sabbath was all about. He acted parabolically by dying and rising, thus upsetting all assumptions about sin, righteousness, the Law, and God. In the words of Crossan, “The parabler became a parable.”⁷² Christians follow a parabolic Messiah.

Parables are most valuable, I believe, for persons who are in danger of thinking they know all there is to know about their faith, people ensconced securely in the world of myth or too at home with their own certitudes. Persons who exhibit an affiliative faith style often need to be shaken up so that they can see the extent to which their faith vision is dependent on myths they have never seriously questioned but tacitly accepted as a condition of membership in the group. Parables can move them to initiate the necessary process of questioning their beliefs in order to fully understand them. All too often young people in an affiliative faith style assume they know what they believe. Many times such is not the case. A good parable can clear a space for those who think they’ve heard it all to hear the truths of the faith once again, not in a superficial manner but with real understanding.

Likewise, persons who exhibit an owned faith style need to be reminded that they are ever pilgrims on a journey of faith and that there is no point at which they can say, “I have *finally* arrived.” The great temptation of those who have actually struggled through from the phase of experienced faith to that of owned faith is to think that the journey finally ends when one can say, “I accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.” Indeed, owning one’s faith

entails making the dynamic of quest-and-questioning, which characterizes the searching mode, a permanent feature of one's life. Faith must be "owned" not just once, but over and over again in the course of a life of quest-and-questioning. The difference for those who own their faith is that their searching is done from within a tradition that not only gives direction and meaning to the search, but allows them to catch now and again, the glimmers of the Ultimate Truth which is the goal of the searching.

"It is possible to live in myth and without parable. But it is not possible to live in parable alone. To live in parable means to live in the tension between myth *and* parable."⁷³ Parable constantly reminds us that our myths are provisional; it does not release us from the need to create myths. While Crossan suggests that there is no religion that "gives us the final word on 'reality' and thereby excludes the authentic experience of mystery,"⁷⁴ this does not mean there is no truth or validity to our religious beliefs or our life-visions. Any human creation is going to suffer from the limitations of human knowing. But if we cannot know all truth, we can at least know some of it – enough to keep us busy constructing myths more adequate to our growing perception of Mystery.

Some Further Points to Consider

We began this chapter with a discussion of the four faith styles in Westerhoff's scheme and moved on to explain the five modes of story and their contribution to the dynamics of each faith style. Before ending, there are some further points that need to be made. The first is that the insights regarding the use of story presented here do not exhaust the possible uses of story in fostering faith. I am certain that there are other usages and other story forms that have not been touched on in this essay. Moreover, one will notice that the divisions between genres are not fixed but tend to blur depending on the way we tell the story. On one level, the story of David and Goliath is an action but it is often told as an apologue. The story of the Good Samaritan can be told as an apologue that illustrates non-discriminatory compassion or as a parable that overturns notions of who's in and who's out. The story of Abraham's calling can be taken as an apologue of faith or as a founding myth. *Gulliver's Travels* was originally a satire, but most children today would read it as an action. Much depends then on the intention the storyteller brings to the telling, the way he shapes the narrative to fulfill his purposes, and the mode of reception by the audience.

The second point is that my suggestion that certain types of story are particularly appropriate to certain faith styles should not be taken to mean that we should only use these particular types of story for persons who exhibit a particular faith style. What I have tried to do, rather, is suggest that particular story form brings with it a particular "genius" or "gift" that can be helpful for persons engaged in the specific dynamics of a particular faith style. The central dynamic of experienced faith is receiving and imitating. Thus, it is an ideal time to plant the seed of myth, which structures the sense of reality. The central dynamic of affiliative faith is seeking to participate and belong. Therefore, apologues are useful for learning the kind of life membership entails and how such a life can be lived. Satires, by ridiculing inauthentic living, are useful for ensuring that persons in the affiliative mode give their best to this way of life. Parables are useful for keeping such persons from premature certitude and self-satisfaction, thus opening the way to transformation. The central dynamic of the searching style

is that of questioning and experimentation. Actions are particularly useful because they allow individuals to conduct their search for truthful living vicariously. Finally, because the central dynamic of owned faith involves maintaining a healthy tension between deepening in the Christian life while remaining open to future possibility, myth and parable are helpful in allowing individuals to maintain a creative tension between rootedness and openness.

My final point is that the needs and dynamics that characterize particular faith styles do not disappear once faith expands to encompass another style. We will always need experiences of enacted faith and love. The dynamic of questioning and experimentation does not evaporate once we shift from searching to owned faith. We always experience the need to belong, which is characteristic of affiliative faith. We will always be, to some extent, reliant on the faith of others for support and guidance. Westerhoff's image of the tree rings is meant to suggest precisely that – we add new layers – we do not shed them. This implies that we never outgrow the need to hear particular types of stories although, at different points in our lives, some stories and story forms may be more helpful to us than others.

Chapter Four

In this final chapter, I would like to explore the *process* by which learners learn from stories. I will build on the work of Pamela Mitchell in her article “Why Care About Stories? A Theory of Narrative Art.”⁷⁵ While her process directly applies to the activity of reading stories, it holds just as true for other ways of making contact with the story such as film, oral narration, and theatre. In the course of this discussion, therefore, I will treat “reading” as a metaphor for intentionally engaging stories in whatever way one does or can.

A Theory of Narrative Art

As Mitchell sees it, in the course of reading, the learner is three things: an Immediate Reader, an Entering-Exiting Reader, and an Extra-Narrative Reader.⁷⁶ As *Immediate Reader*, one steps out of one's actuality and enters wholeheartedly into the world of the story in order to experience its reality. As *Entering/Exiting Reader*, one confronts the life-view or vision of the story with one's personal questions. Ideally, this is not an individual activity but occurs in a “community of discourse” sharing and discussing their questions, insights, and evaluations of the story's vision. As *Extra-Narrative Reader*, one carries the new insights learned from engagement with the text and with the community of discourse into his or her actual life.

The Immediate Reader

The task of the Immediate Reader (IR) is to become intimate with the story rather than trying to maintain the aesthetic distance urged by some modern schools of literary criticism.⁷⁷ At this stage the IR does not read primarily to analyze, which would be characteristic of the objectivist approach discussed earlier, but rather opens oneself to being “taken over” or “colonized” by the world of the story so that one accepts the “rules,” the bounds and limits of the story's world rather than imposing rules external to the narrative. This is the stage of imaginative participation. One accepts that there is magic in the world, that trees talk, and that there are spirits in the earth and waters. One travels through the forests

of the enchanted kingdom in the company of princes, knights, elves, and changelings. The reader is a silent participant able to identify with the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the story; he is able to share them. One knows the story through imaginative participation. One becomes a believer for the duration of the story. It is in this primal relationship with the story that our perspectives are deepened, broadened or transformed, at least for the time being during which the story unfolds, and possibly even afterwards.

The responsibilities of the IR at this stage are two-fold: first, to grasp the specifics of the tale (characters, events, setting, conflict, relationships between characters, etc.); and second, to grasp subjectively the underlying vision of the world that grounds the action, the way the story world works and the norms of causation and behavior that can be expected in it.⁷⁸

The Entering-Exiting Reader

The reader as Entering-Exiting Reader (EER), while immersed in the world of story, is simultaneously aware that he or she is participating in a story-world which he or she can enter and exit at will. The story remains a constructed story.⁷⁹ As an EER, this ability to participate and to withdraw from the story world brings with it a number of responsibilities.

The first of these responsibilities is to be able to distinguish between the realities that the storyteller wants the reader to accept for the duration of the story (nonce beliefs) and the beliefs that the storyteller expects to be functional and valid outside the world of story, in the reader's actuality (fixed norms). In C. S. Lewis' science-fiction novel *Out of the Silent Planet*, we are asked to accept as nonce beliefs that each planet in the galaxy has a governing spirit and that these spirits are in constant communication with one another. We are asked to accept as a fixed norm the idea that our unwillingness to accept "creature-hood" and mortality lead us to destructive behavior. The "fixed norm" is part of the life-vision the storyteller wants to affirm.

The second responsibility of the EER is to bring his or her perspective to bear on the story in order to question it and *to be questioned by it*. In my opinion, Mitchell does not stress enough the mutuality of the process. She speaks solely of questioning the story. I believe, however, that good stories also question us. The questions we bring to the text are evaluative questions and tend to touch on the vision of life embodied in the story. Did so-and-so do the right thing? What would I have done in that situation? What's he saying about life? Do I agree with that? What do I believe?

The third responsibility of the EER is to raise and share questions within a community of persons bringing their own questions, judgments, insights, and stories to the text. "In that community, we compare the story's world with our previous experience, with others present, and with their previous experience. We ask our questions not of the story alone but in the presence of others, and we ask the questions *of* these others as well. We become part of a spiraling dialogue, with stories and persons."⁸⁰

The Extra-Narrative Reader

The Extra-Narrative Reader (ENR) has a life beyond the story. The ENR carries the new thoughts, perspectives, affective loyalties, and insights gained through participation in the text (IR), questioning and communal evaluation EER, and brings them into his extra-narrative actuality. The ENR “takes with him or her a newness and a possibility from the stories, into his or her ongoing life.”⁸¹

Mitchell’s process underlines the need to balance three things: imaginative participation, self-reflection, and communal discussion. It is a process that suggests a number of possibilities for shaping the pedagogy of faith formation.

Conclusion

In this extended essay, I have made the claim that religious educators tell stories ultimately to change lives and that one way they do this is by employing stories to transform the life-visions of learners in order to facilitate the learner’s growth in the life of faith. Proposals have been made regarding the use of myth, apologue, satire, action, and parable to address the needs and dynamics of persons in each faith style. Some important considerations flow from the proposal being made here.

One implication of the proposal presented is that religious educators ought to know their students well enough to identify their predominant faith styles. By understanding the dynamics and needs of students in a particular faith style, we can bring greater deliberateness to the choice of stories we share and to the ways we share them. It is not enough, however, to know about faith styles. We need to be particularly alert to the implicit life-vision that underlies students’ values, beliefs, attitudes, decisions, and actions because these suggest to us the matter and mode of our stories.

One should also bear in mind that the reason for resorting to stories rather than didactic exposition is because one wants to convey not merely a message but an experience. One wants to invite imaginative participation before inviting analysis. Thus, in the choice of medium (oral narration, print, film, drama) or in the manner presented, an effort should be made to encourage this participation. We should not, if we can help it, shortcut the process by cutting immediately to the punch line by saying, “What the story is trying to say is. . . .” We ought to encourage the subjective knowing that comes from “speaking to” the story and allowing the story to “speak to” its audience. The way to do this is by sticking with the story. By allowing the readers to become intimate with it so that it can move, probe, and question them.

We need also to consider the reflective and analytic capacities of the learner. Most young people have no trouble getting into a story. Their problem is getting something out of it. Sometimes, the “thickness” of a story prevents them from getting at its meaning or from distinguishing elements of the life-vision to which they need to attend. This means that we have to provide opportunities for them to be able to engage in the type of questioning that will help the stories yield their meaning as well as allow the stories to question the learners.

As I see it, this requires two things: the preparation of the learners prior to the telling of the story and guided reflection and discussion following the story.

We can prepare students for a story by introducing the story in such a way as to tell them what to pay attention to. A very simple way to do this is to merely say, “This is a story aboutPay attention to” and then pointing to the pertinent features that will help them to keep track of what is unfolding narratively. This gives learners a perspective, a “way” of going into the story so that they are not completely swallowed up by the narrative but are able to locate important clues, nuances, or threads that help them to understand what the story is doing. Following the sharing of a story (whether by oral narration, film, etc.), a series of questions can be used that begin by evaluating the personal and affective reactions to the story and, then, move on to explore the significance of the life-vision presented.

Finally, a word about the orientation religious educators bring to the use of stories. Religious educators who use stories are using them for very specific reasons, and these reasons differ from the reasons that may motivate a literature teacher or a film critic. The point of the process is not primarily an appreciation of the story as an artistic piece, but rather the expansion and/or transformation of life-vision that can occur through imaginative participation and critical dialogue with the story. As religious educators committed to sharing a Christian vision, our ends are unapologetically partisan. The question of the literary critic who deals with story is, “Does it all hang together?” The religious educator on the other hand asks, “Does it reveal something of the truth? Does it help us to see a little better in the dark?”

Religious educators need to maintain a stance of creative fidelity when they use stories to help learners come to a deeper understanding of Christian beliefs and doctrines. Religious educators have an allegiance to the Church’s teaching that cannot be compromised. On the other hand, stories often have a surplus of meanings that often burst the seams of our tightly knit propositions. Nor can we completely control how a story will be received and interpreted although we can exercise care in insuring that stories are told in a way that highlights the meanings we want to probe. Religious educators then have to exercise prudence in their choice of stories as well as in the way they tell them.

This extended essay is intended as a modest contribution to bringing some method and deliberation to an activity in which nearly all religious educators engage. My hope is that it will be of some practical value to educators engaged in the work of sharing the Christian story with others.

Endnotes

1. Although this extended essay was written a few years ago, this is the first time that it is being published.
2. Brother Michael Valenzuela has been a De La Salle Christian Brother for the past thirty years. He holds a PhD from De La Salle University in Manila (2004), and he served as a member

of the *Rule* Commission of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2009-2012). As such, he contributed to the formulation of what is now referred to as the *Revised Rule* of 2015.

3. Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1977), page 76.

4. John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Toward a Theology of Story* (Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1975).

5. Terrence Tilley, *Story Theology* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985).

6. John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

7. Westerhoff has since gone on to speak of “pathways to the spiritual life” rather than faith-styles. However, he also acknowledges that the early model continues to be helpful and popular with many religious educators. See, John Westerhoff, “Will Our Children Have Faith? A Query Revisited” in *The Echo Within*, edited by Catherine Dooley and Mary Collins (Chicago: Thomas More, 1997), page 179. Marcellin Flynn also makes use of a slightly modified version of Westerhoff’s scheme in *The Effectiveness of Catholic Schools* (NSW: Saint Paul’s Society, 1985), pages 240-255.

8. Henry Nouwen, *The Living Reminder* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), pages 24, 26.

9. James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), pages 24-34.

10. Abraham Heschel, *Between God and Man*, edited by Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), page 40.

11. Kathleen Fischer, “Faith and Imagination,” *New Catholic World* 225 (July/August 1982), page 257.

12. *Ibid.*, page 258.

13. Kathleen Fischer, *The Inner Rainbow: The Imagination in Christian Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), page 8.

14. Fischer, “Faith and Imagination,” page 258.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, page 259.

17. John Navone, *The Jesus Story: Our Life as Story in Christ* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979), page 56.

18. Ibid., pages 59-60.

19. Pamela Mitchell, "Why Care About Stories? A Theory of Narrative Art" in *Religious Education* 86.1 (1991), page 35.

20. James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981), pages 24-31.

21. From here on, I shall be referring to these overarching imaginative paradigms as life-visions except when directly quoting works which use analogous terms such as "life-view" or "life-meaning system."

22. Herman E. Mertens, "Making a Long Story Short? A Plea for Narrative Theology" in *Louvain Studies* 13 (1988), page 32.

23. Stanley Hauerwas, "Jesus: The Story of the Kingdom," *Theology Digest* 26.4 (1978), page 312.

24. Quoted in Mertens, page 31.

25. One must accede, however, that the Gospel stories are products of theological reflection, truly examples of narrative theology. The Gospels, however, are a later stage of development. My point is that the earliest layers of storytelling consisted of narrative accounts with little theological embellishment.

26. See John Shea, "Introduction: Experience and Symbol, An Approach to Theologizing" in *Chicago Studies* 19.1 (1980), page 15.

27. We also need to situate the doctrinal formulation in its historical context and development in order to understand how truthful insights have been developed, refined, and re-expressed.

28. Mitchell, page 36.

29. Quoted in Mitchell, page 36.

30. Ibid.

31. Mertens, pages 38-39.

32. Ibid., pages 38-39.

33. William Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), page 54.

34. This does not mean that imaginative participation is the only way of transforming life-vision. Rather, it is an alternative “right-brained” path, which does not invalidate more rational and discursive approaches. This does not mean that imaginative participation is the only way of transforming life-vision. Rather, it is an alternative “right-brained” path, which does not invalidate more rational and discursive approaches.

35. A subjectivist approach to knowing is not the same as subjectivism or relativism. A subjectivist approach suggests the mutual engagement of knower and known in the act of knowing. Parker Palmer is an advocate of this type of epistemology.

36. Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), pages 58-59.

37. Mitchell, page 33.

38. *Luke* 11:28.

39. James McClendon, *Biography as Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974), page 37.

40. *Exodus* 15:1-18; *Psalms* 105; *Psalms* 136, etc.

41. *Psalms* 106:6-7, 21.

42. *Hebrews* 11:33.

43. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.

44. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* page 89. Twenty years later, Westerhoff published an article entitled “Will Our Children Have Faith? A Query Revisited.” In this article, he expresses more explicitly his desire to distance himself from the faith-development paradigm with its overly cognitive understanding of faith and its preferential higher stages. Westerhoff twenty years later no longer speaks of styles but of “pathways.” Still he does not repudiate his earlier work and in fact acknowledges its continuing usefulness for many educators. See page 179 of this article in *The Echo Within* (cited earlier).

45. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* pages 89-91.

46. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Page 92.

47. Quoted in Flynn, page 247.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Martin Lang, *Acquiring Our Image of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), pages 9-10.
50. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, pages 94-95.
51. Ibid., page 94.
52. Ibid., page 95.
53. Ibid., pages 95-96.
54. Ibid., page 95.
55. Ibid., page 96.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., page 97.
59. Ibid.
60. Terrence Tilley, *Story Theology* (Wilmington, DL: Michael Glazier, 1985), page 40.
61. Ibid., pages 42-44.
62. Ibid., page 46.
63. Quoted in Crossan, page 58.
64. Ibid., page 61.
65. Tilley, page 51.
66. John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), page 6.
67. True biographies of saints have to be distinguished from traditional biographies, which tend to “propagandize” and preach rather than present experiences from which to learn. Traditional biographies often reshaped the lives of the saints in order to make them fit a pre-established mold or to show that they possessed particular virtues that made them worthy of emulation and canonization.

68. Susan M. Shaw, *Storytelling in Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), page 207.

69. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), page 207.

70. A number of scholars have referred to this book as a parable or as an allegory. The *Jerome Biblical Commentary* says: “The tone of irony, which has been subtly achieved both in the structure of the narrative and in the way previous Scriptures are echoed, suggests that the author intended to write satire rather than history ... Jonah is to be classified as a didactic narrative, satirical in tone with a profound theological purpose.” See Jean McGowan, “Jonah,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, Roland Murphy (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), page 634.

71. Tilley, page 46.

72. Crossan, page 124

73. Ibid., page 60.

74. Ibid., page 128.

75. This work has been cited earlier.

76. Mitchell, pages 38-42.

77. Ibid., page 38.

78. Ibid., page 39.

79. Ibid., page 40.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., page 42.